

## Education Practices in Karnali

*UNICEF conducted a study entitled 'Assessing the Impact of Seasonal Factors on School Attendance in the Karnali Zone'. It is done in 2010 though crucially relevance and importance even today. It is 62 pages report, really time consuming so here, prepared the summary note to understand the reality in Karnali especially on Education.*

### Introduction:

In Karnali, though the academic session starts from mid-February and ends in mid-December. The Nepal Government has been providing free textbooks and scholarships on a mass scale under the School Sector Reform Programme (SSRP). The provision first started with grades 1- 5, gradually extending to grade 8 and then to all the secondary level students. However, the performance of schools including school management committee, teachers, parents and physical environment is beyond the imagination in terms of poor performances. The media and other stakeholders are keep rising the issues of poor educational practices in Karnali.

### Issues:

#### Teacher related:

1. Lack of adequate number of teachers as intended policy
2. Poor performance of the teacher (unaware of curriculum, knowledge and skills)
3. High rate of absenteeism: Based on information collected from schools in Humla, Jumla and Dolpa, seasonal and non-seasonal factors identified as influencing teacher attendance.

#### Seasonal factors

- **Early departure and late returns for and after vacations:** Owing to the scarcity of air tickets, teachers from outside the Karnali region often leave school before vacations begin, particularly in December and September/October (before Dashain). And they often return late after the winter vacation in February and the Dashain/Tihar holidays in October/November.
- **Yarchagumba collection:** Teachers also participate in yarchagumba collection, thereby missing school during the season, especially in Dolpa and adjoining VDCs of Jumla.
- **Involvement in farming:** As with students, some local teachers miss classes during the planting season in May/June, the hay-making season in August/September, and the harvesting season in October/November.
- **Seasonal migration:** Some local teachers migrate to a warmer place during the cold Karnali winter from December to March.

#### Non-seasonal factors

- **Poor teacher management:** Poor management of teachers is cited as a major cause of low teacher attendance in schools in the Karnali region. Head-teachers, who often also have low attendance, are not empowered to enforce attendance regulations on other teachers. The unreliability of teacher attendance registers attests to generally poor management. There is no DEO or SMC mechanism to regulate teacher absences from school. Head-teachers, who are primarily responsible for regulating teacher attendance, fail to do so. Some teachers claim that unfair treatment by management also causes low teacher attendance.
- **Participation in teacher training:** Teachers sometimes leave school with official permission for training. However, schools are not provided with substitutes to cover classes while teachers are at training, and such training programmes are not held during vacations. Even when class coverage is arranged by other teachers, students think that

classes will not be effective and so do not go to school. Even the trained teachers not really show evidences for positive impact.

- ***Involvement in secondary occupation:*** Teachers in the Karnali region often have an alternate occupation, usually in trade or business, and from time to time they miss classes to attend to their business affairs.
- ***Engagement in unions or NGOs:*** When teachers are involved in unions or community-based organizations and NGOs, they tend to prioritize these other activities over teaching classes. When teachers are not responsible about attending school, then students also do not attend regularly.

### Management related issues

1. *Students in a few schools, even in the district headquarters are still waiting to get their textbooks* (Himalayan News, Nov, 2012).
  - At Gyanpunja Lower Secondary School near Jumla headquarters, Grade III students are yet to get their Nepali textbooks just days before they sit for their annual examination. “If such is the condition near the headquarters what could be the situation in far-flung places?”
  - In Dolpa, “There is shortage of textbooks even in schools near the airports; Juphal-based airport, “Textbooks of Optional Maths and Geography of Grade IX have not reached Dolpa till date,” he added.
2. There is no provision of teachers and books students' interest (UNICEF, 2012)  
“We wanted to study Accountancy but took Education due to book shortage,” Arjun K Bam, Class 10, Kedareshwor Higher Secondary School, Doti
3. ***Weak administration and management of school:*** If the head-teacher is absent or unable to ensure regular teacher attendance, then student attendance tends to decline also.
4. An inactive SMC also contributes to weak school administration, resulting in low attendance rates for both students and teachers.
5. ***Lack of child-friendly classroom practices:*** Corporal punishment discourages children from attending school, and results in poor attendance. This in turn results in poor performance in school, leading to more punishment. Schools in the Karnali region are often not child-friendly, and children are sometimes reluctant to attend.

