

Nepal

Civil Society Spotlight Report on SDG 4 for HLPF 2023



■ NCE Nepal's Global Action Week for Education 2023 campaign on decolonising education financing

I. Nepal Country Context Analysis

Nepal has a current population of 29 million¹ with 51.1% female. It has also made progress in the Human Development Index (HDI) ranking, climbing to 143rd place. However, the HDI value has declined from 0.604 to 0.602.² Gender disparities remain significant, as Nepal ranks 96th in the Gender Gap Index³, indicating barriers for women and girls in various aspects of life. Child marriage is also prevalent, with 76.97% of girls being affected. Additionally, the female literacy rate is just 69.4%, which is 14.2% less than their counterpart. In recent elections, the representation of women in the federal parliament slightly decreased (from 33.5% to 33.09%), while there were slight increases in their representation in provincial assemblies

(from 34.4% to 36.36%)⁴ and at the local level (from 40.8% to 41.21%).⁵ The elections were considered free and fair, but no political party secured a simple majority. Consequently, a coalition government was formed, and Mr Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda) became the Prime Minister.

Nepal has faced significant economic challenges such as a high inflation rate, foreign exchange and liquidity crisis.⁶ Nepal's GDP growth rate has decreased to 2.13% in 2023.⁷ As a result, Nepal's budget for the fiscal year 2023/24 has been heavily impacted. Furthermore, the outflow of Nepalese students seeking higher education abroad has increased,⁸ leading to a drain of financial resources and skilled youth from the domestic economy. Thus, to improve the school sector of Nepal, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST) has introduced the School Education Sector

Plan (SESP),⁹ aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). The plan aims to establish a competent and well-managed public education system, but the government has yet to pass the Federal Education Act, a crucial bill for realising the vision set forth in the 2015 constitution and SESP.

II. Nepal's Progress Towards Achievement of SDG 4

Nepal's progress in achieving its commitment to quality education has been slow since its last VNR. The most recent census data indicates that only 76.2% of the population is literate, showing a modest improvement of 4.5% compared to 2019. Female literacy rates continue to lag behind.¹⁰ Although the literacy status of women remains a concern, there is promising progress in terms of GPI in schools. The Flash Report 2021¹¹ indicates that the GPI in

1 <https://censusnepal.cbs.gov.np/results/downloads/national>

2 <https://www.undp.org/nepal/press-releases/nepal-moves-one-place-human-development-ranks-143rd>

3 https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2022.pdf?_gl=1*184bv*_up*MQ..&gclid=CjwKCAiAr4GgBhFEiwAgwORrTCAdT3Zcm1uNoy5g47oNjfwF167XQon-Z1h7obqhNnTvRqqiDXxfgBoCxtYQAvD_BwE

4 <https://risingnepaldaily.com/news/20498>

5 <https://kathmandupost.com/politics/2022/05/28/how-women-candidates-fared-in-local-polls>

6 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2023/04/04/nepal-s-growth-faces-slowdown-amidst-domestic-and-external-challenges>

7 <https://www.mof.gov.np/site/publication-detail/3249>

8 <https://www.mof.gov.np/site/publication-detail/3255>

9 https://moest.gov.np/upload_file/files/post/1668690227_1997409338_Nepal%20School%20Education%20Sector%20Plan%20final%202022%20.pdf

10 <https://censusnepal.cbs.gov.np/results/downloads/national>

11 https://cehrd.gov.np/file_data/mediacenter_files/media_file-17-98334697.pdf

ECED is 0.9. Similarly, the GPI for basic and secondary levels stands at 0.99 and 0.98, respectively. However, school-going girls still face significant barriers to a rightful life. Around 76.97% of girls under 18 are victims of early marriage. Those girls find it difficult to resume education drastically depriving them of their other human rights.

Alternative means of education, such as non-formal and special needs education, face significant challenges in Nepal. Nepal has a total of 2156 CLCs. However, along with the low number of CLCs, these centres often suffer from underfunding and understaffing, with personnel lacking adequate training. Furthermore, Nepal has not given sufficient attention to students with special needs. There are only 23 special schools, 12 schools for students with audio and visual impairments, and 380 resource classrooms. The scarcity of such schools greatly hinders the access of students with special needs to quality education. This highlights the need for a more inclusive and supportive educational infrastructure to ensure that all students, including those with special needs, have equal opportunities for learning.

a. Plans and Policies for Education

Nepal has recently rolled out SESP¹², a seven-year comprehensive plan for the transformation of the basic and secondary school sector and achievement of SDG 4. The plan aims to develop a capable, well-governed, accountable, and competitive public school education system that is able to ensure citizens' right to acquire relevant and quality education comparable to regional and international standards. The plan has given a special focus on equity and inclusion in schools. However, without the Federal Education Act, the plan cannot be effectively operationalised.

