Voluntary Peoples Review of SDGs in Nepal (VPR 2020)
Amplifying Voices of the People: Closing the Gaps of SDGs
Review of SDG 4

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Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Activities done for review:

- Secondary data were analyzed against the Nepal's SDG 4 targets and indicators - Annex.
- Nine external experts' views were solicited on the NPI's draft.

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1. Progresses and Achievements:

1.1. Target and indicator progress:

Table 1: Progress Assessment of SDG 4 Targets and Indicators Set by NPC for 2019

SDG 4.1. By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

Indicator Description:	2019 Target	2019 Progress
4.1.1 Net enrolment rate in primary education (%)	98.5	96.30 (1)
4.1.2 Primary completion rate (%)	90.7	83.16 (1) (2016)
4.1.3 Proportion of pupils enrolled in grade one who reach grade eight (%)	81.5	73.55 (2) (2016)
4.1.4 Ratio of girls (to boys) enrolled in grade one who reach grade eight	1.03	1.04 (1)
4.1.5 Ratio of girls to boys enrolled in grade one who reach grade twelve	1.04	n/a
4.1.6 Ratio of students to teacher in basic education (up to grade 8)	36	19.74 (2) (Primary)
4.1.7 Ratio of students to teacher in secondary education (up to grade 12)	35.3	28.26
4.1.8 Proportion of trained teachers in primary and secondary education (% of total teachers)	96.5	88.85 (2) (secondary)
4.1.9 Learning achievement / Score (Math, Nepali and English) for Grade 5	60.8	n/a
4.1.10 Gross enrolment secondary education (grade 9 to 12)	72	80.18 (2)

SDG 4.2. By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education

Indicator Description:	2019 Target	2019 Progress
4.2.1 Coverage of child grant for pre-primary education (number in '000)	1038	n/a
4.2.2 Day meal program coverage (%)	31	n/a

4.2.3 Attendance to early childhood education (Gross Enrollment) (%)	85.8	87.43 (1)

SDG 4.3 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university

4.3.1 Ratio of girls' enrolment in technical and vocational education	0.66	n/a
3.2 Ratio of girls' enrolment in tertiary education (graduate level)	1.04	n/a
3.3 Scholarship coverage (% of total students)	38.3	n/a

SDG 4.4. By 2030, increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship

4.4.1 Youth and adults having technical and vocation skills (number in '000,)	165	n/a
4.4.2 Working age population with technical and vocational training (%)	38	n/a
4.3 Internet users (percent of adult population)	59.5	n/a

SDG 4.5. By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access

4.5.1 Gender parity index (GPI) (primary school)	1.01	1.05 (1)
4.5.2 Gender Parity Index (GPI) (secondary school)	1	1.04 (1) *(Lower Sec.)*
4.5.3 Gender Parity Index (GPI) based on literacy (above 15 years)	0.72	

SDG 4.6. By 2030, ensure that all youth and at least 95 per cent of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy

4.6.1 Literacy rate of 15-24 years old (%)	91.37	92.39 (1) (2018)
4.6.2 Literacy rate of 15-24 years old (women) (%)	90.5	90.88 (1) (2018)
4.6.3 Numeracy rate of 15 years and older (%)	71.7	n/a
4.6.4 Numeracy rate of females of 15 years and older (%)	63.4	n/a
4.6.5 Public spending per student (Basic education in '000)	19	17 (3) (2017)

SDG 4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development

4.7.1 Human assets index	68.85	n/a
4.7.2 Gender development index	0.58	n/a
4.7.3 Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development, including gender equality	-	n/a

and human rights, are mainstreamed at all levels in: (a) national education policies, (b) curricula, (c) teacher education and (d) student assessment (In scale of 0 to 5: Where "0" is none)		

SDG 4.a. Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non- violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all

4.a.1 Schools with access to electricity (%)	-	n/a
4.a.2 Schools with access to internet (%)	28.6	n/a
4.a.3 Schools with "WASH" facilities (%)	53.0	n/a
4.a.4 Disability friendly schools (%)	-	n/a

