



DEPRIVED CHILDREN AND EDUCATION

NEPAL



Afke de Groot

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Children playing cards in Rautahat

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Abbreviations

BLOP	Better Life Option Programme
BPEP	Basic Primary Education Project
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
CERID	Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development
CWIN	Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Centre
DEO	District Education Office
DOE	Department of Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
GNI	Gross National Income
HDI	Human Development Index
HPI	Human Poverty Index
ILO	International Labour Organization
(I)NGO	(International) Non-Governmental Organisation
KIRDARC	Karnali Integrated Rural Development and Research Centre
LKG	Lower Kindergarten
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MOES	Ministry of Education and Sports
NEPC	National Educational Planning Commission
NER	Net Enrolment Ratio
NESP	New Education System Plan
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NLSS	Nepal Living Standards Survey
NPR	Nepali Rupee (\$1 is approximately 65 rupees)
PCO	Public Call Office
PPC	Pre-Primary Class
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
SLC	School Leaving Certificate
SMC	School Management Committee
UKG	Upper Kindergarten
VDC	Village Development Committee



Collecting grass and wood in Udayapur

Glossary

Adachai	VDC-level government official
Bandh	Forced closure
Bajika	Local dialect spoken in the Terai, similar to Bhojpuri
Basti	Part of village
Bhojpuri	Local language spoken in the Terai
Dalit	Lowest caste
Halwa	Wheat powder mixed with sugar and cooked in vegetable ghee
Janajati	Indigenous people, not classified within Hindu caste hierarchy
Khas	Original form of Nepali language
Maati	Nepali word for 'up/above'
Madhesi	People belonging to plain areas in south of Nepal
Madrassah	Muslim school providing education in the Quran
Maitili	Local language spoken in the Terai
Maulvi	Religious leader in Muslim community
Musahar	A Dalit-caste
Pahadi	Hill People with Hills-origin
Raksi	Traditional home-made alcoholic beverage
Sachip	VDC-level government official
Sasural	Spouse's family house
Tola	Part of village
Yarshagumba	Himalayan herb (<i>cordyceps sinensis</i>)



A classroom in Rautahat

Executive Summary

The question of enrolment and attendance in Nepal should be looked at in the context of a country characterised by a relatively high population growth rate, slow economic growth, a poor social and economic infrastructure, and an increasing gap between the rich and the poor, with the majority of the population living in severe poverty. A majority of the population is dependent on agriculture and forestry for its livelihood [Government of Nepal 2006d:36]. Another important source of income is livestock farming. These modes of subsistence are all labour intensive, and it is not surprising that the help of children is expected.

Nepal is a diverse country, with a vast geographical variety, and thus varied community perceptions on education, which is why research locations were selected in three different areas: the Terai, the Hills and the Mountains. The villages in the Hills were more difficult to reach than in the Terai; the most remote research location was a village in Jumla district in the Mountains where people are largely dependent on cattle, horses, goats, and sheep, which has highly affected schooling.

According to government statistics almost 14% of children of primary-school-age are not enrolled [Government of Nepal 2006a:43-45]. Moreover, a major problem at primary school level is retention. Enrolment figures in class I are high, but a large number of these once-enrolled children drop out of school before completing primary level. Furthermore, despite primary school figures showing a positive trend in enrolment, at lower secondary level the number of enrolled children drops significantly, with more than 50% out of school [Government of Nepal 2006a:43-45]. Enrolment levels of particular groups, such as lower-caste and Muslim communities, are still below those of others.

Although the gender gap in school enrolment in Nepal has declined, it still exists, and increases as children get older. Besides a gender gap, literacy rates provided by Nepal's Ministry of Education and Sports (2001)¹ show variations among regions and districts across Nepal. Interestingly, literacy rates are not per definition lowest in remote areas. The dramatically low enrolment rates in the Terai are caused especially by low enrolment of girls in these areas.

What keeps children out of school

Child work

Children who are out of school are often engaged in work. It is important to find out why these children are working before we want to conclude that it is work that keeps the children out of school. Interestingly, while for some households work can be combined with schooling, for others work is the crucial impeding factor that prevents children from being enrolled.

¹ Available at <http://www.moe.gov.np>

It has been the social norm for generations in rural communities in Nepal for children to help out in the household. Girls, for example, help out with cleaning, cooking, caring for siblings, and cutting grass for the animals. To send these children to school requires an alteration of the traditional division of labour within the household. The work that is no longer done by the children has to be taken care of by someone else: “Who will take care of the cows and goats if I send my child to school!” is an often heard grievance. Nowadays, some households manage the tasks in such a way that at least some children are able to go to school. Within these households it is often the workload of the mother that will increase; the older children will be required to help her so that their younger siblings can go to school. After school hours, however, these school-going children are still expected to help out. It is considered profitable to send these younger children to school so they can acquire some basic knowledge. At this age, primary schooling is not costly and the young kids are not yet able to do much work at home anyway. Besides giving priority to younger siblings, households often send their sons to school, before considering sending their daughters as well. In other households it is possible for all children to go to school by hiring children of poor and often lower caste households to help out with chores. These children are often sent to work because of their severely poor living situations.

Severe poverty, and the requirement of additional labour, is thus an important factor that keeps children out of school and pushes them into work. That connection manifests itself clearly in those cases where a dropout occurs after a change in circumstances at home. Especially in the Hills and Mountains, children are forced to work after the divorce of their parents or remarriage of one or both of their parents. Alternatively, the fallout of an earning member due to illness or death, causing the workload at home to increase, has a major impact on children’s lives. In addition, financial loss due to other causes - such as a robbery - can have a severe impact on a family already living in poverty, and inevitably entails consequences for children, especially the eldest ones.

There are many cases where the work that children are asked to do leads to (temporary) absence from the village and thus to non-enrolment, irregular attendance, or dropout. In the Mountains, children join older family members when they take their cattle outside the village in search of food, thereby leaving the village for a few months. In May, entire families leave the village to collect the remunerative *yarshagumba* (a Himalayan herb) in the jungle, which is not without dangers and leads to absences of school-going children (including the sons of the teachers). In the Terai there is a trend among the Muslim community for boys to drop out of school once they reach their early teens in order to follow their neighbours’ example and go to India in search of work to contribute to the household’s income.

Perceived quality and accessibility

Work should not be viewed as the sole factor keeping children out of school; it always appears in combination with other issues. One of the main factors that, in combination with work, leads to non-enrolment is the perceived quality of schooling. Once people feel that the school does not live up to their expectations, they are likely to keep their children at home, in which case it is expected that they are asked to do some work. Working in this case is perceived as a better alternative to malfunctioning education.

With regard to quality, parents complained about the insufficient number of teachers, who are not able to maintain discipline among the large number of pupils. Secondly, they criticised the lack of commitment of the teachers. Other complaints mainly dealt with the location of the school.

The location of school is in itself never a reason for children to be out of school, although many households mention it as being so. However, in combination with the workload required from children at home, even if that workload is not excessive, it becomes impossible for some children to continue their schooling. In the Hills for example, where primary schools are available within reasonable distance, continuing school after class V requires, for some, at least a one-hour-walk to reach the nearest available lower-secondary school, resulting in children being away from home throughout the day. In combination with the household chores that need to be done at home this distance leads to regular absences and even dropout.

In the Terai, the distance to school was often given as a reason for keeping children out of school. However, the actual distance from communities to the nearest primary school is never really far, especially in comparison with distances that have to be covered by children in the Hills and the Mountains. At the most, the school is located on the other side of the village from the respondent's house. The issue here, rather than the physical distance to the schools, is the social distance to the school, and what keeps children out of school is really a matter of social exclusion.

The school in one of the villages in the Terai is located in the Hindu area, far away from where the Muslim community resides. In addition to the questionable relevance of the curriculum of the government schools, this leads many children, especially girls, to not going to school at all, or attending the *Madrassah* instead. The *Madrassah* is more attractive to a large number of households, because of its location, but particularly because it teaches children the Quran, and the norms and values of the Muslim culture. This is considered more relevant than the government school, especially for girls. Some boys from this community are sent to the government school, because of the job potential. These boys, however, tend to drop out of school once they are in their early teens, when they are able to go to India in search of work.

Thus, while the accessibility to the schools is largely determined by physical factors, other variables such as caste- and religion based discrimination also play a role. In addition, the frequent closures of school as a result of the ongoing political instability, or festivals and days leading up to these celebrations, affect the quality of the school and discourage many from attending school regularly.

The perception of some communities that schools are not available or accessible is an important aspect not to be overlooked. Historically, education in Nepal was reserved for only the highest levels of society, and until the 1990s, many remote and sparsely populated areas remained deprived of educational facilities. The notion of universal primary education had not yet trickled down to each community and region in the same fashion. In order to establish primary school attendance as a social norm for everyone, additional efforts are required to include the marginalised communities, as these are most difficult to reach. In a village in Terai, a growing number of children from the local *dalit*-community are enrolled in and attending a school that was facilitated by an NGO operational in the area. In a village in the Mountains where such programmes do not exist, but where NGOs are taking a holistic approach to include all children in school, many children from the *dalit*-households are still out of school and, in some cases, working.

In many villages, where usually only one school is available and expected to provide education to all children from all layers of society, traditional social rules need to be broken in order to reach education for all. A special focus on creating awareness that all communities within the village have an equal right to education is needed to include the most marginalised groups. It seems that some marginalised communities hang on to their traditions more fervently than others, and are still disinclined to send their children to school. The reasons behind this can be found in processes of social exclusion and poverty, which together add up to vulnerability and the reticence to rush towards new opportunities.

It would be helpful here to increase the involvement of the entire community. This would also improve the quality of education, and would lead to high enrolment and good attendance. Rather than feeling alienated, it is crucial that households are involved with the processes going on in school. Presently, however, parents often have little idea about what happens in the school. Despite current government policies aimed at increasing parental involvement to improve the current education system, centralised management combined with poor accessibility limits such involvement; and so in most villages, decision-making is controlled by the powerful few.

The perceived significance of school

Despite the factors outlined above, an increasing number of households have found their way into the educational system, including those communities previously alienated from school. Nowadays people have certain ideas about why and how education is relevant for their children's daily lives. This is reflected in the trend that most households enrol at least one or two of their children.

When explaining the importance and relevance of education, people often referred to education as a means to improve their current lifestyle. It would enable them to learn and understand new techniques in order to improve or maximise, for example, their agricultural output. More importantly, the basic skills learnt in school would make them more independent in various perspectives. This would benefit them, for example, while travelling or at work, where they can manage their money themselves. Moreover, being educated would broaden their knowledge of the world around them and by doing so, would open up more opportunities.

While people generally realised how education benefits them in this way, and stated that education is indispensable in modern times, most people expressed the hope that these new opportunities would include a way for the children to be able to escape from the current cycle of poverty by finding a good job. Finding a different source of livelihood is in some cases necessary due to the disappearance of traditional vocations as a result of the modern lifestyle adopted by the community. Children as well expressed the wish to find different work from what their parents do. Boys complained that their father's work is heavy and that they would like to do something else in the future, regardless of whether their father works as a farmer, in construction or in a brick kiln. Education is a means by which they might be able to achieve this.

The reason that, despite this awareness, many of the children are still kept out of school lies in the fact that when there is no existing trend within a community to send children to school, habits, and even traditions within communities need to change. Besides awareness campaigns by the government and concerned (I)NGOs, people need examples of other people who have been able to change their occupation and standard of life by means of educating their children. It would be

helpful, for example, if there were more examples of educated girls. It was expressed that qualified and committed female teachers in the schools would have a positive effect on the enrolment and retention of girls in school. With only first-generation-learners in school, the trend of sending children to school is still weak at present, and it is important that these children are retained in school by keeping them interested and motivated to attend daily. Keeping girls in school is an investment with double results: for the girl herself and for the girls to which she will serve as an example.

Education should be a rewarding investment

Many people have certain expectations from sending their children to school. Often, parents expect quick returns from education, but prospects hamper this. In the case of girls, many parents prefer not to invest in a girl's education because of the likeliness of her leaving the household after marriage. In the case of boys it is the lack of possibilities to go for further education and to find a job that holds parents back from sending (all) their boys to school. People throughout Nepal were not very positive when they talked about the possibilities of finding a job. They expressed that jobs are not available in the village, and that they would have to go to the cities or abroad. But even for jobs there they would need connections and money, which most of the respondents do not have. People did believe that education could benefit people personally as well as the community as a whole, but despite all this, many people said they would be disappointed if their child would fail to change his life after investing so much in his/her education.

This is not surprising if we realise that for most households education remains a costly investment, despite numerous affordability incentives. Primary school is supposed to be free, but families still need to pay for admission- and exam fees, books, uniforms, stationary and pocket money. And education becomes even more costly at lower secondary level and therefore out of reach for many families.

Fieldwork data shows that realising the importance of education alone does not mean that one is actually prepared to make the investments required for schooling. For this, many households still expect the help of others such as the government, NGOs, or other sponsors. Parents need to have a strong belief in the value of schooling, before deciding to actually make this investment themselves. However, the trend to send children to school is new, and many families have not yet experienced the expected benefits of education becoming a reality. Therefore, households are more likely to allocate their money to a purpose that gives them more security such as investing in cattle. The fact that the majority of households send at least one or two children to school proves the general awareness that schooling is beneficial for their children. However, parents express a certainty about the future of their working child, while as yet they only have hopes and worries for their school-going children.

Conclusion

The factors, which influence school attendance and which are outlined in the report can be divided into two groups. The first group includes factors that effectually exclude children from the school system. Such factors are poverty, often increased due to a recent change in circumstances at home such as divorce, illness or death of one or both of the caregivers; and discriminatory practices

leading to social exclusion. As long as there is poverty and social exclusion, there will always be children out of school. The second group of factors includes those that impede school attendance, but which are never the sole reason for a child to be out of school. These factors, such as work, and school quality and accessibility factors, such as a convenient location of the school, proper facilities, and the presence of female teachers, should not be underestimated. A combination of such factors does lead to children out of school. If these factors are kept in mind and are tackled appropriately, the strategy may positively contribute to retaining children in schools.

Many children drop out in their early teens after having received a few years of schooling. It is around this age that children are able to contribute to the household's income by working or by getting married, which is still common in particular communities. These activities still compete with schooling. The school should offer children an environment that is attractive to them and which keeps them motivated to attend daily in order to complete primary level. It is essential to provide supportive incentives aimed at removing direct causes for parents to take their children out of school at this age. This includes affordability incentives, but also asks for a focus on increasing accessibility of (lower-) secondary school, instead of increasing enrolment at primary level only.

Education is perceived as a means by which people can improve their lifestyle, as a way to become more independent, and to broaden general knowledge which would open up more opportunities. However, rather than a basic right or need, it is still perceived as an economic investment. Thus, affordability incentives should go hand in hand with persuading parents that education is worthwhile for their daily lives. At present, sending children to school is for many a novel development and parents still need to be convinced about the (non-) economic benefits of schooling, before they will be fully prepared to invest.

Introduction

International treaties have recognised free and compulsory elementary education as a human right for more than half a century now, and especially during the last decade the drive for universal (primary) education has gained momentum. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), agreed upon in 2000, set 2015 as the year in which universal primary education (MDG-2) and gender equality (MDG-3) are to be achieved. Despite such efforts and their echoes in national policies, many children are still out of school. The mid-term results for MDG-2 suggest that big strides have been made in terms of universal enrolment, but also give reasons for concern.

The overall statistics are merely averages and tend to hide what happens to the most vulnerable and most excluded children. Various forms of deprivation continue to put tens of millions of children in a difficult situation without access to education. The estimates of these children not attending school vary from 100 to 200 million. Successes in extending primary education have been unmistakable, but actual school attendance in most regions is still dramatically low, despite high gross enrolment figures (and fairly lower net enrolment figures).

Table 1: Out-of-School Children (millions)

	1998	2002	% Girls
Sub-Sahara Africa	45	40	55
Arab States	8	7	58
Eastern Asia	8	15	58
South & West Asia	36	30	59
Latin America	4	2	45
North America & Europe	2	2	53
Central & Eastern Europe	3	3	55

Source: UNESCO [UNESCO 2005:48]

Table 1 shows that the number of out-of-school children has generally decreased since 1998; unfortunately, the progress is slow and too many children have not yet found their way into the education system.

The current policy focus on education is not only based on the adherence to the “child’s right to develop its personality, talents, physical and mental abilities to its fullest potential” (CRC article 29). Education is also generally considered a key factor in reducing poverty and child labour and in promoting democracy, peace, tolerance and development [UNICEF 2006]. Both approaches largely draw their attention away from the perspectives of parents and children themselves. Efforts have been directed instead towards sensitising uneducated masses of their “right to education” and the “importance of education”. Yet not much is known about how exactly uneducated people perceive education as a tool (or impediment) for their own family’s subsistence or advancement. What future

expectations and aspirations do parents have for their children, or children for themselves? How does (basic) education feature in these ideas? And does the quality of the education on offer influence such ideas? What are the perceived obstacles preventing access to education, and which changes should be made to remove these obstacles?

Repeatedly, there has been a summing up of relevant factors that form major barriers for achieving basic education for all. Sarkar [2004:12] has classified these factors into four groups:

- *Accessibility* - the physical and social distance to school, discrimination, the burden of household chores, and the burden faced by children combining work and schooling
- *Affordability* - direct, indirect, and opportunity costs
- *Quality* - the lack of infrastructure, facilities, materials, and support systems for children, inadequate conditions of work for teachers, low status of teachers, lack of adequate training, aids and materials for teachers, and the lack of sensitivity of education authorities and teachers to the needs of children at risk
- *Relevance* - curriculum detached from local needs, values and the aspirations of children at risk, curriculum inadequate to prepare students for gainful skilled employment

Quality issues have become a central theme in the education debate over the last few years. Increasingly, it is being acknowledged that quality must be seen in the light of how societies define the purpose of education [UNESCO 2004] and that quality can influence parents' choices to invest in education [Plan Netherlands 2006]. However, not much is known about the (lack of) intrinsic, social, cultural or economic benefits different parents and children may see in the education that is on offer to them, or in which way they feel school-attendance may influence their children's prospects. By collecting village case studies from seven developing countries, this study aimed to provide insights into local ideas about future expectations and aspirations of parents and children, and how (basic) education features in these ideas.

In periods of three to four months during 2006 and 2007, research was conducted in different areas of three South-Asian countries (Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan) and four Sub-Saharan-African countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, Burkina Faso and Ghana). These countries were selected on the basis of their enrolment and attendance data.

Figures for the selected regions for 2000-2005 show that in Sub-Saharan Africa only 61%, and in South Asia 74% [UNICEF 2007:105] of children of primary school age are enrolled. In certain countries within those regions figures are significantly lower. The selected countries, with the exception of Kenya, used to have adult literacy rates that were substantially below the average of developing countries, but have made substantial progress over the last decades. The exception is Kenya, where the youth literacy rates in 2004 were actually lower than in 1990. Table 2 shows that where the countries in Asia have done reasonably well (in Nepal, for example, female literacy increased from 27% in 1990 to 60% in 2004), the African countries have had mixed results. Burkina Faso still had, in the early years of this century, male and female youth literacy rates of only 25.5% and 14.0% respectively.

Table 2: Literacy in Selected Countries

	Adult & Youth Literacy				Share of Females in Illiteracy		Youth (15-24) Literacy Rate				Not enrolled (millions)
	1990		2002-4		1990	2002-4	1990		2002-4		2002-4
	M	F	M	F			M	F	M	F	
Bangladesh	44.3	23.7	50.3	31.4	56	57	50.7	33.2	84.2	67.7	2.9
Nepal	47.4	14.0	62.7	34.9	63	65	67.0	27.3	80.6	60.1	0.9
Pakistan	49.3	20.1	61.7	35.2	62	63	62.5	30.6	74.8	53.9	8.1
Burkina			18.5	8.1					25.5	14.0	1.4
Ethiopia	37.6	19.8	49.2	33.8	57	57	51.5	34.1	63.0	51.8	5.7
Ghana	70.1	47.2	62.9	45.7	65	60	88.2	75.4			1.3
Kenya	80.9	60.8	77.7	70.2	68	58	92.9	86.7	79.8	80.0	2.0
Developing countries	75.9	57.9	83.2	69.5	63	64	85.8	75.8	85.0	88.7	

Aggregated from UNESCO [UNESCO 2005]

Access to the research areas was facilitated by local staff of Plan International and other NGOs, but they were not necessarily regions in which these NGOs worked. The long stay in each area, a minimum of three weeks, allowed the researcher to build up a relationship of trust and to distinguish official statements from reality.

