

# From Work Place to SCHOOL

An Account of Educating Children in the Tarai of Nepal



✓ Education  
✗ Child Labor

## Aasaman Nepal



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An Account of Educating Children In the Tarai of Nepal

**Suresh Dhakal**



**Monograph 1**

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# List of Abbreviations Used

AIP	Annual Implementation Plan	NPC	National Planning Commission
ASN	Aasaman Nepal	OSP	Out of School Program
CBO	Community Based Organization	PD	Process Documentation
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics	PLA	Participatory Learning and Action
CRC	Child Right Convention	PTA	Parent Teacher Association
CRP	Child Right Protectors	RC	Resource Centre
CRPF	Child Rights Protection Forum	RDF	Rural Development Forum
DDC	District Development Committee	RP	Resource Person
DEO	District Education Office	SCJ	Save the Children Japan
DOE	Department of Education	SIP	School Improvement Plan
EFA	Education for all	SM	Social Mobilizer
GO	Governmental Organisation	SMC	School Management Committees
HT	Head Teacher	SS	Support Structure
ILO-IPEC	International Labour Organisation - International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour	SZOP	School Zone of Peace
Maith	Maithili	TA	Teachers Association
MOE	Ministry of Education	UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
Nepi	Nepali	VDC	Village Development Committees
NGOs	Non-governmental Organization	VT	Volunteer Teachers



# Glossary

Bal bivah hatwa ke ekta upaye, betike school pathaeb (Maith.):	One way to stop child marriage is to send girl child to school
Bal shram kanuni aa samajik aparadh hai (Maith.):	Child labour is illegal as well as a social crime
Balika sikhaya abhiyan me sab koi jutu (Maith.):	Let's get together for girls child education
Gahan jewar roop sringar, Sikshya bina jivan bekar (Maith.):	Jewelry and ornaments makes your face up, but without education whole life will be ruined
Hum hun school padh jayeb (Maith.):	We also want to go to school to study
Janam deli ta padha di a (Maith.):	you gave us birth; you give us education, as well
Janam deli ta janam darta bana di a (Maith.):	You gave us birth; now provide us the birth certificate
Kaam chodau, school pathau (Nep.):	Get out of the work and into the school
Yudh me nahi school chalu (Maith.):	Not to the war, let's go to school
Tole (Nep./Maith.):	Cluster, Hamlet
Dalits (Nep.):	Lowest in the caste ladder, considered as 'untouchable', water from whom is unacceptable, traditionally 'impure' caste
Haruwa (Nep./Maith.):	One who ploughs landlords' land, often landless, Dalits, a semi-bonded labourer, mostly debt-bondage
Charuwa (Nep./Maith.):	a cow herd, a child labourer, often a Haruwa's son, deprived of all forms of child rights





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## Documentation for Development

**A**sman Nepal (ASN), established in 1999 as a Non-government Organization (NGO), aimed at engaging in community development programmes, was, to a larger extent, a continuity of the programmes of Save the Children Japan (SCJ) in Nepal. Individuals who formed ASN were former staffs of SCJ; therefore, they had issues and experiences to take up. Since then, a decade has passed by. ASN is still working for the similar cause: 'ensuring compulsory and inclusive education for all children'. 'Getting children out of work and into schools' has become ASN's brand slogan. ASN now covers a much broader geographical as well as social landscape, simply incomparable to what it was a ten 10 years ago.

This document sketches a schematic overview of ASN's a decade long journey, reflecting ASN's process, efforts, and experience for getting children into school in Mid-Tarai villages where education had never been a priority for masses of resource poor farmers and wage labourers.

Such a document containing experiences and learning eventually serves as a learning as well as advocacy materials. Documentation and dissemination of learning through experiences in an interesting historical juncture was always considered as a creditable, not only to tell the readers what ASN did but also how it did in an adverse situation.

A Ranga Reddy district of Andhrapradesh, South India based Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation (MV Foundation) has been a source of inspiration to ASN in many aspects, also has a divine influence for this documentation. Almost a year ago, Nawal Kishor Yadav, the Executive Director and a Founder Member of ASN handed me one monograph published by MV Foundation and shared his interest to produce a similar document for ASN, too, comprising its issues and experiences in relation to reducing child labour and promoting literacy through formal schooling. It was an enthralling offer for me to accept. I had been introduced to his team and

programmes when ASN was still in a nascent form. Since then, I have been in touch with ASN team and some of its programmes. I have worked with ASN in a couple of occasions. What I had felt then was a need of document to share their experiences and learning to a larger audience. When Mr. Yadav offered me this task, it exactly fitted into my own idea, and I promised him to take up this responsibility. However, there was long silence since then. More than a year after, in one of the cold morning of winter 2009, I received a call from Mr. Yadav. He had called me to remind my promise that I had made a year ago. We proceeded.

In 14 and 15 November 2009, we organized an interactive workshop with ASN staffs and board members in Janakpur. This workshop aimed to explore what were the salient features of ASN that we needed to record and worth sharing to a wider audience. Similarly, learning and experiences which could be of interest to the readers. This two-day workshop provided the list of contents and processes to be followed, recollected, and documented. Repeated and prolonged interviews and discussions with Nawal K Yadav and some other senior staffs of ASN have furnished this document.

Readers will find this document containing issues and experiences related to the challenges

of getting children out of work and into the school. Therefore, it discusses the problem of child labour, endeavor that ASN made to get them out of the work, and get into the school. This also underlines the process ASN adopted to retain the children in the school as well as the efforts to ensure quality education in the public schools. Nevertheless, the purpose is not only to document ASN's efforts and achievements, but also to raise the issues and awareness of child labour in Nepal, and to urge that formal education to those children is the only feasible solution to stop child labour and getting out of poverty in the end.

In terms of structure, the document introduces the readers with "kaam chodau, school pathau" (release children from work and send them to the school) movements of ASN; followed by an introduction of ASN in the context. This contains how ASN emerged and arrived to this point through a journey that has not been so smooth and comfortable. In

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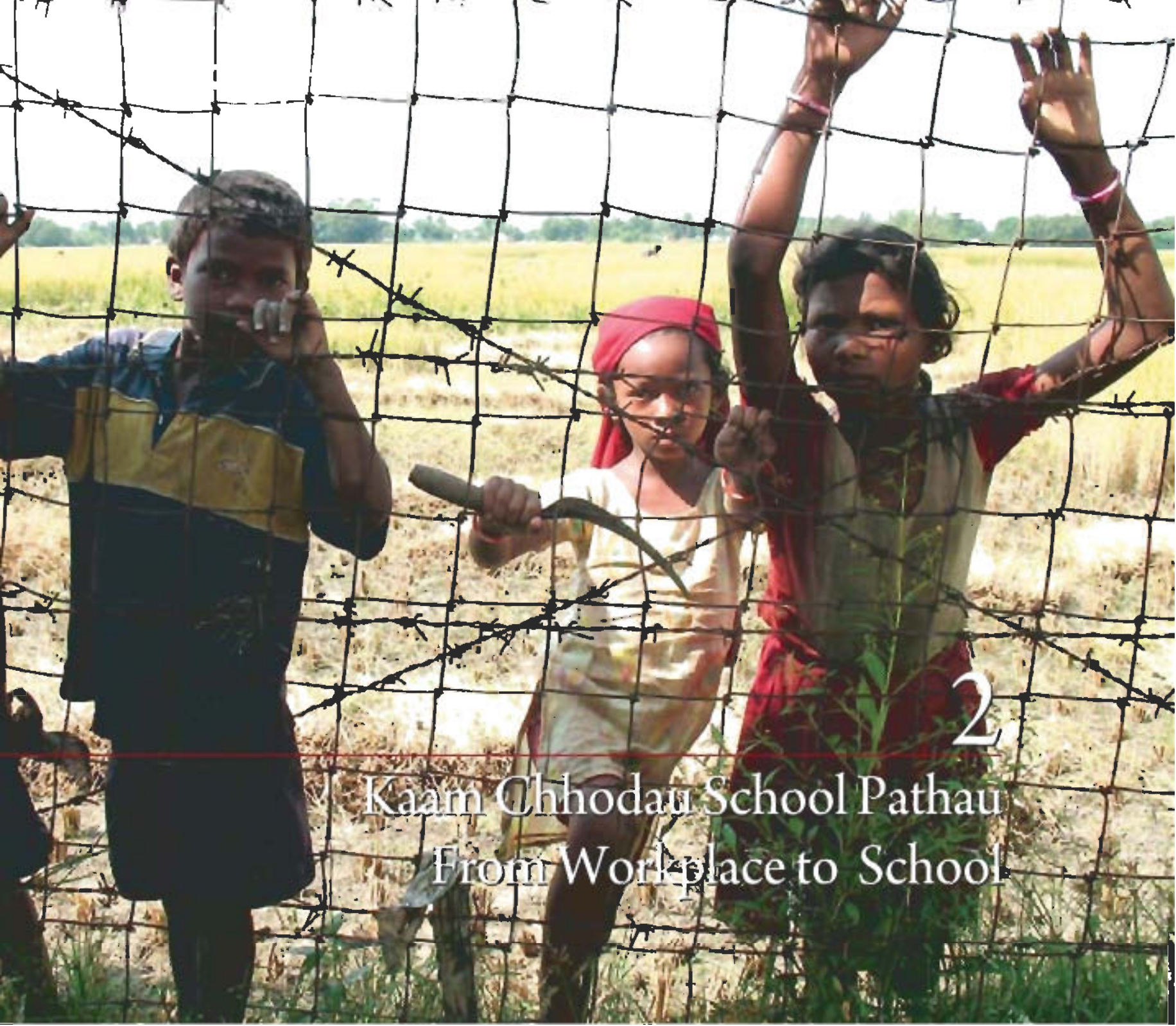
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this chapter, readers are introduced with a spatio-temporal context, and, shaping and reshaping of the working strategies of ASN. Then follows how ASN evolved from a conventional 'community development' organization to a facilitator for the community organizing, and a social movement. Then gradually readers are acquainted with various issues and experiences, with a particular focus on the formation and functioning of support structures in the community level. In addition, some of the statistical facts from the secondary sources are presented as annex, which were updated in different dates. Information from ASN's official

documents are freely borrowed and used. Other sources are referred as and when needed. List of references reviewed, consulted is presented in the end of the main text.

Finally, this document is an outcome of coordinated efforts of ASN staffs, Board Members, and all the informants who voluntarily and readily provided the information, and shared their concerns, opinions, and hopes for child labour free societies. I am, as a facilitator and author of this document, grateful to all of them.





2.

Kaam Chhodai School Pathau  
From Workplace to School

## Kaam Chhodau School Pathau From Workplace to School

**K**umar Das, a Dalit boy of 12 years, from Bharatpur-6, Dhanusha, used to work in a brick kiln, when his friends of his age in his neighborhood were going to the school. Two years ago, with ASN's facilitation, community took an initiative to get him out of work and enrolled into the school. He is now studying in grade four in a local school.

The stories of Ramchandra Das (15) and Rampukar Das (10) from the same village were not different either from the story of Kumar Das. They were from Dalit, landless wage-laborer therefore resource-poor families. All these three kids went to work in brick kilns, worked in a hazardous condition to feed them and to their families, while children of their age in the neighborhood were going to school, playing and enjoying their childhood. Now Ramchandra is in grade five and Rampukar in grade two in Shree Ni Ma Vi (a lower secondary school), Bharatpur. Child-laborer in brick kilns two years ago are now full-time students in a government school: an unusual shift! A welcome shift!

They were just 3 out of 275 children who were rescued from the brick kilns, teashops, and from landlords' houses where they used to work as house servants. No matter where they worked, they worked from dawn to dusk. They were exploited child laborer. They were little-paid, often just two meals a day, and in many cases, were badly treated. Hence, ASN struggled entire decade to get the children out of work and bring them into the formal school system. It eventually succeeded in establishing kaam chodau, school pathau, as a movement in some of the districts, where literacy rates were quite low, compared to the national average.

Population Census 2001 accounted 39 percent children, aged 0-14 years, in Nepal, where 27 percent of them were the children of school-going age; and, reported that about 24 percent of children aged 6-14 years, i.e., the children of school going age, were illiterate (CBS 2001). Despite the claim of government that 92 percent of the school-going children are enrolled in school in 2009, the district average in Dhanusha and Mahottari, the traditional home grounds of ASN, are lower than the national



average. Enrollment rate of the children in the working VDCs of ASN is only 70 percent, lower than the national average and district average. It is primarily due to the purposive selection of the working VDCs as ASN intended to approach the most needy areas with priorities. Those who were illiterate and out-of-school were in child labor. The number of children in labor thereby out of school sounds alarming, but what worries even more is the worse condition of life they have to live in. They are forced labor; sometimes semi-bonded and are exploited; not receiving education, which is badly needed in order to aid their overall development.

### Child Labor: A Need for a Common Understanding

There is no universally accepted definition of child labor; rather there are varying definitions, used by the international organizations, national governments, non – governmental organization, and/or other concern groups. However, child labor is not about the household chores unless that hampers their right to education and development and the schoolwork. It is about the work for children that harms them, hinders their development, or exploits them: physically, emotionally, or morally. (See Annex 3 for complexities of child labor).