SDG 4.b. By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries

4.b.1 ---	-	n/a
4.b.2 ---	-	n/a

SDG 4.c. By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States

4.c.1 Proportion of teachers in primary education who have received at least the minimum organized teacher training (%)	100	97.29 [1]
4.c.2 Proportion of teachers in basic education who have received at least the minimum organized teacher training (%)	100	85.40 [1]

(Cells marked 'n/a' refers to data not available while '-' indicates no indicators set by Nepal)
(1) UIS Update (2020). UIS Database. http://data.uis.unesco.org/
(2) UNESCO UIS (2019). UNESCO Institute for Statistics Report of Nepal
(3). NCE Nepal (2018b). Research on Education Financing GAP Analysis

1.2 General observation and comments:

a) The Government's policy in education, in line with UN SDG #4, emphasizes full access to quality education for all (NPC, 2017b). This inclusive policy has potential to reduce inequalities in society, eradicate poverty, and promote economic growth.

b) The devolution of governance structures in federalized Nepal presents an opportunity for improved coordination of education at the local level, supporting progress towards all SDGs including SDG #4 (Daly, Parker, Sherpa & Regmi, 2020). In addition, this new structure allows for decentralized decision-making and empowers local education agencies to assume greater responsibilities ownership, accountability and authority to strengthen their capacities.

c) Constitutional provision provides full authority to local governments for implementation of the education program and constitutes a big leap forward for decentralized delivery of the education services (UNESCO UIS, 2019).

d) Government plans to establish at least one Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institute in all 753 local levels in the country As of May 2019, Nepal has seen an increase of TVET institutes from 332 to 507 (UNDP Nepal, 2019).

e) Nepal's Ministry of Education, Science and Technology has linked Covid-19 to education by making public service announcements on the guidelines and providing the relevant materials for the students to learn from home (MOE, 2020).

f) Nepal has fared well in increasing its net enrolment rate for Grade 1 in Karnali Province, which was noted at 97.3% in 2017 (MOE, 2017). Showing that Nepal has the capacity to achieve certain education indicators in its least developed province.

g) Nepal has seen consistent success in reaching education indicators. Whereas, in 2019, 87.43% of pre-primary children attended school, higher than the government target of 85.8% (UNESCO UIS, 2019). Additionally, the literacy rate for 15-24 years old was 92.39% in 2018, higher than the Government of Nepal's target of 91.37% in 2019 (NPC, 2017a).

h) In regard to 4.1.6 and 4.1.7, it's important to note that the teacher to pupil ratio is greatly varied throughout the country. Ranging from, 1:60 in some remote schools to 1:15 in schools in urban areas.

i) In regard to SDG 4.6, in 2018, the adult literacy rate of Nepal was 65.9% (Dhakal, 2018), an increase from 59.6% in 2011 – 75.1% were male and 57.4% female (MOE, 2017). Despite the increase in literacy rate, gender inequality and inequitable accessibility persisted across different regions of the country. With the far and mid-western regions still experiencing the lowest literacy rates.

2. Key Issues, Challenges and Gaps:

Despite progress in addressing the targets of its education goal, Nepal continues to confront deeply entrenched issues of educational access, gender inequity, student retention at all levels of schooling, overt unionizations in the learning institutions, undue political influence, poor quality of learning, poorly trained and motivated teachers and lack or inadequate teaching resources. Some of these interlinked and complex sets of institutional, political, and educational challenges are described hereunder.

2.1 Prioritization and investment:

a. The national budget allocation on education has declined from 17.1 % in 2011/2012 to 10.20 % in FY 2018/2019 (NCE Nepal (2018a) that makes around 4 % share of GDP.

b. Government's lack of high priority in quality education has undermined the human capacity development of the population especially impacted by the Maoist conflict (Pherali, 2016) and other factors including natural disasters and health concerns.

c. Many public schools in poor rural areas and urban slums lack essential and adequate infrastructure and resources like toilets (separate for boys and girls), safe drinking water supply (NIRT, 2016) and earthquake resistant schools which is only 11% of total schools (UNICEF, 2019).

