

The right to education under threat by privatisation in Nepal

Policy Paper



Based on a recent report by ActionAid, this policy paper shows how the right to education in Nepal is under threat by the rapid growth in private education. The constitution says: “Every citizen shall have the right to get compulsory and free education up to the basic level and free education up to the secondary level”. However, the low quality of public schools and declining education funding is driving parents towards paying for private education. Private education does not necessarily equate with higher quality and privatisation aggravates existing inequalities and marginalisation of vulnerable groups such as girls and children from poor families. Therefore the government of Nepal, which has the duty to ensure the right to free, public education of good quality for all, needs to uphold its responsibility and ensure funding to free, public quality education for all.

Education is a human right and the responsibility of the government of Nepal

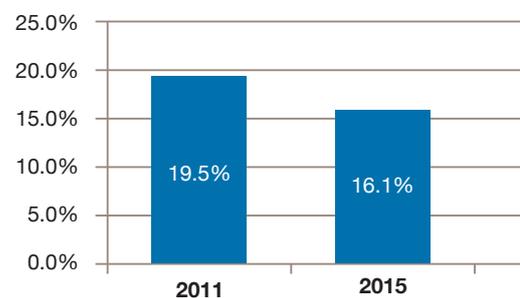
The right to free, quality education is established by the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*,¹ and reaffirmed with the *Sustainable Development Goals*.² In Nepal, the right to education is enshrined in the Constitution,³ and the government should ensure free education of good quality to all citizens. But a recent study by ActionAid shows that government does not live up to this, and leaves a large part of its responsibility to the private sector (ActionAid, 2017b).

The government should ensure funding to free, public quality education for all

Public spending on education in Nepal, as a percentage of the total budget, declined by 3.4 percentage points from 19.5% in 2011 to 16.1% in 2015. At the same time, public spending on education as a share of GDP declined by 0.3% from 4.2% to 3.9% (UNESCO, 2014).⁴

Government funds only 55% of primary and 27% of secondary education, while households, donors and NGOs fund the remaining part. Households are financing 39% of primary and 48% of secondary education, either by contributing to community-run schools or by paying for private education (UNESCO, 2014, pp. 17-18). As these figures show, the government previously accorded a high priority to education, but this has now diminished. The education budget will need to increase to equal at least of 6% of GDP and 20% of total public expenditure to meet international targets for education spending and to improve the quality of public education so that parents do not feel the need to pay for private education. In order to achieve this, the overall national budget should be expanded through more effective and progressive taxation.⁵ A recent study from Nepal shows that in 2014/15 the country suffered a \$990 million revenue loss (equal to 5% of GDP) as a result of tax incentives provided by the government. This amount could more than double the education budget (ActionAid, 2017, p. 48). The education budget should also be sensitive to promoting the education of marginalised groups such and girls and children from poor families, and Nepal’s civil society should be involved in the scrutiny and monitoring of the budget.

Figure 1: Education budget as a percentage of total public expenditure, Nepal

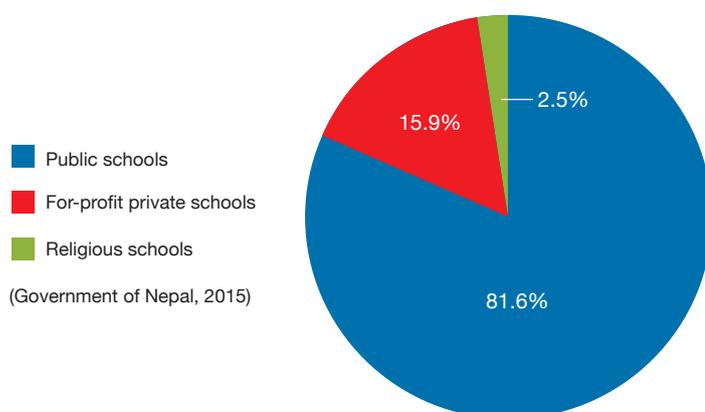


Source: UNESCO/IIEP-UIS (2016)