This study was initiated to deepen the understanding of household and village level perception of education in rural areas, and to get an insight into the factors determining the continuation of non-enrolment and non-attendance despite the efforts made by governments and NGOs to facilitate education for everyone, including the poorest segments of society. A central, underlying theme is the perception of education in terms of relevance and quality by parents and children, and the way these perceptions influence decision-making with regard to school enrolment and attendance. The main question addressed is:

How does the perception, on household and village level, of relevance and quality of education, in interaction with other economic and cultural factors, lead to non-enrolment, non-attendance and/or drop-out?

The research was qualitative in nature and the results cannot haphazardly be applied to any country at large. However, the research areas were selected in such a way that they covered the poorest families in the poorest areas where school-enrolment is low.

The research involved close contact with the various stakeholders, particularly with the parents and the children. Much attention was given to their perceptions, and thus to how their circumstances, ideas and experiences may explain non-enrolment, non-attendance and drop-out, or enrolment and attendance in the face of adversity. Such insights are needed in order to design education policies that respond well to the ideas and circumstances on a grass-roots level.

Country selection

The selection of South Asia as one of the regions for this project was based on its low development and education indicators. South Asia's figures are among the lowest in the world (Table 3).

Table 3: Global Development and Education Indicators

	Human Development Index*	Adult literacy rate (aged 15<)**	Net primary school enrolment/attendance (%) 2000-2005**
World	0.741	80	82
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.472	62	61
Eastern and Southern Africa		73	66
West and Central Africa		49	56
Middle East and North Africa	0.680	72	80
South Asia	0.599	59	74
East Asia and Pacific	0.760	91	96
Latin America and Caribbean	0.795	90	94

* [UNDP 2006] ** [UNICEF 2007:105]

Table 4 shows regional variations within South Asia; Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan present extremely low literacy rates in relation to other countries within the region. Nepal and Pakistan were selected for this project as they, in addition to poor literacy, also exhibit low enrolment and attendance rates. Bangladesh was included because, in contrast to its literacy rate, its enrolment and attendance performance has been impressive.

Table 4: Development and Education Indicators South Asian Countries

	Human Development Index*	Total adult literacy rate (aged 15<)**	Net primary school enrolment/attendance (%) 2000-2005***
Bangladesh	0.530	41.1	84
India	0.611	61	76
Nepal	0.527	48.6	78
Pakistan	0.539	48.7	56
Maldives	0.739	96.3	90
Sri Lanka	0.755	90.4	99

* [UNDP 2006] ** [UNESCO 2005] *** [UNICEF 2007:102-104]

Methodology

The data presented in this report is the result of anthropological research carried out in five villages (in four districts) of Nepal (Table 5). Anthropological fieldwork involves living in the villages, and participating with village life, which makes it possible to observe and interact from sunrise until

long after sunset. For this research, observations were made within households, on a community level, in an around the schools and in the fields. Most of the material was gathered through structured and unstructured interviews. The majority of these interviews were held individually with parents, children, government and NGO appointed teachers, NGO education officers, and government officials. Group discussions with community members also took place, either at locations where these members gather, such as small shops or other workplaces, or sometimes they started spontaneously in a residential area.

Table 5: Research Locations

VDC	Location	Observations and Interviews
Dumre and Tawashree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Udayapur District • Eastern Development Region • Hills • Sagarmatha Zone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 households, 13 unrelated children*, headmasters, teachers, <i>adachai</i> • government school, private school
Dhangadhi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Siraha District • Eastern Development Region • Terai • Sagarmatha Zone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot-study • 4 households, 4 unrelated children*, headmasters, teachers • 2 Dalit-<i>bastis</i>, 1 Muslim-<i>basti</i>, VDC office, private school, 2 governments schools, village market place, surrounding areas
Jaynagar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rautahat District • Central Development Region • Terai • Naravani Zone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selected in cooperation with Plan Nepal • 33 households throughout the 9 wards, 7 unrelated children*, local NGO employees, local community mobilisers, teachers, religious leaders
Guthichaur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jumla District • Mid-Western Development Region • Mountain • Karnali Zone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • government school, Madrassah • 11 households, 14 unrelated children*, 5 unrelated adults*, headmaster, government teachers, <i>sachip</i> • District Education Office, NGOs with local programmes

* Children and adults who are not related or associated with the selected households

The researcher aimed at staying in each village for three weeks. However, obstacles such as sudden and frequent closures of public transportation, businesses and schools, due to increasing political instability - especially in the Terai - led to unavoidable changes to the schedule. Festivals also influenced the ability to adhere to the schedule; in Jumla, where the research was conducted during Lhosar (Buddhist New Year), compromises had to be made.

During the complete four-month fieldwork period the researcher was accompanied by an assistant from Nepal. He helped in selecting the research setting, finding accommodation, and with all other practical matters. Most importantly, he assisted in overcoming the language barrier by working as an interpreter.

Outline of the report

The first chapter of this report on Nepal offers a general background of the selected research settings. It also gives an historical overview of the educational system and an introduction to the current system in Nepal. The consecutive chapters present the fieldwork data. Chapter 2 explains why and to what extent villagers perceive education as something valuable for their children, and which indicators have led to more people sending their children to school. Chapter 3, in an attempt to understand why many children are out of school, deals with factors such as child work and school-related issues including quality, accessibility, and the extent to which the community is involved with school processes. Chapter 4 focuses on girls and Muslim children, and explains why these groups are more difficult to involve in primary education. The report ends with a conclusion and a number of recommendations based on research findings.

It should be noted that names of individuals have been omitted or changed due to reasons of privacy.

Chapter 1

Nepal: Research Locations and Education System

This chapter starts with some general background information on the research locations, and then focuses on the education system in Nepal, as well as the current education status of the research villages.

1.1 Introducing the setting: the Terai, Hills and the Mountains

Nepal is a small land-locked country in the Himalayas, bordering with India in the South, East and West, and China in the North. Geographically, its 147,181 square kilometres can roughly be divided into three parts. The northern Mountain (or Himalayan) region comprises approximately 35% of the country. Elevation here is above 3000 m, with Mt. Everest peaking at 8848 m. The central strip of the country, which comprises about 42% of the land area, is known as the Hills. The elevation here ranges from 600 to 3000 m. This area is characterised by the Mahabharat Range and the Churia Hills, but also by many rivers and valleys. The remaining 23% of the country is known as the Terai region, the southern belt of the country. This is a plain with elevations ranging from sea level to 300 m.

With a GNI per capita (US\$) of 270 [UNICEF 2007], a HDI of 0.527, and a HPI of 38.1% [UNDP 2006], Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world, and in the South Asian Region. It is estimated that 24% of Nepal's population lives on less than US\$1 a day, while 68.5% lives on less than US\$2 a day [UNDP 2006]. According to UNESCO this figure is even higher, at 82.5% [UNESCO 2005]. There is an increasing gap between rich and poor in Nepal, and living in poverty is common for communities in rural areas, especially in mid-western and far-western regions. Slow economic growth, a relatively high population growth rate, and problems such as insufficient social and economic infrastructure all contribute to poverty in Nepal [Government of Nepal 2003:13].

The greater part of Nepal's soil in the mountain and hilly regions is not fit for agricultural production; only the Terai region and the river valleys are suitable for farming. Only 18% is cultivated land, with 70% of this in the Terai region. Despite the limited possibilities, according to 2001 CBS figures, 65.6% of Nepal's economically active population works in agriculture and forestry [Government of Nepal 2006d:36]. It is mainly food crops such as paddy, millet, wheat, barley, and maize that are grown. Cash crops such as oilseeds, sugarcane, and tea are mainly grown in the Terai region, but only comprise 11% of the total [Shrestha 2005]. A related source of income is livestock farming, which is particularly important in the mountain region.

Industry, tourism, and foreign trade are crucial for Nepal's economic development, but only 2% of Nepal's working population works in an industrial enterprise [Shrestha 2005:6]. Economic development is particularly hampered by poor infrastructure. Evidently, Nepal's geographical features make it difficult to develop a good transport network. Roughly speaking there are only four main highways: the longest runs from East to West through the Terai. One connects Kathmandu with

Pokhara in the Hills, and both these cities are connected with the Terai through a highway as well. In addition, there are smaller roads connecting other cities, with some roads currently under construction; the largest part of the road network exists in the Terai. The Eastern and Western mountains are particularly deprived of roads, and reaching those areas is only possible on foot or by air. Not surprisingly, these areas are sparsely populated. Of Nepal's 23.2 million inhabitants [Government of Nepal 2006b] only 7.3% are found in the mountains. 44.3% live in the hills, while the remaining 48.4% live in the Terai. The Terai region is the most densely populated area mainly because of the migratory flow of people from the hills and mountains in search of economic opportunities (which increased once the East-West highway through the Terai was completed).

Besides this geographical division, dividing Nepal into three horizontal strips, another division can be made from an economical perspective. From this point of view Nepal is divided in five Development Regions: the Central and Eastern Development Region being more developed than the Western, Mid-Western and Far-Western Development Regions. Each Region is divided into two or three administrative Zones. This division into Development Regions and Zones is done to facilitate development activities, in order to bring about "balanced development", hereby minimising economic disparity [Shrestha 2005:10]. The 14 Zones of Nepal are subdivided into a number of districts. Nepal has a total of 75 districts. Each district is further divided into Village Development Committees (VDCs) and municipalities (urban areas). Every VDC is divided into 9 wards; the number of wards in a municipality ranges from 9 to 35.

Due to Nepal's diversity, community's perceptions on education are likely to differ as well, which is why this research selected research locations in different areas. A location was selected from each of the three geographical regions. (Table 5 above gives an overview of the villages in which fieldwork was done.) In all three regions at least one district was selected. Five VDCs or villages² were visited in four different districts.

The HDI of these districts differ significantly from each other. Udayapur has a relatively high HDI of 0.488 (ranking 21 out of 75 districts), Siraha's HDI is 0.427 (ranking 51), while Rautahat's HDI is 0.409 (ranking 56). With an HDI of 0.348 Jumla is at the lower end of the scale (ranking 70). Nepal's national HDI is 0.471, which means, out of the research districts, only Udayapur scores higher [UNDP 2004:142-143]. The following three paragraphs give a concise overview of all the villages, according to geographical belt.

1.1.1 The Terai: Rautahat and Siraha

Two districts were selected in the Terai: Siraha and Rautahat. Both districts were (and still are) heavily affected by the current political agitations in Nepal. The Terai suffers from the increasingly violent struggle of the *Madhesis* - people of Indian origin who have lived in the Terai for many generations. Political parties representing the Madhesis express their discontent with a number of

² In some cases the size of the VDC allowed to cover the entire VDC for this research, in other locations geographical characteristics of the area or other limitations required to make a selection of wards within a VDC.

issues, including economic discrimination, and electoral under-representation. In addition, more than a dozen armed groups resort to violent methods including abductions, extortion, physical attacks and killings. *Bandhs* (closures), imposed by the rebels, including bans on motorised vehicles on the roads, and schools and businesses being forced to close, heavily affect the daily lives of the local inhabitants [See also: International Crisis Group 2007].

In December 2006 a short pilot-study took place in a village in ward number 2 of Dhangadhi VDC in Siraha district, Eastern Terai. It has a population of 9569 and is located near (a 10-20 minute walk) the Mahendra Rajmarg, the main East-West highway that runs through the Terai, and 8 km from Lahan, a major town in Siraha district. The major religion in Siraha is Hinduism. In the studied village, however, there is a large number of Muslim and Buddhist households as well. It is a village where Janajati (Tamang, Magar, Rai), Dalits (Musahar), and upper-castes (Yadav) live together.

Many people here have their own plot of land, but there are landless communities as well. The main crops cultivated in the village are rice, wheat, maize, millet and sugarcane. Just like Jaynagar in Rautahat, the village in Dhangadhi is relatively easy to reach by public transportation. PCOs are within reach, and mobile phones can be used. Besides small businesses on the highway, there are daily village markets at different places in the VDC, which are all relatively easy to reach from the village on foot or by bicycle, a popular means of transportation throughout Terai.

The main study in Terai took place in Jaynagar, Rautahat district, Central Terai, in January 2007. All nine wards of the VDC Jaynagar were involved in the study. The VDC is located 28 km south of Chandranigapur, and 19 km north of Gaur, the district headquarters. Plan Nepal has worked and managed development programmes in Jaynagar for the past ten years. Jaynagar has 661 households, and a total population of 4440 [Government of Nepal 2002]. The majority of the population is Hindu, but a substantial part of the population (44%) is Muslim. The main castes represented in the village are Yadav, Saha, Mahato, Chaudri and Gupta, and there is a sizeable Dalit-population comprising mainly Dusadh, Thakur, and Kumhar households. Half of Jaynagar's population is below 18³.

The village is not very remote, and buses can be taken from Birendra Rajmarg, the main road that connects Chandranigapur, which lies on the East-West Terai-highway, with Gaur, the district headquarters of Rautahat district. People have to walk up to 2 km from their houses to reach Birendra Rajmarg. Shipnagar, a small town on this road, is only 2 or 3 km from Jaynagar and is an important market place for the villagers. Besides a number of small businesses there is an important temple and a few private schools. In Jaynagar itself, there are three telephones available. In Shipnagar there are additional phones and mobile phone reception.

The main occupation of the villagers is agriculture. Primary crops are sugarcane, wheat, and rice. Villagers are also involved in other labour, particularly in the brick industry and construction. In addition, there is a large seasonal labour migration of young men to Punjab, Delhi and Mumbai in

³ Information provided by Plan Nepal

India and Nepalese towns such as Kathmandu, Gaur, and Birganj. People usually leave in February when the harvesting season has ended, and then stay away for a period of four to five months. Boys are sent to India for work from the age of 10 onwards. People have also reportedly migrated from Jaynagar to Arab countries and Malaysia for work. Some villagers have found jobs such as teacher, postman, VDC-secretary, and businessman. Setting up a small business seems rather popular in Jaynagar, as there are 15-20 small shops, including medical shops.

1.1.2 The Hills: Udayapur

Both villages selected in the Hills are located in the Eastern district Udayapur. Fieldwork here took place in November and December 2006.

The first research setting is a small village located in the VDC Dumre, which has 2739 inhabitants according to the 2001 Census; the village itself has 460 inhabitants. The number of children in the age-group 5-14 is approximately 113. The population is Buddhist and Hindu and largely consists of Janajati (Tamang and Magar) households, but there are also some upper caste-households (Newar, Bahun, and Sunuwar). The village is located in the hills, and can be divided in two parts (tolas). The part located below the school, and the houses situated above the school (referred to as *maati*, which means “above”). The village is a scattered settlement: the houses are located relatively far from each other.

At the time of research there were no phones or mobile phone reception in the village. In order to make a phone call people have to walk at least 20 minutes to other villages where public call offices are available. There are no health facilities, or any government buildings, except for the government school. There is one small shop that sells tobacco, soap, biscuits, and other small items. For other products people go to Bahunitar (a three-hour-walk) and Katari, a large town in Udayapur, a six-hours walk from the village in Dumre.

The other studied locality in Udayapur was a larger village located lower in the hills, on the riverside. This village is situated in the VDC Tawashree, bordering the VDC Dumre, and is an important market area for surrounding villages. Tawashree VDC has a total population of 5891 according to the 2001 Census. There is a private clinic in the village; other health posts in the vicinity are located in Katari, Udayapur Gadhi and Bwanse.

The main occupation of the villagers is agriculture. The major crops are maize, millet, rice, potatoes, soya beans, and saag. In the surroundings, people have limited alternatives to make money. Some work as a porter, carrying loads from the market in Katari or from Bahunitar. They get 5 rupees for every kilogram they carry from Katari, and 2 rupees for every kilogram they carry from Bahunitar. Others sell to earn a living. There is a trend for men from the studied locality in Dumre to work in Kathmandu as a rickshaw or taxi driver, or in Kargil (India).

Both villages are more difficult to reach than the villages in the Terai due to the geographical conditions. Reaching the village in Dumre is only possible on foot. One can walk from Nepaltar (two hours) or from Bahunitar (three hours). The village in Tawashree VDC can be reached by bus from Katari, which takes three hours, but this is no faster than making the trip by foot, since the bus has to cross many rivers. The bus service is irregular, and does not go daily. It operates only seasonally, since the water in the rivers is too high during the Monsoon.

1.1.3 The Mountains: Jumla

The most remote research location of this project lies in Jumla district, which can nowadays only be reached by foot or by air. There is a small airport in Jumla's headquarters (locally referred to as Jumla Bazaar) from where the private airlines Yeti and Sita Air operate regular flights, carrying cargo and persons to and from Nepalganj and Surkhet, which are located in the south of the Mid-Western Development Region. The Surkhet-Jumla Karnali Highway was under construction at the time of fieldwork, but has since been completed. There were only a few vehicles (motorcycles, jeeps and tractors) in Jumla, all of which have been transported there by helicopter. The use of these, however, is limited, since most of the roads in Jumla and surrounding districts are only suitable for pedestrians and animals.

A set of five villages within Guthichaur VDC, south-east Jumla, bordering Dolpa and Jajarkot districts, were selected for fieldwork, which took place in February-March 2007. Guthichaur has a total population of 2491 [Government of Nepal 2002]. Research was done in ward number 2 (Napani), 3 (Gaurigaun), 4 (Manigaun and Manisangu), and 5 (Dillikot). Manisangu, which is a seven/eight hour walk from Jumla Bazaar, can be considered the centre-point of these villages. Besides three households and a small shop the VDC-office is located here, as well as the police post, which had been abandoned for a few months due to the Maobaadi conflict, but was reinstated at the time of research. Gaurigaun, Manigaun, Manisangu and Dillikot are all located within a walking distance of 20 minutes from each other. Napani, however, lies at a 45-60 minute walk from Manisangu. It is a relatively new village, to where inhabitants from Gaurigaun shifted approximately 16 years before, due to the increasing lack of sufficient land and food in and around Gaurigaun. Napani comprises approximately 25 households, of which only 12 are permanent; the other families also own homes in Gaurigaun, where they move to after harvest time.

The government school is located in Dillikot, as well as a sub-hospital and a veterinary. There is one small shop in Manisangu, but the villagers are basically dependent on Jumla Bazaar for most of their needs. There are no phones in the area, except for a small number of PCOs in Jumla Bazaar.

According to the most recent information available from the VDC (July 2006) Guthichaur has a population of 2821, 1102 of whom live in the five villages included in this study. The population consists of Hindu Chhetri (upper-) castes such as Mahatara, Basnet, and Thapa, as well as Janajati-castes such as Buddha, Khamba, and Lama, who are mainly Buddhist. There is also a significant number of Hindu Bisho Karma (BK)-households, belonging to the Dalit caste. Other Hindu castes living in Guthichaur include Roka, Aidi, Takuri, Kothait, and Nepali.

Families in the researched villages are largely dependent on cattle, horses, goats and sheep, which influences decisions in life. For example, one of the main reasons why people have started building their houses in Napani is because it is nearer to where grass can be found for the sheep and goats. Agriculture also constitutes a major source of income, albeit less than other researched areas in Udayapur, Siraha, and Rautahat. Outside the crop-cutting season one will only find women and, to a lesser extent, children working in the fields. Crops that are available in the area are potatoes, beans, maize, wheat, millet, buck wheat, and barley.

Other sources of income come from construction and furniture work. A limited number of men have positions in the governmental animal farm (*Guthichaur Bheda Tatha Bakhra Anusandhan Kendra Farm*), which is located in the VDC, but has been closed on Maobaadi's orders. In the months of May

and June the majority of the village, including children, head towards Dolpa district in search of *Yarshagumba*. This herb, also known as “Himalayan Viagra”, can be worth up to 50.0000-100.000 NPR per kilogram on the black market.

1.2 Language

Nepal boasts approximately 92 different languages, not including a number of dialects that are adopted as mother tongue by selected communities. Nepal’s official language is Nepali, which is used by the government, banks, businesses, media, educational institutions, and so forth. The other minority languages are recognised by Nepal’s constitution as “languages of the nation”, but not for official use [Toba et al. 2005:11]. The constitution does allow these languages to be used as a medium of instruction in schools, including textbooks. However, this option is rarely used due to lack of trained teachers [Toba et al. 2005:19].

In the Terai, Madhesi’s speak Maitili, Bhojpuri, Awadhi and Hindi, while ethnic groups speak their own languages [International Crisis Group 2007:3]. The majority of Rautahat’s population speaks Bajika, similar to Bhojpuri, which is used by another large part of Rautahat’s population. Only a very small number of people use Nepali as their mother tongue [Sharma et al. 2002:326].