According to UNICEF ([http://www.unicef.org/protection/index\\_childlabour.html](http://www.unicef.org/protection/index_childlabour.html)) an estimated

246 million children are working, and nearly three quarters of those children are working in hazardous places like mines, or working with dangerous tools like machinery and pesticides and also including trafficking, armed conflict, slavery, sexual exploitation, and hazardous work. Child labor is viewed as the main cause of damaging to his or her mental, physical, and emotional development. Children work because their survival and that of their impoverished families depend on it (See Annex for Global Quick Facts on Child Labor).

With a current population of 23.4 million in Nepal, 10.7 million are children under the age of 16 years. According to ILO/IPEC statistics there are 2,600,000 working children of which 60% are between the ages of 6 to 14 years. 1.7 million children work in economically active fields whereas 900,000 work without any payment at all (<http://www.concern.com.np/Frame.htm>). However, it is difficult to verify these numbers because many of children work in situation that are not registered, controlled, or monitored; nor they are accessible to many of NGOs. Hence, number of concealed labor may go higher.

The government of Nepal has ratified 18 international conventions and several regional conventions to help protect the rights of the child. These include the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and ILO Conventions. Further

Government of Nepal enacted Children's Act 1992 and its by-laws 1994. But the violation of children's rights continues despite these legal provisions.

The United Nations and the International Labor Organization consider child labor exploitative, with the UN stipulating, in article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child that:

*"States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development."*

Following, this ASN developed a common understanding on child labor and their rights to education.

- All children of school going age should be full time in formal school, and they should attend at least 70 percent of school days.
- Any children out of school is child labor
- She or he should not be working even outside their own village
- No one shall involve children in work that may affect their future development

### Child Labour Some Facts:

Nepal's Economic activity by boys and girls aged 10 to 14 is 42.07%. Nepal is the world's 6th child labor country.

About 3 million Nepali children are working under the extreme hardship

Of all the child labors, nearly 60% are girls

Half of the country's children have no access to primary school

About 5000 kids work and sleep on the streets

Nearly half the kids in Nepal work

Girls work longer hours than boys

More than 10,000 girls are trafficked every year

20% of the sex workers in Nepal are under age of 16

1.7 million children in Nepal are engaged in economic activity

More than 30,000 child laborers work in 1,600 stone quarries in Nepali

More than one million kids in Nepal work without pay and many work as bonded laborers

(<http://www.nepalvista.com/realnepal>)

- Education is not a mercy but a right. Every child must be going to school

Therefore, ASN has been linking children's right to education with abolition of child labor as 'any child out of school', at the beginning inspired by the undertakings of an Indian NGO called 'MV Foundation' based in the state of Andhra Pradesh. ASN realizes that there is an inextricable link between the program on abolition of child labor and education for all through formal, full-time schooling. ASN has experiences that neither of them can be achieved in isolation and a true program that cares for children has to regard children's right to education in formal, full-time schools as inviolable.

### **Kaam Chodau, School Pathau: An Approach to a Movement**

Based on its experiences of working primarily in two terai districts (Dhanusha and Mahotari), ASN realized that it is possible to abolish all child labor whether working outside of home as wage labor or working at own home. But there was a lack of an appropriate advocacy program to link those grassroots level experience with the advocacy of higher level, though ASN had been doing quite lot for advocacy at local level. Hence, SCJ proposed SCN to support such advocacy activities to link its

grassroots level experiences of abolishing child labor and mainstreaming all children of aged 5-14 years into school. SCN supported the proposal 'Towards abolition of child labor as 'any child out of school' for one year. This is how it all started.

Kaam chodau school pathau has turned out to be a banner of ASN. ASN believes that a child out of school is a child in wrok. ASN envisages a child labor free society, therefore, works accordingly. ASN is encouraged with the success it has achieved so far. In 2003, there were 49 percent children out of school (26923 of 54945, aged between 5-14 years) in its working area. This reduced to 19 percent in 2006 (10709 out of 56361, aged between 5-14 years), and has apparently reduced in the recent years. Several toles - number of houses clustered to form a settlement - have become child labor free toles, i.e., a cent percent children of school going age are in the school, no single child is in child-labor. This was an achievement, a success, but the success was not built in a single day.

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### Getting Children out of Work: A Conscientious Undertaking

A total of 275 working children withdrawn from brick kilns, hotel, and other labor work were enrolled in schools till 2009. 59 toles have been declared 'child labor free' toles. Additional 136 toles are in the process to be declared soon as 'child labor free' villages in tow districts of eastern tarai, Mahottari and Dhanusha. This number may not sound much louder; but this was an encouraging achievement, not easy for anyone to overlook and ignore. This was a small but an important step towards eliminating the child labor, imparting them with education, and creating child-labor free societies. ASN staffs unanimously maintain that, "this success is an example setter in the history of ASN".

This success had not been possible in a single day with a single effort. It was an example of how success can be achieved with coordinated efforts of several stakeholders. The success of kaam chodau school pathau has remained one of the landmarks of ASN; however, the learning from this movement is valued even more precious. There were even resistant forces, adverse cultural practices, belief systems, poor economy, and the status-quoits power structure. There were forces unfolding against the anti-child labor campaign.

Nepalese law says, a child is a person who has not completed 16 years of age. Law says, to work in Nepal as a child, one must be at least 14 years old, and that one can work for no more than six hours, and must not work during 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. hours, must get a break of 30 minutes after 3 hours of work, and nobody should pressure a child to work (<http://www.nepalvita.com/realnepal>). However, child labor has been a long rooted practice, more so in the ASN working areas. When ASN staffs and volunteers approached the far-flung villages of Dhanusha and Mahottari with a motivation campaign against the child labor, they were not welcomed as we might expect, rather, were blamed for not having 'rational' mind.

"If we withdraw our children from work and send them to the school, what would compensate their work? Who would feed them?" was a frequently raised concern by the parents and guardians of the children at work. Some of the employers even refused to release the children from work saying that they would not get their money paid back, if they let the children go free.

Sending children to school was a mere dream for many of those resource-poor parents, who were indebted; had no regular means of livelihood, except laboring for daily wages and ploughing landlords' field, under a semi-bonded tenure arrangement. To survive a day (as they never knew

about tomorrow), used to be the prime concern, were deprived of basic capabilities and resources except their labor, for the livelihood security. Sending children to school, for them, was a mirage. They could have never imagined that their children would go to school someday.

It took quite a sometimes to unmask one of the biggest lies in their lives, that is, 'poor cannot send their children to school'.

The mid-eastern Tarai districts, in particular, have higher rate of out of schoolchildren, that is, children in work. An average of 24 percent of children aged between 5-14 years were out of school in the country, which was 35 percent for the mid-eastern Tarai, fairly higher than the national average. Similarly, proportion of the total population six years and above never attended school at the national level consists of 44 per cent and the corresponding figure for eastern Tarai was as high as 54 per cent (cf.SCJ/ASN/SCDC 2006). This is further explained by the rigid caste system, skewed distribution of the land - the basic productive resources, in particular, and the higher proportion of the Dalit population. Therefore, this is not only the ignorance of the parents who did not send their children to school but it was also the cultural-historical and politico-economic processes which segregated people sharply and positioned some of them in inferior roles and status. Therefore, efforts

for getting children out of work and into formal schools was a social movement, against a type of power structure, based on unequal relationships between haves and have-nots, between high and low castes.

For many villagers, on the other hand, sending their children to school was not a pressing problem. They had already encountered several NGOs before ASN approached them. However, they found ASN's approach different from the rest. They would expect something delivered to them, something to grown-up people. Therefore, for sometimes, they remained indifferent on such a program, which talked about the children. A proverb was popular among them, *padhi guni chhaina kaam, halo joti khayao maam*, literally, 'what is the use of reading and writing, when ultimately you have to plough the field'. Hence, the reading and writing were not of their aspiration, or at least they were made to believe that education is for the dominant class, and for the dominant castes.

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### The Situation Changed

The situation has changed. Things have improved. Community members have become more active and the schoolteachers, SMC, PTA, have become more responsible. ASN staffs and volunteers have become more encouraged and committed.

Sita Devi Das, 53 from Bhartpur-6, Dhanusha, is now an active woman leader of her locality. She is leading half a dozen of different community organizations, and is member in several other community based organizations and civil society forums. We met her on 29th January, 2010 in her own home in order to know how their community has maintained after ASN phased out its programme for their locality. Her narratives were illuminating. In the beginning of 1996, then SCJ invited her to attend a meeting and asked her to organize and lead her fellow-women in a 'poor' Dalit cluster. Since then, she has not ceased her efforts and there has not been any pause so far. She told us many of her personal stories of agonies and ethos, along with her own reflections of ASN's efforts to send the children in the school. She recalled,

*"in the beginning, when Aasman<sup>1</sup> people came and told us to 'get our child out of work and send them to the school', many in our neighborhood thought it was a silly idea, we were not happy with them. It would never happen*

*in this poor Dalit community, who always survived by serving the Jaminars, the masters. We thought they were telling us those things so that they would get salary. We even scolded them. No one was convinced that it could ever be possible. We used to think that we were too poor to send our children to the school. However, after repeated interactions with Aasman people, I gradually believed that it would be possible. But, my fellow villagers, women, in particular, hardly believed in this. Now, it took quite a sometimes for me to convince them. Eventually, they agreed on my arguments. Things changed, we were changed, and, now we realize that we are poor because we did not have education. Now we are sending not only our own children to school but telling others to send theirs too. We have changed a lot. Thanks to Aasman people who insisted us to send our children to school despite we deceived them in the beginning. Now, even if Aasman is not here, Aasman people rarely visit us, but we have not given up our efforts. No matter we are in other groups, but, we still insist in the same values that we learned with Aasman more than ten years ago. We even today tell people to send their children to school; we go to the schools to observe if there have been regular classes, and teachers are on time. We stop child marriage, and help them to send their children to school."*

Sita Devi was not a particular individual who deceived the ASN field staffs at the beginning, but many of the parents of Dalit clusters did the same. Others were rejecting ASN even more severely. Now, all the children of school going

<sup>1</sup>Most of the people in the communities that we visited did not distinguish between SCJ and ASN, most often these two, SCJ and ASN were referred interchangeably. Hence, in the community level, ASN was but a continuation of SCJ. See more in the following chapter.

that have been possible? Sita Devi once a narrated to us,

*"Aasman eventually made us organize a meeting and form a Women Forum. We discussed on various issues including our poverty and our children who had never been to school or dropped out in a few days or months after they went to the school. We tried to explore why we were poor, and why our children were not going to school. Those series of discussions opened up our eyes. We realized that our children were not going to schools, not because we were poor but, we were poor because our people never went to the schools. Now we all agreed that we became poor because we were illiterate. We decided to send our children to school. We not only sent our children to the school, we also monitored if all the children in the village are going to the school every day or not. If we found any child not going to school, we would visit the parents, asked for the reasons, and helped the children to go to school again. Since then, tole is a 'child labor free' tole. You many not believe, now all the children in these toles are is going to the school".*

We heard the similar stories wherever we visited in ASN working areas, in some of the villages ASN had already phased out its programs some years ago. Sita Devi represents many of those women forum members, who are taking up the responsibilities for sending children to school, and to make their village a child labor free village.

Similarly, Shiv Kumari Mandal of Labkatol, a chairperson of Women Forum at her village, recalled her earlier days and narrated to us,

*"When I requested our fellow villagers to send their children to school, they used to react me bitterly saying that, 'who would do our work? Do you come to our house to help us in our chores? Who are you to tell us to send our children to school?' We took a rally in our village, chanted slogans containing message, 'do your work on your own, and send your children to school'. Gradually, one or two started listening to us. Situation changed. Now every child in our village goes to school. No one is left out. We are committed to make our children educated. We are illiterate but we won't let our children happen to be the same".*

Kaam chodau, schoo pathau' campaign evolved as a movement and reached everyone in the villages. Jibcha Devi Das, Bharatpur-6, Shreerampur, an illiterate woman never thought that she could also send her children to school and even the poor can have education. She now tells,





*"Education makes our children literate, they recognize letters, numbers, and no one can cheat them. We were cheated many times in our life because we were illiterate. Our children will not be as dull as we are, giving education to children means leading them towards the light. Now, our poverty shall not prevent our children from getting into schools. We should work hard, try to earn a little bit of more wage, but we send our children to school. This is only way to get rid of poverty in future".*

These were but a few examples of how "Kaam Chodau School Pathau" movement evolved and worked in the villages of Dhanusa and Mahottari. Due to the support of all those wonderful women leaders of their respective communities, now the future generation is in the school. They were eventually successful in establishing *Bal shram kamuni aa samajik aparadh hai*, meaning, child labor is a legal as well as a social crime.

### Partnership, Mobilization, and Coordination with Teachers

It is widely recognized that the situation has changed. Different people from different occupations may have different interpretation for this success. This is primarily because the different people supported the movement with different capacities. Since welcoming and enrolling children into school, retaining them in the school by creating a child-friendly environment to a possible extent expect

much of teachers' engagements. ASN from the very beginning evaluated high the roles of formal institutions like schools and teachers.