The MoEST also unveiled the TVET Sector Strategic Plan¹³, 2023-2032 to strengthen the skill-based education programme of Nepal. This new plan aims not only plans to strengthen the programmes under TVET but also to improve institutional capacities to accommodate students to their full

capacity with the principle of equity and inclusion. It also has plans to introduce new pertinent programmes (such as ICT, business incubation, and others) targeting specific geographical and demographic needs.

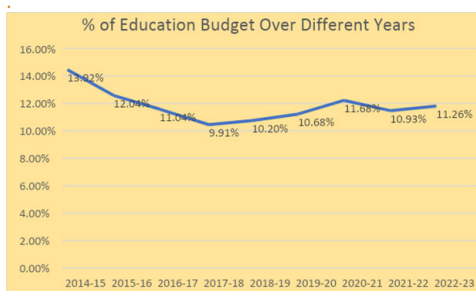


Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 1 Education Budget Over Different Years

b. Education Budget

Education has been continuously underfunded by the Nepal government. Annual budget research by NCE Nepal shows that the education budget has been decreasing in recent years. Last fiscal year, education received just 10.98% of the total budget.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the gross amount has been increasing. However, due to recent economic challenges as presented in the context it has been forecast that there will be a significant reduction in the allocation percentage and amount for education in the fiscal year 2023/24. In the recently announced budget of 2023/24, the government has allocated 11.29% of the budget in this fiscal year (2023/24). But, the size of the actual amount has decreased significantly. In comparison to last year's 196.89 billion NPR (USD 1.501 billion), this year's education has only been allocated 197.29 NPR (USD 1.508 billion).¹⁵ While the proportion jump seems largely due to the overall constricted budget, the actual allocated amount is not much different.

Nepal heavily relies on foreign grants and loans to sustain its education sector. In the 2020/21 fiscal year, grants accounted for 14.28% of the education budget. However, foreign grants for education have been decreasing while Nepal's loans for education have been increasing. This exacerbates the existing underfunding issue in Nepal's education system, which is already more than twice underfunded. The increase in public debt requires the government to allocate a significant portion of its revenue for debt servicing, which negatively impacts social services like education.¹⁶

c. Primary and Secondary Education

Despite the constitutional provision for education, Nepal continues to face challenges in fulfilling obligations. Bhatta and Mehendale (2021)¹⁷ and ActionAid¹⁸ report that schools in Nepal are still charging fees from parents under various categories. NCE Nepal has also documented instances where schools impose fees for items such as admission, examinations, and English education. This discrepancy between the constitutional mandate for free education and the actual practices in schools is more prevalent in secondary schools, disproportionately impacting the poor and marginalised students.

The continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is visible in the enrolment rates at schools. The NER at the primary level decreased to 96.1¹⁹ from 97.2.²⁰ Nevertheless, the GER at the secondary level has increased to 80.3²¹ from 71.64²², but the NER is low at 57.4.²³ Nepal's 2022 target of NER and GER for primary and secondary levels was 99 and 90 respectively. On the other hand, as shown in Table 1 the proportion of marginalised students at the primary level has decreased compared to Flash Report I 2019.²⁴

At the primary level, the GPI of Dalit and Janajati girls is 0.97 and 0.95 respectively, indicating that girls from marginalised communities have lower access to education than boys. Whereas, the GPI of Dalit and Janajati female students is 1.06 and 1.09 respectively indicating that male students' access is lower at the secondary level.²⁵

Nepal has managed to increase the rate of grade 1 students with ECD education to 73.7%²⁶. And the survival rate of basic-level students has slightly increased to 85.7 from 82.2. The completion rate of the basic level is 76.2.

¹² https://moest.gov.np/upload_file/files/post/1668690227_1997409338_Nepal%20School%20Education%20Sector%20Plan%20final%202022%20.pdf

¹³ [https://moest.gov.np/upload_file/files/post/1682672683_2008592279_TSSP-Final%20-%20approved%20version%20\(1\).pdf](https://moest.gov.np/upload_file/files/post/1682672683_2008592279_TSSP-Final%20-%20approved%20version%20(1).pdf)

¹⁴ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hBybXFK4cAT1UfWy6rW1SQZMb9tffBDIG/view?usp=sharing>

¹⁵ <https://en.setopati.com/political/161144>

¹⁶ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_UrwzGj-bprc6bC4FhcSlc6TSN2AVZ2T/view?usp=drive_link

¹⁷ https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-15-0032-9_16

¹⁸ https://nepal.actionaid.org/sites/nepal/files/nepal_national_citizens_education_report.pdf