### Scholarship related

1. Not fulfilling promises for scholarship
  - “We haven’t received scholarships for three years and we have to buy our own textbooks as schools only provide them at the end of the academic session,” Surati Shrestha, Class 10, Chandannath Higher Secondary School, Khalanga, Jumla.

### Community related Issues

#### 1. Total Absenteeism

Seasonal event	Period	Average absent days
Yarchagumba collection or farming season	Mid-May to end of June	35
Before or after national festivals	Mid October-Mid November	20

Before or after winter vacation	Mid-December to end of December and mid-February to end of February	20
Local festivals	Not defined	8
<b>Total absenteeism</b>		<b>83</b>
National Standard for the School day 280 days, 38 % less from the normal standard		

#### Total School Days

	Description of major event	Total class days
February/March (Falgun)	Student enrolment, supplying textbook, teachers waiting for air ticket in Nepalgunj	5
March/April (Chaitra)	Classes	
April/May (Baisakh)	Classes	25
May/June (Jestha)	Yarchagumba collection, farming , livestock to pastures	
June/July (Ashad)	Yarchagumba collection, farming, livestock to pastures	5
July/August (Shrawan)	Classes, local festival	20
August/September (Bhadra)	Classes, local festivals, hay-making	
September/October (Aswin)	Dashain, teachers going home, hay-making	10
October/November (Kartik)	Tihar, teachers returning from home	12
November/December (Marga)	Annual final exam	10
December/January (Posuh)	Winter vacation	0
January/February (Magh)	Winter vacation	0
<b>Total School Days</b>		<b>137</b>

#### Current Status of Student Attendance

**School records from Jumla:** Analysis of attendance records from schools in Jumla reveals that student attendance by grade for 2006, 2007 and 2008 ranged from 168 days per year to 192 days per year. This is substantially below the government standard of 220 days per year.

#### Student Characteristics and Reasons for Low Attendance (Total Number 216)

- Children from poorer backgrounds 76.4 per cent
- Dalit children 71.3 per cent
- Respondents also identified children in households that Focused on farming and livestock-raising 59.3 %
- Girls, with children from ethnic groups, households engaged in business, and high-caste families were less likely to be absent 41.7 %

#### School-related factors

1. **Poor physical environment:** The Karnali region is a cold place, particularly between October and March. Most school buildings are not weather-protected and are uncomfortable during cold weather. This discourages students from attending during the winter.
2. **School far away from home:** For some students, school is far from home and weather conditions make it difficult to attend during the monsoon and winter seasons. During bad weather, they miss school.
3. **Untimely textbook distribution:** Textbooks reach schools in the Karnali region later than in other parts of the country. Therefore, not having textbooks in time means that students lose interest in school and do not attend.

#### **Government initiatives to improve attendance**

**Scholarships:** Many of these students feel that the scholarships are not adequate for them to continue their education.

**School tiffin programme:** Schools in the Karnali region receive government support for a school tiffin programme (*khaja karyakram*) to increase student attendance. Students have a tendency to leave school after the day's tiffin. Another problem is that although schools receive NRs 15 per student per day for the programme, this is not sufficient to purchase tiffin for all students because food prices in the Karnali region are high.

**School infrastructure development programme:** the government has initiated a school infrastructure development programme to upgrade the physical facilities of some schools, making classrooms more comfortable and child-friendly. However, such improvements are yet to be implemented in all schools in the region.

**Directive to promote student and teacher attendance:** field information revealed that DEOs are not successfully enforcing this directive.

**Provision for Resource Centres and Resource Persons:** However, they have not been effective in reducing student and teacher absenteeism yet.