Lalbabu Haathi, Principal of Janata Ikai High School, Jadukuha, who is also a former President of Teachers Union, Dhanusha appreciates ASN for its reliance on and mobilization of school teachers to accomplish the programs to educate the children. He accounted,

*"... community believes more to the teachers than to any NGO. ASN encouraged, organized, and mobilized for the awareness-raising programs in the villages. Teachers also supported ASN programs to welcome children into their schools. While participating in ASN's programs, teachers gradually became more responsible and sincere. During the process, ASN also let communities know about the different supports from government to the schools, teachers, to the Dalits and marginalized, and so on. Nothing to hide, due to the political pressure, corruption and lack of efficient implementing and monitoring mechanism, DEO fails to deliver what it is supposed to do. Policy had not been effectively addressing the need. But, in the schools where ASN worked, the situation was far-better. Government had a policy for Education For All (EFA), but, it had not been so. Not all had equal access to the education or to school. Dalits were lagging far behind, even within Dalits, some were privileged, and others were unseen. ASN carried out programs focusing to a particular group, for example,*



*Mushahar focused programs. Nevertheless, all these were possible, because ASN coordinated with teachers and teachers supported to ASN programs. Had they not been coordinating with teachers, they would not have got cooperation from schools, and no wonder, the program would have failed as many other programs of several other NGO\*.*

Harishchandra Yadav, a former Deputy Controller, and DEO, after observing ASN programs in Dhanusha and Mahottari concluded that, "had there not been ASN during those years of sever conflict, those areas could not have achieved whatever they have in the areas of primary education, in particular".

The monitoring system of government was almost non-existent due to the conflict; ASN worked with schoolteachers and communities, and never ceases the movement of enrolling out of schoolchildren into the schools.

Sushil Pandey, Regional Director for Central Region, Regional Education Directorate, also subscribed to the statement of Harishchandra Yadav. Mr. Pandey shared with us,

*"Though the government had many attractive programs from education for all to school outreach program, they were marred with failure, partly due to government's inefficiency, and partly due to other external causes. ASN, in the Eastern Tarai, actually implemented the*

*government programs, but with its own structures and efficiency. School outreach programs gave rise to branch schools, many of these branch schools later developed as independent schools. This provided access to the schools in their communities, which accelerated the net-enrollment in those areas. Mobilization of communities and teachers together, what they called 'support structure' was a very innovative idea, which actually uniquely contributed to their success\*.*

Mr. Pandey at the mean time did not forget to mention that ASN's focus on Dalits and its anti-child marriage campaign were rightly targeted programs.

### **Balika sikhshya abhiyan me sab koi jutu**

The situation of girl child was even worse. A subsequent to kaam chhodau school pathau, was therefore, *Balika sikhshya abhiyan me sab koi jutu*, meaning, 'lets get together for educating the girls'. Not to mention, in a patriarchal society like ours, daughters often get less preference. Moreover, there was a customary practice of child marriage among Dalits, Muslims and minorities in the mid-eastern Tarai. This was associated with the lower level of education and lack of awareness. At the meantime, the child marriage caused lower level of education attainment for the girl child. Such a lost opportunity to education was not only harmful to these deprived girls but has a wide-reaching repercussion for the

entire children, communities and the country as a whole. ASN believed that educating girls creates many positive outcomes for poverty reduction by improving a girl's income-earning potential and socio-economic status. In addition, child marriage is hazardous to their mental and physical health.

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*... getting children out of work and enroll them into school, campaigning against child marriage, and encouraging girl child to get into school and retain them were a twin process.*

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ASN observed that one of the reasons for girl child not going to school was early child marriage. Therefore, ASN launched another campaign parallel, *Bal bivah hatwa ke ekta upaye, betike school pathaeb*, meaning, 'one way to stop child marriage is to send girl child to school'. Their campaign had to reach both the girl child as well as their parents. To discourage early child marriage and to highlight the importance of education, ASN communicated through

posters and wall paintings: *Gahan jewar roop sringar, Sikshya bina jivan bekar*, meaning, 'jewelry and ornaments makes your face up, but without education, whole life will be worthless'.

Hence, getting children out of work and enroll them

into school, campaigning against child marriage, and encouraging girl child to get into school and retain them were a twin process. The same support structures, Women Forum, and Child Empowerment Centre in particular actively engaged in stopping child marriage in their respective communities.

Sita Devi Das, who married at the age of 12, had to suffer a lot in her life due to early age marriage. She then stood against child marriage all over her life. When, ASN (then SCJ) carried out anti-child marriage campaign, she became one of the leading advocates against the early child marriage.

Fulwa Laheri of Pathrahiya, Bharatpur was just 12 years of old when her parents were ready to gave her in a marriage with an old man of 65 years of age. Fulwa was unaware of all those and had no choice, except to follow her parents instructions. When, Women Forum of Shreerampur, Bharatpur had heard of this, Sitadevi could not tolerate it. She spread the news in the eve of wedding and, claimed that if the marriage is not cancelled the society has to be responsible. She communicated this to the Youth Forum at Birendrabazar. Sitadevi led a group of women to Fulwa's house, and was eventually able to cancelled the marriage, when the groom's procession was already set to bride's home.

Similarly, Shobhit Thakur of Sundarpur, Bharatpur was ready to give her daughter, Geeta of 12 years

old, away through a marriage with a 40 years man from Bhagwanpur. When some members of Women Forum got this information just two days before the marriage date, Sitadevi along with some Youth Forum members went to Sobhit Thakur's house and told them to cancel the marriage. The marriage of a 12 years old girl was stopped. Obviously, Mr. Thakur was angry with Sita Devi, but the community was in favor of cancelling that unequal marriage.

Now, both the girls got married when they arrive at the suitable age for that. They also went to schools after their first marriages were cancelled. Both are now married in better families. Both families are happy, too. Not only in her village, but in the vicinity, child marriage is discouraged, no girls are married before they are at least 18 years of age. These two cases were a precursor for the anti-child-marriage movement in those areas.

### **Kamali Sada: An Ambassador of Change**

Kamali Sada (19 years) from Mushari tole of Govindpur -1, Dhanusha Dham, informed us, during our visit to her family on 29th of January, 2010, that she recently completed a 10 months' teacher training successfully and has just enrolled herself in class 12 in Janakpur. She is now a social mobilizer for Rural Development Forum (RDF), an NGO. It is an unconventional phenomenon among her fellow community people. Mushahars are mostly landless though they cut soils and make the barren land cultivable. They sometimes do the sharecropping, otherwise, they are mostly wage laborers. Sending children to the school is not a common practice among them; still Mushahars have the lowest rate of literacy in the country. Therefore, a girl from a landless Mushar family, attending higher secondary level education was

news for many of us. When asked to tell her journey up to now, she took a long breathe. She then, without any hesitation, began to tell her story.

"When I was a small child, I played in the mud and dust like any other children of our community. When I saw a Mushar girl elder than me from Anandnagar going to school, I also wanted to go to school. But, I had to look for goats and an ox. Our family used to cultivate Ananda Dhungana's land under sharecropping arrangement.

I insisted, and then my parents took me to school. I went for some days, soon found difficult to go to school every day. However, I gradually developed the taste of reading and going to school. The other girl got married when she was in class 3. Then, I was alone from our community to go to school. I





*Hopefulness has become my habit*  
– Kamali Sada

moved to another school in Dhanushadham. Now I was a regular Student to the school.

When, I was studying at grade 9, my parents fixed my marriage. When I knew it, I denied, saying that I want to complete my study. Committee on anti-child marriage in our school also talked to my parents. Sindhu didi from Aasaman also convinced my parents. Then, my parents finally cancelled my marriage. Since then, I also became an active member of anti-child marriage campaign. I focused more to my study. Aasaman helped and encouraged me to continue my study. I passed SLC two years ago with a second division. Aasaman then helped me to pursue a ten months teacher training. Hence, I am here. Now I will not lose my hope and move ahead"

ASN provided all the costs for the training. But, she managed herself to get enrolled in class 12. She earns 5000 rupees a month for running regular meeting for jana mukhi sikshya 'people centered education' in her own community. Women were reluctant to attend the meeting in the beginning. Now, they actively participate in the meetings, discuss about their own problems, and also the way outs to get out of the poverty.

Women group participating in the meeting some years ago went to school in Govindpur and demanded the scholarship for their children, which had been discontinued for last two years. RDF also provides some scholarship to the Dalit children. And, now every child of her community goes to school.

"I was worried in the beginning, but, I did not give up. Now, community people understand me. One day, when I was going to facilitate a women's group in Redcross tole, one of the participating women told to her daughter, 'you should study more and someday you should be like Kamali'. I was very happy to hear that, however, my eyes filled up with tears".

Now, she has been a role model not only to her fellow community members but also for many others. She concluded that, "had there not been Aasaman, I would not have been here with all these success. I would have already married, and, would have deprived from all these. Thanks to Aasaman and thanks to my parents who understood my interest".

Kamali's father, who was listening to our conversation quietly remarked, "our Kamali has been a symbol of change within our community. All of them like her and want their children to be like Kamali".

## The Story Begins, a More Democratic Society in the Making

A story of getting children into the schools does not end only with finding place for children in the classrooms. Actually, the story begins from here. This 'Kaam chodau school pathau' movement has given a hope to the people: a hope of getting out of poverty; and a hope of living a dignified life. Most importantly, a hope for the future.

Jubeda Khatoon reiterated, "sending our children to school is also a way to getting rid of poverty in the future". Jubeda Khatoon, Paterwa-2 Muslim tole of Dhanusa, is now a community leader. She has more to tell.

"When I took a lead to get the children out of work and enroll them in the school, I was criticized by my fellow community members. Muslims had Madrasa education system; they denied sending their children to common school. They thought that mainstream education is Hindu education system; therefore, they do not need to attend. I eventually was able to convince them and reached an agreement to send our children to both the education systems. Now we have hope that our children can compete in every walk of life in the future".

This was also an important initiative towards creating and strengthening harmony and

cooperation in the larger community. This has provided more opportunities to the people of different religions and creeds to come together, share common space, understand and respect each other.

Dipak Mallik, a son of Kangaliya Mallik Dom, a Dalit, of Yangyabhumi, Bhagvanpur, used to run hither and thither the whole day looking after pigs. Kangaliya never thought of sending his son to a school, because not only he was a poor but also because he was a Dalit, an 'untouchable', the most looked down community in the vicinity. With a motivation and insistent efforts of ASN and different forums in his village made him send his son to a school. But, it was more challenging to retain him in the school. Some of his neighbors even tried to ridicule him saying that, "what would a Dom do having education in a school?" Even the children in the school made fun of him, satirized. Thanks to the schoolteachers, who ruled out all the discriminatory treatment in the school. Now Dipak is 9 and studying in grade 3. He wants to be a schoolteacher in the future.

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Hence, this movement also gave confidence to a Dalit family. Kangaliya now thinks that it was his son's right to get education. Education is free in the school for all the people, not only to the people of high castes and to rich people. Dipak was first child from his community to go to a school. He even received a 'booster scholarship'. It was an

unconventional event among Dalits of that caste.

*'banning child labour and ensuring compulsory and inclusive education for all children'. Now, the quality education for the children has become a community agenda.*

Now 4073 Dalit children from 46 toles of Mahottari and Dhanusha districts go to schools. And their regularity is 96 percent. making this movement a success among others, ASN has facilitated to form different forums, for example, Youth Forum, Women Forum, Dalit Forum, etc. These Forums have created unconventional public forums, the 'public spheres', which serves

among others, as an interactive communicative space, contributing in empowering people and creating a democratic society.

Sitadevi, a Dalit from Umrahatole, Dhanusha, lost

her parents when she was a very young. She worked as a house servant in a Pahade's (people from hill) house Master's house in a very young age. One of the relatives of her found a man for her and arranged a marriage when she was just 12. She is now recognized for her social service and community leadership. She acknowledges SCJ/ASN for providing her an appropriate platform for her. She actually attended non-formal literacy classes first, and continued her social work. She gradually became popular among her folks in and around. She was then asked to be a candidate in the last local election at VDC level; she won the election and found a broader platform. A Dalit woman like Sitadevi could have ever imagined to be a VDC representative. Thanks to Women Forum, that gave strength to Sitadevi. Sitadevi is grateful to SCJ/ASN for helping her to achieve this. Now she has been a role model, a source of inspiration for many of her fellow women. This was a beginning of a more democratic and inclusive local politics and governance.

The local and cultural traditions have been recognized and mobilized for the cause of "education for all children". Maijan-Dewan, a traditional institution, not recognized by the state but still holds the respect from the local communities, have also been mobilized as a part of the Support Structure. This has broaden the public space at the local level, where even the dying culture like Maijan-Devan are

revived, recognized and given a space, where they could have their roles and responsibilities. Hence, ASN has created different forums where men and women from all castes and creeds, of all ages can come together and have learned to respect and listen to each other.

After all, compulsory education for all children has become a norm in those areas where SCJ/ASN worked earlier. In many areas where ASN phased out years ago still have 'kaam chhodau, school pathau' movements. No matter, which NGOs entered into those villages later, the same community members who formed the SS before take the lead and, linkup any program with the issues of ensuring quality education for all children and discouraging the child marriage.

Hence, working strategies of ASN that are largely based on community organizing and social mobilizations through SS gave rise to several public spaces in the community, which did not exist traditionally. They brought the issues of child rights, compulsory and quality education in the public schools at the core of their activities.

At the same time, such public spaces have helped in resolving the conflicts and creating harmony among the communities. Likewise, through such public spaces, communities can connect themselves with

the state authorities. Otherwise, for majority of the public, such an opportunity was missing.

These public spheres, primarily in the form of SS, have institutionalized the movement for 'banning child labor and ensuring compulsory and inclusive education for all children'. Now, the quality education for the children has become a community agenda. Community leaders in many areas in Dhanusha and Mahottari during our visit reiterated that the issue of child marriage, child labor and the quality education in the public schools have always remained as their agenda, no matter what their projects are for.