The main language spoken in Jaynagar is Bajika. The language is more similar to Hindi than to Nepali. In Jaynagar it is generally only men who speak Nepali, as women have had very little exposure to languages other than their mother tongue. In the Muslim community of Jaynagar, men are more comfortable speaking Hindi than Nepali.

85% of Siraha’s population speaks Maitili, which, like Bajika, shows more similarities with the Hindi language than with Nepali. Only 5% has Nepali as their mother tongue in Siraha [Sharma et al. 2002:207]. In the village in Dhangadhi VDC, which also has a major *Pahadi* population (people with a hills-origin), both Nepali and Maitili are used. In some communities, such as the Musahar and the Muslims, only a few people can speak Nepali. According to the parents in Musahar-basti, the children learn Nepali by playing with children from other castes; this is a recent development as the Musahar belong to a lower caste, and thus have had little opportunity in the past to intermingle with other castes.

Since the 1950s, language has been a politically sensitive issue in the Terai, and different groups have repeatedly claimed the right to communicate in their own languages. It remains an issue the Madhesis are fighting for [International Crisis Group 2007:4]. In both villages (Dhangadhi and Jaynagar) the language of instruction used in the primary schools is Nepali. Teachers use their native tongue when talking to small children who have just started learning Nepali. The schoolbooks are all in Nepali.

In the villages in Dumre and Tawashree the language of instruction used in the schools is Nepali. Languages spoken here are Tamang, Magar and Rai. All villagers, including women and children, are able to communicate in Nepali.

The mother tongue spoken in the Jumla region is a pure form of the Nepalese language (“*Khas*”). Outside Jumla people often refer to this language as Jumli, a dialect of Nepali. Locals, however, refer to the language as “Nepali”. *Khas* is very similar to Nepali as it is spoken today. The language used in the schools is Nepali, which is considered by many children to be the same language as they speak at home.

1.3 A short history of the education system in Nepal

During the period in which Nepal was under Rana-rule (1847-1950), in addition to English Schools, *Bhasa Pathshalas* ('language schools') were established, which were funded by the state and which offered education in the Nepali language. Enrolment at these schools, however, was a privilege for the highest classes and castes only. This did not change until the 1970s [CERID 1997; Bista 2001; Dixit 2002]. Educational expansion was only designed for those at the highest level of society [Bista 2001:125]. In 1951 the monarchy was restored, which brought an end to Rana rule. A government was formed by the Nepalese Congress Party, and ministries were established, including the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES).

The first educational development plan in Nepal was in March 1954, when the National Educational Planning Commission (NEPC) was installed with support from the USA. The number of schools in Nepal increased, but remained out of reach for the lower castes and classes, and education was still associated with preparing for a government job. Bista [2001:124] argues that "many people realized that the educational system was meaningless, and not geared to the special needs of the country." Getting an education meant acquiring new skills and a higher status, but it was more important (for getting a job) to have the right *aphno maanche* ("own people") connections.

In 1962 a new non-party system known as the "Panchayat" system was introduced. In 1969, under the Panchayat government, a New Education System Plan (NESP) was initiated. According to this plan primary schools were established in places that were accessible to many people, and in the following decades Nepal experienced a great increase in its literacy rate. Many remote and sparsely populated areas, however, remained deprived of educational facilities.

The next development occurred after the abolishment of the Panchayat-regime and restoration of the parliamentary democracy in 1991. Priority was given to making basic and primary education available for everyone, and incentives were introduced such as scholarships for the lowest castes (*Dalits*) and girls, literacy programmes for women, recruitment of female teachers, and so forth [CERID 1997]. However, despite the fact that education became more and more available throughout Nepal, enrolment levels remained low.

In the 1990s the Nepali government established at least one primary school in each ward to meet the demands of the UN declaration Education for All. In 1992 the World Bank-funded Basic Primary Education Project (BPEP) was initiated, which aimed to provide primary education and Non-Formal Education to as many people as possible. BPEP-II was launched in 1999. The BPEP programme was implemented in phases, but eventually covered all 75 districts, and was particularly aimed at marginalised and disadvantaged groups.

In 1999 the government of Nepal shifted the responsibility of implementing and monitoring educational programmes from MOES to the newly established Department of Education (DOE) under MOES. District Education Offices (DEO) were established in all 75 districts for planning and implementing programmes at district level.

The Millennium Development Goals progress report 2005 for Nepal reported three trends related to achieving universal primary education (MDG-2). First, enrolment rates had increased: the NER in primary education had risen from 64 in 1990 to 81 in 2000, and shown a modest increase ever since. Second, the gender gap had decreased, and third, there had been a steady increase in the literacy rate, from 49.6% in 1990 to 70% in 2000 [Government of Nepal. National Planning Commission &

UNDP 2005:21]. However, attendance had remained irregular, and many children were still dropping-out before completing primary education, especially during their first year [Government of Nepal. National Planning Commission & UNDP 2005:22]. Furthermore, increasing enrolment rates occurred unevenly across the country (disadvantaged and marginalised groups fell below the national average) and the enrolment of girls correlated inversely with their age.

The government of Nepal clearly commits itself to Education for All in its National Plan of Action. In the *Education For All 2004-2009 Core Document* the Ministry of Education and Sports outlines three main objectives: (1) ensuring access and equity in primary education, (2) enhancing quality and relevance of primary education, and (3) improving efficiency and institutional capacity of schools and institutions at all levels.

The government has developed a series of policies and strategies in order to achieve these objectives, including (a) expanding early childhood development through ECD (early childhood development) and PPC (pre-primary classes) programmes, (b) ensuring access to education for all children by providing free primary education and through incentive and scholarship schemes, (c) meeting the learning needs of all children, including indigenous peoples and linguistic minorities, by making primary schooling relevant to children of these groups, (d) reducing adult illiteracy through Non Formal Education (NFE) programmes, (e) eliminating gender disparity through recruitment of female teachers, teacher trainings, sensitising the curriculum, and community mobilisation campaigns, and (f) improving all aspects of quality education including teachers, instructional materials, learning environment, improvement of school facilities, and management and capacity building [Government of Nepal 2003].

Central to the government's strategies to improve the current education system and increase school enrolment is decentralisation in educational planning and implementation, including transfer of school management to communities, providing grants to schools, empowering SMCs, increasing direct parental involvement in SMCs through election, discouraging teacher's direct involvement in politics, and establishing Village Education Committees to ensure access to education and regular monitoring [Government of Nepal. National Planning Commission & UNDP 2005:23].

These days all wards in Nepal have access to at least one primary school and, with education high on the developmental agenda of both the government and numerous civil society organisations, most people have grown aware of the value of sending their children, including their girls, to school. The government now realises that while the focus of the National Plan of Action 2001-2015 is on ensuring universal participation in basic education of school age children, policy should be aimed at improving the quality of existing schools, as well as expanding easy access to lower secondary education as well [Government of Nepal 2005:6].

Nepal faces a number of challenges to meet its goals. First and foremost is the country's political instability. After more than a decade of Maoist insurgency, disturbances created by *Madhesi* and ethnic minority-groups are the new disruption to the well functioning of schools. High repetition and dropout rates, late enrolment, gender inequity and lack of quality remain major problems.

1.4 The education system in practice

Table 6: The current distribution of school classes.

Level	Class	Age-group
Primary	1-5	5-9
Lower Secondary	6-8	10-12
Secondary	9-10	13-14
Higher Secondary (+2/Intermediate)	11-12	15-16

Although, according to the Education Regulation of MOES, the official age to admit a child in class 1 is 5 years old, many children enrol much later, and others well before they reach this age.

Nowadays children are required to take exams on national level after completing secondary education (class 10), in order to obtain their School Leaving Certificate (SLC), which gives them access to higher secondary level education. The Ministry of Education is currently working on a plan to make class 12 the school level exit point instead of class 10. In their proposal class 8 would be the exit point for primary level education instead of class 5. This would become effective in 2009⁴. Like other government programmes in the past this plan is mainly aimed to increase access to education in rural regions, but also intends to focus on establishing quality educational institutions. After higher secondary or intermediate level, students gain access to higher (university) education. The focus of this report is mainly on primary-level and to a lesser extent on lower secondary education.

The official curricula, textbooks and other educational materials of government schools throughout Nepal are developed at the Curriculum Development Centre in Bhaktapur in the Kathmandu Valley. At primary level the curriculum has been designed with the objective to provide children with basic literacy, numeracy, survival and social skills [Government of Nepal 1996]. In practice, classes 1 until 3 of government schools focus on the subjects Nepali, Math, and Social Studies. In classes 4 and 5 subjects like English, Science, Environment and Health are added. Furthermore, the government has given guidelines for subjects related to life skills education to be developed on district level for all primary classes.

The school year starts around April 15th (the Nepali month of Baisakh). The year ends in the Nepali month of Chaitra (mid-March/mid-April) in which the examinations take place. In this month only the first nine days are normal schooldays, after which the exams start. The DEO in Jumla has changed the begin and end-date of the school year, as people in the education sector were not happy with the current situation, which leaves very little time after the winter holiday to prepare properly for the exams in April. From this year their school year starts mid-February, immediately after the winter vacation. In the Guthichaur-school I was told the admission period runs from Magh 25 (around February 8th) until Falgun 15 (around February 27th).

⁴ Himalayan Times, January 24, 2007

In certain parts of the country there is a summer holiday of 45 days in July and August. Due to the climate and geographical conditions in the area, other states have a winter holiday instead, which is 45 days from mid-December to early February. During Nepal's main festival *Dashain* there is another holiday of 15 days. In addition, there are numerous festivals throughout the year during which the schools are closed for a few days. According to the mandate of the Education Regulation of the Government of Nepal all government schools are required to be open 220 days per year, of which 40 days are reserved for exams and other school-related programmes. However, according to MOES data [Government of Nepal 2006a:30-31], many schools did not meet this mandate during the 2005-2006 school year. Some schools were only open 160 days, whereas a few others were operational for more than 220 days (with a maximum of 250 days).

Government schools are open six days per week, with Saturday as a free day. On Friday the schools operate only a half day. Official school hours are from 10 am until 4 pm, with a lunch break from 1 until 1:30 pm.

The government of Nepal guarantees free primary education, and its policy is aimed to keep households expenses on education as low as possible. All books until class 5 are free for all students. School uniforms are not free, but in many schools they are not compulsory. The government also provides scholarship programmes to encourage regular attendance of students. The policy is to provide a scholarship to all Dalit students, 50% of all enrolled girls at primary level, children with all sorts of disabilities, for martyrs' children, and others. There are also students who receive scholarships from local communities and other (I)NGOs. In practice, however, scholarships do not always reach the proposed beneficiaries. According to MOES, only 96.2% of the selected girls and 90.5% of the Dalits received scholarships during the 2005-2006 school year [Government of Nepal 2006a:5]. MOES also reported that a large number of schools did not receive government funds on time [Government of Nepal 2006a:27]. All schools visited for this research complained that they do not receive sufficient money from the government to provide all enrolled Dalit and girl students with a scholarship.

Despite the government's attempts to make primary education free, households are required to invest a certain amount of money in their children's education, even at primary level. These costs include admission and exam fees; the government school in the village in Tawashree, for example, charges an admission fee ranging from 10 rupees for class 1 to 50 rupees for class 5, and in Dumre the school charges exam fees ranging from 5 rupees for class 1 to 15 rupees for class 5. This money is used to buy paper and carbon, or other items needed for exams. A school uniform, still compulsory in some schools, is also a cost that falls upon parents. Each uniform costs approximately 500 rupees. Furthermore, many parents complained that children request pocket money to buy snacks from the vendor who visits the school; this adds to the costs of sending a child to school. Finally, pens and notebooks used in class are often not provided, and have to be purchased by the families themselves. In some villages (I)NGOs provide a selected number of children with school uniforms and/or stationary.

Education becomes more costly at lower secondary level. From class 6 onwards, books are no longer free, and schools demand higher admission and exam fees. The government school in Tawashree, for example, charges 200 rupees admission fees in class 6. In class 10 this amount has gone up to 500 rupees. Class 6 parents are expected to contribute up to 150 rupees for exams.

The costs for enrolling children in private schools are much higher, where parents are required to pay monthly school fees. In the private school in Dhangadhi, for example, enrolment in class 1 costs 160 rupees per month, increasing every year, and resulting in a monthly school fee of 250 rupees per month for class 5 pupils. Furthermore, exam fees are not usually included in these fees. Books, stationary and the compulsory school uniforms have to be paid for by families, which puts private schools out of reach for the majority of the population in the visited villages. Some private schools do, however, provide scholarships. Some schools exempt talented students from paying school fees. In other schools discounts apply for *Dalit*-families and other marginalised groups.

1.5 The status of education in Nepal and the studied villages

According to educational statistics of Nepal's Ministry of Education and Sports (2001)⁵ 54% of Nepal's population above six years of age is literate. There is a gender gap, with 65% of all men being literate, and only 43% of the women. The next table shows variations among studied districts in terms of their literacy rate. Jumla and Rautahat have the lowest literacy rates, while Siraha scores slightly higher. Udayapur has the highest literacy rate of the selected districts and lies close to the national average.

Table 7: Literacy Rate Population above six years of age

	Male	Female	Total
Jumla	46.9	16.7	32.4
Rautahat	42.6	21.6	32.5
Siraha	53	26.8	40.3
Udayapur	64.5	42.2	53.3
Nepal	65.1	42.5	53.7

Source: Government of Nepal, Ministry of Education and Sports, 2001(<http://www.moe.gov.np>)

Table 8 shows the Net Enrolment Ratios (NER) of the visited district and development regions. Nepal's NER is 86.8. The NER for girls is lower (83.4), but has experienced an increase since 2003 when the NER for girls was 77.5. Nepal's NER for boys has been relatively stable and now stands at 90.1. Rautahat's NER for primary level education is 61. This low figure is caused by Rautahat's extremely low girls' NER which is 30.1. Rautahat's boys' NER of 90 is comparable to the national NER. This dramatically low girls' NER is also found in the Central Terai Region as a whole, with a girls' NER of 68.4, and a boys' NER of 90.5 (averaging 79.9). Siraha shows a different trend, where the overall NER at primary level is relatively low at 53.4. Siraha's boys' NER (58.6) and girls' NER (47.8) indicate a gender gap similar to that of Nepal. Udayapur's NER is, with 97.5, higher than the national NER (86.8) and the Eastern Hills NER of 86.5. The NER of 96 for girls is only slightly lower than the boys' NER of 98.9. Finally, the NER of the Mid-Western Mountains and Jumla are comparatively high as well.

⁵ Available at : <http://www.moe.gov.np>

Table 8: Net Enrolment Ratio for 2005

	Primary Level			Lower Secondary Level		
	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total
Nepal	83.4	90.1	86.8	43.1	49.8	46.5
Cenral Terai	68.4	90.5	79.9	25.8	33.2	29.7
Rautahat	30.1	90.0	61.0	15.0	26.7	21.2
Eastern Terai	81.8	86.2	84.1	45.4	56.7	51.2
Siraha	47.8	58.6	53.4	29.2	51.9	41.1
Eastern Hills	86.0	87.0	68.5	59.3	63.4	61.3
Udayapur	96.0	98.9	97.5	46.9	48.6	47.7
Mid-Western Mountains	92.1	98.9	95.5	15.1	35.1	25.1
Jumla	92.6	98.9	95.8	21.7	32.6	27.3

Source: [Government of Nepal 2006a:43-45]

At primary level, 47.6% of pupils are girls; this percentage remains similar (45.6%) at lower secondary level. Almost 14% of children at primary school age are not enrolled in school. Plan Nepal [Plan Nepal 2006:1] estimates that about 600.000 primary school age children are out of school. Most striking is that in Rautahat 70% of all primary school age girls are not in school. The figure, however, greatly decreases at lower secondary level. Due to government awareness campaigns and (I)NGO efforts enrolment has risen significantly over the past years, especially at primary level. Attendance and retention remain to be the main problems of school education in Nepal. Repetition is also an issue; nationally 30.4% of pupils repeat class 1 [Government of Nepal 2005:15]. Repetition slowly decreases as pupils progress up through the classes, but the number of students decreases. More than 80% of the students pass class 5 and class 8 exams. In class 10, however, the passing rate is only 43% [Government of Nepal 2005:13-14].

1.5.1 Education in the Terai: Rautahat and Siraha

Rautahat has a dramatically low NER, caused in particular by the low enrolment levels of girls. In Jaynagar VDC the literacy rate is 17 [Sharma et al. 2004], far below the district literacy rate (32.5). According to the INGO Plan Nepal, which operates education and other development programmes in the VDC, only 24.2% of the population of Jaynagar is educated. The following literacy information is based on the Census of 2001:

Table 9: Jaynagar literacy

	Total	Male	Female
Cannot read or write	2701	1269	1432
Can read only	160	84	76
Can read and write	596	438	158
Not stated	52	45	7

Source: [Sharma et al. 2002:329]

In Jaynagar there is one government school, which offers education until class 5. 673 children are enrolled, of whom 375 boys and 298 girls. According to the Education Act and Regulation the average class size in a school in the Terai should be 40 [Government of Nepal 2006c:27]. The Jaynagar government school, however, has 385 children enrolled in class 1, 70-90 students in classes 2 to 4, and 50 students in class 5. Many children, however, are irregular attendees and absent most of the time.

In the school there is one headmaster, five government appointed teachers, and a *peon*⁶. In addition, there are two teachers who receive their salary from other sources than the government. The teachers are all local; they come from Jaynagar itself or from surrounding villages.

Children have to travel at least 2 km if they choose to study beyond primary education. There is a Madrassah in Jaynagar for the children of Muslim households, but this school is not recognised by the government. In nearby Shipnagar there are a few private primary schools.

In Dhangadhi VDC the literacy rate is 46.5, which is slightly higher than the Siraha literacy rate of 40.3. The following literacy information is based on the Census of 2001:

Table 10: Dhangadhi literacy

	Total	Male	Female
Cannot read or write	3793	1477	2316
Can read only	351	158	193
Can read and write	3696	2321	1376
Not stated	109	87	22

Source: [Sharma et al. 2002:163]

The studied village, located in ward#2 of Dhangadhi VDC, has a private school and a government school up to class 4 (although the headmaster claimed the school also had a class 5). In the surrounding wards there are many other schools available. In the whole VDC there are five government primary schools, and one secondary school. Most school-going children from the studied village are enrolled in the government school in nearby Chainpur, which offers education until class 10.

193 students are enrolled in the local government school (95 boys and 98 girls), who are from the village itself and the nearby Dhangadhi Bazaar. Attendance is poor. The school has a headmaster, a female teacher and a *peon*. There is a vacancy for a third teacher.

The secondary government school in Chainpur attracts many children from the studied village and surrounding localities and from other VDCs as well. The school has an enrolment of 389 students at primary level, of whom 253 are boys and 136 girls. Just as in Jaynagar, the class sizes are much higher than the Education Act permits. There are 105 children enrolled in class 1, 70-80 children in classes 2 to 4, and 50 students in class 5. The total enrolment at secondary level is 363. The

⁶ A *peon* is a lowly paid government employee who functions as a caretaker, and who may sometimes also perform teacher's tasks in the absence of qualified teachers.

Chainpur government school has 14 teachers (2 of whom are female) and a peon. Except for two of the teachers, they are all from Dhangadhi-VDC and surroundings.

In ward # 2 there is a private school that was established in 2002 (Nepali year 2059), and which offers education from nursery until class 6, to approximately 250 children from throughout Dhangadhi VDC.

1.5.2 Education in the Hills: Udayapur

Dumre VDC has a relatively high literacy rate of 55.3. Tawashree VDC has a literacy rate of 40.2. The following tables are based on the 2001 Census:

Table 11: Dumre literacy

	Total	Male	Female
Cannot read or write	948	232	615
Can read only	74	27	47
Can read and write	1266	766	501
Not stated	0	0	0

Source: [Sharma et al. 2002:106]

Table 12: Tawashree literacy

	Total	Male	Female
Cannot read or write	2707	1120	1587
Can read only	155	82	73
Can read and write	1921	1262	660
Not stated	0	0	0

Source: [Sharma et al. 2002:107]

In the village in Dumre VDC there is one government primary school, which was established in 1988 (Nepali year 2045), and offers education until class 5. The school enrolment is 106 (46 boys, and 60 girls). The average class size here is 21, well below the 45 maximum set by the Education Act and Regulation. At the time of fieldwork all children were attending, probably because it was exam time. There are also children enrolled from surrounding villages. For them this school is nearer than the school in their own village due to the scattered characteristic of these settlements.

