

DEPARTMENT FOR EVALUATION

Annex 5 to report 7/2022

Evaluation of Norway's inclusion of persons with disabilities in development cooperation

Case study from Nepal



Content

Executive summary	5	Tables and figures	
1. Context of the Norwegian engagement in inclusive education	8	Table 1: Enrolment of children with disabilities (year 2010-11 and 2019-20 comparison)	12
2. Programmes selected for the case study	17	Table 2: Enrolment of children with disabilities in basic and secondary level (2014-2018, MoEST, CEHRD)	15
3. Key findings	20	Figure 1: Nepal, Share of education disbursements with disability marker 2010-2020	9
3.1 Findings related to relevance	21	Box 1: Reconstructed Theory of Change	6
3.2 Findings related to effectiveness	22	Box 2: Acts and policies related to inclusive education	11
3.3 Findings related to sustainability	38	Box 3: School sector development partners adopts	28
4. Reconstructed Theory of Change	41	Box 4: MoEST/CEHRD definition of inclusive education	31
5. Conclusions and lesson learnt	43	Box 5: Reconstructed Theory of Change	42
6. Summary conclusions	50		
List of references	52		



Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank	MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
AUSAID	Australian Aid	MoHP	Ministry of Health and Population
AWPB	Annual work plan and budget	MTR	Midterm review
CAS	Continuous assessment system	NFDN	National Federation of the Disabled - Nepal
CEHRD	Center for Education and Human Resource Development	NGO	Non-government organisation
CERID	Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development	NJFP	Non-joint financial partners
CSO	Civil society organisations	NRs	Nepalese rupees
DPOD	Disabled People's Organisations Denmark	OOSC	Out-of-school children
EGRP	Early grade reading programme	OPD	Organisation of Persons with Disabilities
EMIS	Education management information system	PTA	Parents and teacher association
ESP	Education sector plan	RNE	Royal Norwegian Embassy
ETC	Education training center	RP	Resource person
EU	European Union	SC	Save the Children
GDP	Gross domestic product	SDG	Sustainable development goal
GoN	Government of Nepal	SIP	School improvement plan
ID	Intellectual disability	SMC	School management committee
IE	Inclusive education	SSDP	School sector development partners
IEP	Individual learning support	SSRP	School sector reform programme
INGO	International non-government organisation	ToC	Theory of Change
JFA	Joint financial agreement	TTC	Teachers training center
JFPs	Joint financial partners	TWG	Technical working group



UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund Nepal	WB	World Bank
USAID	United States Agency for International Development	WEI	World Education International
VCDF	Vulnerable community development framework	WGQ	Washington Group set of questions
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene		



Executive Summary

Norway has supported inclusive education initiatives in Nepal for over ten years. In the evaluation carried out in 2011, the key finding was that “Although measures are taken in the education sector program, progress of inclusion of children with disabilities is slow. The social inclusion, democracy and human rights initiatives supported by Norway have in most cases not yet encompassed persons with disabilities”.¹

Since then, Norway has been part of funding the government's two education sector plans, both directly to the government (as part of pooled donor funding to the education sector) and through targeted funding to UNICEF to spearhead inclusive education for children with disabilities. In addition to this bilateral funding, Norway has provided multilateral support to UNICEF global efforts to promote inclusive education and the World Bank multi-donor trust fund for inclusive education (which have both selected Nepal as a focus country). Norway has supported the Save the Children

country programme, which has an inclusive education component, Plan International, which has an inclusive education component and Atlas Alliance members' country programmes, which have components capacity development and engagement in inclusive education (IE) among organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs). The Royal Norwegian Embassy has actively taken part in the Technical working group (TWG) on IE.

Inclusive education in Nepal is spearheaded by the inclusive education unit under the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. Approaches to IE encompass all vulnerable groups, such as girls, children belonging to marginalised ethnic and Muslim communities, children with disabilities, children in poverty and geographic isolation. Compared to 2011, children with disabilities have become a more visible group in the sector plans and in policy papers. According to the sector plans, three modalities of educational provision for children with disabilities are

practiced in Nepal: inclusive schools (children with disabilities are included in mainstream classes); special schools (specific to type of disabilities), and integrated schools (with separate resource classes within in the mainstream schools with resource teachers, to prepare the students to transit to the regular classes – when/if possible).

Presently, most children with disabilities who are identified and enrolled in education attend special schools, which is seen by government as the preferred option. The second option is resource classes, and only as a third option, inclusion in ordinary classrooms. According to an approach paper, produced by the IE TWG, the priorities should be reversed – but old norms and practices prevail. The new sector plan (2021-2030) includes plans for construction of additional 15 special schools.

¹ Norad (2011). *Evaluation of Norwegian support to promote the rights of persons with disabilities - The Nepal country report*

In alignment with the new constitution of 2015, a federal system was introduced with significant responsibilities devolved to autonomous local government that are responsible for services (including education). This has not yet been accompanied by systems and structures for ensuring implementation of national policies and plans on inclusive education. Although conditional budgets are given, the national level authorities only have an advisory role, and they have no monitoring powers. Capacity, competency, and resources for inclusive education are expected to be developed locally. The general school system struggles with large classes and teachers that lack sufficient training, making it difficult to make additional demands on teachers.

The Norwegian supported programmes have tried to navigate in this difficult context. This has included efforts to address many of the obstacles, as shown by the following reconstructed Theory of Change.

Box 1: Reconstructed Theory of Change

IF:

There is a clear policy and a road map for inclusive education is adopted by the national government.

and there is better screening and data on children with disabilities.

There are successful pilots in selected municipalities (approximately one percent of the schools nationwide were targeted by Norwegian partners) showing how it can be done in practice (e.g., through various levels of engagement with local authorities, school improvement plans, awareness raising of communities and parents and with technical and financial support to teacher training, school management training, introduction of EMIS, accessibility measures in schools and scholarships to students with disabilities).

And civil society partners are engaged in supporting the implementation.

THEN:

Local education authorities will have better planning data and be interested to fund and scale up such model.

More mainstream schools will be ready to welcome children with disabilities, be accessible and have ability to teach according to individual education plans.

Parents and communities will be more interested to send their children to mainstream schools.

And more children with disabilities will be enrolled and retained in local schools and their learning outcomes will improve.



Despite these efforts, practices on the ground have largely not changed, apart from a few pilot sites that are supported financially and technically by external development programmes. Also at policy level, progress is slow. The education sector plans, and the policy guidance provided by the government are still not clear regarding if/how inclusive education for children with disabilities should be realised, especially in light of the new federal system. This demonstrates that the underlying assumptions did not reflect prevailing realities. The main systemic obstacles that were not sufficiently considered were:

- The lack of functioning systems for birth certificates and early identification and assessment of children with disabilities, which is a precondition for design of their educational needs.
- Lack of statistical data on out-of-school children.
- The poor standard of the mainstream education system, with overcrowded classrooms and insufficiently trained teachers, which makes the transformation to inclusive education (and the scaling up of pilot initiatives) difficult and costly – unless only minor physical adaptations are needed.

- The lack of pedagogical adaptation – the inflexibility in teaching and learning approaches, materials, curriculum and examination practices.
- The sensible reaction among parents to prefer special schools that have competency and welcome their children – or to keep them at home to protect them from bullying and humiliation at school.
- The general norms and attitudes in schools and local communities against persons with disabilities, and the inflexibility in mindsets about what education can contribute and who is entitled to education.
- The lack of powers to steer and monitor the education system at local level in the new federal system.
- The limited involvement of OPDs in planning and monitoring of interventions, despite their growing capacity to do so.



1

Context of the Norwegian engagement in inclusive education



There has been a disability focus in more than half of the Norwegian support to education provided in Nepal during the period of the review – see Figure 1. There has been steady growth in support to education up to 2018, with a general emphasis on the importance of inclusion and the human rights of persons with disabilities in Norwegian development assistance. The

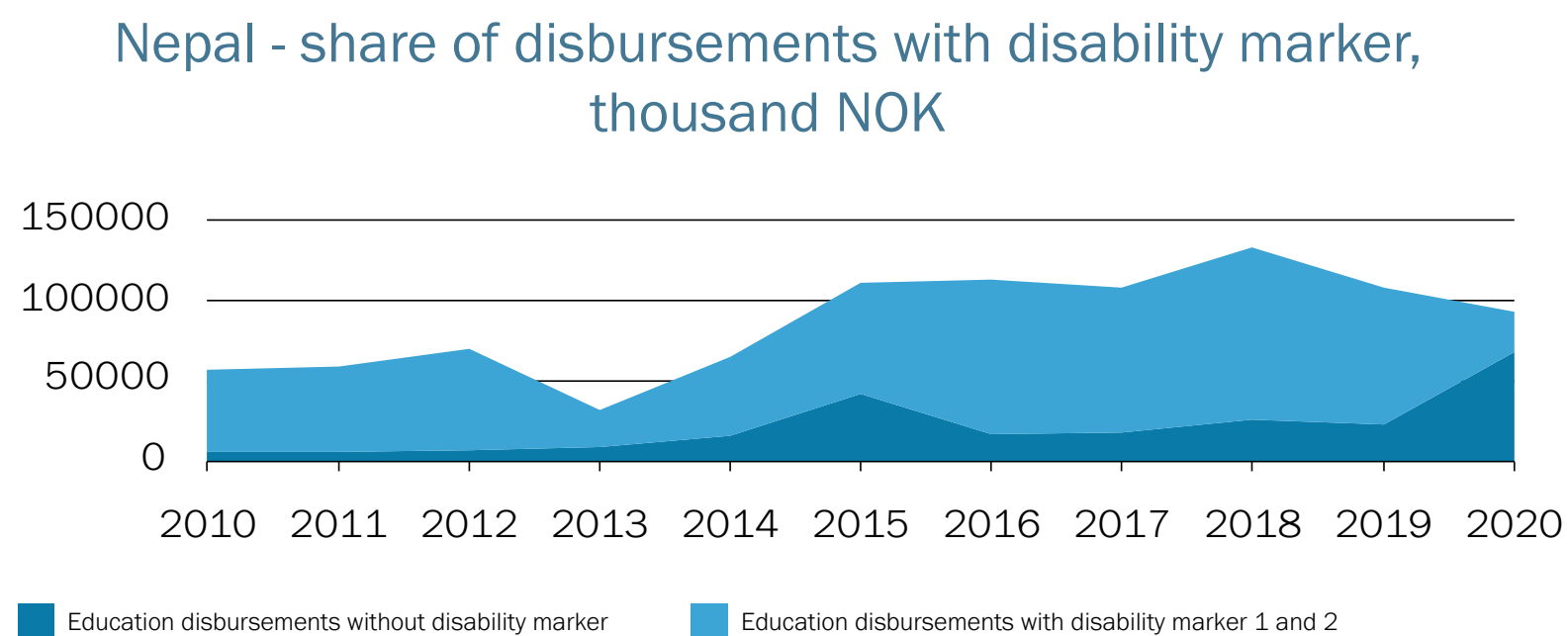
dip in total funding in 2019 and 2020 was caused by the closure of schools due to restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The share of funding coded with a disability marker shrank significantly in 2020 from around 80 % to 27 %. This was due to the finalising of bilateral support to the Ministry of Education and the finalisation of a large school post-earthquake

reconstruction programme, both with disability markers. Inclusive education in Nepal is now supported through multilateral arrangements and Norwegian CSOs.

The Inclusive Education Initiative (IEI) started up in 2018 and is managed by the World Bank, with funding from Norway from 2019-2021. The IEI selected Nepal as a pilot country, and in 2020 it was reported that the IEI worked on mainstreaming disability inclusion in the education sector by influencing the government in development of their next school sector plan. IEI also participated in the revision of the education management information system (EMIS) and carried out several mapping studies to identify children with disabilities and plans for continuation of the teacher training activities.

Nepal applies a sector wide approach (SWAP) in the education sector. Development partners supporting the education sector, channel their support for a common programme framework (education sector plan) through a joint financial agreement (JFA). The current education sector plan, the school sector development Plan (SSDP)², was supported by nine joint financing partners (JFPs)³ having pooled their funds for budgetary support to the

Figure 1: Nepal, Share of education disbursements with disability marker 2010-2020



² Nepalese Government's School Sector Development Plan (SSDP; FY2016/17 – FY2022/23) is a 7-year strategic, which guides the entire education system of Nepal.

³ Asian Development Bank, the European Union, Finland, the Global Partnership for Education, Japan International Cooperation Agency, Norway, UNICEF, USAID and the World Bank.

SSDP. All non-joint financing partners (NJFPs)⁴ are also required to align their support to the SSDP. During the period under review, 2010-2020, Norway supported two education sector plans: 1) the School sector reform programme (SSRP 2009-2015); and 2) the School sector development Plan (SSDP) 2016-2023. The latter specifically focuses on equity, quality, and governance. Norway contributes to the education sector both as a JFP, and through support to UNICEF and civil society partners, mainly Save the Children, Plan International and Atlas Alliance member organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs). The government and the development partners are currently in the process of finalising the new Education Sector Plan (ESP, 2021-2030)⁵.