In addition, such SS and PTA, TA, SMC, etc. have become more inclusive than before. This tendency has been further strengthened by the ASN activities. Social inclusion has become mandatory. This is helping democracy to strengthen from the below.

Schoolteachers and SMC representatives of Shree S.R.P. School, in Keshavkuti, Dhanusha, during an interaction program on 29th, January 2010, univocally maintained that ASN's approach of community purchasing to Support Structure, so far have helped their community in various ways. They have become more united, solved their problem with a collective effort, and, even resolved some of the local political matters during such meetings at

school or in Support Structure meetings. They also maintained that their political affiliation and activities have not been barrier to their endeavor to educating the children.

Muslim Naddaf, CRP VDC Chair and District Joint-secretary from Sarpallo VDC, Mahottari stated that,

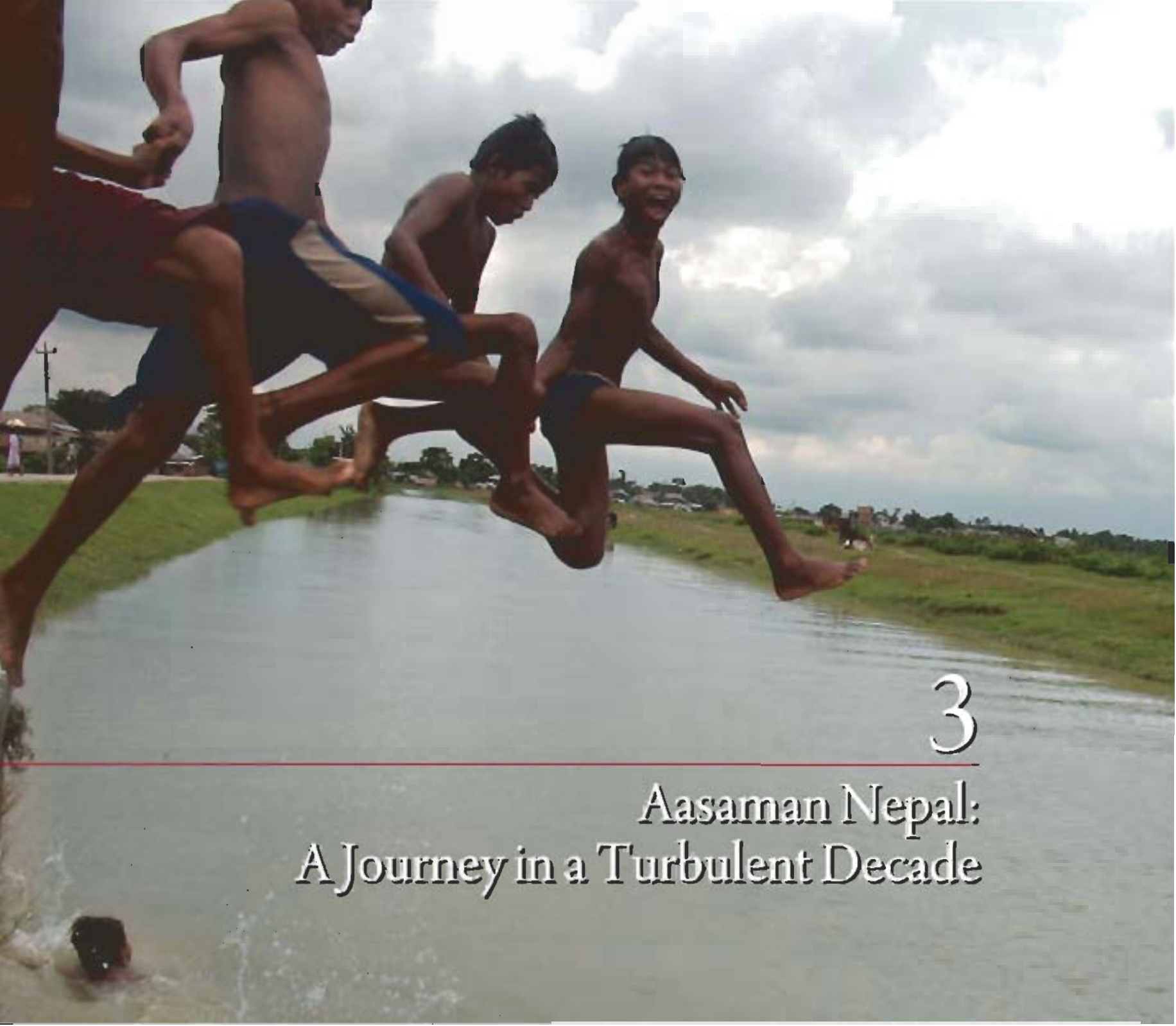
"... our communities were secluded before, many used to send their children to work in India, and a few used to send to Madarasa (a mosque school). After ASN introduced its program to our areas, now our communities are more into interactions with the members from other communities, they send more children to general public school. Our fellow people are in Support Structure. There are less tensions than before."

### How were all these Possible?

ASN envisioned that a 'child labor free' society is possible. ASN from its previous experiences and learning from elsewhere, prepared a strategy to launch a campaign, Kaam Chodau, School Pathau'.

This is one of the successes, nevertheless, the most cherished success of ASN. This was an activity, a program, a movement, among many others. This movement tailored many other movements related to social issues that hindered children from attending their schools. Why and how ASN initiated all these? How ASN came into being? Who initiated ASN? Who supported ASN to carry on these programs? Yes, there can be a series of such questions. To satisfy these and other similar questions, the following chapter introduces ASN in brief.





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Aasaman Nepal:  
A Journey in a Turbulent Decade

# Aasaman Nepal: A Journey in a Turbulent Decade

**A**asaman Nepal (ASN) is an NGO engaged in developing and implementing programmes aimed at protection, promotion, and fulfillment of child rights in Nepal. The organization is working in nine districts from plain to hill. ASN is currently working in Dhanusha, Mohottari, Sarlahi, Rautahat, Kavre, Dhading, Kathmandu, Baglung and Kalikot districts. Now it works with more than 12500 community-based support structures (more on support structures in the following chapters). Its members include women's groups, youth groups, school management committees, teachers, child empowerment centers, community-based organizations, and other stakeholders. Among the members of those support structures, more than 5500 are women and 2500 are Dalits, by the end of 2009. ASN is working with marginalized, disadvantaged, and excluded communities in various districts. Recently, ASN has launched more inclusive and a human rights (child rights and dalit rights) based educational programmes with a coverage of 117373, between the age group 5-14 from 465

schools across 201 Village Development Committees (VDCs) of the those 9 districts. Working strategy of ASN, which invariably has community organizing and mobilization as leading components, has helped it deepen contact and linkage with local people and capacitate them.

Over the years, ASN has been able to run its activities smoothly thereby successfully, despite several adversaries it encountered during the period. Thanks to its community ownership and mobilization strategy. ASN strongly believes that development activities cannot sustain unless it is owned and driven by the local people/beneficiaries, who are recognized as ASN's partners. People on the demand side (service seekers) are not merely passive recipients of services but they equally have rights to those services and are duly entitled to them. They have roles to play. They must make an organized effort to force the duty-bearers remains responsible and accountable to them. Besides, ASN also emphasizes on strengthening the existing government service delivery structures and institutions to enable them

deliver quality and effective services with utmost accountability rather than creating a parallel line agency or structures. In addition to being a direct implementer of programmes, ASN has rallied district level NGOs on child labour issues, birth registration, abolition of early child marriage; child rights awareness raising campaigns and child nutrition issues. It has shared its experience across the board with the view of enhancing the capacity of community-based organizations to manage programmes more effectively by themselves. ASN is committed to promoting good governance in the civil society sector within Nepal.

Thanks to SCJ who relied on ASN to carry on its agenda and the issues of child rights, education, and banning on child labour.

### Social Context: Lower Literacy Rate and Complex Social Structure

Dhanusha and Mahottari, ASN's traditional home ground, lies in the central Tarai. Dhanusha, in particular, is a religious and cultural centre in the Tarai. Both the districts are endowed with fertile agricultural land, stretching from Indian border in the south to the foothills of Chure in the north. However, these are also the districts with lower literacy rates. Such a lower literacy rate is attributed, among others, to the higher population of Dalits, who are mostly landless and subsist with agriculture

labouring and Yadavs, who are basically agriculturalists and traditionally valued less to the education. The districts have the highest ratio of landless population, due to the highly skewed land distribution. Hence, a large number of agricultural labourers had to depend on a few large landholders, and, there was sharp division between haves and have-nots. According to the last census, more than one-third (Dhanusha 34.3% and Mahottari 33.79%) household do not have agriculture land or they are landless (CBS 2002).

In 2001, the national literacy average was 53.7 percent, where, Dhanusha had 48.4 percent, with only 36.1 percent of female literacy rate and Mahottari had 34.4 percent with a 22.3 percent of female literacy rate (CBS 2002). Yadav, Dalits and Muslim together make up 42.04 percent of the population of Dhanusha and 43.31 of Mahottari. Hence, these are the three largest groups in both the districts, and have lower literacy rate. Average literacy rate among Yadav, and Muslims were 37.6, and 32 respectively, where Dalits had less than 20 percent only; Mushahars had 6.4 percent, lowest among all. The average literacy rate in the ASN working areas is even lower than national, and district averages. Other middle caste, nowadays also referred as 'other backward class' (namely, Kurmi, Kewat, Kumhar, Kanu, Hajam, Mallaha, etc.) who are significantly present in Dhanusha and Mahottari districts are also very low in terms of literacy status.

Despite being a fertile ground, historical and cultural city, Dhanusha and Mahottari districts with a lower literacy rate presents a problematic. However, very much skewed land ownership pattern, maintenance of rigid caste system and patriarchal values, and strong maintenance of dyadic relationship of patron-client have contributed in combined to such a

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condition. Historically, such apparent inequalities between different groups augmented the poverty; consequently force the parents to send their children to work to earn the livelihood for themselves and for their families. Therefore, the lower literacy rate is but an outcome of a historical politico-economic process, which favored a particular set of social, political nexus and power structure. not only depicts the condition where ASN started its work some 10

years ago in its home ground, but also indicates how hard that must have been to initiate something targeting to those population who were economically poor, socially excluded and politically oppressed. Nevertheless, at the meantime, there

could not have been better opportunity to start literacy campaign in the neediest areas like Dhanusha and Mahottari where that was needed the most. Moreover, literacy campaign used to be taken as a political mission therefore a threat to the landed and high caste groups and to their hegemony. On the other hand, it was equally difficult to organize and mobilize those needy groups who were so much dependent on the formers.

Aslok Chaudhary, the founding chair of ASN shared,

*"It was almost uncertain then if we could continue the work or not. We had hopes, little experiences but we found it very difficult to approach and address the needy groups. Literacy was a less attractive program for them, who were struggling and toiling hard to manage their two meals a day. We actually were disappointed and depressed several times, and were frightened if we could get through".*

On top of this, the political context was growing complicated and the worsening conflict situation made the work much more difficult.

## Development and Political Context: A Turbulent Decade

During the 10 year armed conflict (1996-2006 AD) between the CPN Maoist and government, many people were internally displaced, mentally tortured,



physically injured, children drop out from the school, involved in child labour or joined armed groups, many of them were sexually abused and unemployed. Schools and the education system was the most hit and affected areas during the entire conflict period. By 2004, due to armed conflict, 328 children (232 boys and 93 girls) died while, 250 children (167 boys and 83 girls) had been seriously injured. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Childworkers in Nepal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Childworkers_in_Nepal))

Soon after government and Maoist conflict came into an end, several insurgencies in Tarai erupted, and, Dhanusha and Mahottari were among the hotspots. ECM 2007 of ASN estimated that 48 percent of school going children were out of school. Among them 24 percent were primary level drop out children. There could have been many reasons, the conflict situation being the major one. To minimize the adverse effect of conflict in the schools, ASN had a school zone of peace (SZOP) programmes. However, it had a limited coverage, 45 schools in Dhanusha and 45 schools in Mahottari, in 26 VDCs together in two districts, this program and related activities created a momentum. Actually, it was difficult and risky, too, to go to the villages and carry out any programmes or activities.

Community organizations and their mobilization, to some extent, enlivened the teaching learning situation and stopped further deterioration. ASN's

strong commitment and partnership with communities, they could enter the villages that could have been impossible for any other similar organizations. They encountered several terrific situations and received threats from both the warring parties. Some of the staffs even experienced a very narrow escape a few times.

Government offices, viz., DEO and RCs, had no access therefore no 'existence' in the villages. Delivery system was ruptured; monitoring and backing ups were completely absent. Even in such a situation, ASN could mobilize the community and support structures and helped schools run and hold children in the schools. series of armed conflicts of different scales in the Tarai complicated the work of ASN. Despites all odds, it continued and was able to achieve some success in getting children out of work and get into the schools. During that period also, ASN maintained its collabouration and networking with different line agencies, GOs and INGOs.

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Despites all odds,  
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Madhu Lama, program officer of SZOP recalled the situation then and reflected, "it all looks like a dream now. Those were the days, when we were risking our lives to keep schools running and retaining children into the schools".

