

Formative Research Project for EFA 2004-09

Synthesis Report
of the Researches Conducted in 2007

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ASIP	Annual Strategic Implementation Plan
CBOs	Community Based Organizations
CERID	Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development
CSSP	Community School Support Program
DEO	District Education Office
DEP	District Education Plan
DOE	Department of Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EFA	Education for All
EMIS	Education Management Information System
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
FRAG	Formative Research Advisory Group
FRP	Formative Research Project
GPI	Gender Parity Index
HTs	Headteachers
LongSIS	Longitudinal System Indicators Study
MOES	Ministry of Education and Sports
NGOs	Non-government Organizations
PCL	Proficiency Certificate Level
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
RCs	Resource Centers
RP	Resource Persons
SIP	School Improvement Plan
SLC	School Leaving Certificate
SMC	School Management Committee
SSR	School Sector Reform
STR	Student-teacher Ratio
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
VEP	Village Education Plan

Preface

Tribhuvan University, Research Center for Educational Innovation and Development (CERID) is undertaking the Formative Research Project (FRP) for the Education for All (2004-09) program of the Ministry of Education and Sports of the Government of Nepal, with the financial and technical support of the Royal Norwegian Government. In the fourth year (2006-07) of the implementation of Nepal's EFA program, along with the Longitudinal System Indicators study (LongSIS), five case studies and two short-term quick appraisals were successfully completed. This report presents a synthesis of the major findings and recommendations listed up in the research reports completed in the year 2006-07. This report is expected to be useful for quick reference of the studies conducted under the FRP.

The Formative Research Project has been acclaimed by many stakeholders at the central, regional and district levels as a good endeavor in supporting the educational reform program in Nepal. As a matter of fact, the FRP has been successful in providing research-based information to the MOES and its EFA implementing line agencies. This has, on one hand, helped to monitor the progress of the EFA program and on the other hand, it has helped the policy makers to reform policies and programs for the successful implementation of EFA program.

On behalf of CERID, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all the researchers, resource persons, experts, research associates and research assistants who worked hard for completing the research work in time and maintaining the quality of the research work. I also would like to extend our sincere gratitude to Mr. Balananda Poudel, Secretary, Mr. Arjun Bahadur Bhandari, Joint Secretary of MOES, and Mr. Janardan Nepal, Director General of the Department of Education for their continued support in undertaking the research work. Our appreciations also go to Dr. Ishwor Prasad Upadhyaya, Chairperson of the FRAG and all other FRAG members for their valuable comments and suggestions at various occasions in undertaking research work and in finalizing the research reports and preparation of action steps. Thanks are also due to all others who contributed in some way or other to accomplish the research tasks. Thanks also go to all the members of the CERID family for their logistic and administrative support in undertaking the studies. Special thanks go to Mr. Gautam Manandhar for cover design and page lay-out and Mr. Bhakta Bahadur Shrestha for the printing.

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Introduction

Formative Research Project (FRP) for EFA is the Technical Assistance of the Government of Norway to the Government of Nepal for effective implementation of the national EFA programme 2004-09. Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES), Nepal which is the main responsible body to conduct FRP has entrusted CERID to undertake the project activities. Ministry of Education and Research, Norway has been supporting MOES and CERID in undertaking the FRP.

FRP Objectives

The main objectives of FRP are as follows:

1. To generate research-based information and critical understanding of the process of implementation of the national EFA program,
2. To assist capacity building of MOES for utilization of Formative Research as an instrument for program monitoring and adjustment, and
3. To assist a process-based institutional development of MOES and underlying agencies based on working experience and available knowledge and skills.

Formative Research Advisory Group (FRAG) is a stakeholders' committee composed of senior researchers, educationists including specialists in the areas of gender, ethnicity and pedagogy; head teachers; policy makers; and District Education Officers. The FRAG supervises FRP activities and also mediates in ensuring effective implementation of the research outcomes.

The main research outcomes and recommendations along with the research reports are presented to FRAG which then discusses the research findings and combining them with its own experiences suggests action steps to MOES for necessary reform in the policies, programmes and implementation processes. This provision is made to ensure that the stakeholders are aware of the progress of the reform as well as the critical aspects regarding the implementation. The research activities and the outcomes are also shared with MOES and DOE through thematic discussions and formal dissemination programs.