The SSDP implementation period witnessed a major transition in the governance system, as the country adopted a decentralised three-tier federal system (federal, provincial and municipal), where the responsibility and authority over all basic services, including basic and

secondary education, was devolved to the lowest level of the government – the municipalities⁶. The apex bodies at the federal level – the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) and its education unit, the Centre for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD) – lead the implementation of SSDP. While the federal government provides policy and technical guidance to all provincial bodies, the municipal governments have the authority to develop their own specific policies and programmes. With the fiscal devolution in 2018, the local governments have greater discretion to finance education from multiple sources. However, they rely heavily on the federal government's grant as the main source for financing basic and secondary education, which is channelled through a conditional grant directly to the local municipalities (referred to as red-book funding). The Aide-memoire of the joint review meeting held November 25-29, 2019⁷ mentions that the federal government allocated 92% of SSDP budget to local government (0.29% to provincial and 8.13% to the federal MoEST) as

a conditional grant earmarked for specific expenditures⁸. While the local government is said to also allocate additional funds, there is no mechanism to systematically capture and consolidate their contributions. Such contribution is estimated to be low and mostly used for infrastructure related activities.⁹

UNICEF and the European Union (EU) education budget brief for 2021/22 reports that the ratio of the education budget to the total has remained constrained between 10-12% for several years and amounts to around 4% of gross domestic product (GDP). The expenditure on education against total government expenditure was 14.2% in 2018, which is still below the benchmark of 15-20% set out in the Incheon declaration to address the multiple disadvantages experienced by children with disabilities. The percentage of the education budget earmarked for educating children with disabilities is difficult to extract from sector budgets, which are likely to be subsumed or clustered within other line-item budgets¹⁰.

⁴ Development partners, who do not pool their fund for budgetary support to SSDP but are implementing education projects and programme externally.

⁵ MoEST (2021). *Nepal: Education Sector Plan, 2021-2030 (draft V-1)*, March 2021

⁶ Local government comprises of provincial and the municipality, where the municipalities have the main responsibility (authority) for service delivery while the provincial have the policy guidance and coordination function.

⁷ Nepal School Sector Development Programme Joint Review Meeting - Aide Memoire November 25 -29, 2019

⁸ ECED, teacher salaries, textbooks, teaching learning materials and book corner, school management costs, social and financial auditing, school improvement plan and capacity development

⁹ UNICEF & EU budget brief (for FY2021/22) reports that the provincial priorities are not focused on education and allocate on an average of only about 2-2.5 per cent of their budget to education except for Province 7 allocating 8.6 per cent of its budget to education

¹⁰ Grimes, 2021



The spending for inclusive education for children with disabilities is reported to include mostly scholarship¹¹ and budgetary support to special schools and resource classes (special teachers and resource teacher salaries; materials like books in braille; trainings).

Inclusive education (IE) is spearheaded by the IE unit under the CEHRD. Three modalities of educational provision for children with disabilities are practiced in Nepal: 1) inclusive schools (children with disabilities are included in regular classes; 2) special schools (specific to type of disabilities), and 3) integrated schools, with separate resource classes within in the mainstream schools (with support of teachers/resource teachers), to prepare the students to transit to the regular classes – when/if possible. However, a study reports that the students in resource classes rarely have chances to mix with other children without disability¹². Of the total children presently in school, less than 1% are children

Box 2: Acts and policies related to inclusive education

- The Constitution of Nepal 2015
- The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2017
- Disabled Person Protection and Welfare Act 1982 4
- Special Education Policy 1996
- Protection and Welfare of Disabled Persons, Rules 1994 5
- National Policy and Plan of Action on Disability 2006
- Education Act 1971 8. Education Act, New Amendment 2008
- Education Regulation 2002
- Education Policy 2019

with disabilities¹³. While significant achievements have been reported in terms of net enrolment rate (from 71% in 1998 to 96.9% in 2016), increase in the primary cycle completion rate (from 58% in 2004 to 80% in 2016)¹⁴, and increase in inclusion of girls and children from marginalised caste and ethnic group¹⁵, the same progress is not reflected in the case of children with disabilities.

The comparison of MoEST/CEHRD Flash 1 Reports of 2010/11 and 2019/20 in Table 1 indicates that the percentage of children with disabilities, which hovers around <1 to 1.3% of total enrolment, has not increased over the review period (2010-2021). On the contrary, the percentage of children with disabilities enrolled has decreased for all levels (except for secondary level).

¹¹ Scholarships to children with disabilities are provided in four categories (for a period of 10 months annually):

Category A: Those requiring residential support NRs. 40,000- Rs. 30,000 per year (higher for remote/difficult to access regions)

Category B: Those who need assistive device and assistance NRs. 6000. per year

Category C: Those who use assistive device or transportation for going to school NRs. 4000. per year

Category D: For other general school going children with disabilities NRs.2000. per year.

¹² CERID, 2008

¹³ Government of Nepal, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Center for Education and Human Resource Development (2020) Flash I Report 2076 (2019-2020) I

¹⁴ SOFRECO – FBC Consortium (2019). School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) External Independent Evaluation Mid-Term Review

¹⁵ Thapaliya, 2020

Table 1: Enrolment of children with disabilities (year 2010-11 and 2019-20 comparison)

Education Level	Year 2010-2011				Year 2019-2020			
	Total enrolment		Enrolment of children with disabilities		Total Enrolment		Enrolment of children with disabilities	
Primary/lower basic (class 1-5)	Total	4,951,956	Total	60,348	Total	3,543,862	Total	34,464
	Girls	2,494,472	Girls	28,641	Girls	1,762,541	Girls	NA
	Boys	2,457,484	Boys	31,707	Boys	1,781,321	Boys	NA
			% in total enrolment	1.2 %			% in total enrolment	1%
Lower secondary/upper basic (class 6-8)	Total	1,699,927	Total	17,000	Total	1,775,142	Total	12,419
	Girls	847,607	Girls	7,881	Girls	891,145	Girls	NA
	Boys	852,320	Boys	9,119	Boys	883,997	Boys	NA
			% in total enrolment	1.0			% in total enrolment	0.7%
TOTAL ENROLMENT IN BASIC LEVEL EDUCATION (CLASS 1-8)								
Basic Education (class 1-8)	Total	6,651,883	Total	77,348	Total	5,319,004	Total	46,883
	Girls	3,342,079	Girls	36,522	Girls	2,653,686	Girls	NA
	Boys	3,309,804	Boys	40,826	Boys	2,665,318	Boys	NA
			% in total enrollment	1.16%			% in total enrollment	0.9%

Table 1: Enrollment of children with disabilities (year 2010-11 and 2019-20 comparison)

Education level	Year 2010-2011				Year 2019-2020			
	Total enrolment		Enrolment of children with disabilities		Total enrolment		Enrolment of children with disabilities	
Secondary (class 9-10)	Total	811,910	Total	6,838	Total	1,040,976	Total	13,793
	Girls	395,945	Girls	3,173	Girls	523,185	Girls	NA
	Boys	415,965	Boys	3,665	Boys	517,791	Boys	NA
			% in total enrolment	0.84%			% in total enrolment	1.3%
Higher secondary (class 11-12)	Total	318,426	Total	1,495	Total	661,642	Total	1,355
	Girls	161,486	Girls	753	Girls	351,095	Girls	NA
	Boys	156,940	Boys	742	Boys	310,547	Boys	NA
			% in total enrolment	0.47%			% in total enrolment	0.2%
TOTAL ENROLMENT IN SECONDARY LEVEL EDUCATION (CLASS 9-12)								
Secondary education (class 9-12)	Total	1,130,336	Total	8,333	Total	1,702,618	Total	15,148
	Girls	557,431	Girls	3,926	Girls	874,280	Girls	NA
	Boys	572,905	Boys	4,407	Boys	828,338	Boys	NA
			% in total enrolment	0.74%			% in total enrolment	0.9%

Table 1: Enrolment of children with disabilities (year 2010-11 and 2019-20 comparison)

TOTAL OVERALL ENROLMENT (class 1-12)			
Year 2010-2011		Year 2019-2020	
Total number of children enrolled	7,782,219	Total number of children enrolled	7,021,622
Number of children with disabilities enrolled	85,681	Number of children with disabilities enrolled	62,031
% of children with disabilities in total enrollment	1.10%	% of children with disabilities in total enrollment	0.88%

Source: GoN/MoE/DoE (2010) Flash I Report 2067 (2010-2011) ; GoN/MoEST/CEHRD (2020) Flash I Report 2076 (2019-2020)



As stated in UNICEF's budget brief updates (2021) and as shown in Table 2, the consolidated flash report did indicate a sharp rise in enrolment of children with disabilities, with 126,893 enrolled in 2015. However, the enrolment started to drop drastically from 2017, indicating the likelihood that a substantial number of children with disabilities are out-of-school.

The percentage of total population of children with disabilities currently enrolled in schools is uncertain as the data on the population of out-of-school children are not clear. Population monograph data (2014) on child disability indicates 0.99% (92,012) of children aged 0-14 years were children with disabilities in 2011, compared to 0.39% in 2001. MoEST/CEHRD¹⁶ reports

that 77,705 children with disabilities are currently enrolled in schools, including children in special schools, as of November 2020. The preliminary data of the national population census (2011)¹⁷ indicates that the current population of Nepal is 291,92,480 and 35% are below 14 years. In general, the World Health Organisation estimates that the proportion of children with a disability is around 5% of the child population. Hence, taking this as the reference, it can be estimated that only 15%¹⁸ of children with disabilities are enrolled in school. Though the flash report does not present disaggregated data on out-of-school children, it indicates that the bulk of out-of-school children are from poor households, children from deprived communities and children with disabilities. Of the parents of children who have never attended school, 3.4% mentioned 'disability' as the reason for not sending their children to school¹⁹. A study by MoEST, UNICEF and UNESCO (2016) reports that 30.6% of children (aged 5-12 in lower secondary level as per census 2011 data) are out-of-school children. The flash report also reports negative trend in survival (retention) and high repetition rate among children with disabilities. The education

Table 2. **Enrolment of children with disabilities in basic and secondary level (2014-2018, MoEST, CEHRD)**

School type	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Basic	68,949	112,351	189,057	69,918	65,492
Lower Basic	52,904	84,568	98,953	52,096	48,225
Upper Basic	16,045	27,783	30,104	17,822	17,267
Secondary	8,031	14,542	16,097	11,370	14,214
Lower Secondary	6,238	11,516	12,172	7,987	8,433
Upper Secondary	1,793	3,026	3,925	3,383	5,781
Total	79,980	126,893	145,154	81,288	79,706

Source: UNICEF's Education budget brief updates (2021)

¹⁶ Interview with the Head of IE unit/CEHRD

¹⁷ Government of Nepal (GoN), National planning commission (NPC), Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), (2021). *Preliminary report of National Population Census 2021*

¹⁸ Children below 14 years population is 10,217,368 (35% of total population 29,192,480). So estimating 5% of this child population are children with disabilities which is approximately 510868

¹⁹ Government of Nepal, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Center for Education and Human Resource Development (2020) *Flash I Report 2076 (2019-2020)*

sector analysis report²⁰ states that children with disabilities are the most marginalized in terms of access to and participation in education. This is even more so for girls with disabilities and those in rural areas. The midterm evaluation of SSDP (2019) also reported disparity in access and learning outcomes which persist across socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, and disability, and between public and private schools²¹.



Photo: Norad/ Bjørnulf Remme

²⁰ National Institute for Research and Training (NIRT) & American Institute of Research (AIR) (2017). *Nepal Education Sector Analysis*

²¹ SOFRECO – FBC Consortium (2019). *School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) External Independent Evaluation Mid-Term Review (MTR_SSDP,2019)*

2

Programmes selected for the case study



Norway has supported IE in Nepal through a range of modalities:

- Bilateral support directly to the government to implement the education sector plans, which have inclusive education components;
- Support to UNICEF global efforts to promote inclusive education (multilateral funding);
- Bilateral support to UNICEF inclusive education from the Norwegian Embassy (adding to the global funding);
- Support to the World Bank (WB) multi-donor trust fund for inclusive education (which has selected Nepal as a focus country);
- Support to Save the Children country programme which has an inclusive education component;
- Support to Plan International which has an inclusive education component and support to Atlas Alliance members' country programmes, which have components on inclusive education.