### Networking and Collabouration: Sharing the Resources Sharing the Issues

ASN initiated networking, collabouration and lobbying at different levels for advocating changing the definition of child labour, student-teacher ratio adjustment, increasing in government resources for quality education by conducting block, VDC level as well as district level interaction meeting on concerned issue. ASN also conducted district level interaction program on STR and grade issue jointly with Nepal Teachers Union. For both the districts they had joint monitoring in the field for the effectiveness of the program as well as they are implementing some programmes, for example, CLC, FSP, VEP, DEP, EP, EC Tracking etc jointly. As a result ASN has been able to link up CRPs as EP, VT as Rahat Teacher, SIP as a institutionalize, Grade ½ as LPP/CAS, SOP as temporary school and child friendly concept as well as local resource management, mobilization and ECD promotion while UNICEF promoting tin trunk library and message painting.

This helped organization in maintain good relation with district level line agencies, DEO, DDC, Women development office, Nepal teaches union, District women rights concern groups, District dalit rights concern groups, CFW, RSDC, Samaj Utthan Kendra, DEIP, Disable association etc were some of them. Consequently, all the concern groups' helped in national enrolment, international child labour elimination day, ID for disable children, and government resources mobilization, among others. Concern groups were conceptually clear and aware on the fact that ASN is working for child labour issue and advocating in different forum. To influence at the policy level of education right of children and child labour, ASN has coordinated with many likeminded organizations e.g. WHR, SEED, Help Nepal, SWC, and Children Nepal and they had already visited the working area of ASN and adopting the issues in their working areas.

### Looking Forward: Development Approach<sup>2</sup>

Aasaman Nepal opts for an ensemble of development approaches in view of the three thematic, structural and institutional issues. They are briefly discussed below.

<sup>2</sup> This section is extracted from Strategy Paper of Asmand Nepal (2010-2012).

## A. Need-based Approach

Aasaman Nepal believes that it should critically engage itself with both the supply side (duty-bearers) and the demand side (rights holders). Either side has needs, duties, rights and obligations. Aasaman Nepal believes that it should help meet the immediate needs of both the stakeholders and rights holders. In other words, Aasaman Nepal prefers to engage itself in preparing the ground work and help set up the launching pad. Every one needs to have equally strong shoulder to burden the responsibilities and deliver effectively. Aasaman Nepal will engage itself in strengthening the shoulders before placing burdens on them.

## B. Issue-based Approach

Issues sticking out like sore thumb of the community such as child-marriage, gender discrimination, caste-based discrimination, child labour, bonded labour etc. need advocacy, social movements, and critical engagements with the Government agencies. These issues may warrant triggering policy debate, policy changes, structural reshaping, removing constitutional or legal hurdles and influencing the lawmakers, media groups, and a broader spectrum of stakeholders at both micro and macro level. Under this approach, issues shall be identified, social movements built around them, advocacy strategy devised and a collected, concerted and unified effort

initiated. The strategy will be pursued both at micro and macro level in collaboration, concert and unison with allies, partners and stakeholders.

## C. Human Rights-based Approach to Development

Aasaman Nepal based on its long-term engagement with the community (rights holders) as well as duty-bearers has learnt that a top-down process of change has been tardy. On the other hand, changes take place faster through a bottom-up process. Change seekers have always fought a battle with the status quoits before any meaningful changes have taken place. Aasaman Nepal sees the basic needs of people, for which the state has an obligation, as their fundamental rights. Several needs such as food, education, shelter, and equal treatment and so on are indeed the people's fundamental rights. The state through its pledges and commitments to international conventions and protocols is obliged to enable people enjoy these rights through legal and structural adjustments.

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*... rights holders need to  
be aware, informed,  
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their rights.*

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However, rights holders need to be aware, informed, empowered, organized and mobilized in unison and concert to assert their rights. Unless they make effective and vociferous demands, the status quoists would keep dragging their feet. Aasaman Nepal has complete belief that all rights-based actions and struggles must be peaceful and non-violent. Every struggle for rights should have a legitimate basis. It will strictly abide by the theoretical and normative framework while pursuing rights of excluded and marginalized groups. The basis of Aasaman Nepal's rights holders shall be national constitution, legal frameworks, and international conventions and protocols of which Nepal has been a signatory.

### Working Strategy

Aasaman Nepal shall work on the following strategy in pursuing the issues:

- Participatory (Community participation in planning, implementation, and monitoring)
- Partnership (With donors, State agencies and NGOs and CBOs)
- Collaboration & Networking both at micro and macro level (relevant actors and stakeholders at district, national and regional level)
- Micro-macro linkages (Grassroots issues used to trigger debate and noise-making at national and regional level)

- Critical engagement with the Government

### Mode of Action

- Awareness raising/sensitization
- Organizing
- Empowering
- Social mobilization
- Issue-based Advocacy/social movement
- Social Audit

### Conflict Sensitive Strategy

In view of the ongoing conflict situation in the Terai and the conflict causal factors and escalation possibilities, Aasaman Nepal based on its observation and experiences will adopt the conflict-sensitive strategy. This means to avoid or reduce conflict-triggering elements, for example, non-sensitive to local culture and practices; discriminatory practices along communal and ethnic lines; disregard to local culture, faith, language and ethnic identity; absence of participatory and democratic exercise; exclusion and marginalization; caste-based discrimination and political affiliation and partisan politics.

ASN also identified the factors contributing to the existing conflict, which included, injustices; all equal but a few are more equal practices; partiality and unfair distribution of justices; unemployment;



politicians not delivering on promises; unscrupulous political grouping fueling fire to bake their bread; discrimination, exclusion and marginalization; lack of transparency and accountability, etc. ASN remained sensitive to these factors and always tried to minimize and avoid these factors adopting conflict-sensitive strategies. Some of the strategies ASN engaged were no partisan affiliation but a critical engagement with all political parties; secular outlook and practices; rights perspective to all sorts of abuses and violations and maintain transparency and remain accountable to its actions. Similarly, build consensus through community participation, and maintain inclusive staff and board structure and follow the principles in forming all kinds of support structures. ASN also developed code of conduct for its staff to abide by, respect all religious faith; rise above communalism through actions and behaviors; non-discriminatory principles and practices; and organize social audit.

Hence, even during the intensified conflict in the Tarai, pertaining to the armed conflict between the Government and the then CPN (Maoist) and several armed groups in the Eastern Tarai, in particular. ANS, never stepped back, continued its works. Realizing the immediate need of the children during the conflicts, ASN adopted additional programmes to help the children, when that was

most needed. Likewise, smooth running of the schools during such a turbulent period was also one of the concerned of ASN. Since, the violent conflicts have decentralized now, and, there are several armed groups and political parties are agitating, and ASN is very sensitive to keep children and education sectors less hampered. Recently, ASN coordinated a meeting with different political groups operating in eastern tarai and brought them together for a cause of not disturbing education sectors during their agitation process.

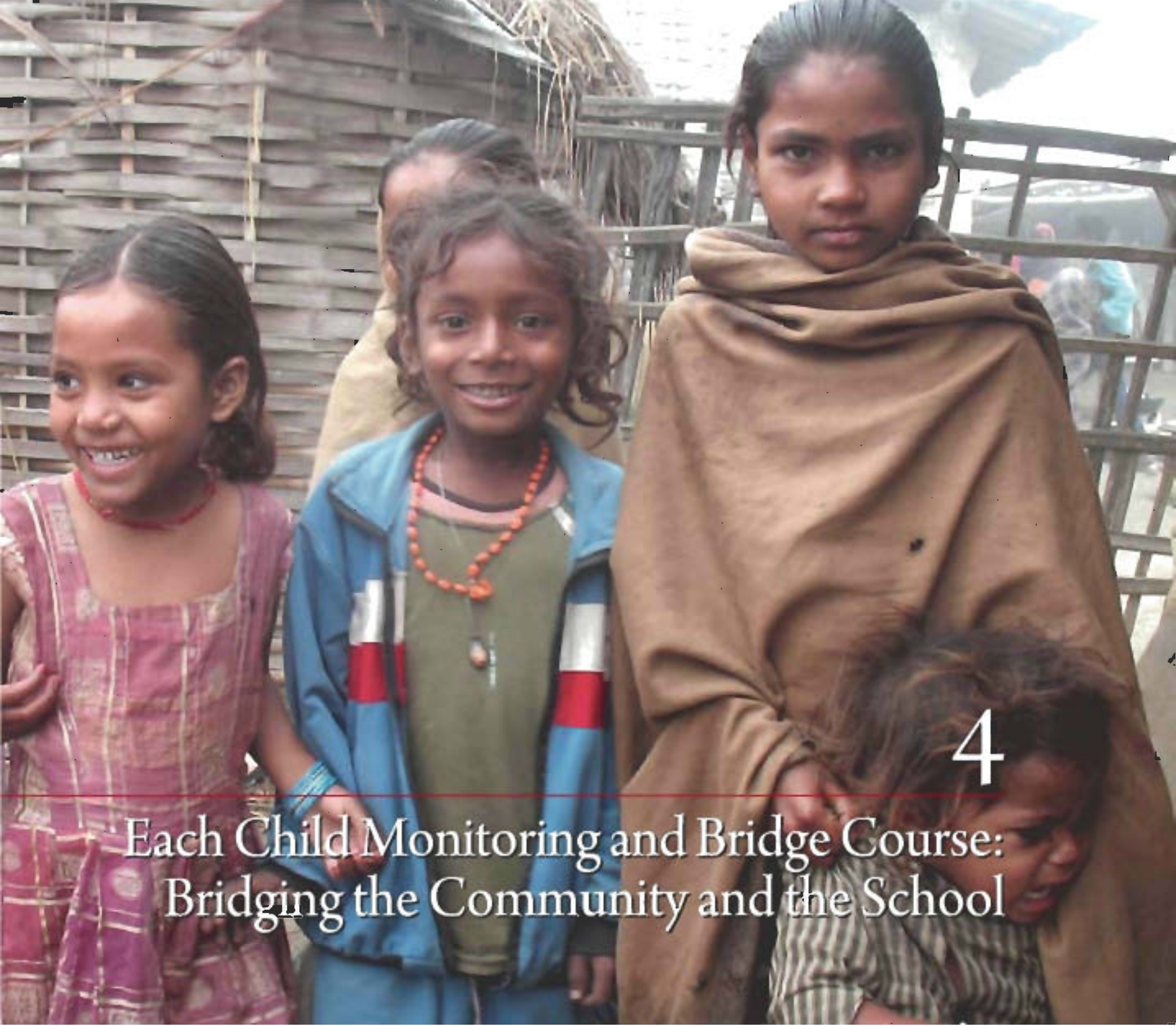
ASN staffs during the interaction program in Dhanuhsa reiterated that it was all possible for ASN to work in the communities because of its pro-community approach. "We never thought that we were working for them, but we were working with them. Therefore, as long as community was there, we were there, in every up and down".

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*ASN remained sensitive to  
these factors and always tried  
to minimize and avoid  
these factors adopting  
conflict-sensitive strategies.*

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4

Each Child Monitoring and Bridge Course:  
Bridging the Community and the School



# Each Child Monitoring and Bridge Course

**A**SN aimed to bring every child of its working area into school. For this, ASN initiated several movements. The most remarkable of which was its "kaam chodau school pathau" movement. ASN largely got success in getting children out of work and into the schools. But it was difficult to ensure that each child of school going age (i.e., 5-14 years) in ASN working areas is retained in school once they are enrolled. For ASN, one child is 100 per cent in itself, meaning no single child should be outside the school (otherwise, they are in work), and should not be dropped out untimely. It was a responsibility as well as a challenge for ASN at the same time.

From the very beginning of its program, ASN involves community and the issues of children of out of work. As ASN considers any child of that particular age group is not in school, and then he or she is in work, ASN prepares community to engage in this new discourse.

Each Child Monitoring (ECM) and bridge course are devised as tools for community mobilization and a movement to get all the children into schools.

Therefore, ASN launched a campaign, "kaam chodau, school pathau". Experiences suggested that only to get a child into a school is not enough, it is even tougher to retain him or her in school and to maintain the regularity and to check the drop outs. Therefore, ASN in collaboration with support structures, monitors if every child in the village is going to school, if not, what are the reasons, how is the regularity in the school, and what is drop out ratio, and what are the reasons behind, and so on.

## Volunteers: Training for the Future

ECM is not a single event or a process isolated from other activities. ASN decides to work in any communities based on some statistical facts and proximities from its earlier working areas. ASN focuses on those areas where poverty intensity is high, prevalence of landless and the Dalit population, ethnic minorities is higher. ASN also takes in to account of the out of school children in the districts or VDC.

Once, ASN decides to enter into a new VDC, it organizes a VDC level meeting where it invites VDC representatives, school representatives, different

group members, including a traditional groups/institutions, and the community people. ASN introduces itself and introduces its working modalities. Then, request them to select two individuals from their respective wards as volunteers. Several names are sent to ASN, and then ASN staffs interact with those individuals and based on the dialogue, their social background and education qualification, select two individuals from each ward, altogether 18 in a VDC, as volunteers.

Thus selected volunteers are oriented to carry out a general survey, which lasts for about 15 days. During this survey, these volunteers should reach each family of the VDC, not only to collect data but to let family members know why they want to collect information. Finally, the data thus collected is analyzed with specially designed software for the ECM. Then the volunteers with the ASN staffs go back to their respective communities, and share the findings of the survey. Then follows yet another interactive session, where ASN staffs, volunteers, and the community members discuss about their situation, status of out of the school children, and also ponder upon what can be done then to improve the situation.