#### **Other initiatives to improve attendance**

Initiatives by other organizations and the community to improve attendance usually include capacity-building of SMCs/PTAs aimed at improving the management and monitoring of schools; awareness-raising and community mobilization; development of child-friendly physical environments; teacher training in child-centred teaching–learning methodologies; provision of teaching–learning materials; activation of child clubs; income-generation programmes; and other innovative interventions.

**Capacity-building of SMCs/PTAs:** Various organizations have supported capacity-building of SMCs/PTAs with the aim of empowering these bodies to develop school improvement plans and monitor their progress. These plans often include activities to encourage better attendance by students and teachers. For example, to reduce teacher absenteeism, SMC/PTA members visit schools to monitor teacher attendance. Teachers who are absent are given a warning and asked to improve their attendance. In some schools, the names of absent teachers are publicized to control absenteeism. Teachers who are regular and have good performance records are rewarded.

**Awareness-raising and community mobilization:** Head-teachers, teachers, students and community members identified public awareness programmes, door-to-door campaigns, street

dramas, and monthly interactions with parents on the importance of regular attendance as important community mobilization interventions that have increased student attendance.

***Development of child-friendly physical environments:*** The physical infrastructure has been rehabilitated and weather-protected, and drinking water and toilet facilities for students and teachers have been installed. In addition, playgrounds have been constructed and recreational equipment has been supplied. This type of support usually comes from projects.

***Teacher training in child-centred teaching–learning methodologies:*** As well as improving physical facilities, projects have organized training/seminars for teachers on child-centred teaching–learning methodologies.

***Provision of teaching–learning materials:*** Schools in some project areas have received child-centred teaching–learning materials. Some social organizations have arranged extracurricular activities for students.

***Activation of child clubs:*** In some schools, child clubs have been involved in initiatives to reduce student and teacher absenteeism such as tracking attendance and meeting with absent students and their parents to discuss the issue.

***Income-generation programmes:*** Some I/NGOs have provided support for income-generation programmes to parents in selected VDCs. These programmes particularly target the families of children that are absent from school for reasons of poverty.

***Other innovative interventions:*** Faced with low student numbers, some communities have merged their schools and are offering residential facilities. For example, communities in upper Dolpa have merged eight schools and are now running a residential school with financial support from external donors. This school is running well in terms of quality and regularity of students and teachers.

## **SHORTCOMINGS IN ADDRESSING LOW STUDENT AND TEACHER ATTENDANCE**

***Role of DEO:*** Weak enforcement of attendance-related regulations by the DEO was cited as a major cause of low attendance among teachers and head-teachers. It was also reported that teachers are drawing salary for the days they are unofficially absent from schools. In most cases, school attendance records do not reflect actual absences, and are not reliable.

The allocation of teachers' positions is based on the number of students enrolled in school. According to the government norm, the student–teacher ratio in the mountain region is 45:1. Since most primary schools in the Karnali region have between 20 and 40 students in a class, the reality is that inadequate numbers of teachers are assigned to each school. Most communities are composed of poor families who cannot afford to hire additional teachers from their internal resources. Inadequate numbers of teachers results in irregular classes, which promotes student absenteeism and hinders learning.

Other areas of weakness in DEO management cited by study respondents included regularity in school supervision, the performance-based teacher appraisal system, the rewarding of teachers and students for good attendance and performance, the provision of adequate tiffin for students, and the equitable provision of scholarships.

***Role of VDC/DDC:*** VDCs and DDCs do not oversee the operation of schools in their jurisdiction adequately. Through their planning and funding mechanisms, they could ensure that schools are child-friendly with adequate physical facilities and properly trained teachers.

**Role of SMC:** Teachers, students and community members stated that SMCs are not performing their role in monitoring student and teacher attendance. SMCs are not sufficiently empowered to enforce attendance rules and control student and teacher absenteeism.

**Role of head-teacher/teachers:** Almost all respondents including teachers felt that teachers were not as professional as they could be. Some people said that head-teacher and teachers were more concerned with personal benefits than with professional practices. They felt that teachers should be role models for students by being punctual, committed and conscientious.