For this case study, we studied Norway's overall contribution to inclusive education policy and practice, and selected two Norwegian-supported programmes for in-depth review. The programmes incorporated a mix of interventions targeting both national (federal) and local systems (local government, school and community) and strengthening the framework of government education sector plan SSDP. One humanitarian intervention was also reviewed, but only in a light-touch manner as the scope of that project in relation to the evaluation issues was limited. The programmes reviewed were:

- **United Nations children's fund's making development disability-Inclusive for all children in nepal** – a mainstream programme for strengthening national systems and IE practices in schools. The expected outcomes of this programme were: 1) An inclusive education master plan completed and approved by IE thematic working group; 2) The introduction of the Education management information system (EMIS) – a statistical system to assist education authorities to plan and monitor performance of children with disabilities and other marginalized groups; 3) Improved school facilities for children and people with disabilities achieved

through provision of disabled-friendly infrastructure; 4) Inclusive education implemented in targeted pilot schools; and 5) Strengthened disability grant delivery system to provide grants to eligible children and adolescents.

- **Save the Children Nepal's Sahayatra²² : children learn and are safe** – a mainstream programme for strengthening IE practices in school. This project focussed on; 1) supporting basic education for children from disadvantaged and marginalised groups, including children with disabilities, to enable them to learn and develop their full potential; 2) creating a safe and protective environment for children in school and other community settings; and 3) improving the implementation by government and civil society of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), especially the general measures of implementation (GMI). The expected outcomes were: 1) increased access to basic quality education; 2) established quality learning environments (QLE); and 3) improved learning achievements for children.

²² Nepali word meaning co-traveler; sharing a journey



- **Plan International Nepal's inclusive early recovery in earthquake-affected sindhupalchowk, Nepal -**

Temporary learning centres were built in schools as part of early response/ relief after the earthquake in 2015 (humanitarian support).

To assess the relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of the above programmes, field visits were conducted in 11 schools (3 districts in 3 provinces) where a diverse range of local stakeholders were interviewed. These included members of school management committees (SMCs) and the parents and teachers associations (PTAs), teachers, and children with disabilities and their family members. Government stakeholders, members of the disability network and programme implementing partners (including Norad's agreement partners) at both national and local levels were interviewed.

It should be noted that:

- Since the programmes under review were already phased out, field visits were conducted in sites where the partners have been implementing extensions/subsequent phases of the same project, or similar projects, drawing on the lesson learnt from the projects being reviewed.
- Findings presented here are in relation to the three projects/programme under review, which are mainstream inclusive education initiatives. There are several other targeted initiatives supported by Norway implemented in Nepal [such as those implemented by partners of Atlas Alliance; other partners of RNE such as Aasmaan Nepal (local NGO), implementing projects promoting inclusion of girls and children with disabilities in the Terai (plain) region], which are not part of this review but may have implications in the findings discussed. Efforts have been made to make references to such initiatives where relevant and possible. However, without data on projects not reviewed, it was not possible to analyse the synergies between these various other initiatives supported by Norad.



Ramp in Nepalese primary school. Photo: Era Shrestha

3

Key Findings



3.1 Findings related to relevance

The Government of Nepal has prioritised both education and inclusion as key to its political and development agenda. After a decade of armed conflict, which brought the agenda of “equity and inclusion” to the forefront of political and development discourse, the government committed to reduce poverty and pursue its ambitious agenda of inclusive growth and accountable service delivery. Nepal recognises education as a prerequisite for developing human capital and an important strategy to achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and realize the country’s vision of graduating out of least developed country status by 2022 and reaching middle-income country status by 2030. The agenda of inclusive education supported by Norway aligns with these commitments. The government, civil society and the disability movement of Nepal all recognise Norway as a pioneer in raising the equity and inclusion agenda, particularly for steering the focus on disability and inclusion of children with disabilities in education. Norway (via RNE-Kathmandu, UNICEF and the World Bank) as a JFP, is part of the institutional mechanism which gives it

the leverage to engage in close policy dialogue and engagement with the government and influence its education priorities. The JFA approach has been recognised by the Government of Nepal as an effective means to “*advance equity, assure quality and strengthen governance and mainstream school safety in the Nepal education sector.*”²³ Norway and other partners participate in two joint annual review meetings (budget and programme review) with the MoEST and development partners, which is considered as an effective mechanism for steering dialogue with the government.

Norway’s budget support to SSDP is a relevant approach to align its contribution to the national priorities and aspirations. The SSDP is considered more inclusive than the previous education sector plan. SSDP aims to increase participation in quality education and improve “equitable access, quality, efficiency, governance, management and resilience of the education system”. A wide range of stakeholders, development partners, civil society organisations (CSOs) were involved in the design and implementation of SSDP (including consultation with OPDs), which may be an effective approach

to increase relevance for a wider constituency and achieve greater coherency. In addition to the budget support for SSDP, Norway’s modality to channel support through a wide range of actors, particularly the CSOs – non-government organisations (NGOs); Atlas Alliance partners – have contributed to this process, enabling space for diverse perspectives, and addressing the issue from multiple fronts. UNICEF’s and Save the Children’s (SC’s) programmes, implemented outside the SSDP, were also found to be aligned with the SSDP framework.

Though progressive, the SSDP has major gaps in defining measures on IE for children with disabilities and is geared more towards special/segregated system of education. While endorsing IE in principle, neither the government nor the OPDs (disability community) representatives interviewed thought it possible to transform the education system sufficiently during the sector planning period to enable children with disabilities to be included in regular schools. The project interventions, exemplified by UNICEF’s theory of change (ToC) and SC’s intervention design, considered some of the major systematic barriers identified. They aimed

²³ Statement by secretary of the Ministry of Education made in the JFA signing Ceremony, (EU 2017).



to supplement the SSDP interventions and address operational gaps in implementation or demonstrate measures which the government can scale to make the implementation of SSDP more disability inclusive. Thus, this agenda, though aligned with the government priorities, remained largely donor driven. The local government (and even CEHRD at federal level) reported not being aware of all aspect and technicalities of the pilot project interventions of Norway's partners, applicable to development interventions outside SSDP. Furthermore, some of the key obstacles remain unresolved (see Section 5 on Lessons Learned). This raises questions regarding the relevance of the SSDP and partners' interventions. Moreover, though the OPDs have participated in the dialogue on SSDP, they have not been engaged enough in the process thereafter. The National Federation of the Disabled-Nepal (NFD-N) and their local networks seek greater roles in pre-programme design and monitoring as well as community mobilisation for greater outreach and better targeting, which they believe would enhance the relevance of the interventions for right holders.

Summary findings on relevance: To summarise, Norwegian support to IE is relevant to national structures and policies due to its strong alignment with national frameworks for achieving equity and inclusion

more generally and through the SSDP. As will be discussed under effectiveness, challenges arise when these relevant goals are pursued through devolution to local government, where understanding of IE is limited, capacities are not in place and where objectives may diverge.

3.2 Findings related to effectiveness

Both UNICEF's and Save the Children (SC)'s programmes selected for review aims to promote inclusion of children in the mainstream education system, with the aim to improve access to education; participation and learning outcomes for children with disabilities in an "inclusive", "safe" and "protective" environment. UNICEF's ToC seek to address three key barriers identified:

- i. Policy and planning for children with disabilities is currently not targeted and needs-based.
- ii. Children with disabilities face the highest disparities in terms of access, participation, and learning.
- iii. Schools, households, and communities do not provide enabling learning environment for children with disabilities.

UNICEF programme strategies follow three lines of actions for addressing these barriers: 1) System-level interventions – generating evidence to inform the policy frameworks; 2) school-level interventions – pilot projects to demonstrate inclusive education practices; and 3) community-level interventions – engagement with immediate family and larger community for a supportive environment for inclusion. SC's programme interventions are also aligned to similar goals, focusing on school and community-level interventions.

As assessed against the above intended targets, the following sections present the results and challenges that could be ascertained.

3.2.1 SYSTEM-LEVEL INTERVENTIONS: INCLUSIVE POLICY AND PROGRAMMING

National inclusive policy framework: Norway has been part of the collaboration with the Government of Nepal for development of the SSDP. This SSDP is reported by partners to be more inclusive than the previous strategy with regard to inclusion of children with disabilities. Various technical working groups (TWGs) were formed to support the implementation of the SSDP through advisory input and knowledge sharing. These platforms are also a means for coordinating efforts and for policy



dialogues. Norway and some of its supported partners (UNICEF- as co-lead, WB,) are members of the Inclusive Education sub thematic Technical Working Group (IE-TWG), formed under the 'Equity and Inclusion' TWG. The IE-TWG focuses on strengthening policies, systems, and mechanisms for inclusion of children with disabilities. This platform also engages with CSO partners (Save the Children; Plan Nepal) and OPDs (Atlas Alliance partners), facilitating discussion among a wide range of actors, including the development partners themselves. Atlas Alliance's partner OPDs, Save the Children and Plan see this platform as an important channel of communication and engagement with the government at policy and programme level.

SSDP did not include specific measures to address inclusion of children with disabilities and was more oriented towards special or segregated education. Given these gaps in terms of a common conceptual understanding and framework for actions, the development of a five-year IE master plan integrated in SSDP was envisioned (as reflected in UNICEF's ToC). UNICEF, as part of the IE-TWG, supported various

studies, including an education sector analysis. The multiple indicator cluster survey 6 (MICS6) was instrumental in highlighting the prevalence of disability²⁴, and spotlighting the need for, and importance of, giving special attention to IE. It also identified key barriers and strategies for informing the development and adoption of the IE master plan. The master plan was intended to ensure targeted focus on inclusion of children with disabilities with the wider goals of social inclusion. This was also important as the government's general focus on inclusion of all socially marginalised children, and not specifically on children with disabilities. However, the IE master plan as envisioned was not adopted, although the final draft was prepared. The official reason cited for this was the need to phase out the current sector plan and prepare a new one, considering the transition to the federal structure²⁵. There are also indications that the government was not yet ready for this commitment as it was perceived to have a huge resource implication as a representative of Norway's partner organisation stated

“ when thinking about disability inclusion, the immediate thought is of those children who are severally challenged and will require extensive support with huge resource implication. But children requiring such support may be few, while a majority can be adjusted within the present system with just minor, low cost or no cost adjustments. ”

An IE approach paper (2020)²⁶ was developed as an alternative to the master plan. It was developed in close collaboration with the CEHRD, which is said to have helped steer discussions, built conceptual clarity and consensus around measures for inclusion of children with disabilities. The partners have stated that the IE approach paper was effective for dialogues (especially for the new School education sector plan, (ESP(2021-2030)).

²⁴ It reported higher disability prevalence than the national census data

²⁵ The RNE/UNICEF (2020) Progress report states that “The shift from focusing on finalizing the “IE Master Plan” to preparing the “IE Approach Paper” is a deviation from the original plan, as it was preferred by the GoN to avoid revisiting an antiquated draft plan which was prepared before the shift to federalism and it was also considered opportune to use the occasion to better frame the IE strategies for Nepal to align more with international and national advances in the area of Inclusive Education (UNCRPD, etc.)”.

²⁶ Approach paper and the road map for implementation of inclusive education in Nepal. Jan 2020



Institutionalisation of mechanisms for generating evidence for informed (targeted and need-based) policy and programming:

UNICEF envisions the Education management information system (EMIS) as an important tool to facilitate informed actions. SSDP utilises EMIS as its monitoring and planning framework for targeting and improving the quality of education for all children, including children with disabilities. The Government's Annual work plan and budget (AWPB) utilises EMIS data. EMIS is designed as a real-time data generation mechanism wherein the schools themselves are required to feed in the data twice a year. Red-book²⁷ allocations are directly linked to the EMIS data.

The equity index (2017), embedded in EMIS, is envisioned as a tool to facilitate equity focused targeting and allocations (addressing the level/kind of deprivation reported), effectively linking national (AWPB) and local planning. The equity index is designed to rank, analyse, and compare prevalence, composition, and trends of education disparities (based on various parameters which includes disability) as derived from various data sources (household and population census, surveys, etc.). UNICEF and other development

partners are in dialogue with the government for development of a performance-based sector plan and budget, but such processes of equity-based allocation are yet to be realised.

With regards to disability-based programming, the present EMIS data reports only on the number of children with disabilities enrolled in school and the type/level of impairment (as per government's categorisation)²⁸. With this limitation in data coverage, the EMIS system is inadequate to contribute towards disability focused monitoring and planning (equity-based performance). The mid-term review of SSDP indicates that the indicators set in EMIS do not always include the level of disaggregation required to monitor the impact of the targeted interventions for gender equality and social inclusion (including for children with disabilities). Further, lack of data on out-of-school children (OOSC), makes it impossible to allocate resources to fund measures to reach out to OOSC, and, hence, address the main educational disparities. The EMIS system has thus far not been effective in informing specific programming decisions, other than the regular support to special schools/resource

classes and scholarships. None of the mainstream schools visited with children with disabilities reported receiving any additional support (fund or services for disability inclusion based on EMIS data) besides the scholarship. Further, the EMIS reporting itself does not always ensure that the scholarships reach the children in school unless they are requested by the respective school. As the education officer in the municipality stated *"over two years of my tenure none of the schools have requested for the scholarship fund. It's just lying there"*. When inquired about the children with disabilities reported in EMIS, he further added *"yes they are children reported in EMIS but have not gone asking about them, why scholarship was not requested"*.