There are three government appointed teachers and a headmaster in the school, who are all from the village itself or its surroundings. The school is looking for funding so they can build a few new rooms in order to realise education until class 8. There is strong community support for the school's future plans. In this school there are two incentives in order to promote children's enrolment. A midday meal scheme provides children with a daily portion of *halwa*, wheat-powder mixed with sugar and cooked in vegetable ghee. Secondly, oil is distributed to girls and children of the lowest castes, provided that they attend 80% of the classes.

Nowadays most children from this school stop going to school after passing class 5. To continue their schooling they would have to walk for at least 2 hours to reach other schools in nearby villages. Considering that the children are also required to do homework, this distance makes it impossible for the children to help out in the household after school hours; help that is indispensable for families.

Most of the children in the studied village in Dumre in age group 5-12 are enrolled in primary school. A large problem, however, is attendance, especially during the Dashain festival, when the children are required to do more work in and around the household. Other times at which children are frequently absent are those when work in the fields demands additional labour.

In the village in neighbouring Tawashree VDC there is a larger government school with 12 teachers, which was established in 1968 (Nepali year 2025) and currently offers education until class 10. The enrolment here is more than 1000. At primary level (classes 1 to 5) there are approximately 400 children enrolled. At upper-level there are many children from surrounding villages, which explains the higher enrolment at (lower) secondary level.

A private school has also been recently established in the village. Besides the headmaster, there are three teachers of whom two are women from the village itself. Because it is a new school the only classes currently running are the nursery, kindergarten (KG), classes 1 and 2. There are approximately 100 children enrolled, who live both in the village and in surrounding localities.

1.5.3 Education in the Mountains: Jumla

Jumla has a literacy rate of 32.4. According to KIRDARC, a national NGO, which is concerned with the development in the Karnali Zone, 73% of total primary school aged (6-15) children enrol at primary level, but the number of pupils rapidly declines at lower and higher secondary level education. Like in the other areas, the major problems in the education sector in Jumla are dropout and repetition.

According to information provided by the VDC office, 60% of the population of Guthichaur is illiterate: 51.5% of the men, and 69.2% of the women. The following literacy information is based on the Census of 2001:

Table 13: Guthichaur literacy

	Total	Male	Female
Cannot read or write	1409	597	812
Can read only	36	20	16
Can read and write	452	371	82
Not Stated	0	0	0

Source: [Sharma et al. 2002:537]

Guthichaur VDC has 4 government primary schools, and 1 upper-primary school. The upper-primary school is located in Dillikot, and offers education until class 7. The school enrolls children from ward numbers 2 through 5, which is where this research was conducted. If children want to continue their

schooling after class 7, they are required to go to the neighbouring VDC Dillichaur, which is a 4 hour walk, or to Jumla Bazaar, which takes 7 to 8 hours to reach, requiring the children to live separately from their parents.

According to VDC information from 2001-2002 there are 307 children in the age group 6 to 15 in ward numbers 2 to 5. The enrolment in the government upper-primary school in 2006 is 241: 158 boys and 83 girls at primary level. The size of class 1 is, just like the other visited schools, remarkably high: 132. The number declines rapidly as children progress into higher classes. There are 46 children in class 2, 34 in class 3, 12 in class 4, and 17 in class 5. According to the attendance register the attendance is regular except in the months of May and June (*Yarshagumba* season). Children are kept at home at other times as well, to help out with household chores, such as caring for the animals.

The school in Dillikot was established as a primary school in 1959 (Nepali year 2016). The school has been an upper-primary school up to class 7 since 1975 (Nepali year 2032), but there are plans to add a class 8. Besides the headmaster and two teachers, who are from Dillikot and its surrounding wards, there are three teachers from the Terai region. The latter go home during the holidays, but live in the village during school time, where they provide extra tuition to the children after school hours, in return for food and accommodation.

During the time of the fieldwork a new private school was opened near Dillikot for nursery, lower kindergarten (LKG) and upper kindergarten (UKG). The opinions of community members about this school were divided, and parents were not sure whether they should send their children there or not. It was not officially registered with the District Education Office in Jumla Bazaar.

In all the villages a primary school is available. A general trend seems to be that there is an extremely high enrolment in class 1, but the number of students decreases thereafter, particularly at lower secondary level. Chapters 3 and 4 will deal with the factors that may explain these poor levels of attendance, retention, and repetition. But first, Chapter 2 looks at the community's perception of the relevance of education for their daily lives and future.

Chapter 2

What Drives People to Send their Children to School?

As we have seen in Chapter 1, there has been a significant increase in Nepal's school enrolment over the past few years. Despite the problems of irregular attendance and high drop-out rates, the high enrolment figures, in particular those of class 1, indicate that most households are familiar with the idea to enrol their children in school, and most children find their way to the schools at some point, regardless of whether they complete primary level or not. In order to understand the motivations to enrol the children, it is first of all important to look at how communities in rural areas perceive education. This chapter deals with the various views on the relevance of primary education at village level.

2.1 Relevance for current occupations

In the visited villages the main occupation is agriculture. People work on their own land or on that of others, either by leasing the land or by earning a daily wage. Other people work in construction and furniture making. Some, more well-to-do households run, next to farming, small businesses, which provide them with additional incomes. Many people, especially in Jumla, also have a number of animals to take care of. Another significant livelihood strategy is (seasonal) labour migration, with destinations such as Kathmandu or Birganj, and foreign destinations like India, Malaysia, and the Gulf States. These migrants, especially in the Terai, include children from the age of 10 who move to India for a number of months a year in order to contribute to the household income. Whereas adults indicated to be mostly involved in construction work when they are abroad, children are mainly found in factories of the garment and bone industry (bangles) in Delhi or Mumbai. The majority of the households, however, are involved in agriculture. This section looks at whether villagers feel that the available education is relevant for their current occupations.

Most villagers feel that education does lead to an improvement in their current occupations, especially in terms of technology. An educated farmer from Dumre indicates that educated men know exactly when to sow seeds, and which medicine/pesticides to use in order to improve the crops. To educate villagers thus would improve agricultural output. An uneducated shop-owner from Dumre agrees with him: "Educated farmers use different kind of methods, and have different ideas. They are able to learn what to do from books. Uneducated farmers only work the old way". His brother, an uneducated farmer compares his village to a neighbouring village, where "everyone is educated, so the living standard there is better. Farmers from that village have other ideas about different technologies and methodology". A poor landless farmer from Tawashree, whose children are not attending school, agrees that uneducated farmers only look at what others do, and have no concept of their own, whereas educated farmers have their own ideas on how to farm. A teacher in

Siraha agrees with these parents and says: “the educated farmer knows exactly how to farm: how and when to plant the seeds and vegetables, and how to get enough revenue from that.”

Due to a shift in traditions, education is increasingly perceived as indispensable for a modern way of life. Examples are the Kumhar-families, who are traditionally involved in pottery-work. In Jaynagar two men belonging to this caste complained that it is nowadays difficult to make enough money by doing pottery work. They are uneducated and try to complement their income by doing agricultural work. When there is not much labour required on the fields, they make pots. Their children are not involved in this work. “The younger generation is not interested in our traditional occupation anymore. For children it is more important to go to school than to work. After school they are able to face other people easily and to start their own business”.

An opportunity to become more independent is also considered as an important benefit. A milk seller from Jaynagar, who passed class 10, believes that even without this education he could have been in the milk business. But, he explains: “If you are uneducated and you are in the milk business you need help from educated people. Educated people are independent”. A farmer from Jaynagar went to school until class 8. He recently got ill, and he explains how he had no problems going to the hospital: “I could easily find the address, find the doctor’s name, and which room to go to in the hospital. I did not need any help from others”. Due to this illness, however, his oldest son had to drop out of school. The 12-year-old Jalaludin from Jaynagar hopes that his younger brother can at least finish class 5. He himself was taken out of primary school and has already been to Delhi to work in a factory, where they make bangles. He regrets that he could not finish primary level education, because often he is dependent on others. His friends in Delhi speak Hindi and can write a letter. They can easily communicate with others. When they do, he regrets that he cannot.

People who are involved in labour also appreciate the ability to manage their own money. “Now we are dependent on others who count our salary, and if we want to go to Delhi or Mumbai, we have to ask others, because we cannot read the signs”. An older man in Guthichaur, who makes sheep wool rugs, complains: “in our time there was no education, so we have to do this work to earn some money”. Now his grandchildren go to school: “first they will gain some general knowledge, so if they leave the village, it is easy for them to talk to strangers. They can read the signs and find the way. They will not be dependent on others”.

Not all villagers agree though, and there is a group of people that feels that education would have been a waste of time if their children are not able to find a job and end up being farmers in the future. A young farmer in his late twenties from Jaynagar explains that he could never go to school, because his father died young. “Now I am a farmer, and my future lies also in farming, so education in this life is not important”. A carpenter from Jaynagar teaches his son, who is enrolled in class 9, some carpentry skills after school, but he hopes that his son can obtain a government post. “If such a job is not available for my son, I will be sad. I am spending so much on education nowadays. For becoming a carpenter this kind of education is not important. Most of the efforts I put into giving my son a good education will have been wasted”. Education is thus seen as a means to escape their current way of life. But for many it can also be a costly investment, and thus parents need to believe in its value.

2.2 Education as a way out of the current lifestyle

Most people do recognise the inherent value of education, even with the prospects of their children remaining in the same occupation as their parents. However, many also perceive education as an opportunity to change current lifestyles. Farming is seen as hard work, and by getting an education there might be a chance of earning money by other means. An older farmer in Dumre explains that “once children have had a good education, they do not have to work in the village anymore; they do not have to plough or do any other heavy work”. An older farmer from Guthichaur observes that “children of parents, who sent their children to school in the past, are now active. They are contractors, engaged in business, or became teachers. The people who never had the opportunity to go to school are only dependent on their animals”. According to him, more and more people become interested in sending their children to school because they do not want to be dependent on rearing animals anymore. He is one of 7 brothers, of which only 1 is uneducated. He says that the brother who is uneducated has more sheep and goats than the others. “If you have many animals, you also need many people to take care of these animals. People who choose to educate their children cannot have many animals”. 12-year-old Ramesh agrees that uneducated people can only depend on their animals and fieldwork. According to him, educated people get a job like doctor, engineer, or teacher.

Parents who have never been to school express that that is exactly the reason why they want to send their children to school: to give them opportunities, which they never had. An example is a brick-kiln worker from Musahar-basti in Siraha, who tries to continue his 14-year-old son’s education, who studies in class 6. The household is in a financially weak condition, but the father is determined to send his son to school so his children do not have to become labourers. The father often goes to Punjab in India: “day and night I had to carry heavy loads”. In the brick kiln work is also heavy and his working hours are long, “but if I do not go, I cannot feed my children and wife”. He wants his son to complete class 10, and if affordable, even further. His son expressed the hope that he can continue his education, so he does not have to become a labourer like his father.

In all the sampled villages there were children who expressed the wish to have a different future than their parents. Dinesh and Giri from Dumre, both studying in class 8, help their parents after school with cutting grass for the animals, with looking after the goats, and with ploughing and digging in the field. They do not want to become farmers like their father, because “it is hard work, and I do not want my own children to have the same life as I do”, says Giri. They both hope to become teachers in the future, “so I can teach others what I learn in school”. In Jaynagar 10-year-old Darminder studies in class 4, and hopes to find a job in Nepal, and if that does not work out, he will start a business in Kathmandu. He does not want to be like his father, who is doing construction work in Punjab. “I want to do better than that. My father is doing hard labour. I want to use my mind”. In Guthichaur, Teek Bahadur, from a dalit-caste, studies in class 5, and hopes to become a teacher. His father does construction and furniture work. “I want to be an educated man like my teacher Ramesh-sir. I do not want to do furniture work like my father”, he affirms.

Some parents hope that sending children to school will benefit them once they are old, and their children are taking care of them. A father and member of the SMC in Dumre, for example, hopes that at least 1 of his 5 sons who are all educated will get a job, and that he will also get a little profit. And a farmer from Dumre explains that he sent his sons to school, so that they can find a good job after education. His son is now in Kathmandu. “Maybe soon a letter comes that says that I

do not have to live in the village anymore”, he hopes. A manual labourer and widower from Tawashree sends his sons to school and he hopes that they will be clever, and able to make their own future: “They can be an engineer, a driver, a door-boy, and even a thief. It depends on their own mind really. I hope that my sons will find a job, and that they will take care of me when I am old.”

An often-heard complaint, however, is about the lack of job opportunities in their village and surroundings, and in Nepal in general. A farmer from Dumre observes that “many children are passing class 10 nowadays, but they are left without jobs”, and a teacher from Tawashree explains that education is important: “educated men can find a job, can talk, and are never hungry wherever they go”, but that the lack of job opportunities is a major problem: “many educated people are jobless. Their parents have taken a loan to afford a child’s education, but if they do not get a job, it is not possible to pay back that loan, so people feel guilty”. An uneducated man from Guthichaur, who is employed at a government animal farm, explains that: “In the past it was easier to get a job, but now you need to pass at least class 7 to be able to get a job there. Even people who passed class 12 have difficulties getting a job there nowadays”. Also for a job as a teacher, competition is high. A government official in Dumre explained that there are now too many people who passed class 10 or even class 12, which is why there is major competition once a vacancy opens in local government schools.

People also believe that with education alone, a job is not guaranteed. A father in the village in Dumre has two sons who are both educated at intermediate level. Now they are both jobless, because they have “no source, and no power”, which means they lack the contacts and the money to get a job. His older brother agrees and blames the government: “They dominate the people. They only use us. Why do we need money if we want to be able to get a job?” An uneducated mother from Siraha states that “our government never invests in people with an educated mind”.

Some parents expect quick returns from education and tend to view education only as a means of generating income [See also: CERID 2005:37]. Education at primary level, however, is not sufficient for realising this goal. A government official in Dumre also points to the level of education that the majority of children achieve. He explains:

People hope that children are able to make their future through education, but they are only able to send their children until class 5, which is not sufficient for getting a job. Only 15-20 people from this village passed class 10. Only a few of them went for further studies, but many are now leading a life as a farmer and enjoying their family-life in the village. The rest is earning money in Kathmandu or India.

An educated farmer from Dumre knows that the children need more than class 5. “They learn only basic knowledge, which they quickly forget during their married life”. A businessman from Jaynagar, who deals in potatoes, was educated until class 5, but, he argues, “if I had studied more, I could have developed my mind, which would have been good for my business”. Two men from the Muslim community in Jaynagar believe as well that government primary education alone is not sufficient. They explain that if people want to send their children to school, then they should be given the opportunity to send them for higher education as well. “If children are only able to go to school until class 5 because of financial reasons, then it will be better to send them to the

Madrassah”. An educated father from Guthichaur thinks that the investment in education is wasted if a child drops out in class 3. “A child has to pass class 10 at least, but the facilities for that are not here”. The nearest school in his area offers education until class 7, which he believes is not sufficient.

Interestingly, some people make a distinction between different groups of people with regard to a sufficient education level. For example, a father from Jaynagar, who belongs to a *Dalit* caste, argues:

If my children are interested to go to school, I like to send them to collect general knowledge until class 5. If possible I want my son to complete at least class 8 or 9. Education is good, because it enables them see from the inner soul/inner eye. For people who have money it is necessary to send the children until +2 (class 12), but for people like us class 8 is sufficient.

A teacher in Tawashree agrees with him and argues, “Only if people have lots of money to spend on education, then they can build a good future”.

Lack of job opportunities and a poor salary are major drives for people to move from their villages and travel in search of work. Thus, in most cases escaping their current lifestyle entails leaving their village to go to Kathmandu, or to go abroad. In Jaynagar 5 boys, all enrolled in school at upper-primary level discussed their future, and indicated they wanted to be teachers, doctors, and computer engineers. These jobs, however, would most probably not be available to them in or near their village, and they said they would have to go to Kathmandu.

Many men aspire to a life abroad, or at least the opportunity to go there for a few years. Life is difficult, and one is expected to work hard, but the earnings are believed to be better than in Nepal. In Musahar-basti in Siraha it is given as one of the most important reasons to pursue an education: “through education we can go abroad!”, and, “it is important to read and write “because if you want to make money in a foreign country like Dubai, you need to be educated”.

According to the *adachai* in Dumre many men leave the village to earn money elsewhere. They are in Kathmandu, in Kargil and other places in India, but also in far away places such as Malaysia and Qatar. According to him, one has to be educated nowadays to be able to go abroad, and primary level only is not sufficient. A teacher in Siraha tells that many of his students have gone abroad to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Malaysia, and Thailand once they completed class 10 and obtained their SLC. According to him the outflow is due to the lack of jobs available in their own area for children who have passed class 10.

2.3 Education is wealth

Many respondents indicated that getting an education leads to something else than only a good job. Parents argue that education benefits the people and communities, regardless of what the child does for a living in the future. An uneducated mother from Siraha explains that education is wealth, which never dies: “Education is never lost. Once you have taught someone, the knowledge can be passed on to others. Education always increases, it never decreases”. A father in Guthichaur concurs: “school means the wealth of education. Children learn things that you can only learn in school. Education will always increase”. He himself failed class 10, so he says that his son should

definitely pass class 10. Then his grandchildren will go to class 12, and it will always increase. “And if they share the knowledge, it will never go away.”

Many people see education as good for the future of the community or that of Nepal. For example, villagers in Dumre attribute the strong communal sense existing in their village nowadays to the fact that more and more villagers have been able to go to school over the years. A teacher in Siraha explains how education is important for Nepal: “If there is no good education in a country, that country can never be developed. Nepal is really poor, and gets help from other (neighbouring) countries. It is dependent on others. That can change if there is good education offered in Nepal.” An uneducated father in the community also emphasises that education is important for the future of Nepal: “if everyone is educated then no one can do bad things to Nepal”. A member of the Muslim community in Jaynagar believes that it is due to the lack of education that “Nepal is in a bad condition. That is why education is necessary for both boys and girls. If everyone is educated, then Nepal will change in both economical and social aspects. If every person here is educated, then the village will be like heaven”. According to the headmaster in Guthichaur villagers should think about businesses that the children could start after completing school:

The village shall change tremendously if all are educated. These children can start an animal farm, or do business in herbals from the jungle, and they can get more benefit from their crops. Women can learn tailoring. When clothes are damaged now, everyone has to go to the tailor at the market in Jumla Bazaar, or they have to buy new clothes. Women can start a tailoring business here.

Other benefits mentioned by villagers affect the character and personality of the children themselves. According to a mother in Dumre whose son studies in class 6, school is very important: “He will get a very good life, whether we are alive to see it or not. After marriage he will be able to be good for his wife and children”. According to a teacher in a government school in Siraha parents send their children to school, so they gain a certain general knowledge. If children remain uneducated, their behaviour and way of talking is different. In the words of an uneducated grandfather in Dumre: “Everybody is blind, once you are educated you can see!” A poor landless farmer in Tawashree emphasises that educated persons have a good reputation within the society. “They have other ideas than uneducated men, ideas, which are respected by others in the community”. In Musahar-basti in Siraha it is expressed that education “opens the inner-eye”, and that “one can learn everything through education”. Many people in all sampled villages argue that education teaches people to tell the difference between what is right and what is wrong.

Practical knowledge is perceived as an important benefit. We have already seen the ability to read, write and count that enables people to be less dependent on other people. But also issues of health are discussed. In the words of an educated father in Guthichaur: “If an educated person takes a bath once a week, uneducated persons take baths once a month, and if uneducated person takes a bath once a week, then educated persons will bathe daily, because they have learnt about health in school”. An uneducated mother in Dumre says:

There used to be jungle everywhere, surrounding only a few houses, now every family has many houses. This happened so fast, because people are uneducated. Every family has five or six children. Now there is family planning, but in the old days this was non-

existent. A small family is a good family. Then the environment is good. We heard about this from teachers and from neighbours.

2.4 Why people send their children to school: examples and incentives

In rural areas people are likely to copy behaviour from others, like a mother in a Magar household in Tawashree: “I do not know what my children learn in school or why it is important to send them there, but all the people in the village send their children as well”. Thus, when there is no existing habit of sending children to school in a household, it takes examples from others in the village, whose living standards are similar, and, ideally, whose lives have visibly improved through their investment in schooling. According to a teacher this trend also exists in Guthichaur:

Nowadays, many families realise that it is good to send their children to school in this area. They have seen the examples of the 3 local teachers who teach in the government school and their educated friends who have started a business or have a job with the government. These people were educated in this area. This is what the parents here also want for their own children.