This is the beginning of the planning for the coming years. Community suggests several ways to get the children out of work and enroll into the school, and to improve the schools in their communities. In the

same or in the consecutive meetings, communities discover what they can do and what resources are available in the communities. Then, with some of the representatives of the communities, they will have a similar sharing and interactive meeting with the schoolteachers and management committee members. They also compile the information from the schools and then go for the school level planning.

These will take around 3 months time. ASN, then bridges two planning; planning of the community and the planning of the schools. Then the planning is presented to the communities again: how it works, what ASN does and what not, how the resources are mobilized, etc. This is to let the community people know about the working modalities, at the same time, it is to respect the communities' right to the information. This practice is also intended to be a part of transparency and accountability.

Primarily, volunteers are selected for up to this process. However, now ASN needs to hire several

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mobilizers and staffs to work in those areas, they are selected from among those volunteers. They further continues as social mobilizers, bridge course teachers, etc. By this time, volunteers and the ASN staffs get familiar with the community people, existing opportunities, local power structures, contradictions, and so on.

Ashok Kumar Paswan, a social mobilizer from Beluwa, Mahottari is of the opinion that social mobilizers of ASN are well received by the communities. He further clarifies,

"...communities have seen us volunteered for long, they have seen us how we work and for what we work, therefore, they listen to us, and we find working comfortable with them. They know that we are not only working for the money, we are working for the good cause. They accept us as their own people, and we are among them. We are working in our own community, and with our won community."

### Bridge Course: Bridging the Community and the School

Once the children are withdrawn from the work, they are enabled to get enrolled in the formal schools. Since they cannot immediately go to the formal schools directly from the work place. They need to prepare for themselves to be students in the formal schools. Such preparation of studentship, in order

to get enrolled in the formal school is done through a bridge course.

In the beginning, ASN had several Out of School Children Classes (OSCC), usually it used to run for 9 months. Later, similar program was called a motivation center. Now, ASN has bridge course, which is more like a bridge camp. For ASN staffs, it is a rediscovery of missing link, which while preparing studentship and taking out-of-schoolchildren into the formal schools, also connects the community to the schools.

The single objective of all those programmes was to prepare the studentship, but there was a fundamental difference between bridge course and the previous two programmes. Former two programmes were almost like events but this one is more like a process.

Children withdrawn from work are usually not ready to get into the formal schools immediately for various reasons. Their age ranges from 8-14 years. Even if children are not sent elsewhere for earning, but also not sent to school till late age are the participants of such bridge courses. They are oriented to certain types of school behaviors; they learn basics according to their age and aptitude to get enrolled in appropriate grades. The course runs for 18 months in one time, and 4 hours each day. But, actually it operates as a continuous process.

Child can come in at any point of time, and they do not need to be graduated from a 18-months course, rather they can be enrolled in school at any time once they are prepared. This is, hence, a process of studentship preparation.

Such bridge course is run in a school, usually in the morning time, not disturbing school's regular time, and activities. Each bridge course has a trained teacher, often from the same communities where the courses is run. Communities themselves select teachers (See ECM for detail procedure in the following chapter). Places where the classes are run are well equipped with required teaching-learning materials. Normally there are 10 to 25 students in one time. Children learn to read and write. They learn letters and numbers. They also learn what it means to be in school and read and write. They gain confidence and zeal to join the formal schools during this bridge course. They eventually prepare themselves to get enrolled in the schools.

This is a non-formal schooling, however, unlike the previous non-formal literacy programmes, which implicitly allow children to go for labouring; this bridge course is intended to eliminate the child labour. This course (the process) is tried to mainstream in the formal school system. Therefore, to a possible extent, the classes are run in the schools, where they are expected to be enrolled later.

Need for a bridge course arises during SIP preparation (See SIP for detail, later in this chapter). Community, with supports from school and ASN, manages the bridge courses. ASN provides all the required materials to run the classes, however, parents have to provide a pen and copies. Several bridge courses are conducted simultaneously. There will be a meeting every month with teachers to ensure the quality and progress in such classes.

This is also turns out to be a community mobilization tool. There are numerous examples that after the beginning of such classes, community have become more sensible about child labour, about schools, about education, and so on. They have become more attentive on why children do not go to school.

Surveying children in the workplace, withdrawal of those children and getting them into bridge courses and eventually into formal schooling is done by the direct and active involvement of the community members. Therefore, community owns the process, feels responsible and

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concerned for the success of the program. In many places, community are organized in different forums, which ASN recognizes as support structures.

Hence, children are withdrawn from work, oriented in the bridge courses, and enrolled in the formal school. They are consistently monitored to ensure that they continue to the schools and getting quality education. This lead to a child labour free villages.

### School enrolment campaigns for Bonded labour child

Ideally, there should be free access to primary and secondary school education for all children. Government has several programmes for this. ASN believes that the education of a child should not be affected just because he or she was born in a low income family, or in an economically poor family. Therefore the school mainstreaming of children under age group 6-10 year was one of the major activities so that none of the children from bonded labour families remain out of school. Various activities were conducted for this campaign such as public rally; cycle rallies, home visit, street drama and wall painting at the community level in three target VDCs viz. Bharatpur, Ragbunathpur and Ramdaiya Bhawadi. The women groups, child clubs,

youth groups, students, teachers, local social activist were also mobilized for such campaigns to sensitize the general people about the importance of education in the community particularly in Harwaha/Charwaha families. Total of 189 children (90 girls, boys 99) were enrolled into formal schools.

### Ensuring the Quality Education in in Schools

To ensure the right of children and provide educational opportunity to them government of Nepal is implementing the project SISM (The Support for Improvement of Primary School Management) in Dhading district in 5 VDCs, as a pilot project. This project is jointly planned at DOE with the technical support of JICA Nepal. The project aims to strengthen the capacity of school management committee (SMCs) in planning/implementing school improvement plans (SIPs) to manage school with community participation, to strengthen the capacity of DEO, DDC, and VDC to support technically and financially to improve school-based management and to prepare suggestive measures as policy options that should be taken by MOE and DOE to achieve minimum quality in education nationally.





From Community Development to  
Community Organizing and Advocacy

# From Community Development to Community Organizing and Advocacy

For the universalization of education and ensure the education right of the Dalit, disabled, poor, disadvantages groups and girl children from remote areas SOP (Branch School) have been promoted. A total of 19 centers had conducted with 1248 children, female-590 (80%), Dalit-520 (79%). Out of the 19 centers, 12 centers (7 in MHT, 5 in DHN) have already been approved as a primary school by DEO, Dhanusha and Mahottari respectively.

Similarly, with the objectives of mainstreaming the Dalit, girls and disable children, child rights protector (CRP) was introduced in selected focus toles as an inclusive approach to reduce drop out and irregular students. Ultimate aim of CRP was to make child labour free toles. There were 95 CRPs (80% female, 20% Dalit) in 144 focus toles. Up to December, 06, the school enrolment status of focused toles increased by 16 % ( Female-20%, Male-12%) whereas 23% in Dalit and 13% in non Dalit

respectively. Now, 98% children aged 5 to 14 years are school going from 144 focus toles. By 2009, total 4485 individual from different walks-of-life, such as teachers, women, SMC members, youths, political leader, and parents now can speak out and advocate with regard to child labour issues, concept of child labour free toles and so on. Because of their enormous efforts along with the continuous support from the local community structures, 58 toles have been declared as Child Labour Free Toles.

The impacts of CRP's efforts have been recognized by the government of Nepal. The Department of Education has introduced the concept of education promoter in a pilot phase in five districts of Nepal. The roles and responsibilities of these education promoter are similar to that of ASN's CRPs. 35 CRPs have been performing as Education Promoters, assigned by the DEO in ASN's present working areas in Dhanusha. This is also a valued achievement for ASN to integrate its best practices



and policies into the government programmes. Government has planned to implement 340 EPs in VEP prepared 20 VDCs as per districts.

To prepare older children (8-10 years of age) for studentship who were engaged in child labour and could not be enrolled in school at a grade level congruent with their age, bridge course was introduced by conducting classes 3 to 5 hours per day. In most cases, these classes are conducted in the school to familiarize children with the school environment. The course books developed by the Department of Education were utilized. Two hundred and twenty eight centers had conducted by 2009 with 5756(3580 female, 1501 Dalit) children to prepare them for studentship and enrolled into school for mainstreaming them in the education. Some of those students are now studying up to diploma in engineering (overseer) and B. Ed.

ASN also focuses to improve the retention and quality learning of grade 1 and 2, which are usually neglected groups in school environment and where teachers do not give importance to teach them. Similarly, the enrolment rate in grade 1 and 2 is high but retention rate is low. To address the issue, VT support concept was introduced to create child friendly learning environment within school. Altogether, 141 VT of 58 schools (ASN and community side) are working to improve the status of grade 1 & 2 in their respective school by using

child friendly teaching method. VT do take regular attendance, home visit for irregular children, monitoring and follow up for children especially grade 1 and 2. Joint meeting are organized among women, parents, SMC, teacher and children and form the mobile committee to get the name list of not school going children with the support of VTs. Such committee collected the names of the children who were out of school at that time, sent invitation cards for school enrolment. VTs also supported to children for enrolment into schools who did not have birth registration card. Prepared local teaching materials and used in the school teaching especially focusing for grade 1 and 2 children.

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### **Community Mobilization and Facilitation: A Strategy that Worked**

A total of 1101 groups with 12699 members were mobilized to withdraw children from work and enrol them into school; advocate preventing misuse

of financial resources; mobilized on different promotional campaigns and initiated joint follow up activities and monitoring of the school. A total of 275 working children withdrawn from brick kilns, hotel, and other labour work were enrolled in schools. ASN has mobilized local resources worth Rs. 12967178 especially on volunteer's teacher's incentive, education materials, and physical facilities, game sets and scholarship till now. This helps local institutions (VDC) to think seriously on the child labour and right to education.

ASN has conducted 193 events of different training & workshops. They included CRC management and accounting system, resource management and mobilization, SMC strengthening, RBA, Social Inclusion, and Advocacy. Similarly, also included were child friendly and Agro forestry management, etc. Altogether, 5053 participants (1644 female and 1098 Dalit) participated in for capacity building of governmental (DOE, DEO etc) as well as non governmental organizations on child labour issue while facilitated on social mobilization training. Each child tracking system, developed DEP, VEP with DEO for data management and many more.

Similarly, in total 66279 people had participated in different meeting and interaction of cluster, VDC as well as district level among them 30157 (45%) were females and 15959 (24%) were Dalits. From this community people have chance to participate in the bottom up planning directly and they are

aware on the concerned issue and have taken ownership.

Due to this, 18 VDC level CRPF was formed and they are mobilizing themselves in the community. Finally Kam Chodaun School Pathaun project was handed over formally to the community from 28 VDCs of Dhanusha district and 7 VDCs of Mahottari district. More than 50 schools from both district thanks ASN for working coordinating in the past and requesting technical support in the future. At last ASN has learned that phase out means to change in the strategy and roles and phase in follows after every phase out.

For all these, ASN follow a certain strategic guidelines, as illustrated below,

Go with people

Live with them

Learn from them

Love them

Start with them what they know

Build with what they have

When the job is done,

All say- we have done these ourselves

Hence, a working strategy of ASN is guided by a philosophy that people have the knowledge and resources, recognize and respect them and share what it has, to change the situation in order to make a better world. Immersion, interactions in the community and recognizing the indigenous knowledge and resources has been given high priorities, therefore ASN works with Majjan-Dewan (an traditional institutions of indigenous communities of eastern Tarai), has been able to mobilize the resources, human and financial, by launching a door to door donation collection for school building, and so on.

### Promoting Child Participation: A Forward-looking Approach

Participation of children in the entire cycle of activities is valued high. To create child-centered environment in the school and promote child participation, various activities such as child committee quarterly meeting, child committee monthly meeting, BAL news publication, celebration of various events and support to extracurricular activities are implemented in the schools. Such a participation of children in different activities has resulted into increased school attendance and the school authority has become more attentive to children's voice. As a result, 78 child committees comprised of 821 children (35% female and 65% male) have been formed in 78

schools with an objective to promote children participation in School Governance system. They do so by raising their voices on the issue of child rights, child labour, regularity of children as well as teachers in schools, early child marriage etc. through several programmes.