Schools also reported that disability identification cards were mandatory for receiving scholarships. The municipality visited confirmed that they release the scholarship funds only upon request from the respective schools and only for children with disability identification cards. Scholarship disbursements are made only after the requested fund are verified with EMIS data, and social development section is

²⁷ The Red-book presents the government's detailed estimated expenditure, based on AWAP.

²⁸ The four categories include profound disability, severe disability, medium disability (moderate) and minor disability (mild). Disability identification card of four colors are given as per this categorisation respectively red, blue, yellow and white. Government social security allowances (disability allowances) are available only for red and blue card holders

responsible for disability identification card distribution. The same kind of cross-verification is not done to check the validity of the EMIS data or to confirm the required funds are being channelled (practice equity-based allocation). Schools have also stated that they generally do not report children without disability identification cards in the EMIS system.

Further, since disability prevalence is very low compared to other forms of disparity (e.g., gender, caste) and the EMIS reports only on the children enrolled in school (excluding OOSC with disabilities, hence, not reflecting the actual scale of exclusion), the disability score in the equity index is very low. As such, it does not affect the overall ratings, therefore, any policy or programmatic measures informed by the equity index are less likely to benefit children with disabilities.

The government chose not to apply a weightage system to address this gap. Alternatively, to address this challenge, the IE-TWG supported the design of a sub-system (a separate system integrated with the main EMIS and referred to as EMIS disability sub-system)

that would enable reporting on disability specific data. The EMIS disability sub-system is expected to generate more detailed and disaggregated data on disability, within a much wider parameter than just enrolment. This additional data set is expected to operationalise equity-based resource allocation, which would equitably benefit children with disabilities. The system is presently piloted by UNICEF's partner, World Education, in 80 schools out of the 30,000 schools nationwide – with funding from USAID. UNICEF reports that they are in the preparatory phase and have yet to adopt the EMIS disability sub-system in their pilot projects²⁹. The EMIS disability sub-system is also expected to generate detailed data on each individual child and support in planning for individualised support (including the child's Individual Education Plan). It is also expected to be used by local governments for planning and budget allocation. The future upgrading of EMIS is also planned for, which should enable the disability sub-system to capture data beyond the school to cover the school's entire catchment area to also identify and generate data on OOSC. The sub-system will be linked to the other data sources, such as vital registration (birth registration, disability identification

cards, etc.). Further, the EMIS is also expected to be linked with multi-sectoral data, such as WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene, including drinking water and toilet facilities) and DRR (disaster risk reduction), and, hence, has now been renamed as Integrated education management information system (IEMIS). However, challenges in linking systems designed in different or incompatible platforms (e.g., health and education) are foreseen.

The EMIS-disability sub system is still in the nascent phase and would require a great deal of investment for effective functioning in the future. Challenges are anticipated. EMIS data and School improvement plans (SIP)³⁰ are two key mandatory deliverables required from the local government (municipalities) for budget disbursements from the federal government. The schools were found to rely heavily on paid private services (such as cyber cafes, and school accountants) to fill the EMIS data (where schools reported an incurred expense of approx. NRs. 5000-8000 per event). Further, the schools, government officials and OPDs state that the existing EMIS data are not reliable. During the field visit, it was found that some schools

²⁹ Save the Children, as part of their internal monitoring, have reported recording detailed data on each child with disabilities enrolled in school and also prepare an individual profile of each child (similar approach to the EMIS disability sub-system envisioned by the IE-TWG). This data is also provided to the local government. However, it is not clear if the local governments have used this data. The individual child profile data was also not reported to be used for the IEP

³⁰ School Improvement Plans (SIP) define the schools' priorities and action plan. It is developed annually by the SMCs (together with stakeholder). SIPs must align with the existing government policy provisions and budget disbursement are made on basis of it. As reported in MTR of SSDP (2019), schools lack capacity to properly plan and execute it SIP to improve service quality.



were over-reporting or under-reporting enrolment data. One school principal reported attendance ratio of only about 60-70% while the rest were 'ghost students' who were enrolled in school but not attending or attending only on some days. This included students enrolled in unregistered private schools in the Terai region, who attended regular classes in the private school for also enrolled in government school for formal certifications. The intent to increase the per child budget allocation and to increase their scholarship allocation for other marginalised children (scholarships for Dalit and girls) was also indicated as reason for over-reporting. Double reporting was also observed in cases of children who attended madrasa (Islamic religious school in the Terai³¹) in the morning and the government schools during the day.

In other cases, the data were found to be under-reported in case of children with disabilities. Out of the five schools visited in the Terai, all of which had children with disabilities, three schools did not report any child with disabilities while the other two under-reported

the number. In the Terai, where birth registration of children was found to be a challenge, such cases were more prevalent³². A case was found that a child (with intellectual disability) had been attending school regularly for the last two years. This child had not been formally enrolled and reported in EMIS. There were also several cases of children without disability identification cards not reported in EMIS. This included both the hilly and the terai regions. Parents in general, but even more so in cases of girls in the Terai where stringent gender norms prevail, were found to refrain from getting disability identification cards for their children as "*it will cause difficulties in their marriage*". Two cases were reported where the parents refused to accept the identification card as it did not entail any financial assistance (as all categories of disability identification cards are not entitled to social security allowances³³). There were also three cases reported where the identification card was denied by the local authorities as the child "*looks just fine*", i.e., with intellectual disability and no 'visible' physical difficulties.

Inclusive local policy and programming: The approach paper, which is found to be effective in national level policy dialogue, has not been equally effective as a policy instrument to inform the local level planning and programming. None of the local government officials have reportedly used EMIS to inform their local policies and plans (other than the red-book fund management which is limited to scholarships and funding special schools). SC have mobilised local civil society networks to engage with the local government for influencing their local policy and programme. As reported by SC's project implementation team, municipalities in their project areas are reported to have developed their respective education policy, which also includes provisions for IE. However, the same success reported at municipalities level, has not been achieved at the provincial level. None of the provincial governments in the areas where SC and UNICEF run their projects have developed their education policy.

³¹ Madrassas were found to include not just children from Muslim communities but others as well. Since the classes were conducted only for a few hours in the early morning, most of the children attended other school in the daytime. However, since the madrasa receives government support, they are mandated for inclusion in EMIS reporting.

³² In the Terai regions, which share a porous border with India, women in general, but particularly with Indian origin (married to Nepalis) face difficulties in acquiring citizenship certificates. Birth registration requires citizenship certificates from both the parents. Further, Nepal is among the countries with highest rate of child marriage (higher prevalence in the Terai regions) (MoHP, New Era Nepal and IFC International (2012)). The official age of marriage is in Nepal 20. Births are not registered if both the parents have not yet reached legal age of marriage.

³³ Disability identity cards are distributed based on 10 types of disability categories grounded on the severity spectrum i.e., profound (red), severe (blue), moderate (yellow) and mild (white). Only the red and blue disability ID card holder receives monthly social security allowance of NRs. 2000 (approximately US\$ 20) and NRs 600 (approximately US\$ 6) respectively. Children can either received the social security allowance or the scholarship (not both).



UNICEF has reported that their support to local governments for preparing the policy framework is channelled through federal red-book grants. Since UNICEF does not have a mandate for direct engagement with the local government within the scope of the present pilot project, they have prioritised the locations where their partners (e.g., World Education International – WEI) have been directly engaging with the local government as part of a USAID funded project³⁴. UNICEF also reported that they once directly supported three local municipalities to prepare their education policy with budgetary and technical support through WEI. Two of the three municipalities have prepared their education policies (yet to be endorsed³⁵), while one has refused the grant stating their inability to prepare the education policy. One of the municipalities visited reported that they have halted the process of preparing the education policy, cautioned by the cases where municipalities who have prepared such policy are facing legal charges for acting against the law as the federal Education act's new amendment (2008) has not been amended to make provision for local-level education policy.

3.2.2 SCHOOL-LEVEL SYSTEM INTERVENTION: MODELLING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PRACTICES (SERVICE DELIVERY)

UNICEF and SC's interventions targeting school system strengthening, aim to address the key barriers where children with disabilities face high disparities in terms of access, participation and learning.

Identification, assessment, and accessibility – Creating opportunity: Identification of children with disabilities (and persons with disabilities in general) is a key issue raised by OPDs in Nepal as families often reportedly keep children with disabilities hidden due to stigma or lack of assessment. There is no accurate data on disability prevalence. The prevalence rate (1.94%) reported by the previous national census (2011) is highly contested, while the recently concluded national census (2021) also failed to incorporate the Washington Group Questions (WGQ), in spite of strong advocacy by the disability movement. In the context where the data on out-of-school children (OOSC) are not available, identification and outreach to OOSC with disabilities is one of the major barriers

to inclusion of children with disabilities in education. The local government and the schools have also not defined any mechanism or strategies in place for overcoming this constraint. This indicates that the SSDP measures primarily caters to children who already are in school. Schools carry out home visits as part of their “enrolment campaigns”, but in interviews they report that they have never asked about children with disabilities. The teachers involved in enrolment campaigns usually inquire with families if “there are any children likely to join school”. Such inquiry will not get the child identified in cases where education is not seen as a necessity for children with disabilities.

SC has undertaken household surveys (covering the entire population) in their project areas to identify and reach out to OOSC. This can be said to be a very effective measure given the situation that EMIS does not report on OOSC and neither is there any other reliable data on OOSC. The general response to the question “are you aware of any OOSC” during the evaluation, the standard response received was “none, at least not of the school going age” or “none who are able to (physically) access school” or “only those

³⁴ Reading for All: Disability Inclusive Education for Nepali Children (Early Grade Reading Programme/EGRP). World Education is a partner of Handicap International- Humanity & Inclusion (HI) on the Nepal Reading for All Program, supported by USAID. <https://worlded.org/project/reading-for-all-disability-inclusive-education-for-nepali-children>

³⁵ The policy is endorsed by Municipality's executive committee.



who are with severe impairments, bed ridden”, or “those with severe intellectual disabilities who are not able to attend classes”. All those children who “are able to learn” were reported to be in a special school. However, Save the Children have reported identifying several such OOSC who were excluded from education in the local school. SC’s programme interventions start with a household survey to identify OOSC using the WGQ. Most of these children were referred to special schools while there were some children with multiple disabilities (primarily intellectual disability) who could not be enrolled in the mainstream school nor referred to special school. To ensure access to education for these children, SC arranged for a “school at home” programme, as part of their project intervention. To ensure integration of this support within the mainstream education system, the children, though schooled at home, are formally enrolled in the nearby schools and attend the school’s regular examination (assessment and accreditation) procedures. The “school at home” programme included support for a teacher who was assigned for each child to teach them in their own home, following a curriculum designed

by the project team (abridged version of the school curriculum). It is most likely that without the school at home initiatives, these children would have remained out of school. UNICEF/WEI have consulted with the local communities/teachers to identify OOSC. During the field visit, UNICEF’s implementing partner WEI reported identifying 160 children, which included children with severe (and multiple) impairments with no possibilities to attend schools. Save the Children also organised health assessment camps which have helped in distribution of assistive devices and referrals to hospital for more detail technical assessment and referrals for receiving disability identification cards. However, it has been a challenge to incorporate health assessment and early detection components as part of the core school intervention programme. None of the partners reported any engagement or collaboration with the health agencies or the local government section responsible for disability identification card distribution³⁶ with regards to identification of OOSC or to assess their needs.

Box 3: School sector development partners (SSDP) adopts

- The National Framework of Child-friendly School for Quality Education (2010) defines the standards for learner-friendly environment for all learners, including children with disabilities (physical access, teacher training, participation)
- Guidelines on Physical and Information Accessibility of Persons with Disabilities (2013)
- Teacher’s professional competency standards which include IE.
- National Curriculum Framework (2007) which endorsed the principles of inclusion

³⁶ The section is responsible for health and social assessment for distribution of identification cards, though their capacity might not be optimal including diverse team with expertise in area like health, education and psychology.

Both UNICEF and SC project interventions have provisions for support material (stationary, uniforms, bags, etc.) for the children with disabilities, in addition to the scholarship and school meal support that comes through red book funding. Teachers and parents have identified such support to be of value and, hence, found to be an effective incentive in attracting children with disabilities to school, especially for children from economically poor communities. One school shared their first experience of enrolling children with disabilities where upon being allocated scholarships for disabled children, the teachers had gone looking for children in the community and enrolled them.

In addition to the identification, another major barrier in access is infrastructure accessibility. The schools are mandated to follow the building guideline/code, which means that once inside the school premises, the infrastructure is likely to be accessible. However, the infrastructure to reach the school, such as roads, transportation, etc., are generally not accessible.