FRP activities including research, reporting, and preparation of action steps are synchronized with the key annual schedule of MOES for EFA program including planning meeting for ASIP and Budget, review meeting of donors, and government reporting schedule.

Major FRP Activities

Formative research activities include:

1. System indicators-based longitudinal study
2. Case studies on the issues and core topics considered important for the implementation of EFA program and policy reforms
3. Interactions and disseminations through different committee meetings, workshops, seminars and publications.

System indicators-based longitudinal study has been one of the main features of FRP since its beginning. It has the following main features:

- Forty-three indicators identified as important for progress monitoring of the implementation of FRP and also to support research analyses.
- Periodic collection, analysis and reporting of the data from 62 sample schools from 16 sample districts of five development regions and the Kathmandu valley.
- Cohort analysis of the students from the 62 sample schools – cohort of students enrolled at grade one in BS 2059 and the subsequent years.
- Analyses by gender, social groups, program interventions such as ECD, incentives for students including scholarships and day meal.

The indicators were identified by the researchers in consultation with MOES and DOE personnel responsible for school census data reporting/flash reporting as well as the planning and monitoring. The indicators are reviewed annually.

CERID organises research and related activities with the help of individual researchers contracted on the basis of competition to undertake case studies. There are arrangements for technical adviser(s) and resource persons for ensuring the professional quality, relevance and effectiveness of FRP case studies.

The main features of case studies include:

- Review of the implementation of EFA programs and identification of core research topics and issues for case studies
- Selection of the researchers based on the open invitation for application with short conceptual proposal for the case studies on the core topics and the issues
- Finalization of the proposals with identification of key factors and variables to be included in the case studies.
- Field study
- Interactions with the concerned constituencies, report preparation and preparation of action steps

Core Research Topics and Key Issues

Core topics and key questions for formative research are formulated by MOES and DOE based on the outcomes of the FRP activities conducted earlier, experiences of implementation of the EFA programs, and on the emerging issues in the related areas. The inputs from the dissemination of the FRP activities including regional level workshops, district level interactions and feedback from the RCs at the school cluster levels are also taken into account in the identification of the issues and core topics for research.

The core issues and the research topics are then discussed with the academics and professional researchers for developing in-depth understanding and clarification. Then research questions are developed. Upon the approval of the MOES the research questions are considered as the basis of annual FRP activities.

Nepal is currently passing through a phase of unprecedented social and political transformation. It has just come out of several critical political events including the constituency election. Education is considered as an important aspect of social and

political change, both as a means as well as an outcome. In this line the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES), Nepal is currently engaged in three major tasks:

- Transforming the political and social aspirations of the people's movement into the policies and programs
- Meeting the challenges of achieving the EFA goals through consolidation of EFA core strategies and programs
- Preparing comprehensive plan of School Sector Reform (SSR)

These challenges and the tasks became major guiding factors for the formative research activities in 2007/8. The following key issues and questions emerged as crucial for further study and in-depth understanding:

1. School autonomy is one of the main thrusts of educational reform in Nepal. However the meaning of autonomy may vary at different levels and among different stakeholders. This has to be understood with clarity and unanimity by the concerned actors and a shared understanding developed.
2. For the last several years, many reform interventions are being implemented. The implementing agencies are loaded with added tasks and increasingly made more responsible. Questions arise whether this situation matches with the implementation provisions in terms of structure and operation modality? Did the capacities of the responsible agencies enhance appropriately in proportion with the added tasks and responsibilities?
3. With the operation of EFA program, school enrolments have improved significantly. However ensuring quality in education has remained a challenge. The challenge pertains in defining, achieving and also in ensuring through effective monitoring. Quality aspects and indicators are not new terminologies to define, however the challenge is to understand what are the relevant indicators in the context of Nepal. Although schools in Nepal are grossly commented in terms of quality of education, there are explicit examples of quality assurance activities in many schools. Then, it becomes pertinent to know what important and good examples could be drawn from the experiences of such schools in order to incorporate the meaningful lessons in the national system?
4. Classroom practice is the core of all quality aspects of education; quality assurance cannot be expected without better pedagogic approach in the classroom. However classroom practices, except in few innovative cases, have remained limited to teacher lectures and rote learning. This situation has continued despite the fact that many researches have figured out this situation since long time. The researches in the past have listed scores of reasons for no change in the classroom practices and government has made several efforts – classroom renovation/ construction, curriculum reform, short term and long – term teacher training, and provisions of textbooks and instructional materials. In order to break through the limiting situation a need was felt to study how some schools could become exceptional in ensuring better classroom practices? What are the factors and approaches that could be built in the national system to ensure better transformation of the classroom?
5. The interim constitution of Nepal explicitly states that basic and primary education is the right of all the citizens. However, such right-based approach to education need to be understood from many dimensions – ensuring access to