**Role of Teachers' Union and professional organizations:** Although it was acknowledged that the Teachers' Union can play a vital role in reducing student and teacher absenteeism, no specific examples were identified. Some respondents felt that the Teachers' Union is sometimes the cause of absenteeism by head-teachers and teachers. Respondents stated that the Teachers' Union could play an important role in conducting periodic monitoring, providing guidance to teachers, and arranging for teacher training.

**Role of parents/guardians:** Teachers, SMC members and students stated that while some parents/guardians in the Karnali region are conscientious and concerned about the education of their children, others are less aware of the importance of education and the need for regular school attendance. Most parents/guardians do not visit their schools routinely to check whether children and teachers are attending, and do not ask about the achievements of their children.

**Role of politicians:** Respondents believed that political organizations in the Karnali region do not regard educational development with high priority. The improvement of schools including student and teacher attendance is rarely on the political agenda.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING ATTENDANCE OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS**

**1. Develop a strong regulatory and monitoring mechanism:** The DEO should be empowered to strengthen school monitoring to ensure that students received the minimum required educational inputs. School Supervisor positions should be filled, and made functional and effective. School Supervisors should be motivated with incentives and rewards, based on their performance in maintaining required school-days, instructional hours, student and teacher attendance, and students' academic performance.

### **2. Ensure adequate number of teachers in each school**

The existing practice of providing *darbandi* (teachers' positions) should be re-visited for the Karnali region to ensure there are sufficient teachers. If teachers have to be absent for an official reason, there should be an arrangement for substitute teachers because, when there is no teacher, students usually do not attend school. Schools should be encouraged to engage local volunteer teachers as short-term substitute teachers. The volunteer teachers would be appointed and remunerated by SMCs.

### **3. Ensure that student and teacher attendance records are correct**

The accuracy of student and teacher attendance records in schools was found to be questionable. For effective management of absenteeism by schools, these records need to be correct. They should be verifiable and shared with SMCs and the community. They could also be supplied to the DEO. Furthermore, if records accurately reflect the actual attendance of students and teachers, then they can be used to reward those students and teachers with outstanding attendance. They also need to be accurate because they are sometimes used to assess eligibility for receiving certain incentives such as cooking oil from the World Food Programme.

### **4. Give schools more flexibility in developing their own school calendar**

The DEO should be given flexibility in authorizing schools to develop their own school calendar, school hours and timetable, maintaining minimum requirements for school-days and instructional hours.

## **5. Build capacity of SMCs/PTAs to monitor attendance at their school**

SMCs should be strengthened and empowered to take greater charge of managing school affairs, including attendance of students and teachers.

**Increase the authority and accountability of head-teachers:** The DEO should monitor the attendance and performance of head-teachers. Head-teachers should obtain approval for leave, including *kaaaj* (secondment), from their SMC, and the DEO should also be informed.

**Increase accountability of teachers:** The salary, benefits and incentives of teachers working in the Karnali region should be reviewed and made attractive enough to recruit and retain competent teachers. However, such incentives should be based on performance, assessed using transparent criteria/standards. The MOE should explore ways to motivate teachers such as honouring and rewarding well-performing teachers.

**Ensure schools are child-friendly, with adequate physical facilities and appropriate teaching-learning methodologies and materials**

The DEO should ensure that the physical and learning environment in schools is child-friendly, with adequate learning materials including textbooks. The curriculum should be flexible, interesting and relevant to children's lives.

**Increase awareness on the importance of education**

Schools should organize meetings and door-to-door visits within their community to discuss ways to combat seasonal low attendance and encourage parents to send their children to school regularly. Local NGOs can conduct community mobilization on education and the prevention of gender- and caste-based discrimination that can keep girls and Dalits out of school.

**Consider developing special packages for the Karnali region**

From Grade 4 onwards, weather-protected residential schools could be developed, through gradually merging existing schools, if necessary.