

Assessment of Education Provision for Children with Disabilities during COVID-19

Summary of the report

The COVID-19 crisis is an unprecedented situation globally, and Nepal is no different. The pandemic has disrupted education significantly. According to a UNESCO report, 1.6 billion children across 191 countries have been severely impacted by the temporary closure of the educational institutions.⁽¹⁾

In Nepal, prior to COVID-19, approximately 81,88,425 children were enrolled in school from grade 1 to 12. Among these, 70,225 were children with disabilities. **This data indicates that less than 1% of children with disabilities were enrolled in schools,**⁽²⁾ although it is likely that a higher number of children with undiagnosed disabilities are already in schools.

When the Government of Nepal announced a complete lockdown on 23 March 2020, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) had already called for the closing of all schools as a precautionary measure. In May 2020, **UNESCO estimated that nearly nine million students in Nepal had been affected due to school/university closures in response**

to the pandemic. Out of this number, 11% are in pre-primary, 28% are in primary, 39% are in secondary and 5% are in tertiary education. In order to mitigate the impact of school closures, the MoEST endorsed the “Guideline on Facilitation of Students’ Learning through Alternative System 2020” which listed radio, television, online and offline lessons, self-learning, and remote teaching as methods to be used for teaching and learning.

The lockdown was lifted in July but to date (October 2020) educational institutions remain closed. This assessment conducted by HI in July investigated the impact of COVID-19 on the Nepalese education system, with a focus on children with disabilities.

The findings indicate that the pandemic has had serious impacts on access to continued learning for children with disabilities and on their well-being, and that it potentially widens the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children in their equitable access to quality education.

Methodology

This assessment report prepared by Handicap International (HI) Nepal’s technical unit, and supported by the Inclusive Education Global Specialist at headquarter level, highlights the impact of the COVID-19 on the education of children with disabilities. To identify the situation, challenges, learning need of children with disabilities the assessment interviewed

parents/caregivers of children with disabilities, teachers, head teachers and School Management Committee members. This Educational Assessment aims to:

- Understand the educational needs, barriers to access, and issues for children with disabilities during COVID-19, and

1. <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>

2. MoEST flash report 2018/19.

- Provide evidence to advocate for education policy, planning, and response for children with disabilities during and after COVID-19.

The assessment was carried out through telephone survey during July 2020. **A total of 1,166 samples interviewed in this survey which includes: parents and caregivers of children with disabilities, teachers, head teachers and school management committee members.** The geographical spread is fairly representative of Nepal with respondents coming from all seven provinces and includes representatives from 21 districts across Nepal.

Major Findings

Parents and Caregivers of children with disabilities:

A total of 677 parents/caregivers of children with disabilities were interviewed on the barriers, challenges and support provided by parents/caregivers of children with disabilities to their children in order to continue their learning during COVID-19. Among the respondents, 54% were male and 46 % were female.

- One of the biggest concerns shown by 83% parents/caregivers of children with disabilities is fear of their children falling behind in learning followed by lack of knowledge on how to use technology (75%), lack of support from teachers (70%).
- Interestingly, 66% families have access to simple mobile phones which is more than have access to radio at 44%, 41% percent had access to television, and only 22% had access to smart phones.
- Only 22% families are using radio, 16% are using television and 6% are using smart phones in order to support their child in learning. Access to use of internet computer and tablets for learning are less than one percent.
- Only 14% expressed that their children with disabilities have access to accessible learning materials.
- 52% shared that they are providing support in their child's reading which is a positive statistic, given all the other conflicting priorities.



Gulsan Jaha Sai, with support from HI empowered to enroll in a bridge class from south-western part of Nepal, listening to radio schooling program during the COVID-19 lockdown period. © HI Nepal

- 70% parents/caregivers shared that lack of suitable learning materials was the top barrier as compared to only 31% reporting that distraction by other children in the house is an obstacle in support their child in continuing learning.

Teachers:

A total of 232 teachers were interviewed. Among those interviewed the highest representation was from Bagmati province (34%), followed by province 5 and province 2 with 16% representation from each province. Similarly, 13% respondents were from Sudurpaschim province, 11% from Gandaki province and 5% each from Karnali and province 1.