education in terms of physical, social and cultural perspectives without discrimination and feel of prejudice; making provisions acceptable to the people, ensuring that education is adaptable to the local contexts and day-to-day living of the community and people, and ensuring that the system and provisions remain transparent and accountable to all. Inclusion of the right-based approach to education in the constitution is just an initial step. Is our system and the concerned agencies including schools and the communities have capacities to address the needs and ready to implement? What structural reforms will be needed to successfully implement the approach?

6. Linked to the rights based approach to education and also the need to address meaningful access to basic and primary education for the children of disadvantaged communities, particularly those living in the remote areas, there is the need to look for alternatives. One of the potential alternatives is to mobilize the existing social organizations in the country – Madrasa and Gumba. How can they be mobilized in best possible ways?

Overview of the Major Findings and Suggestion for Action

This overview lists the main activities and outcomes of the research activities conducted in 2007 and are presented by the major study teams.

Longitudinal System Indicator Study (LongSIS)

The LongSIS has been presented in two main aspects:

- a. *Time series analysis of EFA reform program implementation*
- b. *Cohort analysis of the students enrolled to grade 1 from 2002*

Time series analysis of EFA reform program implementation

The trend analyses show that there is an increasing trend in the percentage of new entrants at grade one with ECD, on an average of 11.8% per year, which is very encouraging. Nevertheless, in order to meet the EFA goal by the specified time the efforts are still not adequate.

At the primary level the enrollment is increasing on an average by about 1% per year. There is a need to analyze the enrolment growth pattern and the scope for expansion of the school facilities.

The gender parity index trend line shows a steady growth since 1999. The GPI is more than one since 2004 indicating that the number of girls enrolled in school has increased than that of boys. There is a scope for critical analysis of the trend – is the population of the boys shrinking or that the boys are drawn to somewhere else? Gender parity is almost reaching the ideal value in the case of the teachers in the sample schools: on the average the GPI of primary teachers is 0.99.

There is a need to analyse the enrolment growth pattern and the scope for expansion of the school facilities. There is also a need for critical examination of the situation regarding gender issue in order to achieve true gender equality.

Improvements in terms of national educational budget and facilities at the schools are notable, for example, the numbers of schools with library facilities has increased by 17.7% since 2002. However, per child expenditure has not improved and the facilities like libraries do not come with the concept and development as a sound library which are useable by the children both in terms of the kinds of books holding as well in terms of the layout and services available for the students.

The average student-teacher ratio of the 62 sample schools is lower than the national norms. However, there are wide variations in terms of situations in the individual schools. Similarly, the classrooms seem crowded -- average classroom space per child was found to be less than the national norm set by the government. There has been no significant change in the average per student classroom space in the past five years except in the year 2005, which indicate that there is little improvement in terms of the classroom space and the facilities.

The majority of primary school teachers have officially required minimum qualification of SLC; there are also a significant number of teachers (32.0%) who have the qualifications beyond SLC. It has however also to be noted that there are about 9.0% teachers who haven't received the teacher training yet.

The mean number of times school visited by the school supervisors has increased significantly in 2006 compared to 2005. Also, the number of visits by other stakeholders has also increased; this may be because the schools were suggested to document the visits by making visitors books. The visits from among the stakeholders of schools especially in primary schools do have positive impact on improvement of schools activities as quoted by the head teachers of some of the sample schools.

Cohort Analysis of the Students Enrolled to Grade 1 From 2002

Analysis of true cohort of the students enrolled in 2002 and the subsequent years in the participating 62 schools is one of the most important aspects of the system indicator-based longitudinal study. The cohort analysis shows that grade repetition and dropout in the schools is rather a persisting challenge. Almost 50% of the students either repeat or drop out at the end of grade one. Those who could make up to grade 5 in straight cohort years – 5 years cycle is only 21% for the 2002 batch. There is however gradual improvements in the crossing of the grades in the cohort groups of the successive years with the exception of the grade 2 of 2003 batch.