The programme's intervention strategies address physical access within the schools; within classrooms; to libraries and particularly WASH. Such measures for physical accessibilities, though not part of core IE interventions, were supported within the partner's

other programme or other sources. When such support is not a core part of the funding, the arrangement is not always optimal or adherent to the principle of universal design. As per the building code guidelines, school buildings are required to build wheelchair ramps. In most cases these ramps allow access to the ground floor. OPDs shared that most structures do not meet the specification, and most importantly, these ramps start only from the building itself, whereas the passages (road, ground) to the buildings itself were not accessible. One of the OPD representatives shared his experiences of monitoring schools in Norway's partners project locations stating:

“We requested {...} to support monitoring of the local schools. Accessibility measures were taken such as ramps were made, they widened the school and toilet doors, but my wheelchair did not go through any of it. Are they following the universal standards?”

Further, the interventions for accessible infrastructure primarily targeted children with physical impairments. Tactile support to blind children were not part of the design and use of visual aids were limited, as one OPD representative stated:

“They could have considered using braille as well, for instance, for signs indicating girls and boys toilet, or library or office rooms.”

Children have reported feeling included in classroom activities although excluded from external activities (sports, games) due to challenges in physical accessibility, such as inaccessible playgrounds.



Participation-safe, protective and inclusive

(participatory) learning environment: Meaningful participation in schools is another major obstacle for children with disabilities. Past studies have indicated that parents prefer special classes over inclusive classes in mainstream schools - as their children in those schools are not only ignored, isolated and neglected, but also subjected to humiliation and abuse from both teachers and fellow students³⁷. Schools are not prepared to support the children due to lack of capacities, skills and materials. Both UNICEF and SC programmes have been designed to demonstrate approaches for ensuring meaningful participation of children in a “safe”, “protective” and “inclusive” (participatory) environment. The key frameworks that guided the interventions are “child friendly classrooms”, and the “quality education/ quality learning environment framework”. Additionally, SC specifically emphasises embedding interventions within the “child protection” framework for promoting a safe and protected environment. This approach has been very important to ensure both a safe and also a dignified learning environment for the children, as the teachers are also learning to value and support all

learners equally. These approaches are embedded in the “early grade teaching” methodologies. Accordingly, both UNICEF and SC, projects include teacher trainings on child friendly classrooms and quality education, and they provide teaching material support (development and use of teaching resources). Within the overall “early grade teaching” framework, which is same for the entire classes, the teachers have been trained in techniques that include classroom management, which include sitting arrangements (in circle or free-style floor sitting where each child can interact with each other in small groups); use of materials that are playful, engaging and interactive, rather than the traditional one-way teaching approaches (play, games and material based as opposed to text-book based) and creating a vibrant ambiance. Additional support for children with disabilities entails sensitizing the teachers to be mindful of each child's need. Teachers who report they are aware of the child's needs have been making effort to ensure that they are able to participate in the learning process, adopting measures, such as sitting arrangements, making toys accessible, and checking on them to ensure participation.

It can be said that Norway's partners have made genuine efforts to ensure meaningful participation of children, even in emergencies, where children with disabilities are likely to be excluded. In addition to the efforts made by SC and UNICEF, Plan International Nepal were recognised as being in the forefront of efforts to advocate for ‘disability inclusive humanitarian response’. Schools confirm they were asked to submit data of children with disabilities in the temporary learning centres.

Learning Outcomes; Realization of full potential –

Individual Education Plans (IEP): When the system is still struggling with ensuring access, learning attainment of all children often gets side-lined, but this is even more so for children with disabilities. UNICEF's ToC and SC's interventions seek to address this constraint through demonstrating experimental measures that are likely to support the children with disabilities to learn and realize their full potential. The teachers are trained on the pedagogical approaches for multi-grade and multi-level teaching. The government has introduced the practice of multi-grade teaching in early grades (1-3), where the teachers are trained to

³⁷ A Human Rights Watch (2018); Plan International, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (2014) study concludes that when children with disabilities drop out of school, it can have a negative impact on their psychosocial well-being as many will have faced violence, bullying and discrimination by peers and teachers in community and home life.



assess and categorize students by their learning level and provide support accordingly. The training also included teaching material development and use. The pilot projects build on similar approaches, but with additional tools and approaches focusing on IE for children with disabilities which includes interventions for assessing, ascertaining level/learning need and planning for personalized support using the IEP. The training also included teaching material development and use. "Individualized learning support" is a key strategy for supporting the children's learning and hence the teacher is trained to develop an IEP for each child and use it in their teaching and learning process. IEPs include a section on individual assessment based on adapted WGQ, and a learning plan based on it. IEP is designed to be reviewed and updated every three months.

Following the training, the teachers have reported that they are more sensitized on children with disabilities and IE approaches. Strategies for support include classroom placements, i.e., children are made to sit in the front or near the teacher; or are paired with fellow children who can help them (peer support measures); repeating the instruction/content, speaking in louder voice, speaking slowly or standing next to the child while speaking (in case of children with hearing difficulties).

Box 4: MoEST/CEHRD defines IE as:

Inclusive education is a process of developing an educational system that ensures the opportunity for receiving education in a non-discriminatory environment in their own community by respecting multicultural differences. Inclusive education believes in the principle that all children can learn if they are given an appropriate environment and support to address their needs, and recognises the importance of the ownership of the community in schools. Inclusive education is a strategy to identify those children at national and local level who are in danger of dropping out from school due to the lack of an essential appropriate environment and support and learning to fulfil the social, cultural and educational needs of all children".

Children with visual impairments are helped by friends to copy notes. Children are allowed to have flexible assignments (delayed or submission with help of friends). Teaching materials like the flex chart with large colourful print, blocks and toys, etc., are said to be very effective in teaching, as a teacher mentions "earlier we were so dependent on textbooks. *Now I feel we can easily teach without any textbooks*".

The experiences shared by the teachers indicate that the arrangement for additional support for children with disabilities have been largely made only within standard pedagogical practices, raising questions with regards to 'universal design for learning'. One teacher stated

“we are able to recognise if children have some kind of disabilities and need additional support. But we have not been able to assess them properly and plan for their support”.”

The teachers report they have not been able to support the children beyond the generic strategies for classroom management (mostly logistic). However, no pedagogical adaptation of teaching and learning practices was found to be made. Teachers do not refer to use of any adaption in their teaching materials, or their teaching approaches (variation in techniques). They report struggling to find ways to support children with disabilities that require adaptations in teaching approaches, without which children who cannot adapt



to the standard pedagogical approaches and require additional measures do not benefit much. The support has been successful to enable children to participate in a “safe” participatory environment but not in terms of meaningful learning. The »safe learning environment” in itself is a very important milestone for promoting participation and for overall well-being of a child. So it can be said that support has been successful to create access to ‘opportunities’, however, in absence of additional support, the children with disabilities have not been able to capitalise on those “opportunities” for meaningful learning, as one OPD representative shared:

““The government defines inclusive education as a process of giving an appropriate environment. So that’s what has been achieved. They have given the environment for education, be it in a segregated setting. In mainstream schools children have the opportunity to be in a ‘same’ environment. But that’s it! they have the environment for participation. But are the children able to utilize that opportunity for meaningful learning?””

The IEP has helped teachers to understand that children need individual attention and that they have to plan for it. However, in terms of practical application, the results have not met expectations. The IEP are generally not used as a daily reference by the teachers

for planning lessons and teaching strategies or for formative assessments to guide their practices. Most of the IEP have not been monitored as required. One of the IEP reviewed was found to include just two actions – refer for medical assessment and provide extra support, without any details. UNICEF have been using the IEP designed and piloted by its partner WEI and it was found to be more comprehensive in terms of assessment and action planning. However, the planned actions articulated learning goals without any clear pedagogical strategies to attain it. An IEP of a learner with intellectual disabilities includes learning goals like “recognise colours”; “teach numbers up to 10” while the child’s teacher stated “no matter how much I try, she remembers nothing. The next day we have to teach her the same thing”. Another teacher shared similar experience in relation to supporting a deaf child who was helped to copy alphabet from the book or from her friends copy, but the teachers confirm “It’s just copying, she is only drawing. She does not know what the symbol means”.

Yet another example is of a child who could hear but has a speech impairment. He follows all verbal instructions but cannot verbally respond. His teacher questions “he cannot speak, so how do we assess him?”. Another teacher shared a case of a child with

physical impairment who cannot hold a pen and hence cannot sit for written examination. Save the Children and their implementing partners candidly report that they are in a learning phase and faced challenges in facilitating the process. SC Norway has been arranging trainings on topics like WGQ and IEP for the field implementation team. SC’s Nepal team recognise that they continue to need more support to ensure they can adequately support the schools. SC’s mid-term evaluation (internal) report also states the limited capacity of the front-line staff who are assigned to support the teachers on implementing the IEP. UNICEF/WEI also acknowledged this gap, stating that the capacity of the learning motivators mobilised to support the teachers needs to be strengthened further.

Teachers report that the big class size (with sometimes 50-60) makes it almost impossible to give individualized attention or even extra time for children. As part of government programme, teachers in higher classes have been practicing remedial class support (additional classes after school hours/in break to help children with poor performance). However, such additional learning or support sessions for children with disabilities were not reported to be taking place. Though they have experience in teaching children in multiple groups (multi-level teaching), teachers have



not been able to incorporate additional (differential or layered) measures for children with disabilities. In cases where a child is not able to participate in the on-going standardised learning processes, teachers have reported just giving materials/toys to the child with disabilities to keep the child engaged, while the rest of the class continue their regular lessons.

The standard curriculum, textbooks, and assessment processes are followed for all children. In accordance with the government system teachers are trained in Continuous Assessment System (CAS) and are required to develop portfolio of individual child, which are practices in-built in the government's system that can be instrumental in ensuring individualized support for learners with disabilities. However, such a system was not found to be practiced consistently.

SC's school-at-home programme uses the same curriculum to support all the children. The children have multiple disabilities (including a diverse spectrum of intellectual disability), and hence have very different learning capacities and needs. One child was able to secure third position in his class (in school examination based in the standard curriculum) while another can

only recognise letters but not numbers. The team who designed the curriculum shares:

“We are aware that the curriculum is not ideal. We had no choice but to come up with something to help the child. We didn't know where to get the technical help. We asked the help of a local teacher, sat with him to review the school curriculum and over several sittings decided what would be feasible within our resources... we have heard about the portage³⁸ curriculum, but had no idea how to access it.”

Teachers in general express views that “these children need separate classrooms; they would benefit more in a resource class” or “there is a limit on what we can do for them” while there were also some teachers who shared their frustrations on not being able to do much:

“From trainings we have learned to be child friendly, psychosocial training has helped us to identify children with difficulties. We have made sure that the children are and are treated well and not harassed by peers. We have taken steps like bringing the children to the front, but then what next? Is this enough to ensure the children with disabilities learn equally as others?”

We have been successful in giving them a positive environment but have not been able to help them in their learning.”

The strategies adopted can be said to be beneficial for only children with certain type of impairments, like low vision or hard of hearing. For others, it did not mean much, as a teacher shared:

“We are trying to manage IE only with classroom management approach. If the child has problem with sight, we bring them to the front, if hearing problem we go near to the child while speaking. But for the student like Sunita [name changed], who apparently has intellectual disabilities (we don't know for sure, but looks like from her behaviour), these things are of no use to her. She does not speak to any of us, but only to her close friends, with whom she talks continuously. It doesn't matter if we put her in the front row, or last row, or the middle row. It does not matter if we make her sit with her close friends or separate her from. We don't know what we can do to help. We have also not been able to deeply study her case or understand how we can help her.”

³⁸ Portage is curriculum usually used for home-based early intervention programme for children with special needs, which entails engagement of the family member and supports.

The teachers report that they do not have sufficient skills and technical support to adequately support the children. In addition to the training on IE provided by the projects (which is also reported to be not sufficient), the teachers have not received much capacity building support. The formal education and the mandatory teachers' trainings (pre-service trainings) have very limited content on IE. Prior to the transition to the federal structure, there was provision for school supervisors and resource persons in the district education offices to support/guide SMC, PTA, and teachers. The SSDP (2026-2023)³⁹ recognised that "the current system of school supervisors and resource persons is insufficient to meet the evaluation needs and supporting the pedagogical processes within schools", and planned for reallocation of school supervisors based on the number of students/schools in the district, strengthening the capacities of the school supervisors and resource persons and reviewing the structure of the resource centres to use them for the technical backstopping of schools and teachers. However, with the transition to federal structure these support mechanisms have been dismantled. The services of the previous district level teachers training centres (29) are not provided by only seven provincial level units.

Schools/teachers have also reported limited availability of teaching and learning materials to support the children with different learning needs. None of the mainstream schools visited reported availability of any materials in braille⁴⁰. Only teachers in special schools/resource classes received trainings in braille and sign language. Though some children with hearing impairments in mainstream school have received hearing aids, deaf children do not have access to sign language trainings.

In case of humanitarian response project, the schools shared that they were asked to report on children with disabilities whereas in terms of the support, they do not recall any specific arrangement made. It was generic for all children (safe environment, psychosocial support etc) as a teacher said;

“at that time survival and protection was the main priority. We were not in the position to think about anyone specifically. Every child was in equal risk, and everyone needed to be supported.”