2.2 Inclusiveness and equity in education

a. Contrary to the aim of the Government's 'Nepal School Sector Reform Plan 2016–2023', the education system in Nepal remains neither inclusive nor equitable (Ezaki, 2018).

b.   Although enrolment of girls in primary school is increasing (UNESCO UIS, 2019) retention of these female students, especially in secondary schools, remains a challenge given the societal pressure to withdraw early from school due to patriarchal expectations as well as early marriage. This trend is higher among Dalit communities especially and along the Nepal-India border, and lower in hill communities (LeVine, 2019). Traditional taboos, socio-cultural factors, and the patriarchal system continue to limit women and girls from reaching their full potential in formal learning including their access to higher education (Karki, 2019).

c.   The gap between educational outcomes of public and private schools is significantly wide indicating growing educational inequality, contradicting the 'School Sector Reform Plan 2016–2023', of an inclusive and equitable education system for all. The analysis of the differential educational outcomes of public versus private schools is largely absent from national planning (Ezaki, 2018).

d.   There is inequity in the education sector, as only 12% of children from the lowest wealth quintile are developmentally on track in literacy and numeracy compared to 65% from the highest wealth quintile (UNICEF, 2019). Challenges to access of quality, among females and marginalized communities, continues to be a bottleneck in improving participation of these groups in various sectors of the country.

2.3 Enrolment and completion

a.   Despite progress, primary school enrolment targets remain unmet. In 2019, Primary School Net enrolment rate was 96.3% falling short of the government target of 98.5%. This difference resulted in 103,384 children and 46,598 adults unable to access learning and education (UNESCO UIS, 2019).

b.   Enrolment rates of 6-10-year-olds have increased at the primary level, but access to schools remains a problem for marginalized and underprivileged groups like the Dalits and Janajati, and those with special needs such as physical disabilities. Access to school is further complicated due to the terrain of the country with physical distance to schools remaining a challenge especially for children from poor households (Uprety, 2019).

c.   A significant proportion of students do not complete primary schooling whereas only 73.55% made it to the last grade of primary school (UNESCO UIS, 2019). 770,000 children aged 5-12 years are still out of school and over 80,000 children with disabilities or from indigenous minorities are currently not able to stay in school (UNICEF, 2019).

2.4 Early childhood development and protection:

a.   The Early Childhood Development (ECD) is a key policy of the government that has had positive outcomes. However, services provided under ECD are not integrated and do not ensure protection of children under five (UNICEF, 2018) and, ECD has been mistakenly understood to be privately run Early Childhood Education (ECE) centers such as nursery/kindergarten.

b.   Attendance rate at ECE is still low at 51% (UNICEF, 2019) and the cause for the low attendance rate is not well understood. Additionally, the detailed data on coverage of child grant for pre-primary education is not publicly available.

2.5 Quality education:

a.   Nepal has improved access to schooling significantly, including access across all groups. However, the disparity across regions, gender and type of schools (public/private/others)

remains very high. Very few schools in Nepal meet child-friendly school standards to date (UNICEF, 2019).

b. National Achievement of Student Achievement (NASA) indicates that half of students in grades 3, 5 and 8 do not meet the academic achievement criteria for Nepali and mathematics (UNICEF, 2019). Additionally, NASA fails to report of achievement in English and also on how achievement indicators have been used to monitor and improve the progress on SDG4.

c. According to a World Bank report, 80% of children in poor countries cannot read and understand a simple story by the end of primary school (World Bank, 2019). This leads to the questioning of the reliability of the literacy progress claimed by Nepal.

d. Teacher quality is an important factor impacting the quality of education in Nepal. However, Nepal lacks adequate data on teacher quality and performance.

e. Per new provisions, the power to manage and award the School Leaving Certificate will be devolved to local and provincial governments. However, currently the government does not have the resources nor the expertise to effectively execute these powers.

f. Enhancing the quality of public schools and managing private schools are challenges affecting the provision of quality education. Given the better educational performances of private schools, it is not surprising that they are increasingly associated with that 'quality education', resulting in a large shift of students moving from public to private schools (Ezaki, 2018). Under these circumstances, concerns haves been raised about the 'pauperisation' of public schools and how it would disproportionately affect children from lower economic strata as well as the loss of respect and trust in the quality of education of public schools (Ezaki, 2018; Mathema, 2007; Dhakal, 2019).