Low quality drives wealthier parents to pay for private schools

The quality of education in Nepal needs to improve. Only 11.5% of pupils starting in Grade 1 continue in school until Grade 12 (Government of Nepal, 2016, pp. 125-132). School Leaving Certificate (SLC) pass rates in public schools dropped from 46.6% in 2011 to 33.7% in 2015. Private schools in Nepal are perceived by parents as a ticket to better education. As a result, private education has grown considerably over recent decades, with enrolments doubling between 2005 and 2010 (Bhatta & Budathoki, 2013, p. 7). From 2011 to 2015 the proportion of for-profit schools increased from 14.7% to 15.9% of all schools,⁶ and enrolment in for-profit schools grew by 17% at primary level and by a remarkable 69% at secondary level, with the total share of enrolments in for-profit private schools reaching 19% - almost one fifth of all school-going children.⁷

Figure 2: School types (primary and secondary) Nepal 2015



Private education is not equal to higher quality

While some private schools offer a high quality of education, this is not necessarily the case for all private schools. While quality may be high in expensive schools, it may not be true for the low-fee schools.⁸ The overall pass rate for the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) is higher in private schools, reaching 89.8% in 2015 compared with only 33.7% in public schools.⁹ Researchers explain this by better infrastructure/equipment and management in private schools. However, another reason for better exam scores is not related to what the private schools offer, but to the fact that parents who send their children to public schools are usually from a higher socio-economic status and better able to support their children,¹⁰ and many also pay for extra classes/ tutoring.¹¹ Furthermore, many teachers in private schools are not trained. In 2015, only 87% of teachers in private primary schools were trained compared to 94% teachers in public primary schools.¹² Our research finds that many private schools focus narrowly on exam results, using rote-learning in order to achieve higher pass rates and attract more students. Informants also said that students in public schools tend to acquire better soft skills in areas such as participation, creativity, social interaction, community engagement and sports. Many parents are therefore misled in terms of the quality that private schools actually offer.

Existing inequalities are aggravated by private education

Private education is a costly burden for parents. The level of fees is supposed to be regulated by the state, but the state doesn't enforce regulation (GI-ESCR et al, 2015, p. 5). Fees can be really high: household expenditure is eight times higher for private primary schools than for public primary schools (GI-ESCR et al, 2015, p. 6). The

Nepal Living Standards Survey in 2010/11 shows that the wealthiest families are the main users of private education. Over half of pupils enrolled in private schools belong to the richest 20% of the population (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011, p. 99). So private education further aggravates existing inequalities between the rich and the poor, and further marginalises underprivileged groups in the population. Private schools do not help to increase availability of schools in underserved areas, since 41.4% of all private schools are concentrated in and around the capital (compared to 26.8% of total schools).¹³ The growth of private schools is creating and entrenching social inequalities. As expressed by one researcher: “A major consequence of private sector growth has been middle class flight, which has left many public schools with a concentration of socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Private schools have become valuable as a social differentiator, which makes public school stigmatization a long term concern for education systems.” (Joshi, 2016, pp. 6-8)¹⁴

Girls are paying the price and are discriminated by privatisation

Girls are particularly disadvantaged by growing privatisation. While gender parity has been achieved in Nepal reaching a share of girls’ enrolment in total for primary and secondary education at 51% in 2015,¹⁵ there is a remarkably lower enrolment of girls in private schools. In the private sector, girls constitute only 43% in primary and 44% in secondary (compared with 52% in primary and 53% in secondary in the public sector).¹⁶

Figure 3: Public primary school enrolment by gender Nepal 2015

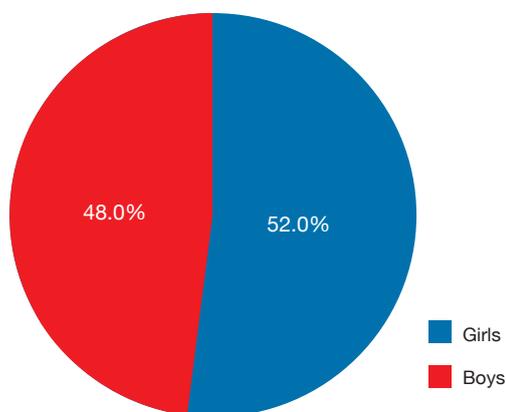
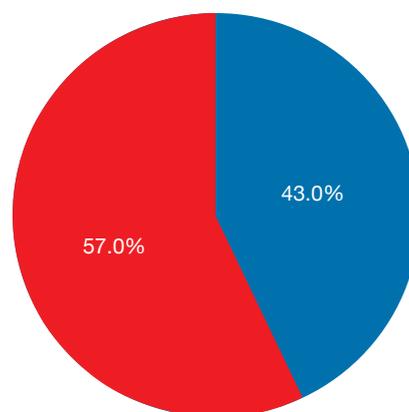


Figure 4: For-profit private primary school enrolment by gender Nepal 2015



Source: (Government of Nepal, 2015)

When parents cannot afford to pay for schooling for all of their children, they choose to send boys to private school. More girls than boys go to public schools. Because of the negative image of public schools, this may affect girls’ chances in the job market and of entering higher education. Furthermore, the government’s monitoring of private sector school is low, and this constitutes a problem as it is not possible to know if girls’ rights are respected in private schools.