In Dhangadhi people believe that “those who are already sending their children to school should make an effort to convince others to do the same in regular meetings”. In Dumre teachers feel that the key to achieve enrolment of all children is to continue to communicate with parents, and to make them aware of fellow educated villagers and how education has benefited them. The school *adachai* in Dumre expects that a great deal is already achieved by having an increasing number of children in school, who will continue the trend. “These children are getting an education now. Of course they will send all their own children to school in the future”.

In order to have examples that appeal to other villagers, awareness about why school is important has to be created in a community and picked up by inhabitants in such a way that they are prepared to change their habits. This can be a slow and lengthy process. A private teacher in Guthichaur expects that more and more people will send their children to school, but that parents will always keep one child at home to take care of the animals. People might be ready to change the pattern, but still have to figure out a way to deal with the necessary chores at home: “Parents have to find a solution for the animals that need to be taken to the jungle”.

Increasing awareness about why school is important through government awareness campaigns has played a significant role in increasing school enrolment. In addition, tremendous work is done by numerous NGOs throughout Nepal in order to increase awareness regarding education in other development related issues such as health, hygiene, early marriage, and child labour.

In order to make school attractive and affordable for even the most poorest segments of society, the government together with (I)NGOs have introduced a number of incentives. Many reports have already indicated that these encouragement programmes have been effective in increasing school enrolment [see for example: CERID 2005:42; Government of Nepal. National Planning Commission & UNDP 2005:23]. One such incentive is the school nutrition programme, which has been implemented by both NGOs and the government in a number of VDCs throughout the country. It is a scheme in which children are provided with a meal at school every day. In the sampled villages this scheme was operational at the primary school in Dumre, and at the ECD-centre in Jaynagar. It proved to be

attracting children to the schools. Also in villages where such a scheme was not in existence, people had heard of this programme in neighbouring villages, and expressed the wish to have something similar in their village, as it would relieve people from poverty, and thus serve as an effective pull-factor to attract children to the schools: “It would be nice if the school provides the children with something to eat, so they will not come home hungry to have lunch”. A teacher in Guthichaur argues that “they should also provide free lunches to the children in schools in remote areas.”⁷ And according to a teacher in Dumre children from other villages came to his school because the incentives were not available in the schools nearer to these children’s homes.

The same was true for the oil distribution programme, another incentive encountered in the village in Dumre. This programme contains the provision of two litres of oil per month to girls in classes 2 to 5. The girls are required to attend at least 80% of the classes. In addition, children have to pay 2 rupees per litre since it has to be carried to the village from Bahunitar. According to members of the community the oil, together with the meal-at-school programme has surely increased school enrolment, and children have become regular attendees.

A third incentive introduced by the government for the entire country in an attempt to make education affordable, is the scholarship programme which provides 25 rupees per month to specific groups of children, including girls and those of the lowest castes (*Dalits*). These scholarship programmes have proven effective. A head of a Basnet-household in Guthichaur argues: “Many girls started going to school because of the scholarships. It does not affect the rich families, since they send their children anyway. But poor families have started sending their children as a result of the scholarships”. There seem to be some problems with the implementation of the programme, and only a certain percentage of eligible *Dalits* and girls receive the scholarship. Some people, such as this mother from Dhangadhi, complain about promises not being kept: “We only hear on the radio or from others that the government provides us facilities, but it never reaches us. Before it does, it is already taken by clever people”.

There is a great sense of recognition of the effectiveness of such incentives, especially when they are implemented by NGOs and CBOs. Jaynagar is one of the programme villages of Plan Nepal, and, in cooperation with smaller local organisations, this INGO has been running several programmes related to education, health and other development issues. The NGO has, for example, initiated and supported the school and *Madrassah* with the construction of latrines, two Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres, and *Dalit*-support programmes.

In the village, especially among the lowest castes, there is appreciation for the work that has been done in the village, and people seem to agree that enrolment has increased largely due to the work of Plan and its partner organisations, which is illustrated by the following cases. A landless farmer from a *Dalit*-community here remembers that members of the NGO approached him and his neighbours and convinced them to send their children to school:

⁷ According to the District Education Office in Jumla they have just started the Midday Meal Scheme in 30 schools in the district headquarters, and in two remote VDCs not including Guthichaur.

They had meetings with us and encouraged the parents to send our children to school. We are grateful to them. Upper-caste families never gave this information, because they think if we are educated, we do not want to work on their fields anymore. If the NGO did not come here, we would not have been able to send our children to school.

His neighbour explains:

All parents are uneducated, and we are dependent on the landlords. Now all children in our part of the village go to school. It is the first generation going to school. In the past girls could only do household works, but the NGO gives first priority to educate girls. That is why now we also think that this is important. The NGO did many things for us: children get notebooks and pens, they help us manage a small plot of land, and now we have our own hand pumps and latrines.

Many children from Jaynagar, and from the *Dalit*-community in particular, receive materials such as notebooks, bags and pens that facilitate them to send their children to school. The head of one of these household had already been sending his son to school, but explains that through these incentives he recently send his daughter to class 1:

In the past I could not afford to send all my children to school. But now there are many facilities managed by organisations, which makes it possible to send all my children to school. I never get money, but we get clothes, books, notebooks, and pens.

Not only *Dalits*, but also other Jaynagar members of the community appreciate the work of the NGO and local partners. According to a tuition teacher in the village they have progressed tremendously. Not only in terms of education (school buildings, latrines, more teachers, and a park where children can play), but also in the mentality of the villagers in general. For example: “In the past you never saw any women at meetings, but nowadays they are attending as well”.

The downside of such programmes is that it has also created a sense of dependency. This argument is supported by people who complain that NGOs are not doing enough for them. They have a negative attitude towards (I)NGOs and adopt an expecting and dependent mind-set [See also: CERID 2005:36-37]. Instead of being cooperative and helpful, they complain that what has been provided is either broken or not sufficient, and are waiting for the NGO to supplement or repair it. It is not uncommon that people demand more latrines in villages where latrines remain unused. NGOs in the Jumla-area expressed their concern that output of their work is disappointing in comparison to the input due to lack of commitment and cooperation of the community. According to CERID [2006:37] people have become aware of the importance of educating girls, but still expect investments by the government and NGOs to provide schooling to their daughters, since spending their own money would be a waste (see Chapter 4 for an explanation for this attitude).

Some would argue that people have become increasingly dependent on benefits. Instead of having a genuine understanding of the need and importance of schooling, “most parents send their children to school just to get the scholarship, the free clothes, the free oil, the free uniform, the free textbooks” [Plan Nepal 2006:20]. A mother from Dumre argues that “people only send their children for profit, because they don’t know the value of education”. Many parents fail to contribute

opinions on school curriculum or other educational issues, but do actively complain to teachers for not providing them with the money and other benefits they believe they should be rewarded. For example, a head of a Dalit-household in Jaynagar complains:

Nowadays, most of the children go to school, but some do not. The main problem is that the budget, which the government reserves for *Dalits*, goes to the school instead. The headmaster does whatever he likes with it. What is left is provided to our children, but that is not enough for all the children.

Someone from the Muslim community in the same village agrees: “The headmaster is connected with a political party. The education budget from the government goes to that party. We only get help from local NGOs. What the government gives, does not reach us”.

Other parents, however, indicate that they will most likely continue to send their children to school even if the government has to discontinue the subsidies. A father from a *Dalit*-household in Jaynagar says, for example, that school has become affordable due to NGO-help, but if such support ends, he will still put an effort into ensuring his children’s education, because now he understands that education is useful for his children as well. The community is increasingly aware of the value of an education, and hopefully in the future fewer people will send their children to school for subsidies and benefits only.

There is a discussion about whether education should be provided absolutely free or not. Currently, primary school is free, and people argue that for full enrolment and attendance to be reached, exam fees should be abolished, and education should be free until at least class 10. Nowadays many children drop out after primary level due to the sudden increase in costs, which discourages students to do their best at primary level.

On the other hand, we have also seen how scholarships, meal plans and stipends can make people dependent on external funds. In addition, Chapter 3 will show that government schools, because they are free, are perceived as low quality institutions. Parents would prefer to send their children to private schools, which they cannot afford. It is argued that when the community is asked to contribute a small amount, it creates a sense of ownership that boosts community involvement. As argued by Dixit [2002:206]: “free schooling must be rationed only for those who are absolutely indigent. For the rest, parents must be made to pay a reasonable amount on a sliding scale so that they can demand quality and have a greater stake in the opportunities provided for their children”.

A teacher of the Better Life Option Programme (BLOP), a programme where young people, both educated and uneducated, are taught about issues such as education, personal hygiene, and abusive situations, observes that society in Jaynagar is slowly changing. “Programmes like BLOP should be organised especially in parts of the village where narrow-minded concepts still prevail.” “There should be regular community meetings to discuss these issues”, argues a religious leader in Jaynagar.

2.5 Conclusion

This Chapter looked at whether communities perceive schooling as being relevant or not in the daily lives they lead. It was observed that many people feel that by obtaining practical knowledge and

skills through education, it leads to improvement of their lives, even when they continue with their current occupations. It gives them the opportunity to become more independent, and thus leads to empowerment. This will benefit the character and personality of the children, but also the community and Nepal as a whole.

Due to a shift in customs and traditional occupations disappearing, education is increasingly considered a tool to escape their current lifestyles. Work presently done by parents is perceived as hard work, and children hope they will be able to lead different lives. Parents want to give their children opportunities they never had, and secretly hope that their new prospects will allow them to earn a good income, and possibly also for them to eventually provide for their parents.

However, there are villagers who believe education becomes a waste of time, money and energy if children are not able to find other work than what is currently done by the parents. Due to the lack of job opportunities in rural areas and in Nepal as a whole, this concern is a reasonable one. For many households it is not realistic to be able to send the children to lower secondary level education. Primary level education alone, however, is not sufficient for obtaining a government job. The lack of job opportunities should not be overestimated, and should not be interpreted as a major obstacle for people when deciding to send their children to school. There are also other reasons for children to be kept out of school. These are discussed in the following chapters. These have to be taken into account before one can determine whether the potential (non-)economic benefits outlined in this chapter are sufficient for parents to decide whether they should invest in their children's education or not.

Many people started sending their children to school after seeing successful examples in their communities, and through incentives implemented by the government and NGOs in order to make education affordable. Even though there is a debate on the efficiency of such incentives, they have undoubtedly resulted in an increase in school enrolment, and it is expected that education data will further improve if such programmes are expanded. However, affordability incentives should go hand in hand with awareness raising (to persuade people of the value of investing in schooling for their children), to prevent people from abusing the school system purely for its material benefits, instead of benefiting from its educational value.



Walking to school in the hills of Udayapur

Chapter 3

What Keeps Children Out of School?

Despite people's general awareness that education can be beneficial for their children, many children are not enrolled in school and even more children do not attend school regularly or drop-out. Enrolment in class 1 is high, but many of these children are unable to proceed to class 2 at the end of the year. The high number of repeaters, in addition to the newly enrolled children in class 1, explains the high numbers. To cope with this large number of students in class 1, schools generally divide class 1 into different sections (according to the levels of knowledge of the children); this division requires additional teachers. Children who habitually fail and repeat classes are likely to drop out before completing primary level.

High levels of drop-out and irregular attendance are two major obstacles for ensuring primary education for all in Nepal. Many children are kept at home to help their parents with extra work during labour-intensive seasons, such as harvest and *Yarshagumba* season (in the mountains) and during major festivals such as Dashain and Lhosar. However, children are absent on regular schooldays as well. This chapter looks at possible explanations for non-enrolment and irregular attendance.

"Poverty" is the most commonly cited reason by the children, parents, teachers, and other members of the community, for keeping children out of school. It is also the response given by local NGOs and CBOs. However, the costs involved with primary school seem to be only marginal. In Chapter 1 we saw that the only costs that people have to spend on education are those of registration (single payment), stationary, exam fees, and pocket money. Books are free and schools uniforms are not compulsory in most schools. Altogether, the costs involved with primary schooling are low and affordable, even for most of the families who claim that they keep their children home "due to poverty". Since many of the out-of-school children are not earning money, there must be other more important reasons that explain why they are not in school.

Nevertheless, there are families who absolutely cannot afford school costs, and these should not be overlooked. Often, these families have dealt with sickness or death of one or more family members, which increases the workload at home. A household in Guthichaur, where the children do not go to school, is an example:

I cannot even afford food. My wife and small children are always ill. I cannot even go to the mountains during the *Yarshagumba* season to make money like the other villagers. In this situation some people would be able to sell an animal, but it becomes very difficult if you do not have animals.

However, in many other cases families do not seem to be willing to spend money on educational materials. It is a matter of money allocation rather than lack of finances. Education is not considered worthy of saving or investing. Many families instead choose to spend their money on other needs or conveniences (such as *raksi*) [See also: CERID 2005:21]. This Chapter explores the reasons why families are reluctant to invest in education.

3.1 Education and child work

According to the ILO [1998] there are 2.6 million working children in Nepal. There are more working children in the mountains (work participation rate of 52%), than in the Terai (work participation rate of 36%). This is also shown by the government district data on child labour. The highest percentage of working children is found in Jumla; according to Sharma [2004] 37% of the children in Jumla, aged 10-14, work. In Rautahat, Siraha, and Udayapur the percentages are respectively 13%, 11%, and 12%.

Data indicates that only 45.2% of children in the age group 10-14 go to school; the remaining children combine school and work (33.5%), only work (16.6%) or are classified as non-active (4.7%) [National Planning Commission 2004:53]. According to the same source the majority of children in the age group 5-9 go to school only (64.8%), and 21.4% is qualified as non-active. Work thus appears to be an impeding factor to school, especially in higher grades and, as we have seen in the previous chapters, especially for education at lower secondary level and above. We have also seen that enrolment in school does not necessarily mean that the children actually attend (regularly). It is thus likely that the number of children who go to school, or who combine schooling with work, is in fact lower than recorded enrolment rates.

Three groups are important here: the children who are defined as working only, the children who are classified as non-active, and the children who combine school with work. The question is how these children spend their time, and whether these activities are a direct cause for the children to be out of school.

In order to give an answer to this question we first have to look at how “work” is defined. The Nepal Living Standards Survey (NLSS) perceives a person as working, if he/she worked “at least one hour in the last seven days” in the fields of agriculture, non-agriculture (self or wage) and extended economic work [National Planning Commission 2004:43-44]. According to the NLSS, most working children are self-employed in agriculture (80% of the working children in age-group 10-14, and 82% of the working children in age-group 5-9). The rest of the working children are employed in “extended economic work”, referring to activities such as collection of fodder, firewood, and water.

In many households younger children are enrolled in school, but once they reach an age at which they are able to work they are taken out of school. Consequently, many working children have gone to school for at least a few years. The NLSS data also shows that most children in the primary level age group go to school only, whereas in the age-group 10-14 more children start being involved in work other than household chores. When the child is in class 4 or 5, or is ready to start school at lower-secondary level, work becomes an increasingly impeding factor.

The 10-year-old Umesh is not enrolled in school. He takes care of two of his younger sisters, and while he does so he plays around the house. One of his younger sisters is enrolled in class 2. Umesh

would also like to go to school, but his father says that his son is old enough to take care of children. His sister is too young, so she is still able to go to school. A father from Jaynagar agrees that children have to work in order to make money: “from the age of 12 they can work. Then we cannot send them to school anymore”.

It is important to note that household work is not included in the NLSS report on employment. Household work and household-related activities, however, is indicated by many children as the reason they are not able to attend school every day, like in the following cases:

One day, the 12-year-old Ram from Jaynagar rushes through the village at noon with his school books under his arm. He is enrolled in class 3. He is late, and a little worried that the teachers will be angry with him. He wanted to go earlier, but his father asked him to cut grass for the animals first.

Bishnu from Jaynagar is enrolled in class 1, but is playing on the road near his house. His father asked him to stay and help him on the field, beating the rice. Bishnu is playing with Lakshmi who is enrolled in class 2. Today, however, just like every Sunday and Wednesday Lakshmi cannot go to school, because on these days his mother wants to go to the market. His father and older brother work in the field all day, and Lakshmi is asked to stay at home to look after the house and his younger sister. He would like to go to school, but he cannot when his mother does not allow him.

Gopal and Bhimsen, both from a lower caste, from Guthichaur are enrolled in classes 3 and 1. Their parents also expect them to work in the household after school hours. They have to do duties such as cleaning the house, bringing water, cooking food, washing dishes and taking the cows to the jungle. Both don't like to look after the cows, “because the cows just go everywhere. It is difficult to keep them from damaging the crops. Sometimes I do not go to school, because I have to take care of the cows”.

Giri from the village in Dumre is one among a group of friends who go to school in Udayapur. He is enrolled in class 7. After school time he needs to help his parents in the household, and sometimes this is the reason that he is not able to attend daily. Often he is asked to go to the jungle to cut grass for the animals.

Just like Giri, the 14-year-old Dinesh who studies in class 8, is away from home all day when he goes to school. He leaves home at 8 in the morning, and comes back not earlier than 4 o'clock. After coming back he goes to the jungle with their goats.

In Nepal children are expected to help their families with household chores. In the words of a lady in Guthichaur: “What to do if the children are all going to school? Children have to take care of the sheep, the goats, oxen, cows, and horses. Others have to fetch water and wood for fuel. And someone has to take care of the small children, is it not?”

The children from the cases above are all able to go to school, though they attend irregularly. Giri and Dinesh from Dumre even have the opportunity to go to secondary school. Many of their friends, however, are not able to combine work and school due to the distance to the nearest lower secondary school, and thus the time it takes them to travel to and fro. Therefore, many children drop out of school after they finish class 5. In small villages in mountain or hilly regions such as Dumre the need for children to help out in the household in combination with the long distance to the lower secondary school is clearly an impeding factor.

One day I spoke to Mohan Bika and two friends passing through Bahunitar on their way to their village. They were carrying a heavy load of salt, which they had bought in Katari. They are from a village, which is a five-hour-walk from Bahunitar. Mohan went to school until class 5, but had to drop out after that, because there was no one else in his family who could do his work. His friends dropped out after classes 3 and 5 for the same reason. The nearest secondary school is a two-hour walk. He argues: “although it is a little far, it would have been possible for me to go there, because many other children in my village also go there”.

This thus raises the question why it is possible for one child to go to school, while others are asked to contribute to household work or other activities in order to earn money. Nowadays the majority of the households enrol at least one of their children in primary school. The families seem to have found an arrangement in which tasks that need to be done are divided among children, allowing at least one of them to go to school. An example is a family where the second son has been sent to India to work. They use the money that he earns for another sons’ education. Father said:

My second son’s future stands firm. He will be a farmer in our field, just like me. In India he is a mechanic, and he also learns how water pumps work, which will be of a benefit when he is a farmer later. My other sons should get a government job in the future. That is why they are also attending tuition class after school.

The following cases show that this division of labour among children can mean that a child is sent to another household to do household chores, allowing siblings to go to school. This is also a way for economically better-off households to enable their own children to go to school who then only marginally have to help out after school hours and in school holidays.

The 12-year-old Kumari is from a nearby village, but works for and lives with a family in Tawashree. She is the oldest daughter. Her parents have sent her out to work so her younger brothers can go to school. According to her, she is the only child in her village that does not go to school. She would like to go to school like her friends, but she has to earn money. Only her father knows how much money she makes.

The 12-year-old Chamar works for a Tamang-household in the village in Tawashree. He is from a village approximately two hours walking from where he works. He says that his parents are very poor, which is why he is always asked to work, so his younger siblings can go to school. First, he worked in his own village, but he decided to leave, as other children were always teasing him for being a labourer. He is from a Dalit-caste, which is why he eats and sleeps separately from the other members of the household for whom he works. Once in a while he receives some pocket money, but the salary goes to his father. “I would like to go to school like other children, but I do not want to go back to my own village.” He does all kinds of agricultural work. “I do not like

ploughing the land, because it is difficult and heavy work”. All the children in the Tamang-household are enrolled in school.

In a Basnet-household in Guthichaur there are four children: three sons and one daughter. The oldest two sons attend classes 9 and 10 in a neighbouring VDC. The daughter goes to school in Surkhet where she stays with relatives. The youngest son is only 4 years old. They have many goats and cows that need to be taken to the jungle every day for feeding. They do not require any of their sons to drop out of school. Every day two young girls from a poor BK (Dalit)-household take the cows to the jungle from 10 o'clock in the morning until 4 o'clock in the afternoon, and the father takes the goats. In the school-holidays their sons help out. The two BK-girls are not able to go to school. In return for their work they eat twice a day in the house of the Basnets. They hardly ever eat in their own house. Their father, who works in construction, sends their older brother to school. He is in class 3. He cannot afford the education of all his children, and has given preference to his son.