2.6 Digital exclusion:

a. In 2017, 58.72% of the population were internet users indicating that almost half of the population still lacked access to the internet (Rana, 2018). In the age of digital learning and communication, the lack of ICT literate teachers, costly internet facilities, and low level of ICT literacy is worrisome. Moreover, the infrastructure needed to extend internet to rural areas is not adequate (Dawadi and Shakya, 2016; Rana, 2018).

2.7 Technical and Vocation Education Training:

b. In 2019, the total enrolment in TVET for students in secondary education was 2.65% (UNESCO UIS, 2019). Low enrolment rates have attributed to unskilled adults being in hazardous and dangerous occupations in and outside the country, without the appropriate training to ensure their safety and well-being.

c. TVET sustainability and relevance of curriculum as well as quality of teaching remains unmonitored and thus standards are questionable.

2.7 Appropriate and reliable data availability:

a. The target and indicators NPC have set are not uniform with global standards. Resulting in the absence of important indicators in the UNESCO global database.

b. NPC fails to consider important factors – income distribution, geography, demographics – in setting targets and indicators. Resulting in the review of SDGs difficult and unrealistic.

c. Nepal has Education Management Information System (EMIS) in place but it draws mostly administrative data. Student performance data is missing in EMIS.

d. Nepal's NASA covers students in grades 3, 5 and 8, on an intermittent basis (Education Review Office, 2016) but how these are used to target SDG4 indicators is not clear.

e. Five years after the adoption of SDGs, there is no updated data for indicators that Nepal set such as: tertiary education, learners' relevant skills, TVET, ICT, ECD and educational facilities. This data gap may signal that Nepal is mainly focusing on access and participation of the children and neglecting quality and equity.

f. There is no data on gross enrollment data on ECD, the data only convers the enrollment for ECE.

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3. Call for actions:

Nepal's education system is facing challenges requiring remedial action by the government. Below are suggested actions by the government during the next three years.

3.1 Investment:

a. Increase public investments and ensure funds are clearly targeted for education policies, infrastructure development, and programs that are: (i) fully gender-sensitive and disability-friendly, (ii) directly benefit poor and marginalized groups, and (iii) promote higher standards, quality, sustainability, community participation, and effective supervision.

3.2 Inclusiveness and equity in education:

a. Provide free school uniforms, nutritional meals, stationery, and first aid at schools to promote a student centric approach – to foster high enrolment and high retention.

b. Prioritize the provision of subsistence grants and scholarships for students from poor, under-privileged and marginalized families; including Dalit, Janajati and students with disabilities.

c. Provide free education as the fundamental rights enshrined in Article 31 of the Constitution of Nepal (2015). National government must ensure that private schools provide free education to marginalized students which will represent no less than 15% of the total student population.

d. Enact legislation to implement Article 38 of the Constitution, on special measures for women's education especially addressing the needs of those from lower socio-economic status and remote and rural geographical locations. Government must spearhead a program to bring fundamental changes to entrenched patriarchal practices, taboos and stigmas that affect Nepalese societies, which greatly restrict students.