Friends.
PHOTO: BISHAL RANAMAGAR/ACTIONAID

Recommendations

The Government of Nepal should:

- **Right to education** - Guarantee the right to free quality education for all children as stipulated in the Constitution. Primary and secondary education must be free and compulsory, not only in law but also in reality. The government should not delegate its responsibility for ensuring the right to education to the private sector.
- **Education financing** - Increase the education budget to 20% of the national budget or 6% of GDP; increasing the size of the overall budget by expanding the tax base through progressive and effective taxation; increasing the sensitivity of the budget by allocating more resources to promote equity and increasing scrutiny to ensure that the budget is allocated and utilised efficiently.
- **Cost of education for parents** - Ensure that primary and secondary education is free, not only in law but also in reality. This means abolishing all compulsory direct and indirect costs (e.g. enrolment and exam fees, uniforms and learning materials amongst others) to parents and ensuring that the State education budget adequately covers all these costs.
- **Quality education** - Improve the quality of education by allocating more resources to public schools and to attracting, training and retaining an adequate number of qualified teachers. Allocate sufficient resources to monitoring and supporting the schools, to providing sufficient learning materials and improving school infrastructure such as classrooms, toilets and playgrounds.
- **Regulation and monitoring of schools** - Strengthen the regulatory control of private schools, holding them to account and inspecting them regularly to ensure that they comply with current education standards. Impose sanctions if private schools do not comply with requirements such as teacher salaries and conditions, level of fees, etc. Ensure transparency by reporting accurate and detailed data on private schools (including data on school owners, profits, categories of schools etc.).
- **Gender equity** - Take firm action towards the achievement of gender parity and equality in education by ensuring appropriate policies are funded and implemented in order to tackle persistent barriers to girls' education, including but not limited to: gender-related school-based violence; lack of sanitation facilities; lack of female teachers and gender bias in teaching and learning materials. Engage with communities, civil society and policy-makers to shift deep-seated discrimination against girls at all levels.

Civil society organisations in Nepal should:

- **Right to education** - Raise citizens' awareness and hold the government to account for delivering the right to free, compulsory, quality education. Expose violations of the right to education arising from the privatisation of education.
- **Education financing** - Raise awareness and support citizens to advocate for the government to increase the size of the overall budget to 6% of GDP by expanding the tax base through progressive and effective taxation; increase education's share of the budget to at least 20%, increase the sensitivity of the budget by allocating more resources to promote equity and increase scrutiny to ensure that the budget is allocated and utilised efficiently.
- **Cost of education to parents** - Raise awareness and support citizens to carry out participatory budget monitoring and analysis in order to fully understand what is spent on education by government and by households and to campaign for an end to compulsory direct and indirect costs to parents for public education.
- **Quality education** – Hold government to account for providing quality education for all children, making the case for the financing of sufficient quality trained teachers, improved school infrastructure and learning materials.
- **Regulation and monitoring of schools** – Hold the government to account for ensuring that private schools are properly regulated and regularly inspected to ensure that they comply with national education standards.
- **Gender equity** – Engage with communities and policy makers to raise awareness and shift deep-seated discrimination against girls. Identify, highlight and oppose issues such as violence against girls in schools and child marriage. Promote positive alternatives of quality inclusive and equity-focused education.