³⁹ Government of Nepal, Ministry of Science and Technology (2020). *School Sector Development Plan 2016/17–2020/21, approved August 2016*

⁴⁰ Nepal Association of the Blind has two braille printers and have won government tenders to supply braille books to special schools for blind



Overall, interventions can be said to be largely effective in case of children who can adopt to the mainstream learning processes with some minor adjustments, whereas the system effectively excludes the children from the learning process if they need specialized and additional support. Hence, the finding indicates that even children who are already in school and included in a 'participatory' environment can still be excluded due to challenges in pedagogical adaptation. The constraints in assessment and early identification processes further add to this process of exclusion. A misdiagnosis or inaccurate/inadequate assessment can affect the process of supporting children with special/additional needs. Many children with less visible impairments may not be identified and supported. Hence, children who are in school but still excluded from the learning process are not just children with functional impairments, but also those with learning difficulties, which are not easily assessed and identified by teachers. UNICEF's progress report acknowledges this gap⁴¹ and emphasise the importance of a stronger assessment and identification process.

Retention: The degree to which children with disabilities are retained in schools is reported to be problematic, though evidence of the extent of this problem is unclear. The partners' theories of change do not articulate any specific strategies for retention of children with disabilities, rather, it is assumed that interventions aimed at promoting safe and protective environment, reducing discrimination, and providing individualized support - will help retain children as well. Strategies for promoting access such as school meals, scholarships and material support (stationary, uniform, etc) were also reported to support retention of children in schools. Most of the children who started in early childhood development were reported to have continued in upper grades but there were also reported cases of dropouts (which could be linked to specific conditions). During the field visit two children who had recently dropped out were identified. The reasons for dropping out were related to issues concerning protection (verbal abuse by fellow children, physical punishment by teachers) and lack of an enabling learning environment. In SC-supported schools, teachers reported being oriented on child rights and

child protection and on topics related to quality learning environment - like identifying children who are in stress and psychological counselling. The children interviewed reported to be happy in school in general. These were mainly children with physical impairments who could adopt to the learning environment with some logistical support and did not have problems learning within the existing system. However, students mainly in the schools in the Terai regions had a different experience to share. One child had reported to have discontinuing school after he was beaten up. The teachers at these schools in the Terai, did not mention anything related to child protection or child friendly practices while discussing what they learned from the trainings. These schools mostly had children with intellectual disabilities who could not learn within the standardised education system. One child explicitly indicated that she dropped out as she was not able to cope with the learning expectations. She had appeared for her final exams but refused to sit for the last one saying

“they ask me to write, I don't want to write. I don't want to go to school.”

41. The RNE/UNICEF (2020) progress report states that; "The 442 children identified are those who have been already identified as having a disability, particularly those with more severe or "obvious" disabilities. Because the early detection activities have not rolled out due to the COVID situation, it is not known exactly how many children in the project schools have a disability or functional limitation. However, it is estimated that many more children within the project schools do in fact have a disability or functional limitation. Studies from UNICEF and partners' earlier phases of work in 2016 - 2018 indicate that 26 per cent of children in schools within project districts of Mugu and Bajura had a disability/functional limitation or learning difficulties. Additionally, according to the results of the NMICs6 Child Functioning Module, in project provinces (2, 6, 7) the range of per cent of children with disabilities is between 10.1 - 12 per cent."

A principal of another school recalled a child who dropped out the previous year:

“I keep thinking about the child with autism who left our school. She was an orphan, and I am not sure if she continued her studies. I keep wondering if there was anything we could have done for her. Maybe, if we had helped her, she would have continued.”

Teachers (and programme teams) have indicated potential risks in retention of children with disabilities, especially in higher grades. The project interventions are designed to target early grade teachings. The teaching learning strategies designed for individualized support for children with disabilities are mainly for young learners. In absence of similar support mechanism in higher grades, the students are likely to fall out. Besides, when the students transited from 'grade teaching' to subject teachings, the pedagogical adaptation will be even more complicated and hence challenges are anticipated, especially in subjects such as science and maths, and particularly for children with hearing and visual impairments and for children with intellectual disabilities. Furthermore, children with disabilities often start schooling very late and as they grow older, they feel embarrassed to be in school with

smaller children and hence drop out. Besides, the projects targeting children are not able to continue their support to them once they cross their legally defined childhood age (18 years). High incidence of irregular attendance was reported in case of children with disabilities, which is likely to induce dropouts. Specially in children with intellectual disabilities and learning difficulties, once there is any kind of gap, the whole process has to be initiated from the beginning, and hence discourages children as well as teachers.

3.2.3 COMMUNITY-LEVEL INTERVENTIONS: FAMILY; COMMUNITY AND CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT

Both UNICEF's ToC and SC's intervention strategies give priority to family and community engagement as a key factor for successful inclusive education. The SSDP also recognises the importance of family and community engagement. The implementation plan for SSDP aims to strengthen the participation of children with disabilities through strategies like raising awareness of parents and the community to enable greater participation in educational management and leadership in SMCs and PTAs.

A Vulnerable Community Development Framework (VCDF, 2011) has also been introduced by the government, which emphasises the participation of parents and the community and is promoted as a planning tool for enabling the SMCs and PTAs to prepare the SIP in collaboration with the local communities, through self-evaluation and local level planning for child friendly schools. However, the framework was not found to be operationalised. In addition to Save the Children's capacity building interventions targeting SMCs/PTA (as part of their child rights governance framework), very few activities for awareness or engagement of communities were found to be implemented at the field level.

School governance: SC's programme framework integrates a strong component of "child rights governance", which also encompasses the child protection component, covering regulatory frameworks, community-based child protection mechanisms, protection policies in schools, and empowerment of children. The interventions include engagement with the school governance system, including training of SMC/PTA; training and mobilizing child club on issue of child right which includes rights of children with disabilities. In these schools, the SMCs reported that the school's



School Improvement Plan (SIP)⁴² include reaching out to children at risk, which includes children with disabilities, as their priority. UNICEF reported that the community and family engagement component of the project were heavily affected by the Covid 19 crises and very little was implemented. SC's project also includes a strong component for engaging the larger civil society for advocacy with the government. A CSO network which includes OPDs and other CSOs working in child rights, IE or disability, create awareness among a larger sphere. Where such components of stronger school governance and civic engagement are not included, similar results are not reported. SMCs and PTAs were found to be less aware of disability or IE. Some of the members were not even aware that there were children with disabilities in their school and their expressed priorities and commitments did not reflect anything in relation to IE.

Parents engagement: The IEP is designed to engage the family/parents and seeks commitment from them to support the child's learning. However, teachers indicate that it has been a challenge to secure parents' support due to their level of awareness. The IEP are supposed to be drawn up jointly with teachers, students and parents. But in practice it is the teacher who alone

drafts it and sends for parent's signatures. In one case, a teacher shared *"I called the parents in pretext of possible incentive for the child [stating children with IEPs are entitled to some benefits]. After signing the IEP, when they asked for the incentive, I told them, it hasn't come yet, it will come later"*.

Awareness raising interventions for parents (or community) were as such not extensively planned. Parents, though now conscious of their children's education, were found still to have reservations with regards to their child's capacity to learn in a mainstream school as there were parents who shared *"my child is learning nothing here, what is the use"*. However, there were also two parents who expressed their different understanding and expectation from the mainstream schools as a mother shared *"being in school with other children is very important. My child may not learn the alphabet, but will learn social skills - how to be with others [conduct], how to communicate"*. The UNICEF interventions include provision for "individual family service plans" to support the parents' and families' capacity to provide an enabling environment for the child. However, the parents and teachers interviewed did not seem aware of these.

Summary findings on effectiveness: In summary, at the national level, there is greater conceptual clarity and consensus on way-forward. Institutional mechanisms for generating information are in place and the efforts are now to ensure that the system facilitates disability inclusive local level policy and programming. At the operational level the projects have demonstrated viable measures to operationalize inclusive practices. The interventions have helped introduce some tools and technical know-how (like IEP) and also facilitated teachers to build technical skills which are likely to better support inclusion of children. Measures and practices introduced have benefitted children specifically in terms of increased participation in a safe, protected and inclusive environment. However, the inclusive education measures practiced at schools are yet to transcend beyond access and participation to transform the pedagogical practices that would result in more equitable learning outcomes (education attainment) for diverse learners, so as to enable them to realize their full potential. Furthermore, for the changes achieved within the purview of the few pilot projects to translate into a broader system wide change, i.e., transforming the overall education system, the sphere of influence would need to expand further

42 Hva skal stå her?



than the present scope of the projects. This would entail clear strategies for the government to scaling up these pilot initiatives. The education sector plans and the policy guidance, particularly at the local level, needs to be clear and committed for inclusion of children with disabilities. The findings of this evaluation align with the findings of the MTR of SSDP (2019) which found that:

- The current system of special resource classes/ special schools and limited residential scholarships although well intended, is not sufficient to contribute to the inclusive education approach.
- Even appropriately trained teachers cannot properly undertake child-centred pedagogy or provide appropriate support to students encountering difficulties when classes are overcrowded.
- Identification of out of school children with disabilities and appropriate support for their engagement in school activities still need further effort.

3.3 Findings related to sustainability

Norway's development cooperation in education, sustained over period of more than 10 years, with persistent focus on equity, inclusion and disability have contributed towards establishing disability as a determinant of disparity. Inclusive education is now a prominent part of the mainstream political and development discourse of Nepal. Partners have contributed to steer the focus on children with disabilities within the larger discourse of inclusion which earlier predominantly focused on gender, economic (poverty) and social marginalization based on caste/ethnic identity and poverty. The increased ownership of the inclusive agenda among diverse actors with focus on children with disabilities is likely to sustain the agenda of inclusive education. Diverse actors, including development partners, governments, CSOs, and OPDs now engage in dialogue on IE at different levels. More and diverse development actors are reported to adopt equity and inclusion agenda in their development agenda, with the focus on children with disabilities as their strategic priority. This includes JFPs of SSDP, who are members of the Equity and Inclusion TWG together with Norway and UNICEF (with approximately 15 % of their funding from Norway).

In addition, the World Bank has engaged in support to IE in Nepal (around 50% funded by Norway). This is a shift from earlier when only international NGOs and development partners working on disability or supporting separate targeted interventions were engaged. Efforts like SC's approach to engage the larger civil society in the process (including OPDs) have also enabled wider ownership of the IE agenda among a broader network of local CSOs including OPDs at the local level. SC has reported implementing the project as part of their core institutional strategy, and not only as a stand-alone targeted initiative.

There is emerging clarity on the concept of IE among key stakeholders at the national level, which is likely to further strengthen the ownership of the IE agenda. The IE Approach Paper is recognised by the key government actor (CEHRD) as having facilitated discussion around IE among the government and development partners (IE-TWG). The trainings and collaboration with the CSOs at the local level as part of the partners' project interventions have supported processes at local level. The local government and schools at the local level shared their conceptual understanding of "IE" in much broader terms, but at the same time also expressed the implementation challenges and hence preferences for SNE as a more feasible approach. On the other



hand, the OPDs (members of the local networks) emphasised IE in line with UNCRPD. Hence though 'special education' continues to be dominant within the disability discourse, there is also strongly emerging voice for IE among different actors.

The disability movement is also found to increasingly organize around the agenda of inclusive education, where earlier they were said to be divided and more oriented towards special schools. The network members, National Federation of the Disabled Nepal (NFDN federal and the provincial chapters), expressed a very clear understanding of IE and issues related to the viability of the approach given dedicated resource commitment for it. The national disability movement is now lobbying the federal government to reinstate the IE policy, which was abolished with the enactment of the national education policy. NFDN and their local chapters are increasingly taking up the watchdog and whistle-blower role. NFDN local chapters have reported to mobilize their own local resources to monitor the IE interventions implemented by UNICEF. Both in SC and UNICEF project areas, OPDs have carried out surveys to ascertain the disability prevalence rate (targeting

specific areas). Atlas Alliance have been supporting the capacity strengthening and advocacy initiatives of the disability movement in Nepal, along with other Nordic countries – MyRight/Sweden⁴³ and Disabled Peoples Organisation Denmark.

National institutional capacity on IE is also gradually strengthening with enabling policy frameworks and institutionalised systems (like EMIS). The partners (and CEHRD) have commented that the new education sector plan (ESP- 2021-2030) is more progressive than the SSDP as it integrates clear targets and measures, such as curriculum differentiation (already started this year for Early Childhood Development), stronger assessment and identification through dialogue with the Ministry of Health and Sciences – reported to be recently initiated by CEHRD, and increased focus on teachers' professional development, with specialised IE training for sixty master trainers planned for next year. With reference to this, it has been reported that some of the development partners have set specific disbursement linked indicators.