This allotment of labour thus stops some children from being able to go to school, whereas others are able to continue education and help with household chores whenever they can, which often leads to irregular attendance. The combination of work and school is not always an easy one, and can eventually lead to drop-out, especially at (lower) secondary level.

Santosh from Guthichaur was very talented when he was in school. But after passing class 6 he decided to drop out:

At home there were only my parents to look after the household and the animals. Father told me I could help out after school hours, but I did not want to do both. If I am studying, I would like to devote all my time to education, and do homework after school, but if I am expected to look after the cattle after school time, I rather drop out altogether, and so I did.

Often an unfortunate incident in the family can cause an increase in workload at home, and consequently to one or more children having to drop out of school. For example, sickness or death in the household results in a loss of a working (and often earning) member, which needs to be counterbalanced by sending one of the children to work, but also the caring of the patient adds to the workload around the house.

In a household in Jaynagar the oldest son dropped out when his father got ill. He was in class 2 at the time. Now he is 12 years old and works in construction in a neighbouring town. Their 10-year-old son attends class 1. Their oldest son would like to continue his education, but his parents feel that it is necessary for their son to work, because they have no field of their own, and no savings. However, they do not actually like their son to be working and living in another town, “because he is actually too young”.

In a Janajati household in Tawashree the two oldest sons had to drop out in class 7. Their father died, after which responsibility for the work on their land was left to them.

Due to father's illness in a Dalit-household in Rautahat both older sons had to drop out to earn money. Father tried to take a loan instead of taking his sons out of school, but the moneylender did not want to give money, since he has no property of his own. Now the older brothers are earning, which enables the youngest son to continue his education.

Other changes in the household's situation can also lead to drop-out. An often heard incident is when one or both of the parents marry someone else, which has a significant impact on the children from the first marriage. For example, Bhim Chhettri has lived and worked in an upper-caste household in Guthichaur for four months. His parental home is a 5-day-walk from Guthichaur. He went to school until class 4, but then his mother eloped with another man. Once his father married another woman, his stepmother told him to drop out of school. His father supported her and told him to go and find work. He was very angry when he had to drop out. Sometimes he thinks about his future: "I can have so many dreams, but they'll never be fulfilled". He receives food, lodging and 700 rupees per month in return for the household work he does, but he has to give all the money to his father's sister. When asked whether he likes his job, he replies: "It is not a matter of whether I like it or not, I have no other choice but to work".

Finally, financial loss, other than the fallout of an earning member due to illness or death, is encountered as a reason for drop-out. The 13-year-old Rambhu spends every day from 9 o'clock in the morning until sunset in the fields near his village in Dhangadhi to take care of their 22 cows. In crop-cutting seasons he also works with his parents on their land on which they grow sugarcane and potatoes. He has been out of school for four years. He dropped out in class 4. His older brother went to school until class 7. He had to drop out to go to Malaysia in order to earn money after a thief robbed the household of all their money. After his brother went to Malaysia their father told Rambhu to drop out of school and take care of the cows. "When I was 9, my parents told me that it is better not to go to school anymore". His younger sister is still going to school and is now in class 2.

A child's education can also be effected by having to perform work other than household chores. The final section of this paragraph deals with those children who are absent from the village for a few months because of labour elsewhere.

In Guthichaur, the children's temporary absences from the village cause irregularity in school attendance and even drop-out. Due to scarcity of food for both man and cattle, many families take their horses, cattle and other belongings and migrate to locations such as Surkhet and Dang, districts in the south of Nepal, for approximately 5 months per year. These families lead a nomadic life, which makes regular school attendance difficult, even though some of the children go to school in both places. Even though the school in Guthichaur is flexible with regard to enrolling these children, who often return after the registration period, the headmaster complains that it is difficult to teach these children since they are behind on the work, though interested to learn.

In May-June parents take their children to neighbouring Dolpa district to find the expensive herb called *Yarshagumba*. Some families are able to appoint others to take care of their tasks, so their own children are able to go to school. But these families allow their children to accompany them in finding herbs during the *Yarshagumba*-season. The son of a teacher in Guthichaur, who himself studies in class 10, explains that many children in the village are unable to go to school, since there

would not be enough family members to look after the cattle. He explains that they always managed by themselves, and otherwise they hired other people to help them. Some people got money in return and others food. He had always been able to go to school, just like his younger sister who studies in class 6. Only during the *Yarshagumba* season he is out of school to go into the jungle. He does not like it, but “if I do not go, how is it possible for me to afford school?”

The 12-year-old Teek Bahadur attends class 5, and is also absent from school during the *Yarshagumba* season. Together with his friends he collects 20-25 mushrooms per day. During this time he earns around 10,000 rupees. He gives this money to his father. From this money his father can buy stationary for him.

Temporary absence from school heavily affects the child’s performance. However, the children in the above cases do attempt to continue schooling when they return to the village. Others drop out from school in order to go abroad to contribute to the household’s income. In these cases it is not possible to combine work with school.

It is not always a parent’s decision to send the children away for work. An example is a Yadav-household from Jaynagar. The father, who is uneducated himself, put a lot of effort into ensuring a good education for both his sons. He even took out a loan. His younger son is currently studying at intermediate level (class 11). His oldest son, however, dropped out in class 9. He decided himself to end his schooling and ran away to Kathmandu where he is now working as a carpenter.

Work done by children (whether voluntarily or demanded by parents) indeed prevents them from attending school regularly, if at all. But there is nevertheless a general awareness that education can be beneficial for the children, which is proven by the fact that most households try to send at least one child to school. Also, most children who are found working during their teenage years have had at least a few years of education at primary level. It is thus crucial to retain these children in school, and prevent them from dropping out at an age at which they are old enough to be able to work, which differs per family but is generally around the age of ten.

3.2 What the child wants: the importance of its environment

A village or home atmosphere in which children are stimulated to go to school is fundamental for good attendance. For example, the 11-year-old Ajay is officially enrolled in class 2, but he only attends a few days per year. One morning, he is playing on the road with other children. He says that he has to look after their 3 buffaloes which is why he does not go to school today. Then he says: “I only like to go to school when my father sends me”. Ajay missed the exams for the same reason. He himself does not show any interest in going to school.

Parents, however, often take on a passive attitude. Once they have enrolled the children in school, they leave it up to their children to attend as they wish. In a particular Muslim household in Jaynagar, for example, there are six children: three sons, of whom the oldest is 15 and working in a bone-factory in Delhi, the second son is enrolled in class 1, and the youngest is only 2 years old. The oldest daughter is 12 and already married, but still living with her parents. The youngest two girls go to the Madrassah, because, the mother says, the other school is very far, and their daughters are very small: “My daughters are happy in the Madrassah, but if they say they prefer to go to the

government school, it is okay. It is not expensive to send them there. But now, they are not interested to go themselves.” Their oldest son passed class 3 at the government school. “We enrolled him in class 4, and bought everything for him. He already had the books and stationery, but instead he ran away to Delhi with friends who worked there. (...) As long as our sons like to study, we will enrol them in school.”

In some cases the parents have no other choice, but to depend on the child’s own will, as is illustrated by a family in Jaynagar: The 8-year-old Kumar is enrolled in class 1 of the government school. His father works in Punjab, and only spends 2 months per year in the village. His mother is at home with his younger brothers and sisters. She tells her son every morning to go to school, but he always comes back and plays around the house.

I get angry, but the school is far, and he does not want to walk there alone. If his friends are not going, he also stays home to play with them. I like to be strict and order him to go, but he does not listen to me. He only listens to his father. When he comes home from school and his father is here, he takes him all the way to the school himself. I cannot do the same, because I have small children at home to look after.

Peers are influential. If his friends would go to school everyday, Kumar would likely do the same. The environment in the village is thus very important: what do the neighbouring children do? It is because of this village environment, that Sura BK from Guthichaur sends his son to a school in Dolpa, where he lives with relatives: “the children here do not care about their studies; the environment here is just not good.” Another case that illustrates this is that of Pashpatti from Siraha. One morning he is getting ready to go with his father to help him with work in the brick kiln. He usually goes to a nearby private school, but today it is a holiday. He prefers to stay in the village to hang out with his friends, but his father insists on taking him to the brick kiln: “otherwise he only roams around with children who do not go to school, and he will lose interest in his education”.

When parents lack the persistence and determination to make sure that their children attend school daily, then all responsibility falls upon the child itself. Often children are absent from school, because they themselves are not interested; but the opposite can also be true. A child might be motivated by neighbouring children to go to school, despite a possible absence of encouragement from within its own household. An example is a household in Jaynagar with four daughters, of which the oldest three have never been to school. The father was planning on keeping the youngest at home too, but she decided herself to join her friends at school. She passed class 5, after which she got married.

3.3 The school: quality, accessibility, and community involvement

Ten years ago Jean Drèze and Haris Gazdar [Drèze & Sen 1996:82] already noted that quality of schooling is of significant importance to the decision making of parents in regards to bearing the expenses that come with educating their children. They argued that children have sufficient time before and after school hours to help out in the household. According to UCW-research the quality of education does not only increase school attendance, but also reduces involvement of children in work. It shows that when schools offer good quality education, parents are encouraged to send their children to school instead of sending them to work [Rosati & Rossi 2007:10]. In the context of Nepal,

Shanta Dixit states that “every malaise that the country is saddled with today harks back to the poor quality of schooling” [Dixit 2002:194]. She argues that education in Nepal only produces high school graduates “with the ability to read newspapers, but without the aptitude to think independently or pursue meaningful careers” [Dixit 2002:195].

Quality education is thus essential for high enrolment and attendance rates. The following paragraphs present the opinions of villagers about aspects of quality at the school available to them, and look at accessibility and community involvement, which affect community’s demand for schooling as well.

3.3.1 Quality

The number of teachers appointed to a school, and their performances, are important factors when assessing quality of education. An overall complaint from teachers and parents is that there are not sufficient teachers in the school to manage the high number of students that are enrolled. Chapter 1 already noted the large number of children within classes, especially in class 1. MOES-data shows that the pupil/teacher-ratio slightly increased over 2003-2005, reaching 40.8 at primary level, and 54.7 at lower secondary level in 2005. In practice, especially in smaller rural schools, one teacher can be responsible for two or three different classes, making it even more difficult for them to give proper attention to the individual students. During this fieldwork teachers claimed that they cannot handle the number of students, especially those in class 1. Due to its size, class 1 is frequently subdivided into smaller groups according to the knowledge of the individual child. This may explain why some children “do not remember” how many years they have been in class 1, but still do not know how to write. Especially in smaller schools with only two or three teachers, including the headmaster, other (administrative) duties required from the headmaster keep him from teaching, and thus result in 1 less teacher in the school. Schools also suffer from an inadequate number of female teachers. The female teacher/school-ratio of 1.1 at primary level, and 0.5 at secondary level, is deemed “unsatisfactory” by MOES [Government of Nepal 2006c:28-29]. In the schools in the village in Dumre and in Guthichaur, it is not the number of teachers that children and their parents complain about, but instead the absence of a female teacher:

If you compare the number of students enrolled in the school with the number of appointed teachers, then three teachers are enough. But we do need a female teacher. A lady is important, because for small children it is easier to connect with a lady. Now sometimes, children come home saying they are scared of the male teachers. (According to a father of school-going children in Dumre)

During a group discussion in Guthichaur, the children also indicated they would like to see a “Madam” being appointed in their school.

Due to the scarcity of properly educated and trained teachers in certain areas of Nepal, teachers are recruited throughout Nepal. Therefore, in remote mountain-VDCs, such as Guthichaur, there are schools in which half of the staff originates from Terai-districts. In Guthichaur, villagers are positive with regards to the recruitment of teachers from the Terai districts: “They have better qualifications and good teaching methods”, but for these teachers, it is difficult to live in this remote area far away from their families.

There is disagreement on whether teachers should be appointed in the area in which they live or whether they should be potentially recruited from elsewhere. In the Terai some villagers argue that they want teachers from outside their locality, because their involvement in local politics would give them too much protection, which is why they “do not care about teaching the children properly”. In Guthichaur respondents are positive about the teachers from the Terai, because of their qualifications as well as their commitment to teaching. In Guthichaur they give children tuition class after school hours, while the local teachers have their own family obligations and often drink *raksi*, which is seen as a bad example for their children by many parents. In the village in Dumre on the other hand, the villagers are positive about the local teachers, since they are committed to the school.

Another often-heard complaint is that the amount of time that teachers actually spend on teaching, and the methods they use, do not lead to sufficient learning. Communities complain that the teachers do not give adequate attention to the students, and do not inspire them to do their best in school, illustrated by the following quotes:

Most of the children go to school, but the teachers do not pay attention to them. Children only play, and they can leave the school compound whenever they like. There are no strict rules, no discipline in the school. Also when children fight with each other, teachers do not intervene. Sometimes some boys beat my daughter. Then she comes back home crying saying that the teachers do not care. Then she does not like to go back to school. (A father from a Dalit-household in Jaynagar)

Children complain that only half of the teachers are present. During break-time children usually come back home, because they are bored in the school, or because they are hungry. I do not send them back to school: if the teachers are not there, then why should the children be in school? (A father from another Dalit-household in Jaynagar)

Teachers only write things on the blackboard, but do not actually teach the children. When I went to school and asked the teachers why students do not learn anything, the teacher replied that it is only his duty to write on the blackboard. (A father from a Dalit-household in Siraha) Teachers only take attendance, and then go into the office to chat with each other. All children are then more interested to play than to study, but the teachers do not care. (His son)

Parents and students also complain that teachers fail to recognise differences between pupils. They claim that teachers only give attention to intelligent students, and fail to give sufficient assistance to students with learning disabilities. An old man from Guthichaur complains that teachers did not teach his son anything. “When he was in class 2 he still did not know how to read and write. I went to the school to complain, but the teachers only blamed my son for not being intelligent enough. I told them that if they teach ‘word by word’, my son will understand, but they were not interested to do so”. More people complained about the rote learning method. “They only teach by mouth, nothing practical. Only intelligent children can learn easily, but not all children are intelligent.

Because villagers are not satisfied with methods of teaching, many children are kept at home to do household chores and to look after animals instead”.

Therefore, recruitment of qualified teachers is crucial. Some respondents even wished that older teachers would resign to make place for “young energetic teachers” who use “modern teaching methods” with more practical assignments in which children are expected to actively participate. The latter could also be established by adopting effective teacher training programmes. The school in Guthichaur complained that the district education office in Jumla does not provide them with any teacher training when they have to adopt a new course. “We have to find out our own methods, while in Jumla-headquarters government teachers get this kind of facility”.

There is thus a desire to be able to provide quality education to children, and in fact, there are examples of successful efforts that should not be ignored. Extra tuition after school, for example, is regarded as a valuable (and necessary) addition to regular schooling. Many families have lost their confidence in the government school and believe that children learn more with tuition:

To send them to school is not sufficient. It is better to send them to tuition class, but that costs money. If teachers give class regularly, then it is not necessary for students to take tuition class. Only during the tuition sessions children learn properly. It is necessary for getting a school certificate that shows good marks. (A mother in a Rai-household in Siraha)

What the teacher teaches in school is not sufficient, because older children still do not know how to read and write their name. Tuition is most important, but many people cannot afford the 60 rupee-fee. There is only one man who wants to teach our children. Other people are hesitant. They are afraid that we refuse to work in their fields once we are educated. People here would do everything to keep the tuition-teacher to teach here in this basti, whether it is expensive or not. Through education, our lives can improve. (A head of a Dalit-household in Jaynagar)

What the children learn in school is not sufficient, but if they go to the teacher’s house in Manigaun⁸ after school hours, then they learn many things. (A father in a Chhetri-household in Guthichaur)

Tuition is popular due to the commitment of the teachers (government teachers or other educated members of the community), but also due to the length of the classes; they are usually only two hours per day, and are easily combined with the requirement to help out at home. However, costs are involved with tuition, which results in these classes not being available to all children. In Guthichaur, tuition sessions were, at the time of the research, given by the teachers originating from the Terai in exchange for food. More commonly, however, tuition teachers charge a monthly fee ranging from 30 to 80 rupees.

⁸ A locality in Guthichaur where a teacher recruited from the Terai lives and gives tuition

Initially, tuition was implemented as additional support for children with learning difficulties, and to help pupils study during exam time. However, tuition now appears to be developing into an education institute in its own right, since some children go to tuition class, but are not enrolled in school. A father in the Muslim community has two sons who go to tuition class, but who are not enrolled in school: "School takes a long time. Tuition class only takes one or two hours, which leaves enough time for them to do work. Who else will look after the animals if they have to go to school the whole day?" He sends his sons to tuition class "so they can at least acquire some general knowledge".

Tuition sessions seem to positively contribute to education in Nepal. However, it also seems to have a relatively negative consequence for school enrolment. Some families believe that if they cannot afford to send their children to tuition class, that there is no point in sending them to government school, as they believe that the children only learn during the tuition sessions: "The child will not develop if you only send him to school. Tuition is necessary. We cannot afford that, so it is better not to send our children to school at all".

The private school is generally seen as an institute that provides education of better quality. Many families would like to send their children there, but cannot afford the expenses. "In the private school parents have to spend a lot of money, which is why parents care a lot about quality in those schools" According to a government school teacher in Chainpur it is a misconception that the quality in private schools is better, "but in private schools teachers have to deal with a smaller number of students, so it is easier to maintain order in the classroom."

Whereas some people believe that government schools are good, because they are open to all children, others disagree. According to a father from the Muslim community in Jaynagar:

There is a huge difference between government and private schools. Those who have money can have good food and good education in private schools. There are always problems in the government school. In a private school education is business. The teacher's intention is to make money, so he has to teach properly. In the government school teachers are government officials who do not have to worry about their salary. In addition to their job in the government school they also have other jobs to make more money! Nobody checks if teachers are doing their job properly.

This woman from Dhangadhi concurs: "Teachers who do not receive their salary from the government have fear of losing their job, which is why they teach the students carefully (...) The quality of the government school here increased when there were two teachers appointed by the NGO".

Because the government school is free, it is rapidly associated with bad quality. In Jaynagar I was told that "Only in a private school they charge high monthly fees, so the quality of education is good there. In the government school it is not necessary to pay, but then you get education of bad quality".

Villagers thus complain about the teachers. The importance given to the tuition sessions illustrates the poor perception the community has of the school available to them. However, it is too simple to blame only the teachers for students not performing well in school. Irregular attendance of children and a home environment which is not conducive to learning are also important factors. According to

the 12-year-old Rakesh and his friends, who are all enrolled in lower secondary school and involved in a child club supported by a local CBO in Jaynagar:

We have always been regular in school, which is why we never failed any class. The government school in the village is okay, but when children are irregular attending school they are likely to fail class. It is necessary to come to school every day, otherwise you miss too much. In this village many children are not interested to go to school and only play around. And many parents order their children to take care of the younger children or to look after the animals.

Teachers note that children have no time to do their homework: “Once they go home, they do not care about their studies (...) Parents do not support their children in studies. We inform them that they should send the children to school everyday, but they always use the same excuses and keep the children at home.”

3.3.2 Accessibility

Another important school-related aspect is the accessibility of the school. In all researched villages there was a primary school available at walking distance, which was by many elderly villagers mentioned as a positive change compared to when they were young. However, physical distance, in combination with geographical features, is still given as a reason why younger children do not go to school. In Guthichaur, for example:

We do not like to send our small children to school, which is down in the valley. Maybe something happens on the way: maybe they fall down the hill, or drown in the river. When they are older we like to send the children to school, but we don't have the resources to send girls as well

Interestingly, while children in the hilly areas of Udayapur do not seem to have any problems with a 2 hour walk to reach the lower-secondary school, children in the Terai complain about having to walk to the other side of the village.

What affects the schools accessibility more than anything is Nepal's political instability. Nepal dealt with Maoist rebels for more than a decade. This had its consequences for education, making schools less accessible for the children as they increasingly feared travelling to and fro. In the village in Dumre, where the villagers often heard the rebels fighting with the Nepalese army in the surrounding hills that the children had to cross to reach the lower-secondary school, villagers said that “everyone was afraid of the Maoists, but many children continued to go to school. Parents were worried every day about whether their children would come back home alive or not.” In Jumla district, where the conflict originated, people believe that “if the rebels did not create problems in this village, then many children would go to school nowadays”. The Maoists had ways to recruit children and teachers, and thus they preferred to stay at home in relative safety. A father in Guthichaur narrates: “Many boys ran away to India. The Maoists beat them and forced children to join the party. They focused especially on the children in classes 6 and 7, because they are smarter. They came to the schools, and that is why many parents kept their children at home.” Children themselves were also scared, and lost interest in school. Moreover, the school was often closed

when teachers were forced to attend meetings organised by the Maoist, or when *bandhs* (closures) were announced. According to the headmaster in Guthichaur this affected the quality of education, “because we had to finish all the lessons in a short time before the exams started”. Regular *bandhs* meant children were unable to know when the school would be open or not, which led to even more absence and loss of interest. Plan Nepal [2006:23] reports in a study that political instability in Nepal has given disinterested and incapable students an excuse to stop attending school. Prolonging absence makes it eventually easier to drop out altogether. The situation has hardly improved since signing the peace agreement in November 2006. The education sector in Nepal continues to be affected by regular *bandhs* announced by various groups throughout Nepal, particularly in the Terai-region.