The cohort analysis indicated better situation for the students with ECD experiences and also for the students receiving incentives. This indicates that the EFA program has overall positive impact. The situation of *Dalits* and disadvantaged ethnic groups remain below the national average, significantly below in the case of Muslim children.

Regionally, there are some disparities. Eastern region seem ahead in terms of the cohort flow whereas Mid-western region remained significantly behind the national average. The rest are near the national average.

Overall trend analysis shows that enrolment is increasing gradually among all sections of the population – girls, *dalits*, and disadvantaged communities. It is likely that with the current trend it is not impossible to attain universal access, though not in near future. Similarly, achieving 100% promotion from grade 1 to grade 2 though possible is unattainable until 2012 for the girls and 2014 for the boys with the present pace of development.

Case Studies

Following 7 case studies were conducted in the year 2007-08 addressing the core areas and the issues/questions identified by MOES and DOE following the outcomes of the FRP studies including the system indicator-based longitudinal study as well as the issues experienced in the implementation of EFA.

1. Understanding School Autonomy: A Study on Enabling Conditions for School Effectiveness
2. Enhancing Educational Reform Process: A Study on Operation of System and Structural Provisions at Implementation Level
3. Basic Enabling Conditions for Quality School Education: A Study on the Successful Schools for Developing Norms and Standards for School Monitoring

4. Classroom Transformation for Better Conditions of Pedagogical Processes and Student-Centered Learning
5. Rights-based Education and Structural Reforms in Basic and Primary Education: A Study on Institutional Needs and Community Readiness
6. Institutional Scope and Need of Mainstream Education in Madrasas and Its Autonomy
7. Education in Gumbas, Vihars and Gurukuls of Nepal: Linking with Mainstream Education

A brief description of the studies undertaken is presented below.

1. Understanding School Autonomy: A Study on Enabling Conditions for School Effectiveness

Decentralized school management with emphasis on school autonomy has become one of the important dimensions of educational reform in Nepal. The importance given also relates to the historical aspect of development of school education in the country. Before 1970s most of the schools in Nepal started with community initiatives. Community leaders, particularly the intellectuals mobilized people in organizing classes for children, acquiring place for running the classes temporarily and getting land and constructing school buildings. Community also supported the school in hiring teachers and getting the resources for the operation of schools. The government provided lumpsum grants to the schools that are duly registered and applied for support. With the introduction of National Education System Plan in 1971, the government of Nepal nationalized education and educational institutions. However there has been fresh move to revive the community participation in school development and management, particularly since the political movement for democracy in 1990.

However, the idea of school autonomy has also drawn concerns and attention of various stakeholders and has sparked many speculative responses. Many development planners and intellectuals feel that it is the only democratic and viable way to ensure quality and effective performance of public schools. On the other hand, some teachers see school autonomy as a threat to their job security; some parents think it will bring extra burden for them because it requires additional time, efforts and resources. People are confused regarding what to expect with autonomy? What will be the positions, roles and responsibilities of the government and other stakeholders? The study was undertaken to shed light on the issues and the concerns with the following questions in view:

- How is school autonomy understood by major stakeholders?
- How are the existing realities and context of school related to autonomy?
- How can school achieve functional autonomy?
- Are the current provisions of Education Act/Regulations, SMC, SIP, block grants, etc. adequate for school autonomy?
- Are the roles and responsibilities of major stakeholders defined?
- How effective/relevant are the provisions of capacity building for giving autonomy?

This study reviewed relevant literature to establish conceptual premises of the autonomy, school autonomy, and accountability and quality aspects of school. The study also collected information from different sources through interview, discussion sessions, observation and the review of school documents and archival records. Semi-structured and open-ended interview and discussion protocols were developed and used. Study visits were made in 9 schools from Chitwan, Syangja and Darchula districts, -3 schools from each district. After collecting the information, a one-day experience sharing session with the participation of DEO, supervisors and RPs was organized in each district, at the district headquarters.