Considering the fact that as of now only about 1% of the children enrolled in schools are children with disabilities, and most are likely to be out of school, and given that the pilot interventions target a very limited geographical coverage, sustainability at scale is doubtful. As articulated in UNICEF's theory of change, it is anticipated that the piloted interventions would be adopted and owned by the government for nationwide scaling up. However, the strategies for scaling up have not been articulated. No discussion with the governments (local or federal) have been reported in this regard.

⁴³ MyRight/Sweden supported the IE Policy (2017) enactment process.



Summary findings on sustainability: The federal governance system is built on assumptions that major capacity can be mustered at the local level for upscaling and sustaining the systems introduced – particularly technical capacity and financial resources. The present gaps, such as inadequate technical capacity, lack of policy frameworks for resource allocation and lapses in governance and accountability mechanisms are likely to risk the sustainability of the programme goals. Very few interventions have been planned to address these massive gaps. As anticipated in UNICEF's ToC, the system strengthening efforts at the national level have not translated into institutional capacity at the local level and subsequent implementation on the ground. The evidence building through EMIS is yet to inform policy action or disability inclusive programming at the local level. SC's programme has, indeed, planned to influence policy reforms in the local government. However, there is no clear evidence suggesting that their interventions have translated into local level programming and significantly influenced specific school practices. Furthermore, no specific interventions have been planned for technical inputs or technical capacity building of the local government (beyond what is channelled through the federal government's red-book funding).

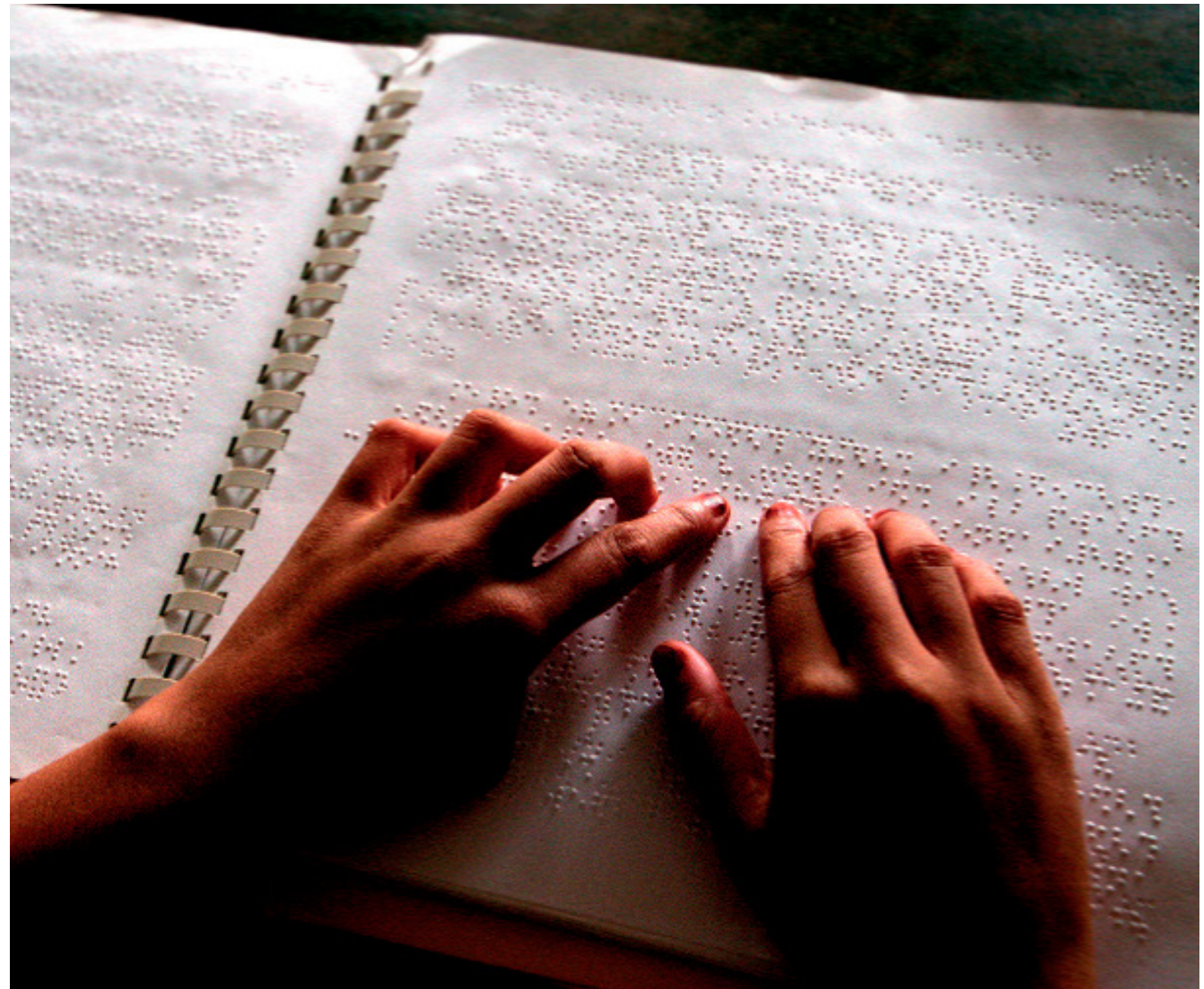


Photo: Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted



4

Reconstructed Theory of Change



The Norwegian-supported programmes have tried to navigate in a difficult context characterized with many systematic barriers. Our understanding of the thinking of the partners and the design of their programmatic interventions indicates the following reconstructed ToC, as stated here:

Key learnings drawn from this evaluation reflect the systematic barriers that continue to restrain the partners' intervention strategies for ensuring equitable inclusive education outcomes for children with disabilities in relation to the reconstructed ToC presented above.

Box 5: Reconstructed Theory of Change

IF:

- There is a clear policy and a road map for inclusive education is adopted by the national government
- And there is better screening and data on children with disabilities
- And there are successful pilots in selected municipalities (1% of the schools were targeted by Norwegian partners) showing how it can be done in practice (e.g., through various levels of engagement with local authorities, school improvement plans (SIP), awareness raising of communities and parents and with technical and financial support to teacher training, school management training, introduction of EMIS, accessibility measures in schools and scholarships to students with disabilities
- And civil society partners are engaged in supporting the implementation

THEN:

- Local education authorities will have better planning data and be interested to fund and scale up such models
- And more mainstream schools will be ready to welcome children with disabilities, be accessible and have ability to teach according to individual education plans
- And parents and communities will be more interested to send their children to mainstream schools
- And more children with disabilities will be enrolled and retained in local schools and their learning outcomes will improve.



5

Conclusions and lessons learnt



1. Legal and policy frameworks are foundational to IE mainstreaming: Translating political commitment to policy actions

The leverage Norway has, as a pool funder (joint agreement partner) and through collaboration with other like-minded development actors, has been instrumental in influencing the dialogue with the policy actors and seeking their commitments. However, political commitments have not yet translated into concrete legal and policy actions. The government system operates through a rigid legal, policy and programmatic framework. If the priorities are not explicitly articulated in the legal and policy frameworks, they will not translate into programmatic interventions within education sector plans, and subsequently will not be operationalised and reflected in the AWPB (and red-book), and ultimately not be translated into school level practices.

The lack of legal and policy frameworks with specific measures for inclusion of children with disabilities continues to constitute a major obstacle. The country's education act (new amendment 2008) has not been amended in line with the emerging understanding and aspirations for IE. The Inclusive Education Policy (IE policy, 2017) which was developed by the CEHRD/IE section, in close collaboration with the disability movement and aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, was recognised by CSO networks and the disability movement as a clear roadmap to realize the country's IE aspirations. However, the IE policy (2017) was replaced by the Education Policy (2019), which did not clearly promote inclusive education and emphasized on special schools. This left a void in terms of policy directions. UNICEF's ToC, recognising these policy gaps had planned for a five-year IE master plan that supplement the SSDP in fulfilling its aspiration for equitable quality education for all (which

was never adopted). The IE Approach Paper, as an alternative, clearly laid out the road map for inclusive education and was an important tool to steer discussion and seek common understanding but was not very effective as a policy instrument as it was not officially adopted as a policy guideline (or part of the SSDP). Thus, the system continued to operate with the same limiting programmatic framework. Without a clearly defined policy framework and directions the measures adopted were open to interpretations and discretions, as demonstrated by the government's action.



- The government plans and budgeting for inclusive education are heavily weighted in favour of special schools.
- The consolidated equity strategy (2014) emphasis on inclusive education but also mentions that though the term 'inclusive education' is used, *"it actually provides for integrated education, which includes resources classes which are separate for children with disabilities and special curriculum for schools that only caters children with disabilities. Developing materials for children with disabilities are done within a limited scope and scale"*⁴⁴.
- The mid-term review of SSDP (2019) reports that Government of Nepal's budget proposing establishment of seven new special schools (one in each province), though well intended, is not a policy approach for inclusive education.

Another fifteen large-scale model special schools are planned for under the new ESP (2021-2030). This is likely to absorb a substantial portion of inclusive education funding⁴⁵.

2. Operationalizing a national level IE programmatic framework requires a monitoring and accountability framework for influencing local government's policy and actions

The federal level programmatic goals and aspirations do not naturally translate into local level actions. Local governments are yet to enact their own legal and policy frameworks that reflect their mandates to promote IE. Lapses in appropriate accountability frameworks and monitoring make it difficult to align the local government's commitment and priorities with the national aspirations. The institutional system and capacity strengthening at the federal level – supported by Norway and other donors – have so far had limited impact on local level policy and programming.

The commitment for IE at the federal level has been built over years of investment with close dialogue and technical collaborations. The same level of understanding and commitment is yet to emerge at the local level. Local governments have not yet gone through the same process of engagement and learning as the federal level and hence do not relate

to the federal plans and policies in the same way. Local governments are yet to enact their education policies. Without a clear policy direction and general understanding of IE, it has been a challenge to get the local government committed to the IE as demonstrated by the gaps in local level budget programming and budget allocation. There are some exceptions to this in the pilot districts of programmes, where local commitment has indeed been enhanced. However, although the education sector plan (SSDP) is funded entirely by the federal government, the federal government has limited direct authority over the autonomous local government and hence has not been able to successfully influence the local level actions, apart from the 'conditional grant'.

The mechanism for 'conditional red book grants', without a strong system for monitoring (and supervision), has not been effective in ensuring the required performance standards from the local government. The local municipalities are yet to institutionalize their monitoring systems. Meanwhile, EMIS, as discussed above, is yet to evolve fully and has not been able to adequately monitor the conditional

⁴⁴ MoEST/CERID (2014). Consolidated Equity Strategy for the School Education Sector in Nepal

⁴⁵ Shared by stakeholder during interview



grant that is channelled directly to the municipalities from the federal government. The municipalities are required to report only on financial aspects to the federal ministry of finance, but not on their educational performance, and hence MoEST/CEHRD have no way of assessing the performance of the schools. Further, since EMIS data is limited to only the number of children (and not to other important aspects, like education outcomes) and is not yet capturing out-of-school children, it has not effectively informed or influenced local government programming, nor has it been used as a performance monitoring or management tool for IE.

OPDs have reported undertaking monitoring of IE initiatives for their advocacy. However, these are within very limited scope (a few sample schools) and lack leverage to influence either the local government or Norway's partner's project activities. The Act Relating to Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2074 (2017) has provisions for a federal level Disability National Steering Committee and Disability Coordination Committee at local level (both province and municipality) with the

mandate to “*monitor, supervise and evaluate programmes*”. However, the National Steering Committee is not yet fully functional. A few municipalities in the SC's programme areas have reported forming disability coordination committees, but their role is limited to recommendations for disability identification cards. The OPDs have expressed their willingness to be engaged in the entire process of IE, stating the slogan of the disability movement of Nepal “our agenda, our leadership” –in line with the global slogan “nothing about us, without us”. But they also recognise gaps such as resources, capacities and most importantly the attitude of government and the development actors towards them. They express their grievances of being position only as a “claim maker” and engaged only in advocacy initiatives and not as a partner for “technical collaboration”. While it is true that the OPDs also have capacity gaps and are not unified in their demands (common agenda), the government and development actors also do not make a sufficient effort to recognise their role and provide support to ensure their meaningful participation and influence on the IE programming and monitoring.

3. Weakened capacities amid the devolution process has left local authorities with little capacity to learn from and replicate “successful” project interventions: Pilot projects in existing government systems thus have poor sustainability and are hard to scale.

The federal system makes the local government the custodian of the IE agenda, even though the local governments lack the necessary policies and capacity to fulfil this role. The local governments are still in process of transition and struggling to institutionalize a functional service delivery mechanism. The institutional capacities for the education services were already very strained before the devolution. Further, whatever little institutional mechanisms and structure within the national education system for supporting the technical aspect of service delivery were either dismantled or their roles redefined to encompass a limited advisory function. The devolution of authority was not accompanied by adequate interventions to strengthen local government capacity.