3.3 Quality Education:
a. Include student performance component in school EMIS data with the capability to assess school performance.

b. Review SDG4 indicators in terms of quality education, linking them with global indicators. NASA assessments and other national efforts in quality education should be streamlined with national and global indicators of SDG4.

c. Replace the current narrow "literacy" definition with "functional literacy". New definition of literacy should include reading, numerical skills with proficiency indicators.

d. Reform teacher colleges to ensure all schools have well trained and qualified teachers with current subject related knowledge. The past glory and image of the College of Education under Trivubhan University (established in 1956) should be regained to produce quality teachers needed for the nation.

e. Conduct curriculum reforms on a 5-year rotation which consider international and local contexts. Incorporating curriculum that encourages empathy and develops critical and creative thinking skills required for rigorous challenges of advanced learning capabilities and problem solving.

f. Integrate climate, health and other crisis preparedness, response and resilience in school curriculum.

g. Make in-service teacher training and knowledge sharing activities mandatory in schools. Draw upon diaspora resources for training and knowledge sharing to enhance quality of education.

3.4 Decentralization and devolution:

a. Provide sufficient and qualified human resources to create dedicated governance structure for education at the local level. Ensure tasks are delegated and decision making devolved to local levels to alleviate persisting educational challenges, as well as address lack of accountability. Ultimately, guarantying the required actors are in place to properly and efficiently carry out all tasks that are required at each level of governance.

b. Ensure that provincial and local institutions responsible for provisioning resources and teachers, are making informed and nonpartisan decisions.

3.5 Management and accountability:

a. Make administrators, bureaucrats and school headmasters accountable for delivery of quality education and for school's overall performance.

b. Stakeholders must plan and operationalize budgets in a timely and transparent manner to garner public support for increasing future budget allocation in the education sector.

c. Hold educators and teachers accountable for students reaching a high-quality of standard in every grade. Provide supervision and support for ensuring improvement takes place.

d. Incentivize schools to create a multi-cultural and children-friendly learning environment. Provide both incentives and sanctions to ensure that quality standards of education and learning are met.

e. Conduct regular stakeholder meetings with parents, local CSO representatives and marginalized communities, to promote ownership and accountability of groups in the shared future of the community.

f. Address capacity gaps of government planners and policy makers at all levels by leveraging the NPC authority and Provincial Planning Commissions and enhance capacity building of federal and local governments to meet the requirements of delivering quality and efficient education management systems which contribute towards achieving SDGs.

3.6 Early childhood development:

    a. Require local governments to deliver ECD services to children in a holistic manner through community run centers, with special focus on marginalized and disabled children.

    b. Government to establish regulatory and monitoring mechanisms for commercially run day care/nurseries/kindergartens.

    c. Ensure that: resources required for the proper training of teachers and, the tools needed to provision quality education, are properly provisioned and accessible to ECE teachers.

3.7 Digital and STEM:

    a. Build adequate ICT facilities at schools to allow for teachers to implement and facilitate ICT classes.

    b. Teachers undergo training to become ICT literate. Mandate basic computer literacy and competency for all teachers.

    c. Prioritize STEM education. Require schools to have minimum of one science laboratory with a trained teacher.

3.8 Technical and Vocational Education and Training:

    a. Set up national TVET qualification and certification system and accredit it with well-established framework. Require it to regulate TVET institutes to ensure that the courses offered are (i) responsive to the demands of the existing and emerging industries, (ii) trained qualified teachers are available in sufficient numbers, and, (iii) quality of practical training meets a minimum standard.

    b. Implement an incentive scheme for students who choose to study vocational courses.

    c. Government provide vocational courses from Grade 10 onwards, both at the local and national levels, to meet the demand for skilled workers.

3.9 Other Important Action Needed:

    a. Adopt a staggered approach to implement trilingual (English, Nepali and mother tongue) education, beginning at the primary level with bilingual education of Nepali and mother-tongue language and English as an elective course.

    b. Establish mechanisms to gather evidence of best teaching and learning practice provisioned by schools and disseminate findings to schools.

    c. Prepare all learning institutions to offer blended teaching (Face-to-face+ Distance) as a new dimension of education and also to cope with the crises like earthquake, pandemic and so on.

    d. Declare schools and institutions of learning into zones of peace; restrict partisan politics by students and school staff, as well as political unionization of students' unions at all levels of learning institutions.

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