The study has uncovered various important aspects of school autonomy. These findings basically dwell on the school autonomy issues.

Educational Administrators including HTs and teachers perceived school autonomy as decentralization and de-bureaucratization of school governance whereas SMC and parents felt school autonomy as empowering local stakeholders including school authorities and community members. They also felt that the autonomy also includes accountability in school governance.

Obviously, there is a need to develop and disseminate clear framework of school autonomy for better school governance. The MOES along with DOE should outline the framework and make provisions for dissemination and feedback from the stakeholders.

Some aspects of regulatory provisions, particularly relating to financial matters, for example, lack of flexibility in using the earmarked grants and SIP grants adjusted along the specific budget headings as per the priority needs of the school limited the school authorities to make decisions in reallocating the budget in light of the school's emerging needs. Similarly, schools were found not being able to execute their autonomy regarding the development of local curriculum as per the regulated provision. In the place of local curriculum they were found introducing Computer and English courses as local curriculum. There is a need and scope for provisions to undertake needs assessments and visioning exercise.

Initiatives by the schools that resonated with the local needs and demands helped them to exercise some aspects of autonomy. For example, the school authorities (SMC members and HTs) were found exercising their liberty to make decisions at the school level in the areas of: recruiting additional teachers, upgrading school's levels from primary to lower secondary and secondary, mobilizing funds, developing separate code of conduct for the teachers and students, having separate English medium classes and using curriculum in a flexible manner.

Giving authority to schools to use the grants as per the priority needs as identified by the school authorities would be useful strategy to motivate the schools and also develop confidence towards autonomy. Disseminating the enabling experiences of such initiatives to other schools would be better approach to grow school autonomy. DOE with the support of DEO can undertake such dissemination effectively.

One of the crucial challenges for autonomy is ensuring self responsibility by all concerned. The HTs and SMC members complained that they did not have power to take action against the negligent and inefficient teachers whereas if SMC takes any action against such teachers it is necessary for them to report to DEO and consequently pressure is built to make alternate decision. The HTs and SMC members felt that the Education Act and Education Regulations still placed the

authority within the Central and district level bureaucracy. Obviously there is a need to develop norms and standards to ensure responsibility through accountability. There is also a need to correct contradictory provisions in the directives. Necessary provisions should be included in Education Act and Education Regulations for enabling communities to govern the school.

Most importantly, participation of HT, SMC members and other stakeholders in the governance was found crucial for enhancing local-level decision making practices. This starts with the preparation of serious and responsive school improvement plan (SIP). There is therefore a need to highlight the importance of preparing and following SIP in a participatory way.

2. Enhancing Educational Reform Process: A Study on Operation of System and Structural Provisions at Implementation Level

MOES has initiated various educational reform programs under EFA. DEP, SIP, VEP, Inclusive Education, Block Grant, Earmark Grant, Scholarship, Teacher Training, Physical infrastructure and Welcome to School are the major reform programs which are being implemented for the development of primary education. Many policies and programs are being implemented in this regard. Obviously, all these actions add extra roles and responsibilities to the system requiring many additional provisions at the local implementation level. In view of the recurrent issues of the difficulties in effective implementation of the policies and programs at the local level question arises -- whether or not appropriate institutional capacity development is provisioned? This study was undertaken focused to this question. Specifically, the study listed the following research questions:

- Are the local level institutional system and structural provisions adequate to undertake different components/aspects of educational reform mainly with reference to infrastructure, orientation/ training, finance and staffing?
- How is the reform programs communicated in the system?
- What mechanism and practices exist for the reciprocity of feedback?

Case studies were undertaken in five districts: Ilam, Nuwakot, Jumla, Kanchpur and Mustang to seek answers to these research questions. The study considered three tiers: DEO, RC, and school as the major institutional provisions of the implementation system.

The study has revealed important issues related to decentralized management system, personnel management, fulfillment of responsibilities by the incumbents, technical capacity to use modern equipment like the computers, establishment and operation of data base system, the incompatible ratio between work load and available staff members, difficulties in appropriately executing scholarship program, and more importantly lack of competence and skills in formulating SIP and so on.