¹⁹ https://cehrd.gov.np/file_data/mediacenter_files/media_file-17-98334697.pdf

²⁰ <https://www.undp.org/nepal/publications/sdg-progress-assessment-report>

²¹ https://cehrd.gov.np/file_data/mediacenter_files/media_file-17-98334697.pdf

²² <https://www.undp.org/nepal/publications/sdg-progress-assessment-report>

²³ <https://www.mof.gov.np/site/publication-detail/3248>

²⁴ https://cehrd.gov.np/file_data/mediacenter_files/media_file-17-1295178199.pdf

²⁵ https://cehrd.gov.np/file_data/mediacenter_files/media_file-17-98334697.pdf

²⁶ <https://www.mof.gov.np/site/publication-detail/3248>

	LOWER BASIC	UPPER BASIC	LOWER SECONDARY	UPPER SECONDARY				
	2019	2021	2019	2021	2019	2021	2019	2021
Dalit Students	19.50%	19.2%	15.60%	16.40%	12.30%	13.40%	8.70%	10.40%
Janajati Students	33.70%	32.20%	37.60%	35.30%	37.60%	36.10%	37.10%	34.80%

■ Table 1: Percentage of Dalit and Janajati Students in Public Schools

But, the survival rate till grade 10 is just 67.3. This means that the dropout rate after reaching grade 10 increases significantly. Likewise, the survival rate till grade 12 at the secondary level is 33.1.²⁷ A lower completion rate has far-reaching consequences for the livelihood of the student as they get older.²⁸

SUBJECT	2015 BASELINE	2018 ACHIEVEMENT	2021 ACHIEVEMENT
Maths	53.3	35	38.67
Nepali	63	34	49.09
English	53.6	41	49.9

■ Table 2: Learning Outcomes of Grade 5 students

The learning achievement of grade 5 students in Nepal has shown improvement compared to the country's previous SDG progress report. However, when compared to the baseline data from 2015, the results are not promising as shown in Table 2. Grade 8 scores have remained the same, except for science, which has increased to 45.07. These figures indicate that there is still a significant gap between the desired learning outcomes and the current performance of students.

d. TVET Sector

In Nepal, there are a total of 1,591 schools that offer TVET programmes; 1,106 are operated by the CTEVT, and 485 are operated by the CEHRD. These schools provide education in fields including plant and science, computer, electrical, civil engineering, and music. However, there is a shortage of teachers in the sector, with only an average of 2.8% teachers available per programme. Additionally, the infrastructure of these schools is not adequately disability-friendly, with only 36.4% of them meeting the necessary accessibility standards.²⁹

²⁷ https://cehrd.gov.np/file_data/mediacenter_files/media_file-17-98334697.pdf

²⁸ <https://borgenproject.org/the-relationship-between-education-and-poverty/#:~:text=Data%20on%20the%20Relationship%20Between%20Education%20and%20Poverty&text=Educated%20people%20earn%2010%20percent,less%20inequality%20in%20the%20world.>

²⁹ https://moest.gov.np/upload_file/files/

e. Teachers

There are a total of 179,172 teachers in public schools. Among them only 37.1% are women and the GPI of teachers at basic and secondary levels are 0.97 and 0.14 respectively.³⁰ This gender disparity in the teaching profession has implications for SDG 4's targets of

gender equality and the empowerment of women. Additionally, the student-teacher ratio in Grades 1-5 is 35, 6-8 is 37, 9 to 10 is 29, and 11 to 12 is 73 which can be detrimental to the students learning.³¹ Research by NCE Nepal also shows that there is a shortage of more than 65 thousand teachers in public schools.³²

f. SDG 4 at Provincial and Local Levels

NCE Nepal's study found that while progress has been made in implementing SDG 4, significant improvements are still needed. The policies align with the constitution's aim of providing free and compulsory education and show positive support for TVET education. However, 85% of the policies lacked essential elements such as quality education principles, mechanisms for ensuring quality, pathways for improving learning outcomes, and preparing students for local and global challenges.³³ The study also revealed that local governments allocate only 5% of their budget to education, relying heavily on federal funds.³⁴ Despite this, the local education policies were found to be more inclusive towards marginalised communities compared to federal policies.

³⁰ <https://www.mof.gov.np/site/publication-detail/3255>

³¹ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/09/student-teacher-ratios-vary-across-the-globe/>

³² https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fUQ5Fh6d_4lUzjo9SpwaaUXdCcQBv14J/view?usp=sharing

³³ <https://ncenepal.org.np/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Local-Education-Policies-in-Nepal-1.pdf>

³⁴ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1al8o1Hu5ltJe-qss3bh1U-IWbhXHNWLW/view?usp=drive_link

g. Challenges and Barriers to the Progress of SDG 4

Nepal faces significant challenges to fully realise the commitments of SDG 4. Firstly, Nepal's proportion of the education budget has been diminishing in recent years,

which has resulted in low budgetary allocation for several vital programmes and education materials. According to Nepal's national and international commitments, the allocation of 20% of the national budget towards education is vital. Furthermore, to fully implement SDG 4 and recover from the effects of the pandemic more than twice the current allocated amount is necessary. Due to inadequate allocation, the state has been unable to provide education with minimum quality standards to children and adults alike.