A third factor that affects the schools’ accessibility is discrimination, which occurs between students from upper and lower castes, and from richer and lower families. Caste-based discrimination also takes place within the classroom where teachers favour children from influential families and those belonging to their own level within society. CERID [2005:ix], for example, identifies upper-caste domination as a reason for children not going to school. In Guthichaur a young man complains about nagging among children: “in the school there are children who always dominate others. They look at the kind of clothes you wear, and then say: Go far away from us!” A father from a Basnet household agrees: “in the city schools children wear uniforms, but here uniforms are not compulsory and people can easily distinguish rich children from poor ones by the clothes they wear”. He adds that teachers support the children from rich families only. “Teachers are also from rich families. If a rich child is weak in education, then the teachers just pass him to the next class anyway”. A school environment in which there is a friendly atmosphere is very important to retain children in school. “When the child is being teased in school by other children, or scolded by the teachers, he will think: ‘I am happier with my goats!’ ”

According to a father from a Dalit household in Siraha they are scolded by rich families when they fetch water. That is why they have to walk to a well that is on the other side of the road. According to him this kind of caste-based discrimination affects the way in which the community is able to get involved in school-related matters.

3.3.3 Community involvement

It has been argued that community involvement is essential for a school to provide quality education, accessible to the whole community. Dixit [2002:196] argues: “Given the lack of motivation in the political structure, the only way to introduce quality into Nepal’s school education is through a bottom-up approach”. According to Dixit, parents have been kept from the management of their schools since the seventies. Within communities, however, the parents all want their children to get the best education possible. It is thus important to involve the community in school management. However, he continues, it is important that the government remains at hand to provide support and guide the system, otherwise there is the danger that the government uses community responsibility as an excuse to unload its responsibilities. Research conducted by CERID also shows that community involvement with the school management increases a community’s attachment to the school [CERID 2005:24]. Current policy of Nepal’s government is that every school should have formed a School Management Committee (SMC), which is responsible for the running of the school [Government of Nepal 2006a:33].

However, establishing real participation of all members of the community, including members of the marginalised and excluded groups, requires more than a polite invitation. Government data shows that especially female and Dalit representation in SMCs is low [Government of Nepal 2006a:33]. Cornwall and Coelho [2007:8] rightly point out that “acquiring the means to participate equally demands processes of popular education and mobilisation that can enhance the skills and confidence of marginalised and excluded groups, enabling them to enter and engage in participatory arenas.”

According to school information, SMCs were formed at all visited schools. In general, however, there seems to be a weak link between parents and the teachers at the school. Since the majority of the parents have never been to school themselves there is no awareness of what happens in the school or, in some cases, who the teachers are who are responsible for their children during school hours.

In all villages the SMC is composed of the headmaster, another school-related individual, and six parents. Discussions are held once a month and revolve around the development of the school, and the achievements of the students. In Guthichaur a teacher informed me about the existence of a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), which was reportedly chaired by the headmaster and has 21 members, including teachers, parents and students who passed class 5.

In most sampled villages, however, decision-making is in reality in the hands of the headmaster only, and SMCs have been founded because of enforcement only, rather than the willingness of the school to increase parental involvement. Cornwall and Coelho [2007:13] indicate that entering a participatory arena might be intimidating for people from marginalised groups who have come to expect discrimination and exclusion. At the same time, they argue, the established powerful elite may view their participation irrelevant, chaotic, and disruptive. A resident from Jaynagar recounts that the previous SMC-president was a father from a Dalit-caste. “The headmaster on the other hand is a powerful man, and he neither cared about the SMC nor its president”. He points out that “the educated elite people of the village are not sincerely interested in increasing people’s participation”. One of the teachers here points out that there is no sound communication between teachers and parents in the village, because of the headmaster who has been posted at the school for 33 years. “It is too long. He is implementing old ways of educating only. There is no space for any changes. According to him it is because of this lack of communication between teachers and families, that many parents tend to talk about the teachers in a negative sense.”

In the village in Dumre the situation is slightly different. Here, the community was involved with the establishment of the school and has remained attached ever since. Before the school was recognised by the government, villagers were expected to financially contribute to be able to open the school. An important player here is the school *adachai* (government representative), who functions as a link between the school and other villagers. This post is currently held by a man from the Newar-caste who passed class 10. He was preceded by a man from the Tamang-caste. His duties are, among others, to monitor the teachers and to see whether they attend and perform regularly. He is a member of the SMC, and so too are the headmaster and five parents, of whom one is a mother, representing the village’s society. There are regular meetings called by the school *adachai*, which are announced by letters and by word of mouth. They are open to all, but the number of people present appears to be dependent on the season. Parents (usually only the fathers) are interested in attending these meetings, but some are unable to participate due to work at home. The teachers are local, and have a good understanding with the parents. This is clarified by the fact

that this is a small community, where members of middle and high castes live peacefully with each other. There is strong communal sense, where caste-based discrimination seems non-existent. The teachers belong to this same community, which explains the good relationship that parents have with them.

In the other sampled villages, many villagers claimed to have never heard of a committee, such as a SMC or PTA, existing in their village. It seemed that in reality, there is no real opportunity for the majority of the community to voice their complaints, which is illustrated by the following quotes:

In the past we complained about the teachers to the *Adachai*. Teachers only order the students to read and write. Then they leave the class to chat with other teachers. When there is a meeting the teachers only invite the important people, and not regular villagers. So it is very difficult for us to influence the quality. (Head of Roka-household in Guthichaur)

When I want to talk to teachers about quality, they reply: “what do you know about school, you are uneducated!” We have no power. What can we do? (Head of Dalit-household in Jaynagar)

There is a committee for parents and teachers, but only friends of the teachers are selected to participate. Only rich people can raise their voices. If others complain, nobody listens. (Mother of Rai-household in Siraha)

Caste is still a major issue here. Many people are dominating others. The government has provided citizens the right to check the school. But in reality, when villagers want to complain, the teachers make a trap. So villagers are afraid to say something. There is no good bond between the community and the school, which is why some parents are reluctant to send their children there. (Head of Dalit-household in Jaynagar)

The last respondent above is afraid that local politics increase the distance between school and the majority of the local community [See also: Plan Nepal 2006:17]:

Sometimes teachers are absent, and there are not enough adults to look after our children. But we cannot say anything, because all teachers are connected with politicians, who will make a case against us. (Mother in a Yadav-household in Jaynagar)

There would be more children in school, if the government starts to appoint teachers who are intelligent and who are not connected with any political party. (head of Muslim household in Jaynagar)

Who the teachers are, and where they have come from evidently has consequences for the community’s involvement with the school. Locally recruited teachers are part of the community, and are thus likely to have links with the majority of other community members. A father of a Magar-household, who sends his children to school in the village in Dumre, explains: “the teachers

attend regularly and teach well. If they do not do their work properly, we can easily complain to them, because they all belong to the same community.”

Many respondents indeed indicated to know the teachers, but school-related issues are hardly on the agenda when parents and teachers meet coincidentally in the village:

Of course I know the teachers. I meet them in the market every week. (...) We never talk about school. (Head of Muslim household in Siraha)

I walk past the school when I am on my way to the market to supply my shop. I never go in to see what happens or to talk to the teachers. I talk with teachers when I meet them in the village, but never about school. (Shopkeeper and father of school-going children in Jaynagar)

With teachers who are recruited from regions far away from the village, the relationship with parents is not always self-evident:

Some teachers come from very far away. I know the faces of the teachers, but I do not know their names. (Mother in a Basnet-household from Guthichaur)

Caste-based domination influences retention of children from certain groups within society, and this caste-based favouritism has an impact on community involvement as well. Social class and caste affects how deep relations go. Even in schools where only locally recruited teachers are appointed, some villagers indicated to have no relation with the teachers at all. A member of a Dalit-community in Dhangadhi explains: “parents here do not know who the teachers are. They never visit this part of the village”.

According to Dixit [2002:203], the fact that the community is not involved in the recruitment of teachers leads to distancing the community from the school:

The evaluation of teachers also happens completely outside the community context, and generally through written examinations. Without a proper system of rewards and disincentives to make teachers accountable to the community they serve, the mistrust between the two is bound to run deep.

The school’s accessibility influences community’s involvement with the school as well. The location of the school compared to the area where parents spend their day (in the field/near the home) influences the contact between parents, the school and the teachers. With so many communities living in one VDC, attention should also be given to the locality in which the school is situated. In Jaynagar the school is located in a “Hindu-area” and a Madrassah is found in the “Muslim-area”; the majority of Muslim households have a closer link with the latter than with the government primary school.

Plan Nepal [2006:17] blames centralised school management for the exclusion of local communities from school-related processes. In their studies they encountered situations in which teachers accuse parents of being “apathetic towards school and child’s studies”, whereas parents blame teachers for not being committed to teaching and properly managing the schools. The District Education

Office in Jumla explains that every school in the district may have a SMC and PTA, but that often only the headmaster and *adachai* are actively involved, with parents and other members of the community remaining passive.

What Mahmud [In: Cornwall & Coelho 2007:58] rightly points out is that poverty holds back participation. “Poor people can spare little time and effort for actions that do not have direct and immediate relevance for their livelihoods.” In addition, Mahmud argues, “poverty also strengthens the hand of the powerful through the real threat of withdrawal of support, and hence limits the spaces in which poor people are able to participate.”

Increasing a community’s involvement is thus not only a matter of inviting members of marginalised and excluded groups to participate, but also to make them aware of their right to do so, as well as creating a genuine space for them to contribute during meetings. More research is required on how to create effective mechanisms of participation, since community involvement is crucial for establishing quality education and involving as many children as possible in the schools. Based on observations in the villages, real community involvement, where the whole community is able to raise their voice when displeased with school matters, still has a long way to go.

3.4 Conclusion

Nowadays the majority of children are at some point enrolled in school, and enrolment numbers in class 1 are often high. The problem is retention, indicated by the high rate of irregular attendance and drop-out in primary schools in Nepal. Although it is up to the caregivers whether to enrol a child at a young age, it is not always a parental decision for a child to drop out. It might well be the child’s own decision. Thus, a child-friendly school environment, as well as a home- and village environment conducive to learning is essential. Once a child becomes indifferent towards education or becomes uncomfortable within the school environment (possibly due to the behaviour and attitude of their peers), it is in most cases a lost battle.

There are a number of factors that influence parents’ assessment of the value of education and their decision to invest in schooling for their children. Poverty is often cited as the main reason for parents to not send their children to school. However, accepting the fact that there are indeed some families who are unable to afford a child’s education due to poverty-related reasons, research has shown that poverty is not solely to blame for poor attendance and retention; especially in the light of significant efforts that have resulted in Nepalese primary education becoming increasingly affordable to even the poorest segments of society.

Poor retention can be better explained by, for example, poor relevancy of the education. Some parents choose to not invest in their children’s education if the syllabus is perceived as irrelevant to their children’s future needs, especially when weighed against other practicalities, such as household tasks. The amount of help required at home is often increased by a family tragedy like a death or illness. In some cases the combination of school and work proves to be exhaustive and leads to poor attendance and even drop-out. Some children deal with heavier household responsibilities, and are required to travel outside their village (or even abroad) to contribute to the household income.

This Chapter also introduced the factors quality, accessibility and community involvement. If the quality of the school does not live up to the expectations of the family, children are likely to be

kept at home to do more worthwhile activities. Accessibility is largely determined by physical determinants, but also by social variables. Caste-based discrimination and the ongoing political instability both discourage many from attending school regularly, if at all. Finally, community involvement is essential for quality and relevance of the education, and in turn high enrolment and good attendance. However, centralised management combined with poor accessibility limits such involvement, and so in most villages decision-making power is controlled by the powerful few.

Ultimately, the required investment of time and money needs to live up to expectations; they are unfortunately not often met in the case of many children, especially girls and Muslim children. The next chapter outlines communities' perceptions of education with regards to these two groups.



A crowded classroom in Siraha

Chapter 4

The Case of Girls and Muslim Children

This chapter highlights certain issues that are exclusively applicable to these groups, and by doing so aims to deepen the understanding of the problems related to involving these children in regular primary education.

4.1 The girl child

The 9-year-old Anita Yadav from Dhangadhi does not go to school. “My father says that it is not necessary to go to school”. She takes care of siblings, and cooks food. She would like to go to school though, and does not like it that her father does not allow her.

Over the past years Nepal has seen a vast increase in the number of girls going to school, and government data indicates that Nepal’s NER for girls at primary level was 83.4 in 2005. However, MOES school enrolment data shows that the enrolment of girls still lies below that of boys. Table 14 shows that in Siraha only 43% of the total number of enrolled children at primary level are girls. In Rautahat and in Jumla this percentage is only 39.3 and 38.9 respectively. In Udayapur the girls actually outnumber the boys with 51.2%. At lower secondary level, however, the percentage of girls in all districts falls below the share of boys, and at secondary level the share of enrolled girls further decreases.

Table 14: Percentage of girls from total student enrolment, by level of education (2005)

	Primary	Lower Secondary	Secondary
Nepal	47.4	45.7	45.7
Udayapur	51.2	47.8	46.7
Eastern Hills	49.6	49.2	49.2
Siraha	43	35.4	34.5
Eastern Terai	47.6	45.7	46.9
Rautahat	39.3	33.9	31.5
Central Terai	42.5	40.1	38.6
Jumla	38.9	28.5	24.9
Mid Western Mountain	40.8	28.2	25.6

Source: [Government of Nepal 2006c:Annex IIB]

Especially girls from lower-income groups, and from marginalised and deprived groups such as Dalits, remain deprived of education [CERID 2006:2]. According to the government of Nepal it is

mainly Dalit-girls who are out of school in all three levels of education, and attributes this to the costs of schooling [Government of Nepal 2006c:9].

Numerous incentives by government and (I)NGOs, have made primary level education increasingly affordable. Costs for primary level education have become relatively low, but have not been expunged entirely. In cases where financial resources are limited, education-related costs compel families to choose which child should go to school, and who will be kept at home. In these cases families mostly opt to send their boys to school. Likewise, girls are most likely to be taken out of school first when costs of schooling increase as the children progress to higher grades. An example of this is a 15-year-old girl from a Magar household in Dumre. She went to school until class 3, and was then taken out of school because her family could not afford the schooling of all their children anymore. Her older sister was also taken out of school in class 3, and sent to nearby Bahunitar to work in a household in return for shelter and food. Their brothers were given the opportunity to complete primary school.

Even when girls are enrolled in school, households still pay more attention to the enrolment of their sons. A teacher in Dhangadhi explains:

In many families boys are sent to school, sometimes even a private school, and everything is provided for them. Girls however are sent to the government school without shoes, bags, or pens. The girls say that parents do not want to buy all these things for them and that they provide only for their brothers.

In rural Nepal it is not common for women to get a job outside the household or village. Generally, the future for girls is defined by their roles as mothers, housewives, daughter-in-laws, and extra helpers for on the fields. And thus people do not generally consider education a relevant investment for girls.

There are, however, people who do believe that education will benefit girls after marriage. A father from Jaynagar thinks that girls should go to school at least a few years before they get married: "It is good to give them a little bit of knowledge to prepare them for married life". The 17-year-old Sumitra from Dumre who currently studies at intermediate level (I.ed) argues that women who have gone to school know how to take care of their children; they value education and thus send their children to school. "Uneducated people don't know properly how to take care of their children". A grandfather from Dumre complains that uneducated women are always bad-mouthing others and they have only knowledge about small, trivial things. A father from a Dalit-household in Jaynagar argues that many people make a distinction between boys and girls, especially in the villages, "but they are the same and deserve the same love, same care, and same clothes." He believes that they should get equal chances at school, because education is important for both boys and girls. "When a girl is educated, she understands how to take care of babies, when to feed them, and that she has to send children to school everyday. Uneducated women do not have this kind of concept". A schoolteacher in Tawashree argues that girls should certainly get education: "when girls are educated, they can also fight for their rights".

General knowledge obtained during primary school also helps girls in their married life. A mother from a Dalit-household in Dhangadhi explains that "you can also be happy without education, but if a girl went to school, she knows how to manage the household and how to manage her time. Maybe

she is even able to get a job, which she can combine with her household work". A woman from a Dalit caste in Jaynagar complains that she never got the opportunity to learn how to read or write. She always has to ask for help when receiving a letter, or when she has to count something. A grandmother of two, both of whom attend the ECCD-centre and class 1 in Jaynagar, says that it is nice that children of poor families can nowadays go to school. She is very happy that her grandchildren are in school. She says that her life was difficult after marriage, being uneducated and having to do so many household tasks. Now her granddaughters are able to get an education. She thinks that when they are uneducated they can only do physical work, which is dangerous. If they finish school, they might even be able to get a job. A father in Jaynagar adds that education raises the status of women within society.

Also, many boys who currently attend school say that they would like to marry a girl who is educated. According to Kumar and Mohan from Guthichaur, for example, there are 75 boys and only 15 girls in class 10. They don't know why there are so few girls. They both indicated that they want to marry an educated girl in the future, because she will be able to read letters, and will not be dependent on them. Also in Jaynagar a few boys indicated the wish to marry an educated girl, so "we will be able to understand each other better, she will know how to love, and how to take care of the children, and the entire household".

More and more people are aware that education is good for both sons and daughters, and the figures above have shown that many girls are nowadays sent to school, at least for a few years at primary level. The older the girl becomes, however, the less likely it will be for her to continue her education. A young, recently married and educated man from Guthichaur points out that people from his village give priority to their sons: "it would be nice if girls would also be able to go to school until class 10, but usually they have to get married after class 5 or 6.

Marriage remains a major obstacle for girls to be able to continue their education, and is the reason why priority is given to sending sons to school. In rural Nepal it is common that boys remain in the parents' household, while girls go to their husband's house after marriage. Girls are expected to one day belong to another household, and thus families see little value in investing in them. A father in a Muslim household in Jaynagar explains that people have to make a choice: "education is important for both boys and girls, but if parents can only afford the education of one person, then it is more important for boys, because girls will leave the household after they get married". A father from Guthichaur agrees with him: "girls do not need to go to school for many years, because they will get married once they are 12-14 years old." He points out that even educated girls become housewives after they get married. An educated SMC-member from Dumre thinks that education is only necessary for girls until class 5. He does not have the money to send them until class 10 as well: "Everyone has equal rights, but my daughter will go to her *sasural* (husband's house)." The mother in a *Dalit*-household in Guthichaur wonders whether it is useful to send her daughters to primary school: "Even if girls go to school, they will not be able to finish it, since they have to work in their husband's house after marriage".

Some people do not believe education can be relevant for girls whatsoever. A father from a Shah-household in Jaynagar is not interested in sending his daughters to school, even though his daughters asked him to do so: "Education is not important for girls, but only for boys. My daughters will go to their husband's house, where the husband takes care of everything. My son on the other hand stays with me". The prospect of married life is reason enough for some people to not send

their daughters to school at all; others choose to enrol them for a few years of primary school only. A mother in a Tamang-household from Dumre went to school until class 7. She was encouraged by her mother to do so. Now she is married. She is happy that she was able to go to school, even though she now works only within the household. She feels that “it was not necessary for me to go to school.” A milk seller from Jaynagar, sent his girls to the Madrassah only, because “there are no benefits for us if we send girls to government school, because after their marriage they are going to their husband’s house”.

Instead of sending girls to school the tradition has been to keep girls at home to perform household work. Chores such as cutting grass for animals, cooking food, cleaning utensils, and cleaning the house are expected to be done by female members of the household. A young boy from Dumre comments: “women have to work harder than men. It is Nepali culture. It is not a good thing, but we have no power to change this.” The 14-year-old Maya BK from Guthichaur never went to school, because her parents wanted her to do household work. A neighbouring mother comments: “when girls are old enough to go to school, their parents already have smaller children, and they have to take care of their younger siblings and cannot go to school”. She says that the mothers are busy with other household chores and work in the fields, which is why they need help from their daughters.