Works Cited

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Notes

1. United Nations, 1948, Article 26
2. Where the international community committed itself to: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all United Nations , 2015, Goal 4: Education
3. The Constitution of Nepal (2015). Article 31: Right relating to education: (1) Every citizen shall have the right of access to basic education. (2) Every citizen shall have the right to get compulsory and free education up to the basic level and free education up to the secondary level from the State.
4. Data from this study varies slightly from Ministry of Education data due to different methods of calculation. For example the UNESCO/IIEP-UIS study includes funding from more ministries in the total public spending on education.
5. In fact, “The Education for All Global Monitoring Report has documented that if governments in 67 low and middle income countries modestly increased their tax-raising efforts and devoted a fifth of their budget to education, they could have raised an additional US\$153 billion for education spending in 2015, increasing the average share of GDP spent on education from 3 to 6% by 2015. (ActionAid, 2017, p. 41)
6. **Invalid source specified.** and (Government of Nepal, 2015). It should be noted, that number of private schools may be underestimated, due to the presence of unregistered private schools or schools not providing annual data. (GI-ESCR et al, 2015, p. 2) and **Invalid source specified.**
7. **Invalid source specified.** and (Government of Nepal, 2015). In Nepal the education system is divided into ‘basic education’ covering grades 1 – 8, here called ‘primary level’. The secondary level corresponds to grades 9–12. Basic education was previously divided into the levels called ‘primary’ and ‘lower secondary, whereas the secondary level consisted of the levels called ‘secondary’ and ‘higher secondary’. The way that statistics is reported varies with regards to different indicators, and they are sometimes reported according to the new division, and sometimes according to the old division. For the sake of consistency and the possibility of comparison with other countries, here is consistently used the new division of levels, and when necessary data have been added up to correspond to this.
8. **Invalid source specified., Invalid source specified.,** (Bhatta & Budathoki, 2013, p. 17).

9. **Invalid source specified.** and (Government of Nepal, 2015)
10. The percentage of students going to Institutional Schools is 52% for parents whose head of household education is above grade 11. The corresponding figure for those households whose head of household have not been to schools is around 16 % (NLSS III). The education of head of households is correlated with poverty status. For example, the poverty rate of households whose head of household education is above grade 11 is 7.1% and the poverty rate of households to those households whose head of households who are illiterate is 33.5% (NLSS III). Individual and Home characteristics also influence learning outcomes for students **Invalid source specified.** It should be noted here again, that the data used is from the NLSS from 2010/12, and therefore may not take into account a possible growth in low-fee schools with a different profile of parents and students.
11. **Invalid source specified., Invalid source specified.,** (Bhatta & Budathoki, 2013, p. 17). International research comparing private and public education largely confirms that once data is weighed in terms of socio-economic background of parents, there is no significant difference in terms of learning achievements. **Invalid source specified. and Invalid source specified.**
12. **Invalid source specified.** and (Government of Nepal, 2015)
13. (Government of Nepal, 2015). Central District of Nepal, covering Kathmandu and the surrounding district . The unequal distribution of private schools is also underlined in research, indicating that private schools are concentrated in urban areas, geographically accessible regions as well as high income level districts. (Bhatta & Budathoki, 2013, p. 13), **Invalid source specified., Invalid source specified.**
14. Also expressed by (Bhatta & Budathoki, 2013, p. 23): “The argument that the existence of a dual education system (consisting of private schools for the rich and public schools for the poor) is leading to a gradual pauperization of public schools (not in the sense that public schools are actually getting poorer but rather that they are becoming places where the poor study) is becoming more and more common-sense knowledge in Nepal
15. **Invalid source specified.** and (Government of Nepal, 2015).
16. **Invalid source specified.** and (Government of Nepal, 2015).



Pupils returning home.
PHOTO: BISHAL RANAMAGAR/ACTIONAID

WAXBARASHO చదువు మార్గము KWAN Giáo Duc
Kakaran 799CT விஷா DZIDZO MmATA
UBUREZI Kogale शिक्षा ELIMU शिक्षा
SIKOLO విద్య تعليم و تربيه
تعليم
MAPHUNZIRO adzesua Nunven atche we Uddannelse
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EDUCATION

A RIGHT IN EVERY LANGUAGE

COVER PHOTO: KARUNA RAI, NEPAL. CREDIT: KISHOR K. SHARMA/ACTIONAID

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ActionAid is a global movement of people working together to achieve greater human rights for all and defeat poverty. We believe people in poverty have the power within them to create change for themselves, their families and communities. ActionAid is a catalyst for that change.

International Registration number: 27264198

Website: www.actionaid.org
Telephone: +27 11 731 4500
Fax: +27 11 880 8082
Email: mailjhb@actionaid.org

ActionAid International Secretariat,
Postnet Suite 248, Private Bag X31, Saxonwold 2132,
Johannesburg, South Africa.

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