### Support Structure: an Unconventional way of Community Organizing

Community mobilization, building a movement for child-labour free communities and creation of local ownership of all the initiatives and processes has been a primary and constant focus of ASN. Considering the social-cultural diversity and preventing the efforts and outcome from the elite capture, ASN adopted an inclusive approach. Local youths, women, and Dalits are often ignored, while elderly men and high caste people capture the forums, opportunities, and voices at the local level. Therefore, deliberately, ASN

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facilitated, as a mandate of its working strategy, several forums of youths, women, and Dalits to emerge in the villages. These forums are more like associations, where people can come and join the forums, which will have no particular structure. These forums function as Child Rights Protection Forums (CRPF) at the local level. Such structures

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*Ultimately,  
the government and the  
community  
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own the processes.*

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are playing significant role particularly in school main streaming campaigns (Cycle rally, rally, home visit, broadcasting through loud speakers), selection of participants and facilitators for bridge courses (earlier, OSP and PLA classes), monitoring of bridge courses (again, formerly, OSP and PLA classes), participate and mobilize local people in awareness creation, child labour prevention and withdrawal initiatives. Also work to prevent the cases of child marriage. Not to mention,

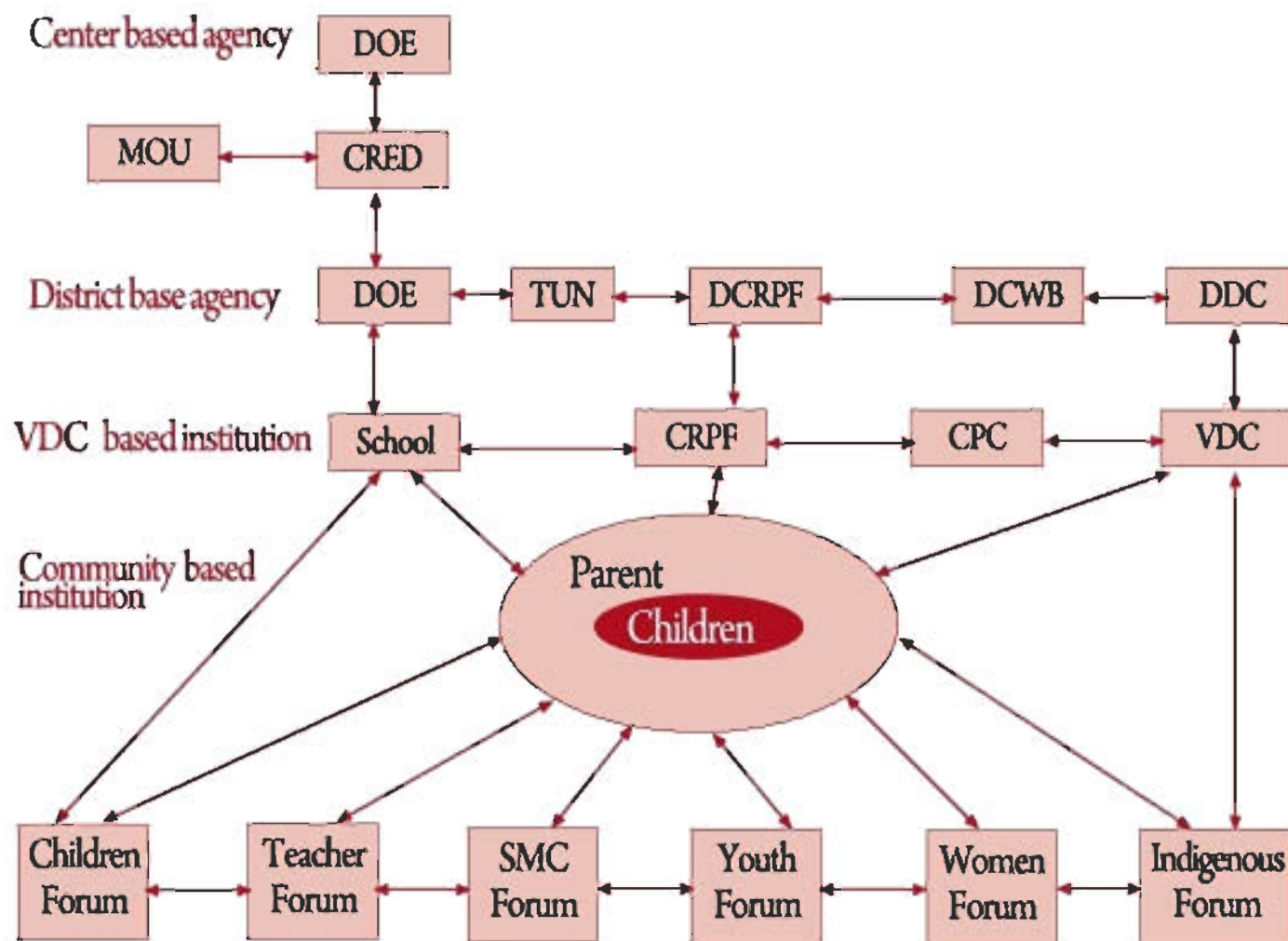
these are formed more spontaneously nowadays, and they also assume their roles accordingly. Communities, where ASN has already phased out, have also maintained these structures, and continued the processes.

Similarly, ASN collabourates with Parents-Teachers Associations (PTA). Such associations are mandatory in government schools. However, ASN works closely with such PTA in its working areas to get all the children of the vicinity (catchment areas, as usually called) into school and ensure the quality education in the schools. ASN helps in institutional strengthening and capacity building of these PTA. In addition, ASN also facilitated to form Teachers Associations. These associations are federated in a block level, which comprises schools from 4-5 VDCs. They will have a interactive meetings in every three months in a block level, where teachers share their progress, success and constrains, which ultimately provide an opportunities to learn from each others. So far, there has been very positive response from teachers, parents, and community members.

All these structures are mainstreamed for achieving definite goals. And, these structures are called support structures.

ASN, at the same time, collabourates and engages VDCs, local political representatives, RPs, and DEO's officials in its initiatives. Ultimately, the government and the community have to work and own the processes. ASN is, after all, a mediator. The schematic presentation of support structure is illustrated through the following figure.

Fig. A Schematic Diagram of Support Structure





Hence, supports structures are federated and function in a web of relationships and networking with other support structures, government organizations, local bodies and so on.

## Bal Shakti Kendra: Children Empowerment Centre

Children Empowerment Centre (CEC) is one of the integral components of SS thereby of CRPF. There is government policy to form Child Club in every school. However, their roles and importance are debated, and sometimes even questioned. CEC, unlike regular child clubs in schools, is organized at village level. They constitute a part of CRPF and aim in 'eliminating child labour and ensuring compulsory and inclusive education for all children'. ASN has exercised child participation in real sense. ASN make sure that children voice is heard in every stages of SIP preparation. This will ensure child participation in creating the environment where they could enjoy most.

Children raise their voice by participating in SIP process, meeting of SS, viz. women forum, youth forum, Dalit forums, and through street drama, meeting, interaction, publishing articles in child section of local newspaper, organizing a delegation, and urging school authorities etc.

To share the information to the people and aware them about child labour elimination process,

creating child friendly environment in the school and protection of child rights, a regular column in a local news paper was published for 140 times (Janakpur Today 3rd page) as Bal Stambha. In which article related with different issues of child labour in community level and child labour are collected and edited by children with the co-ordination of local journalist. Children are much energized and encouraged by their article published in newspaper and give confidence to keep on writing. They are provided basic training for all these tasks to perform.

CEC has become most instrumental in ECM and brining absent children into the schools. They have several stories to tell about taking out children from work, and stopping child marriage with their own initiatives. They are the one who holds most of the information about the children in the communities. Once they find any children not going to school or are sent to work, they visit the parents of that particular children, they bring the issues to the women forum, discuss with the ASN staffs and volunteers, and find out the solution.

Bimala Chaurasiya of class 8 at Yog Kumar High School in Baluwa, Mahottari is vice-chairperson of CEC of her village and represents in district CRPF of Mahottari. Her committee rescued three children from workplace and got into the school two years ago. Three children rescued were a Muslim, a Saha,

and a Dalit boy. Now they are in schools. She described how difficult was it to approach to parents of those child. Their parents refused saying, 'who earn the money for us, do you give us the money?' Bimala replied to them, "will you give me the earnings of your son when he will study more and get job afterwards?" She told us if CEC could not have solve the problem, they would have gone to other forums, but, they tried by themselves first, they succeeded.

CEC has regular meeting once in a month. They work in a close coordination with other forums and ASN.

They become more active during the admission season. Besides regular monitoring of children out of schools and getting them into schools, they are also involved in many other activities, such as school gardening, checking teacher attendance, participating in school enrolment campaign, wall painting, wall magazines, and other extra-curricular activities.

Dineshwor Shah, Program Coordinator of ASN, clarifies,

*"ASN facilitated to form CEC to ensure child participation in a true sense, not only the participation for the sake of participation, but to a level where their voices are heard, their concerns are considered seriously."*

*We believe children can contribute even in SIP preparation. However, still in some schools PTA, TA and SMC ignore children participation and their capacity to contribute to the process. Children participation in ECM has remained phenomenal".*

## Child Right Protection Forum

Jibachh Sah, Baluwa-3, Mahottari is the district chairperson of Child Rights Protection Forum, Mahottari. He used to be a district committee member of Nepali Congress, one of the major political parties in Nepal, now, a district Joint-Secretary of Tarai-Madhes Loktantrik Party for last two years. We interviewed him in his village, during the conversation we cast a doubt if he uses the CRPF for his political benefits. He declined our doubt and said, rather he tries to mainstream the issues of child rights in their political agenda to the possible extent. He further assured us,

*CRPF is successful in developing a common and shared understanding among community members, school teachers, parents, children, and all other stake-holders.*

"Had I been a mere political leader, they would have

not elected me as a chairperson of CRPF. We don't count political affiliation there. Regardless of political beliefs and alienation, we are working together to fight against child labour and to get all the children into the schools."

CRPF mediates government authorities and local schools and communities. There are many government programmes for Dalits, disabled, girl child, and marginalized children, but they never reached the targeted communities. Government does not have access and 'intention' to monitor if children's rights have been violated in the far-flung villages. Jibachh argued that, "government policy would have never been realized if there were no CRPF in our district. At least in those areas where ASN has its programmes, CRPF has facilitated to

ensure peoples access to the government's resources".

CRPF now focuses more on inclusive education. Despite several efforts, Dalits were the ones who were left out to benefit from the programmes, therefore, CRPF now inclined towards 'inclusive education and education for all.

CRPF is successful in developing a common and shared understanding among community members, school teachers, parents, children, and all other stake-holders. CRPF's involvement in SIP preparation from the beginning of the planning stage. This structure has been more like a mediator as well as a pressure group at the same time.



6

Journey Continues: An Epilogue



## Journey Continues: An Epilogue

ASN is now recognized as a leader in the fight to end child labour in its working areas, however, it believes that problems of child labour is complicated and cannot be tackled alone either by government or by NGOs. ASN efforts and achievements are but indication that creation of a child-labour free society is possible. In addition, 'ensuring compulsory and inclusive education for all children', is another hope that ASN is engaged in, and this hope is hopefully fulfilled some day.

ASN learnt that putting children into the work and not into the school is not simply a behavior constrained by some economic conditions, but it is an attitude, which cannot be changed simply by promulgating some laws and regulations. Child labour persists even if it has been declared illegal. National and international protective measures are often dumped, and rarely seen enacted.

ASN has a firm belief that certain forms of child labour must be confronted immediately. Relying on experiences that a community-based action is the ultimate key to a long term, sustained effort to protect child labourers. Thanks to support-structures, which made it possible to mobilize a wide

range of public in the movement to get children out of work and into the school.

ASN believed that research on child labour should be an indispensable tool for action; however, this remained inadequate in the past years, therefore, needs to strengthen further in the future. ASN emphasizes research as an effective way of starting the course of action needed. Research and reflections have lot to do to guide ASN to a journey that led up to this point and will gain prominence attentions in future.

ASN is committed to continue its multi-sectoral collaborative actions involving government agencies, non-government organizations and the civil societies for community organizing, advocacy and policy lobbying, along with mobilizing (local) resources to get the intended achievements. At the same time, ASN concentrates more on meaningful children's participation, for each child monitoring, in particular.

"Child Labour Free Toles (settlements)", popularly, in a vernacular term, "tole free" concepts also turned out to be an effective tool of social mobilization. As discussed in the previous chapter, this proved to be an effective mechanism to make every parent,



guardian responsible for getting children out of work and taken them into schools. Now, ASN is gradually moving towards declaring the VDCs 'child labour free'. This will have effective meaning in making VDC/local leaders more responsible for getting children out of work and getting them into schools. Eventually this helps to make child labour and child rights, a political issue up to a local level. The number may not be so important but the process ASN has started will have a long-term impacts.

ASN has created several interactive spaces through the creation of several forums in the villages, which take up the issue of elimination of child labour and enrolling all the children in the formal school as their immediate tasks. However, such interactive spaces, broadly speaking, public spheres are the basis of democratization process in everyday life in the local level. Hence, ASN's efforts have broader and long-term implications, which, however, are often overlooked or over shadowed. At the same time, fundamental values of democracy: transparency, accountability, participatory planning, bottom-up approaches, right to the information, etc. have also been strengthened in the local level, which, cannot be devaluated.

The process of SIP formulation has altered the government's delivery approach. Now the community through schools creates demand from below, rather than being a passive recipient of whatever delivered to them. This has made the

schools, RPs and RCs, DEO and eventually to DOE more responsible and accountable. Thus has contributed in the process of good governance in actual practices.

Moreover, unlike many other NGOs, ASN is inclined more towards community facilitation and community organizing, going beyond the community mobilization. Making community responsible and facilitating them to be able to take up the responsibilities, for creating a child labour free community, where every child is in school and enjoying all the possible opportunities for their overall development is a challenge, which ASN has already taken up, will provide an innovative development modality.