Suntali is 6 years old, and oldest daughter of a Basnet household in Guthichaur. She helps her mother remove weeds in the field. Her mother would like to send Suntali to school, but there is nobody else in the household who could help her. She explains that daughters have to do household chores, and sons can go to school. She is also afraid that if she sends Suntali to school, that she will become lazy, because the school does not allow enough time for them to help out in the household as well. She claims that Suntali could go to school if the school hours were not from 10 until 4, but shorter. In that case she could take care of her younger siblings after school-time.

A grandmother in a Kumhar household in Jaynagar, where the parents only encourage the youngest of four daughters to go to class 1, has the opinion that “school is only meant for boys, while girls need to cut grass for the animals”. According to her it is okay for very young girls to study, “like the young Sumitra who is in class 1, because she cannot perform any work anyway. Anyhow, her older sisters can cut the grass!”

Other households are more conscious about dividing the labour among their girls, allowing a few of them to go to school. In a household in Guthichaur 10-year-old Geeta does not go to school, but her younger sisters and older brother do. Her older sister is paralysed and needs special care, which increases her mother’s workload at home. Geeta would like to go to school, especially when she sees other girls of her age who are allowed to go. She knows that it is not possible; she knows that she must help her mother in the household so that her siblings can go to school. Her father admits that they have only realised the value of sending girls to school since a few years. “The knowledge comes from seeing other families where educated girls get jobs as a teacher”.

This last point is interesting, since there is still, unfortunately, a lack of examples of educated girls who could inspire parents to send their daughters to school. The rapid increase in girls’ enrolment is a recent trend. In rural areas most adult women are still uneducated and the first girls are only now completing their SLC-exams, which is promising for the future. However, a young man from Guthichaur illustrates that there is only one girl in the entire VDC who passed her SLC; she is now

married and a housewife like many others. A mother from Siraha complains that the main problem lies in the lack of intermingling between educated and uneducated women:

Women here have no general knowledge. Most of them are uneducated. That is why there is no development in this village. Women do not know how to save money, or how to bring up their children. Some women here are educated and they know, but once they have a job as a teacher they do not look after the uneducated women of their village anymore.

Research [For example: CERID 2006:33] has indicated that female teachers have a positive influence on the achievements of girls in school. Female teachers serve as role models for girls as well as their parents, and the latter feel more secure sending their younger children to school. But there are hardly any female teachers appointed in the schools in the sampled villages. The government does have a number of policies aimed at increasing the number of recruited female teachers. For example, in primary schools, one out of every three teachers should be female; schools with more than four teachers should have at least two female teachers, and schools with more than seven teachers should have at least three female teachers. In order to promote recruitment, primary schools, where more than half of the teachers are female, can get an additional stipend [CERID 2006:31-32]. However, presently only 25% of all teachers at primary level are female. At lower secondary and secondary level the share of female teachers is only 12% and 7% respectively [Government of Nepal 2005:17]. In May 2007 a newspaper reported that 11,000 schools in Nepal currently lack female teachers altogether (People's Daily Online, May 20, 2007).

4.2 Muslim children

The previous paragraph indicated that there still needs to be a focus on including girls in school, especially once the girl reaches a particular age at which she is kept at home for household chores, or gets married. Muslim Children also need special attention. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, 4.2% of Nepal's population is Muslim. In Jaynagar half of the population consists of Muslim communities, and many of the children from these communities, both boys and girls, are out of school.

Since the early 1960s there has been a Madrassah in Jaynagar, located in the middle of Muslim Tola. While there is a substantial number of Madrassahs throughout the Terai region, they are not recognised as official institutions of primary education by the government of Nepal. They are run by (local) religious leaders and financially supported by the Muslim community. In Jaynagar the Muslim households are required to pay 5% tax to the Madrassah from which teachers' salaries and food is paid. The Madrassah offers a curriculum that mainly focuses on the Muslim religion; subjects include the Quran, Arabic, Urdu, Hindi, and Islamic code of conduct. There is a little attention given to subjects such as math and Nepali.

The Madrassah is totally free, which makes it a more appealing institute for many households than the government school, which is located in an area further from the Muslim community. The primary school is free of charge until class 5, but requires the children to buy pens and notebooks; the Madrassah is free and provides the children with food as well.

Many households thus prefer to send their children to the Madrassah (there are approximately 250 children enrolled in the Jaynagar Madrassah). This is primarily due to the school curriculum, as one parent explains: “In the Madrassah children study about religion, which they do not do in school. For the future the government school is more important, because only after government school people can find a job, but first children have to learn about their religion.” A young Muslim teacher in the government school agrees: “Of course, once I have daughters I will send them to the government school, but before that they will have to go to the Madrassah to learn about the values of our religion and culture. This is most important!”

Thus, because the Madrassah focuses on teaching the customs and rules of Islamic culture and tradition, it is by many considered essential for their children’s development. However, because Madrassah-education does not prepare children for jobs, some parents decide to send their sons to the government school instead: “For boys government school is more important, but girls should go to the Madrassah”. Others, however, see more benefit in the Madrassah: “Even for boys who finished government school it is very difficult to find a job. After the Madrassah it is not possible to get a job in Nepal, but at least the children learn about our culture”.

According to a study undertaken by CERID [2004] more girls than boys are enrolled in Madrassahs. From conversations with households in Jaynagar it appeared that religious education is considered essential, especially for girls, which is demonstrated by the following quotes:

Religious education is most important for girls, because they have to take care of the children and run the household. In the government school there is no attention given to Muslim culture.

In our tradition we give first priority to the customs and rules of our own culture. In Muslim society girls have to learn about these rules and regulations. After that they are ready to get married.

Just like in some Hindu and Buddhist families, Muslim families are not accustomed to send their daughters to school and would send their boys to the government school before they would consider sending their girls:

My son can get a job after education, which is why he goes to school. There will be no benefits from sending my daughters to the government school, because after marriage they will go to their husband’s house. They are going to the Madrassah, because they have to learn about our religion.

In our culture girls are not allowed to leave the village in order to earn money. We have the culture of *purdah*⁹. Instead of to the government school, our girls are sent to the Madrassah, where they learn about the rules and traditions of our own religion and culture.

⁹ Practice of covering or secluding women from public spaces

The last quote above came from the Maulvi, who also commented on the early age at which girls are married. He does not agree with the practice of early marriage, and tries to convince the parents likewise, but, he says: "It is difficult, because when a girl marries young, the parents have to pay little or no dowry. Moreover, when a girl is 15 she is already mature and it becomes very difficult to find a suitable husband for her." Another worry in the Muslim community is the difficulty with finding a husband who is equally or better educated than their daughters, which is why many parents are reluctant to give their daughters too much education or to send them to school at all.

As is true in many families, here also the motivation of the child plays a role. The 9-year-old Foad, for example, is enrolled in class 1 in the government school. Before this he went to the Madrassah for one year, during which he also received tuition, because he wanted to learn "what they learn in school." He then decided that he wanted to go to the government school. His younger brothers are still in the Madrassah. He knows simple mathematics and the Nepali ABC (Ka-Kha-Ga-Gha). He does not go to school every day. On days that he is absent from school he plays with friends and helps his parents with cutting wood and bringing water. After his studies he wants to be "a tailor-master". He thinks he will leave school after class 4. A 21-year-old teacher in the government school says that his sisters are also going to the Madrassah, because they want to go there themselves. "Their friends are all going to the Madrassah, which is why they wanted to go there as well instead of the government school, where none of their friends are studying".

Thus, many parents opt to send their children to the Madrassah instead of the government school. This has to do with the relevance of the curriculum, but also with the location of the school. Whereas the government school is located at least one kilometre from their households in a Hindu-area, the Madrassah is located near their homes.

Many children in the Muslim community, both boys and girls, neither go to the government school, nor to the Madrassah. They have never been to school, or were taken out of school at an age at which they were able to work. Girls are mainly engaged in household work, while boys are expected to contribute to the household's income. They help out in the field during the season, earning about 50rs per day, but they are also largely involved in wage work. CERID research has shown that a large number of out-of-school boys are engaged in wage earning [CERID 2004:37].

In Jaynagar many young boys go to India for a few months per year to work in Mumbai, Delhi or Punjab in the garment industry. According to a Maulvi, parents send their boys not only out of necessity, but also because parents want to accumulate money. Once they see that children in other families are making money, they want to send their own child as well. A father in the community agrees, and puts it very simply: "to send a child to Delhi means earning, while sending him to school means spending." However, it is not always the parents' decision. Ajmat and his brother (18 and 16 years old) both work in a bangles factory in Delhi. They went to school until class 3, after which they dropped out, which was approximately five years ago. They wanted to go to Delhi, just like their neighbours and friends were doing. What follows are two stories to illustrate the flow of boys to Delhi to earn money:

Jalaluddin is 12 years old. He has five sisters and one 5-year-old brother who is in class 1. Jalaluddin dropped out in class 1, when his parents decided that he had to work. When he was nine he went to Delhi. First he went to Bombay for 19 months, after which he went twice to Delhi for eight months. In Bombay he was doing embroidery

work. In Delhi he was working in a bone factory where they make bangles. He went there together with a friend who is in his twenties. In Delhi he just completed his training period, which means that so far he has not made any money. When he goes back to Delhi he will work in the same factory, otherwise he will have to complete another training session without making money. It is heavy and risky work, and first he was scared, but slowly he got used to it. He regrets that he was not able to finish primary school, and hopes that his younger brother will go to school at least until class 5.

The 15-year-old Saddam works in the bone-factory as well. He was there for one year, and has been back for two months. He earned 2000 Indian rupees, but half of the amount he already had to spend in Delhi on living expenses and transportation. The rest he had to give to his parents. Now he does not want to go to India anymore. Instead, he learns some tailoring skills in the village, after which he plans to go to Kathmandu to find work in the garment industry. He dropped out in class 5, and has no interest to go back to school anymore. "Most educated boys are jobless. It is better to have knowledge about something. I want to become a tailor, because I will earn more money with that".

4.3 Conclusion

Enrolment levels of girls and Muslim children in particular are still below those of other groups. In Nepal the gender gap in school enrolment has declined, but still exists, and increases as children get older. Households give priority to sending their sons to school, especially in the case of financial shortage. Girls are then kept at home to do household chores. Although more and more people realise that education can also be relevant for girls, the trend to send girls to school is a relatively new one. Girls have always been expected to do household chores, and expectations haven't changed much. Marriage remains a major obstacle. People prefer not to invest in a girl's education because of the prospective of her leaving the household after marriage. Families do think about the division of labour among their offspring allowing at least a few children to go to school. It would be helpful if there were more examples of educated girls. Qualified and committed female teachers in the schools would have a positive effect on the enrolment and retention of girls in school.

Especially in the Muslim community visited in Jaynagar people are not in the habit of sending their girls to the government school. Here girls are not sent to school at all, or they attend the Madrassah instead. The Madrassah is more attractive to a large number of households, because of its location, but in particular because it teaches children the Quran, and the norms and values of the Muslim culture. This is perceived as more relevant than the government school, especially for girls. Boys from this community are sent to the government school, because of the job prospective. The boys, however, tend to drop out of school once they are in their early teens and able to go to India for labour work. Because the issues of child labour and marriage come into the picture when a child reaches its early teens, there is thus an urgent need to think about ways to retain these children in school especially at the higher levels of primary- and (lower-) secondary school.

Conclusion

This report is based on anthropological fieldwork carried out in four districts in Nepal. The purpose of this research project was to get insight into how the household and village level perception of the relevance and quality of education, in interaction with other economic and cultural factors, lead to non-enrolment, non-attendance and/or drop-out. During the fieldwork the focus was on the views from below, and most interviews were held with children, their parents and other members of the community.

Nepal has seen an increase in enrolment rates for both boys and girls at primary level. The main problems of the primary education system in Nepal is that children do not attend regularly, that they are often required to repeat classes, especially in the first grades, and that the dropout rate is high.

Research was carried out in villages where primary education was available. In some villages lower secondary schools were present as well. One of these schools also offered education until class 10. In the other villages children had to walk some distance in order to reach the nearest school after they passed class 5. In the sampled villages the number of students in class 1 was relatively high compared to advanced classes, and in general there were more boys than girls enrolled in the schools. Teachers at all schools mentioned the irregular attendance of children, especially during labour-intensive seasons.

Through NGO- and government awareness campaigns and incentives an increasing number of households have found their way to the education system, including those communities who had always been alienated from schools before. Nowadays people have certain ideas about why and how education is relevant for their children's daily lives. This is reflected in the trend that most households enrol at least one or two of their children in school.

An important point that cropped up in discussions with the community on the benefits of education is that schooling is seen as an opportunity to improve their lives. Education, it is argued, benefits the development of the character and personality of a child, but also the community and the nation as a whole. It gives people an idea of the world surrounding them, it empowers people, and enables them to become independent of others.

Other economic justifications arise as well. People hope that children will be able to create a different way of life through schooling and by doing so escape the cycle of poverty, especially when traditional occupations disappear. Children themselves complain about the hard work their parents are doing as farmers or as labourers, and they hope to be able to lead a different life.

However, the majority of households are not able to keep their children at school beyond primary level, and many children have dropped out before even reaching class 5. This, along with the complexity of finding jobs in Nepal, makes a bright prospective unrealistic.

There are still many households who feel that the possible benefits of schooling do not weigh up against the investment which education requires. There are a variety of factors that keep children out of school. One is that children are expected to help out with household-related activities. For

boys this usually means taking the cattle out for grazing and some light work in the field. For girls this includes cleaning, cooking, caring for siblings and cutting grass for the animals. Nowadays, many households manage the tasks in such a way that at least some children are able to go to school. After school-time, these school-going children are also expected to help out. The issue of work starts to interfere with schooling especially once the child reaches the age of 9 or 10, when he/she is able to help out significantly.

At this age school-going children have received a few years of schooling and obtained some basic literacy and numeracy skills. They have also reached an age at which they are able to do other kinds of work and the danger of getting involved in child labour arises. It is also in the higher grades of primary level that the gender gap widens.

In many rural communities the trend to send girls to school is relatively new. Their future is defined by their role as a wife and a mother, who runs and takes care of a household. Because of this fact and the required tasks at home, parents are less eager to invest in their daughters' education as opposed to that of their sons. The fact that there are only few examples of educated women in rural communities does not help to narrow the existing gender gap.

Especially in Muslim communities girls are not given an education at all, or are sent to the Madrassah instead. The Madrassah is considered to be more relevant for girls, as it teaches them the basic values of the Islam. Because it is not possible in Nepal to pursue a career in Islamic education, some families opt to send their boys to the government school, in some cases in combination with going to the Madrassah. Many families, however, remain reluctant to send their children to the government school when it is located far away from their homes, and in a different community in the village.

The school itself needs to be accessible for all, in terms of its location and of its costs. Government and NGOs aim to make primary level education affordable for all, and scholarships and other incentives seem successful in doing so. However, direct costs of schooling continue to pose an obstacle at lower secondary level and higher, which is when school fees dramatically increase. At primary level costs also remain to be a hindrance, especially when the quality of the local government school fails to meet the expectations of villagers and they therefore choose to provide their children with tuition in addition to school, or sometimes even instead of school. This is important to bear in mind, since parents expect quick returns from their investment of both time and money.

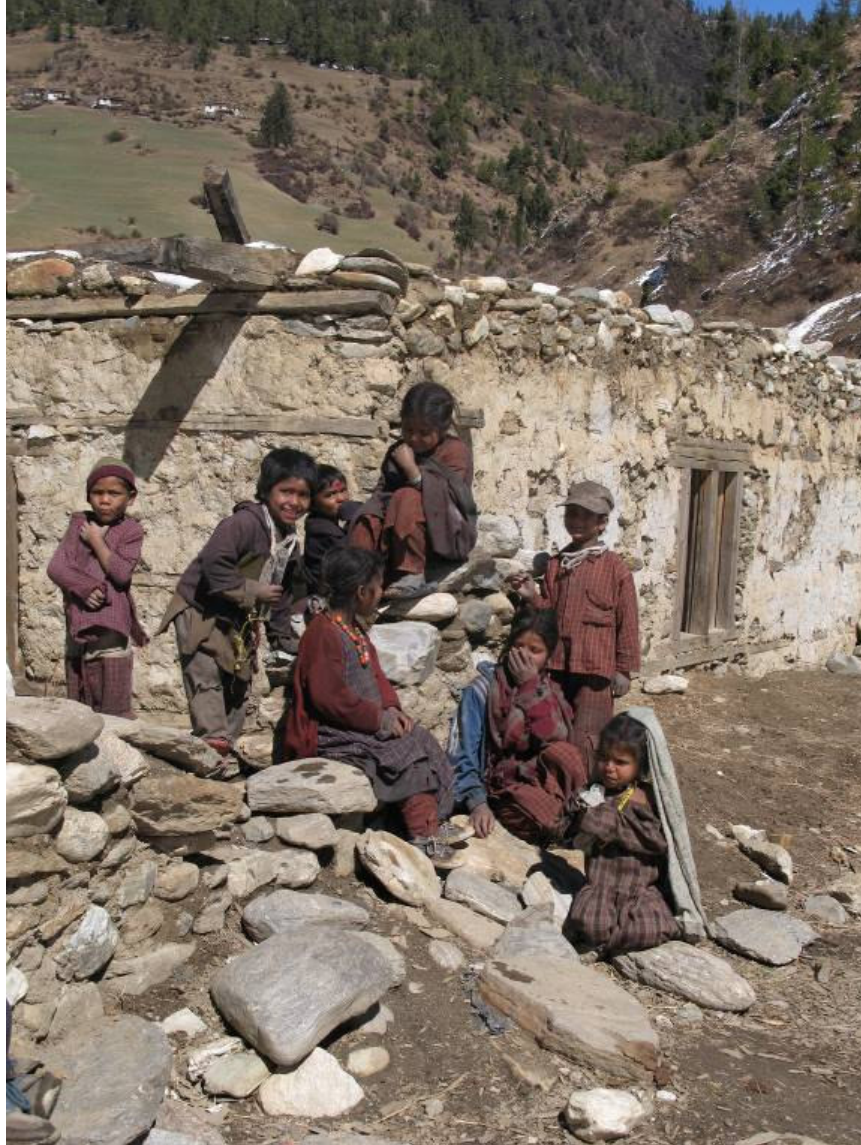
The expectations that people have when they send their children to school, especially those who hope that their children find a good job, jobs other than the current occupations of the parents, cannot be realised if a child only completes (a few years of) primary education. Households are likely to allocate their money to a purpose which gives more security. Investing in cattle gives more security than sending children to school, which cannot guarantee anything. It is considered safe to send children to school to acquire some basic skills, when they are young. At this age primary schooling is not costly and they are not yet able to do much work at home. Data indicates, however, that in higher grades the number of children decreases. It is thus crucial to find ways to retain these children, and convince the parents of the value of continued education, despite sacrifices that must then be made.

The opinion of the child should not be ignored; it appeared that children's will is a major determinant to whether they continue their schooling or not. In order to retain children, an attractive school environment and an encouraging home life is necessary. When children are interested in school themselves they are less likely to roam around, fail class due to irregular attendance, and eventually drop out. Also, children are more likely to follow the examples of others in their households, and in the village.

Poor quality of rural government schools often leads to irregular attendance of children and in some cases to parents not enrolling their children at all. Parents complain about the insufficient number of teachers, who are not able to maintain discipline among the large number of students. Furthermore, the absence of female teachers keeps parents from sending their younger children to school, especially girls. Lack of commitment from teachers is considered as an impediment to quality education as well. Commitment could be influenced by whether a teacher is local or has been recruited from another area. Both situations have their advantages and disadvantages; what appears to be most important is not just the teachers' commitment but also that of the community as a whole. Rather than feeling alienated, it is crucial that households are involved with school processes. Presently, parents often have no idea about what happens in the school, and decision-making is in the hands of only a few.

Nepal shows a positive trend regarding enrolment of children. Rural communities express a willingness to educate their children, and for them to increase their knowledge and become independent. However, constraints pertaining to household chores, traditional norms and values, relevance and the quality of education, and accessibility to the schools, still keep many children from enrolling, and regularly attending school. Once the children, especially girls, reach a certain age (higher primary level) they start to feel the pressure of these constraints, and irregular attendance and eventually drop-out becomes the unfortunate result. Furthermore, many of these children end up in child labour, which brings with it a whole other set of complications.

Numerous actors have been successful in making primary education accessible for an increasing number of children, shown in the high levels of primary school enrolment and attendance. The focus should now be on improving the quality of primary schools, and perhaps to accessibility of (lower-) secondary levels as well.



Children playing with friends in Jumla

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