- Whilst a relatively high 69% of teachers have access to smart phones, and 67% have access to mobile phone (ordinary), only 46% have internet facilities and other devices.
- An overwhelming majority, 91% of teachers, expressed the lack of accessible educational materials for children with disabilities is creating barriers for them to provide learning support during COVID-19.
- Around 87% of the teachers responded that they do not have the adequate support

they need to continue helping children with disabilities learn compared to children without disabilities during this time.

- Crucially, 85% teachers explained that their most important need was to have support from parents or caregivers to develop the relevant materials and support children in their learning.
- 88% of teachers had not received training on the use of technology.
- 61% of teachers shared that psychosocial counseling for parents and children are required to continue learning after school reopens.

Head teachers and School Management Committee Members:

A total of 257 head teachers and school management committee members were interviewed and among them 170 were head teachers and 87 were school management committee members.

- 78% schools have at least provided support in the form of a self-learning pack, with 54% providing support by facilitating small group learning sessions which is good news.
- Only 23% are providing distance learning which reflects the challenge of ICT and resources described earlier.
- One of the challenges expressed by the respondents when school opens is on the risk of drop out (62% were concerned) perhaps due to the long gap in terms of learning, and other competing priorities
- Although most respondents thought that disinfecting schools and providing accessible Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities were a high priority, only 33% of the respondents feel they have sufficient funds to do so.
- Only 7% expressed that local government have placed high priority, particularly in relation to supporting children with disabilities.

Case Story:

Khursaid Pamariya, a seven-year-old boy born to Fekan Pamariya and Sudhwa Khatun, from Haripurwa can only see using glasses and has been using them since he was two. His father was very worried when he started using glasses from a very early age. Khursaid has eight members in his family, among them two are people with disability (khursaid and his brother). His father is abroad for foreign employment, so his mother works as a laborer in others' fields and also takes care of the children.

Khursaid is in the 4th grade, and attended school regularly before the lockdown. Also, he used to go for a regular eye checkup. During the lockdown period, his glasses were broken, and ever since he has had difficulty in performing everyday activities, particularly in doing school work. He has forgotten many things that he had studied as he is not able to review or revise without glasses. As his school is closed, he spends the whole day at home doing very little. He has no access to internet and his mother just has a simple phone which is not suitable for alternate learning.

COVID 19 and the nationwide lockdown have hit Khursaid and his family financially as well. His father is still abroad but with no work, which has affected their income. So far they have been able to keep going, due to relatives who they are borrowing money from. Recently a nearby neighbour was found to have COVID 19 which has meant that people are even more reluctant to come close to him and his family, due to the fear of being close to someone with COVID.

Currently it is difficult to see how Khursaid will remain in school without a scholarship and support with informal school fees. His family may also need him to help with the family business to help earn their livelihood, and this is their biggest priority now.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the assessment below are **ten recommendations** for government, teachers, and schools and organizations working on education.

- Educational support to children with disabilities through distance learning must be accompanied by **additional resources such as learning packs, support from family members.**
- **Learning materials must be available in different formats** and through various approaches (no-tech, low-tech, and high tech) and ensure **accessibility for all.**
- **Additional support from community volunteers** who are trained in supporting children with disabilities is required to guide parents/caregivers.
- **Frequent communication** through phone calls, text messages and home visits where possible, could be done by teachers to support parents. HI is supporting in this through its programmes.
- **Psychosocial support** for parents and caregivers, to support children in these difficult times and build their resilience is imperative. Parents and caregivers should stay in touch with teachers during this time and be receptive when the teachers reach out.
- **Teachers** are central in making sure that children learn best and they **need to be trained to use all available technological interfaces** to support the learning of all children.
- **Training on pedagogical methodologies** considering the need and support required for children with different types of disabilities is vital.
- **All efforts to publicize school opening must prioritize the needs of children with disabilities and new measures should be inclusive and accessible.**
- Schools should plan for **routine cleaning and disinfection of school facilities and surroundings** especially frequently touched surfaces such as tables, doors, handles, etc.
- **Education sector, health, social protection, and livelihood sectors must collaborate and work together to increase support to children with disabilities and their family members** to have affordable and sustained access to care, well-being, and education during emergencies such as this recent COVID pandemic.



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