Secondly, the federal government's resistance is preventing the enactment of the Federal Education Act, hindering local empowerment and necessary reforms in Nepal's education sector. Finally, the limited decision-making power of local governments is hampering their ability to create policies exceeding federal guidelines, hindering progress towards SDG 4 education targets and addressing local needs effectively.

III. Civil Society Engagement in SDG 4 Implementation

Under the SWAP and the periodic meetings led by the Ministry of Education, CSOs' involvement in the education process has remained unchanged. Monthly and annual meetings are held to assess the education sector's progress, address challenges, review the budget, and monitor overall advancement. These meetings serve as crucial platforms for organisations like NCE Nepal and CSOs to review progress, provide recommendations, and monitor the education sector. The CEHRD has developed a stakeholder education plan.³⁵ Under it, NCE Nepal is collaborating with them to strengthen non-formal education in Nepal. However, Parliamentarians at the federal and provincial levels lack the appropriate technical expertise and awareness of the education sector, necessitating

³⁵ https://cehrd.gov.np/file_data/mediacenter_files/media_file-25-1107399427.pdf



■ Youth participants during the youth workshop on education financing in 2022

efforts by CSOs to build their capacity, knowledge sharing, and advocacy. The government's communication of policy and data through digital means is also lacking, presenting a significant gap at the federal, provincial, and local levels.

IV. SDGs Interlinkages

Quality education plays a crucial role in achieving multiple SDGs in Nepal and they also feed to SDG 4.³⁶ The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the urgent need for proper sanitation facilities in schools. However, public schools in Nepal still lack clean drinking water and adequate sanitation, particularly impacting girls' hygiene needs. For ECD, primary, and secondary levels, only 67.2%, 78.4%, 79.7% have access to clean drinking water, and 73.4%, 78.4%, 83.1% have sanitation facilities respectively.³⁷ Insufficient WASH facilities lead to high absenteeism and dropout rates among girls.³⁸ To address this, the budget for the fiscal year 2023/24 has allocated funds to provide free sanitary pads to female students and ensure the continuity of mid-day meals.

36 <https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/publications/2111education%20and%20sdgs.pdf>
 37 https://cehrd.gov.np/file_data/mediacenter_files/media_file-17-98334697.pdf
 38 <https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2022-07/Factors%20for%20Girls%20Missing%20School.pdf>

Many schools still lack electricity and digital infrastructure, hindering students' access to modern skills and digital resources. Only 68.2%, 30.4%, and 10.1% of the basic level school have electricity, computer, and internet facilities respectively. Whereas, 69%, 78.8%, and 54.4% of secondary schools have the facilities.³⁹ These deficiencies undermine SDG 11's objective of creating sustainable cities and settlements with inclusive and accessible services. To achieve SDG 4, Nepal has partnered with bilateral and multilateral organisations, such as Norway, Finland, USA, GPE, EU, UNICEF, ADB, and World Bank.⁴⁰ Financial assistance and technical support from these partnerships help bridge the budget gap and improve education in the country.

V. Key Messages and Recommendations

- The Federal Education Act should be promptly passed to address inconsistencies in educational policies and practices and improve coordination among the three tiers of the government.
- A 20% budgetary allocation for education is essential to meet the demands of quality education,

39 https://cehrd.gov.np/file_data/mediacenter_files/media_file-17-98334697.pdf
 40 <https://www.adb.org/projects/49424-002/main>

recover from the pandemic's impact, and achieve the goals of SDG 4. To increase investment in education, the government should strengthen domestic resource mobilisation and implement progressive taxation to directly fund education initiatives.

- Improving the availability and accessibility of regular and valid education data is crucial.
- The government should also expand the participation of CSOs in policy formulations, programme design, and budget development beyond periodic meetings.
- To promote SDG 4, it is important to increase women's representation in teaching, reduce student-teacher ratios, and address the shortage of qualified teachers through recruitment, training, and retention strategies.
- Infrastructure and resource gaps need to be addressed to create conducive learning environments, and effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be implemented to track progress.
- Local governments should be empowered and capacitated to make their own education policies without undue influence, as they have been given the authority to manage education according to the constitution. A periodic learning platform should be created to share best practices and lessons learnt across all tiers of the government and external partner agencies. •



National Campaign for Education Nepal (NCE Nepal)

P.O. Box: 14421, Babarmahal Kathmandu, Nepal

Tel: +977 -1-5323420 | Email: info@ncenepal.org.np | Website: <http://ncenepal.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. 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).

With support from