Nawal Kishor Yadav, Executive Director of ASN, claims credits to ASN for all these achievements that have been made so far. He also modestly maintains,

*"Whatever we have done so far is a collective and collaborative achievements of ASN staffs, volunteers,*

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*Now the community  
through schools creates  
demand from below,  
rather than being a passive  
recipient*

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*community people, school teachers, children of the respective communities, our partners, supporters and well-wishers, we will strengthen this ties further. At the same time, all our ASN staffs were not only dedicated and committed to the vision, mission, and goals of ASN, but also were very much connected to the community people and their issues. They were reflective and always demonstrated their learning attitude. All these qualities enabled us to learn from our own experience and prepare for more appropriate plan, and capacitate the stakeholders and ourselves accordingly. We did not try to do different things, but we tried them differently, and we are satisfied that we are largely successful. Nevertheless, this is a journey of thousand miles, and, we have already marked our first step. We continue this journey, we never give up, Asaman never gives up!"*

Finally, this was, for me, a revisit of ASN, after a decade. I conducted two evaluations of SCJ programmes, when it was gradually phasing out from direct engagement in the community level, during the end of 1990s. That was the time when ASN was already conceived, and getting prepared to take up new roles and new challenges. SCJ strategically handed over its programmes to ASN, as ASN was, in many ways, a brainchild of SCJ. I had to read their reports, meet several individuals, go around the communities, and to see SCJ through their staffs as well as communities' eyes. I was in a constant touch with ASN's staffs during the entire years. I also happened to work with them in a couple of occasions. Writing this document was an opportunity for me of a similar kind, where I

reviewed their documents, interacted with ASN staffs, community people, and so on. It was a revealing realization that ASN has journeyed a lot. Though they took up and continued the issues and agenda of SCJ, the coverage and the impacts of the programmes are simply incomparable. They have expanded to a much broader geographical areas from its traditional home ground in Dhanusha. The programmes have become socially diverse, but without losing its essence, that ASN is essentially recognized for.

What I liked most about ASN is that they presented their success as a brand rather than portraying vulnerabilities of the community to get the programmes funded. This typical way of telling stories for 'every child in school is a mission possible', is a very much positive outlook and looking ahead approach. Children in school has become its 'brand image' instead of portraying a child in the rags or in a hazardous work place does not tend to conceal the problem of working children in its working areas. Bravo!

After this revisit, and being much impressed with the achievements they have made, in community organizing, in particular, for withdrawing children from work and enrolling them into school, and considering its organic evolution, I think, ASN now should focus more on slightly unconventional roles, of 'mediators', 'knowledge producers', 'capacity builders for the transformation'.

There is hope!



7

References/Annex

# References

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# Annex 1

## Child Labour Quick Facts

The International Labour Organization estimates that 218 million children ages 5-17 are engaged in child labour (ILO, *The End of Child Labour: Within Reach*, 2006).

An estimated 14 percent of children in India ages 5-14 are engaged in child labour activities, including carpet production (UNICEF, *State of the World's Children 2006*).

It would cost \$760 billion over a 20-year period to end child labour. The estimated benefit in terms of better education and health is about six times that—over \$4 trillion in economies where child labourers are found (ILO, *Investing in Every Child*, 2003).

Some children are forced to work up to 18 hours a day, often never leaving the confines of the factory or loom shed.

Children trafficked into one form of labour may be later sold into another, as with girls from rural Nepal, who are recruited to work in carpet factories but are then trafficked into the sex industry over the border in India (ILO/IPEC, *Helping Hands or Shackled Lives? Understanding Child Domestic Labour and Responses to It*, 2004).

Experts estimate that child labour on South Asia's carpet looms has dropped from 1 million to 250,000 since the launch of GoodWeave's certification program in 1995.

(Source : [http://www.goodweave.org/index.php?cid\\_31](http://www.goodweave.org/index.php?cid_31))

## Annex 2

### National Statistics: Some References

- Statistics shows that of about 7 million children between 5-14 years old working in Nepal, about 3 million are found to be regularly working and 1.7 million children are found to be economically active. ('Nepal, ILO Sign Agreement to Eliminate Child Labour', Xinhua: Comtex, 8/9/2000)
- For the year 2000, the ILO projects that there will be 1,277,000 economically active children, 553,000 girls and 724,000 boys between the ages of 10-14, representing 42.07% of this age group. (ILO, International Labour Office - Bureau of Statistics, Economically Active Population 1950-2010, STAT Working Paper, ILO 1997)
- Almost two fifths children of school-going age are economically active. (ILO-IPEC, Child Bonded Labour: Nepal, September 1999)
- The number of child labourers is estimated at around 2,060,000 where about, 94.7% are involved in agriculture and household work and the remaining 5% are engaged in service and manufacturing industries. For every 100 children in the 6-14 years age group, 4-5 are engaged in paid work. (ILO-IPEC, Country Paper: Nepal, September 1999)
- CWCD in 1998 found that 71% of rural, 52% of urban and 63% of Kamaiya children are economically active. (National Plan of Action Against Child Bonded Labour, Nepal)
- According to the ILO-sponsored national survey, of the 6.2 million children between the ages of 5-14 years, 2,596,000 are child workers, which forms 41.7% of this age group. (US Dept of Labour, Sweat and Toil of Children: Efforts to Eliminate Child Labour, 1998)
- Of 2.59 million working children, 278,000 or 4.5% of all Nepali children are in paid work and 1.38

million or 22.2% of all children are in unpaid work. (Central Department of Population Studies of Tribhuvan University and ILO-IPEC, Child Labour Situation in Nepal, October 1998)

- Of all children aged 10-14 years, about 40.8% are economically active. The corresponding figure for the 5-9 age group is 12.5%. (Central Department of Population Studies and ILO-IPEC, Child Labour Situation in Nepal, October 1998)
- About 1.7 million children in Nepal are estimated to be involved in economic activities. (Central Department of Population Studies and ILO-IPEC, Child Labour Situation in Nepal, October 1998)
- About 70% of the economically active children are between 10-14 years old. (Central Department of Population Studies and ILO-IPEC, Child Labour Situation in Nepal, October 1998)
- About 95% (1.58 million) of the economically active children in rural areas perform agriculture related work, in comparison to 78.5% in urban areas. Some 1.6% (27,000) of economically active children work as service workers. 5.3% (87,000) are involved in non-agricultural work. 1.6% (26,000) are in construction, transportation and communication. Children who work as general technical workers constitute 0.8% (14,000). Another 0.8% work as production workers and 0.4% as sales workers. (Central Department of Population Studies and ILO-IPEC, Child Labour Situation in Nepal, October 1998)
- According to Tribhuvan University estimates there were 261,000 children working for wages in Nepal in 1997. (ILO-IPEC, Child Bonded Labour: Nepal, September 1999)
- According to recent statistics availed by CBS (1996), of total wage earners in the country, about 4% belong to the 10-14 age group. (National Plan of Action Against Child Bonded Labour, Nepal)
- Of Nepal's 2,596,000 working children between the ages of 5-14 years, 2,407,000 are non-migrant and 162,000 are migrant. (ILO-SLMPOC, Migration of Working Children in Nepal, December 1997, citing Report from Migration and Employment Survey, 1995-1996)

- It is estimated that migrant child labourers, those who moved due to economic reasons and those who moved due to non-economic reasons but were working in economic activities before and after migration, number about 120,000, of which 68,000 were boys and 51,000 girls. Of the total children aged 5-17 years, migrant child labourers constituted 1.58%. The corresponding proportions for male and female are 1.77 and 1.39% respectively. (ILO-SIMPOC, Migration of Working Children in Nepal, December 1997, citing Report from Migration and Employment Survey, 1995-1996)
- Rural areas overwhelmingly dominate urban areas in terms of migrations of child labourers who move for economic reasons. Of the 80,000 migrant child labourers who migrated for economic reasons, 76,000 (1.12% of all children) moved from rural areas and 3,000 (0.048% of all children) moved from urban areas. (ILO-SIMPOC, Migration of Working Children in Nepal, December 1997, citing Report from Migration and Employment Survey, 1995-1996)
- In 1995, there were 1,200,000 economically active children, 521,000 girls and 678,000 boys between the ages of 10-14, representing 45.21% of this age group. (ILO, International Labour Office - Bureau of Statistics, Economically Active Population 1950-2010, STAT Working Paper, ILO 1997)
- Based on the 1991 Census, there were 531,835 economically active children between 10-14 years of age, or 22.85% of the total age group. (ILO-IPEC, Country Report: Nepal, October 1998, citing the 1991 Census)
- Up to half of all children work, mostly in agriculture. (EI, EI Barometer on Human and Trade Union Rights in the Education Sector, 1998)
- 473,492 children between 10-14 years working in the agricultural sector. (ILO-IPEC, Trafficking in Children and their Exploitation in Prostitution in Nepal)
- The number of bonded children is estimated as 33,000. (ILO-IPEC, Child Bonded Labour: Nepal, September 1999)
- 40,000 children are estimated to be in debt-bondage. (ILO-IPEC, Country Report: Nepal, October

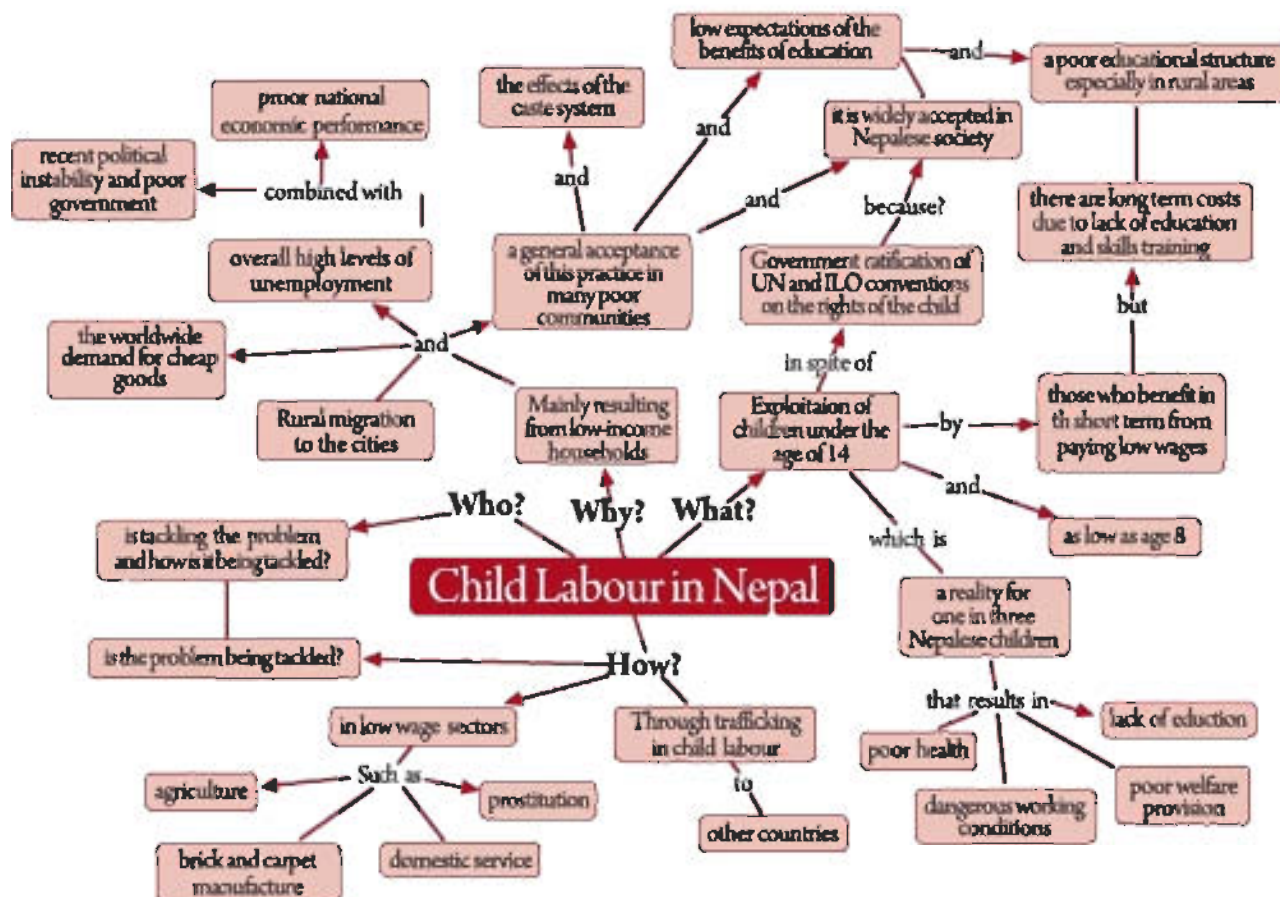


1998, citing CWIN)

- 40,000 Nepalese girls under 16 in Indian brothels are forced into prostitution. (Penelope Saunders, "Sexual Trafficking and Forced Prostitution of Children", 29 October 1998)
- More than 9,000 girls are trafficked each year from Nepal and Bangladesh into bondage in India and Pakistan, often with the acquiescence or cooperation of state officials. (CATW Fact Book, citing Amnesty International press release, 22 April 1998)
- It is estimated that at least 1 million children in Nepal are working as child labourers in difficult circumstances, often as slaves in carpet factories, brick kilns, domestic service, agriculture, plantation, construction, transportation, stone quarry, mines and as migrant workers. (CWIN, Gauri Pradhan, State of the Rights of the Child in Nepal, 1998)
- Available data suggests that approximately 7,000 girls between 10 -18 are lured or abducted into prostitution each year. In many cases, parents or relatives sell young girls into sexual slavery. (EI, EI Barometer on Human and Trade Union Rights in the Education Sector, 1998)
- Among the Kamaiya families the number of children working under the system is reported to be about 13,000. (National Plan of Action Against Child Bonded Labour, Nepal)

## Annex 3

### Complexities of Child Labour in Nepal



Source: Jim Flood, 2007. ([www.arc-worldwide.org](http://www.arc-worldwide.org))





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