Partners' ToCs did not envisage specific interventions to directly strengthening the local government service delivery system and structures. Both UNICEF's pilot project and SC's programmes were largely designed as a means to inform the local government actions. Both programmes intended to compliment the SSDP's goal by demonstrating practices and building knowledge in areas where the local government (and school systems) were lacking with the anticipation that the best practices would be adopted and scaled up by the local government. However, there were insufficient strategies to transfer the learnings and facilitate future scale-up. Further, though aligned with the SSDP framework, the pilot programmes were implemented outside the SSDP framework and without formal engagement with the local government and their institutional mechanisms. They were hence seen as separate programmes – *“implemented by the donors and their implementing partners”*.

Both SC and UNICEF's interventions have attempted to anchor their teacher training interventions in the existing system and approaches already institutionalized through the government's teacher trainings, such as the “child friendly classrooms” and

the “quality education/quality learning environment framework”. But the teacher training provided by the programmes were organized within separate pilot programme interventions and not integrated in regular teacher training programmes. Similarly, all technical inputs (for trainings, tools designs etc) was resourced from within the development partners or their networks and financed externally, which would eventually phase out. UNICEF have been engaging teachers, listed in Education Training Center's roster, as resource persons for their trainings,⁴⁶ but no formal technical collaboration with the institution itself.

Though the project documents refer to ‘school-based support system’, the support structures and mechanism in the pilot projects were not found to be aligned accordingly. The learning motivators responsible for supporting the teachers in areas like the IEP in UNICEF's pilot project themselves were not adequately trained and equipped for the role. SC's end-line study report also recognises gaps in this area.

4. School culture still drives a special (segregated) education system: IE programming needs to confront these segregation approaches

The present IE system is still based upon the premises of a special or segregated education system. Mainstream schools only include children who fit into the ‘existing system’ and exclude others, pushing them to the special education/segregated school. Both SC and UNICEF's programme interventions are said to framed as ‘mainstream inclusive education project’ as guided by the IE Approach Paper, which clearly states the premises of inclusive education. However, the partners interventions are operationalised within the existing government's framework of a segregated schooling system.

The IE system begins with assessment and referrals. After the identification, the first instinct is to try to find an alternative [more appropriate] school for the children, which are special schools or resource classes. The policy guidelines [directive from the local government education department as well as instruction in the teachers training] is *‘once you identify children with disabilities, refer them to appropriate school’*. Hence, it

⁴⁶ RNE/UNICEF (2020). Progress report.

is evident that partners' programmes cater only to those students in the mainstream schools who could not be referred to special schools. While both the partners have planned for interventions like teachers training on assessment and early detections; teaching-learning materials adapted to needs of children with disabilities and support to school management on planning for inclusive education, the entire teaching and learning practices are yet to adopt to the principle of universal design in learning. The classroom teaching and learning practices indicate that the additional arrangements for children with disabilities have been made only within the standard pedagogical practices and the approaches benefit only those "who can learn" within the traditionally defined parameters or who can adapt to the mainstream learning processes with some minor adjustments, whereas others are excluded even after being inside the system [in school yet excluded from schooling.] The children (which includes children with intellectual disabilities; autism; deafblind, children with learning disabilities) who 'cannot learn' in the traditional sense

are excluded. Children who can learn within the existing system, but not without special assistance (children with deafness, blindness), are also excluded within the system. Children who are not identified as requiring additional support are also excluded.

Hence, considering the fact that Nepal operates with a system with limited capacity to effectively serve children with disabilities within the mainstream schools, special education within resource classes is important and much needed alternative. However, the point is, if the guiding principle is anchored in 'segregation' then principles of IE are likely to be overridden. For instance, the resource classes are meant to support the mainstream education, but they can also function the other way-round, to keep the children out to the mainstream education. The starting point should be 'inclusion', with 'special education' as a means towards this end. When development partners, such as SC, talk about a hybrid approach, it is important to understand if it works to support inclusion or if it underpins continued exclusion.

5. Inclusion of children with disabilities in education is not just about education, it is a multi-sectoral intervention: This relies on cross-sectoral coordination and a proper disability identification and assessment system

Many of the barriers in inclusion of children with disabilities were related to issues concerning other sectors such as WASH, physical infrastructure, health, social protection, etc. UNICEF recognised the barriers especially in relation to physical access and WASH whereas both the partners have anchored their programme in child-protection frameworks. However, additional barriers could be identified which constrained the IE programming in ensuring inclusion of children with disabilities.

Health and psychosocial assessment have emerged key challenges that affected the very first step of inclusion-early identification and assessment of children with disabilities. Many children with disabilities (mainly those with non-visible disabilities) had not been identified and assessed while others were wrongly assessed.



5. Inclusion of children with disabilities in education is not just about education, it is a multi-sectoral intervention: This relies on cross-sectoral coordination and a proper disability identification and assessment system

Many of the barriers in inclusion of children with disabilities were related to issues concerning other sectors such as WASH, physical infrastructure, health, social protection, etc. UNICEF recognised the barriers especially in relation to physical access and WASH whereas both the partners have anchored their programme in child-protection frameworks. However, additional barriers could be identified which constrained the IE programming in ensuring inclusion of children with disabilities.

Health and psychosocial assessment have emerged key challenges that affected the very first step of inclusion-early identification and assessment of children with disabilities. Many children with disabilities (mainly those with non-visible disabilities) had not been identified and assessed while others were wrongly assessed.

6. Disability assessment is also linked to the issue of birth registration and disability identification cards which were found to be a key factor in inclusion of children with disabilities

Though the government has adopted the policy of not denying admission to anyone (In line with the free and compulsory education act 2019), schools in the Terai regions have reported to only enrol children with birth registration. The government's guidelines for assessment for disability identification cards entails both medical and psychosocial assessment with engagement of cross-sectoral team under local municipalities. However, the municipalities are yet to form such functional teams. This means that there are substantial number of children with disabilities who are not identified and registered in the education system and reported in the EMIS system. As such, the EMIS system reports on so few children with disabilities that it does not reflect adequately in the Equity Index which influences the equity-based resource allocation procedures. The EMIS foresees expansion in future to link with the other systems like the birth

registration and identification cards to capture out-of-school children as well. These existing systematic challenges, coupled with limited capacity of the schools to accurately report in the EMIS system, are a major constraint. The partners' ToCs have not sufficiently incorporated consideration of these wider multi-sectoral barriers. Nonetheless, the programmes were able to engage wide range of actors in discussion in terms of policy advocacy. Some success has also been made to integrate WASH components, but still gaps exist in terms of appropriateness and adaptability for a universal design. SC has incorporated the support for disability identification cards as part of their social protection, but integration with health assessment is still a major gap.



6

Summary conclusions



Conclusions

Norway has played a key role in promoting and funding the agenda of 'equity and inclusion', particularly in relation to inclusion of children with disabilities in education. As a result of Norway's efforts, increasing numbers of actors including UNICEF, World Bank, Save the Children, and Plan International are engaged in inclusive education. As compared to 2011, children with disabilities have become a more visible group in the sector plans and in policy papers. Disability is recognised as a key dimension in social exclusion and discrimination (in addition to gender; caste/ethnic identity). The pilot projects have been instrumental in demonstrating inclusive education practices, making a case for possibilities of including children in mainstream school as against a segregated approach. However, the results are still limited to a few pilot schools and are yet to benefit a wider number of children with disabilities with diverse needs to access education in a meaningful way in terms of learning outcomes. Though the education policies and plans recognised the rights of children with disabilities, specific measures have not been sufficient to enable most children with disabilities to realize their right to 'inclusive' education since the obligations are still broadly addressed within a 'segregated' or special approach.

The federal system makes the local government custodian of the IE agenda. But the local governments lack the necessary policies capacity to fulfil this role. This limitation has meant that the national aspirations were not followed up with appropriate action on the ground. Though the entire local education system was driven by the federal education plan (SSDP) financed through the federal's conditional grant, the lack of authority of the federal government over autonomous local governments and lapses in monitoring and accountability mechanism made it difficult to steer performance at the local level. EMIS, as the monitoring and performance management system, is not fully operationalised to reflect detailed and adequate data on children with disabilities and could hence not influence the local government policy and programming.

Though the partners' programme interventions were designed as mainstream 'inclusive education' initiatives, the interventions did not transcend the school culture that still drove a special (segregated) education system. Even the piloted schools catered

only to children who could 'learn' within the existing system, while others were referred to special schools and resource classes. The pilot projects were successful to extend the opportunity for children in terms of participation in 'safe environment' but were not able to expand the opportunity to also benefit the children in terms of learning. Children were expected to learn within the same standardized system with little pedagogical adaptation – no curriculum differentiation, no adaptation in teaching/learning material or assessment system. This not only barred the children from entering the mainstream education system, but also excluded the children already in the school system from realizing a meaningful learning experiences. Gaps of cross-sectoral coordination, especially for proper disability identification and assessment and social protection mechanism affected other preconditions for disability inclusion and continued to block children with disabilities from the mainstream education system.



List of References

Asian Development Bank (2021). *ADB Brief: An Assessment of Nepal's School Education Financing in a Federal System*. No.197 November 2021 DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22617/BRF210419-2>

Central Bureau of Statistics (2020). *Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019. Survey Findings Report*.

Central Bureau of Statistics (2014). *Population Monograph of Nepal, Volume II, Social Demography (2014), based on National Population and Housing Census 2011*. uploaded in Disability data portal. <http://nepaldisabilityportal.org>

Centre for Educational Research Innovation and Development (CERID). (2008). *A study on problems and prospects of mainstreaming inclusive education at primary level*. Kathmandu, Nepal

Dangal, H., Paneru, S., and Pokhrel. B. M. (2020). *Constraints on Applying Disability Identity Card: A Study from Roshi Rural Municipality from Midhill, Nepal*. Journal of Social Protection, 2020 (1) pg. 71-79 Save the Children- Nepal Country Office; Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway & Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus, Tribhuvan University, Nepal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jsp.v1i0.38213>

Government of Nepal (2017). *The Act Relating to Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2074* (2017)

Government of Nepal, Ministry of Education, Department of Education (2010). *Flash I Report 2067 (2010-011)* [GoN/MoE/DoE (2010) Flash I]

Government of Nepal, Ministry of Education, Department of Education (2021). *Nepal: Education Sector Plan, 2021-2030 (draft V-1)*, March 2021

Government of Nepal, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Center for Education and Human Resource Development (2020) *Flash I Report 2076 (2019-2020)* [GoN/MoEST/CEHRD (2020) Flash I]

Government of Nepal, Ministry of Science and Technology (2020). *School Sector Development Plan 2016/17-2020/21*, approved August 2016

Government of Nepal (GoN), National planning commission (NPC), Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), (2021). *Preliminary report of National Population Census 2021*

Grimes, P. and Cruz, A.D. (2021). *Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in Nepal*. United Nations Children's Fund Regional Office for South Asia, Kathmandu

IE Approach paper (2020). *Approach Paper and Road Map for Implementation of Inclusive Education in Nepal*, 13 January 2020 Kathmandu, Nepal: Central Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF Nepal

Ministry of Education, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2016). *Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children – Nepal Country Study*, UNICEF, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Ministry of Health and Population (MOHP), Nepal; New ERA, and ICF International Inc (2011). *Nepal Demographic and Health Survey*

Mont, D., Palmer, M., Mitra, S., and Groce, N. (2016). *Disability Identification Cards: Issues in Effective Design*. Leonard Cheshire Disability and Inclusive Development Centre. Working Paper Series: No. 29 (1).

National Institute for Research and Training (NIRT) & American Institute of Research (AIR) (2017). *Nepal Education Sector Analysis*

Norad (2011). *Evaluation of Norwegian support to promote the rights of persons with disabilities - The Nepal country report*

Plan International Nepal (2016). *Final Project Evaluation of Education in Inclusive Early Recovery in Earthquake-Affected Sindhupalchowk, Nepal*

Royal Norwegian Embassy, Nepal and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Nepal Country Office (2020). *Progress Report. Inclusive Education. Making Development Disability-Inclusive for All Children in Nepal*. July 2020

Save the Children (n.d) *Progress Report NORAD Integrated Project – Sahayatra 2015- 2018*

Save the Children, Nepal (2018) *Final evaluation of Sahayatra: NORAD Integrated Project*

SOFRECO – FBC Consortium (2019). *School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) External Independent Evaluation Mid-Term Review (MTR_SSDP,2019)*

Thapaliya, M. (2020). *Moving Towards Inclusive Education: How Inclusive Education is Understood, Experienced and Enacted in Nepali Higher Secondary Schools*. in *Education*. Phd Thesis

United Nations Children's Fund and European Union (2021). *Budget Brief Updates No. 4 Education Budget: FY2021/2. PF4C - September 2021*

United Nations Children's Fund (n.d). *Application for grants from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway application for project/programme: Making Development Disability-Inclusive for All Children in Nepal*



DEPARTMENT FOR EVALUATION



Norwegian Agency for Development
Cooperation

www.norad.no
post-eval@norad.no

Cover photo: Norad/ Bjørnulf Remme
ISBN 978-82-8369-125-2
October 2022