In most of the DEO offices, responsibilities regarding the implementation of reform initiatives were found centered on District Education Officer; Section Officers of the Planning Section and Account Section. There were no program-based administrative provisions. Besides, staff irregularity and vacancy of positions in the District Education Offices have impeded the timely deliverance of the services. Obviously, there is a need for restructuring the approach in line with the needs of the programs

and share responsibilities among the DEOs by assigning them relevant and appropriate roles.

Implementation of the reform programs required optimum use of computers such as for maintaining database and EMIS at the district level and for the dissemination/feedback of information. However, such provisions and skills were lacking in the office of DEO as well as RC and schools. There is an urgent need for providing computers and developing appropriate skills of all concerned in establishing information system and its operation for effective use, dissemination and feedback.

Appropriate planning and provisions to ensure staffing as per government regulations, and even developing clear implementing norms are yet to be developed/ established. For example, the ratio of student to teacher, or the schools to RC, or the staff in DEO and the number of schools in the district in relation with the district population need to be rationalized.

Necessary development of infrastructure is yet to be undertaken to ensure effective program implementation, for example the study reported that in many places RC offices were placed in the head teachers' office.

There is scope for collaboration and cooperation with the NGOs and CBOs to address the different program needs. For example, annual plan for the school-based activities such as assignment of roles and responsibilities to school teachers and community stakeholders for the physical and academic development of the school was found developed with the participation of NGOS, CBOs, and local government bodies in some schools, e.g. Ilam and Nuwakot. In some of the schools the teachers were found performing additional tasks such as maintaining students' records in computer, conducting extra-curricular activities, generating resources and maintaining better learning environment.

There is the need to enhance such partnerships by disseminating successful cases of partnership between school and NGOS, CBOs, and local government bodies.

Provisions of committees are made by the government to bring participation and undertake actions. However such provisions do not necessarily ensure the intended actions, for example, most of the Scholarship Management Committees were found indifferent to fulfilling their roles for the distribution of scholarships. Instead the planning and account sections of DEO were found taking the roles of distributing scholarship quota.

Successful DEOs in all the sample districts claimed that the scholarship quota provided by DOE was less than the need. Allotment of the scholarship quota based on the last year's flash report was found inadequate due to the differences in the number of quota allotted and the number of student recipients at present.

Preparing concerned personnel for handling programs e.g., scholarship distribution, was not in place, even DOE guidelines (with the explanations regarding the amount, dates, and procedures) were not strictly followed. As a consequence, no consistency was found in terms of scholarship distribution and subsequent follow-up. Similar disparities were found regarding provisions and actual utilizations of the provisions made for the preparation of SIP. SIP grant received by the school was found being used for teacher's salary in a school in Nuwakot. Some of the SMC and PTA members were found unaware about the objectives of preparing SIP and its use.

3. Basic Enabling Conditions for Quality School Education: A Study on the Successful Schools for Developing Norms and Standards for School Monitoring

Although major national programs for educational development including EFA has emphasized the need for improving quality of education; provision of norms and standards to measure the status or monitor the improvements have remained challenging. This is because quality underlies multitude of interrelated aspects and dimensions that requires much clarification. This study intends to identify basic enabling conditions for quality schooling focusing primarily on the EFA framework. The study specifically focuses on the following questions:

- What are the viable indicators of basic requirements regarding quality education in terms of training, learning materials, monitoring, classroom operation and physical facilities?
- What should be the basic norms and standards for ensuring quality of education?
- What mechanism and approach would facilitate to achieve the norms and standard?
- How do the key stakeholders, who are engaged in policy and practice level, perceive about the quality of schooling?

The study primarily used qualitative research methods. However, quantitative data was also used in the areas where it can help establish casual relationship among variables and explain about how casual relationship works. The study was carried in 20 successful primary schools covering three ecological zones and five development regions of the country. It covered both urban and rural schools.

The study has brought several interesting findings with respect to various enabling conditions that have potentials to contribute to actualizing quality education. High retention rate, high success rate, high cycle completion rate and relevant contents for meeting daily life needs of students were identified as major indicators of quality education by the respondents, more so by the policy level people. These indicators are well understood by all, and they could be reported on regular basis. Therefore these indicators need to be considered for regular monitoring.

In most of the sample schools considered as successful ones (as identified by CSSP, DEO and Researchers) the classrooms of Grade One and Grade Two were found having better physical facilities and learning environment such as carpeted floors, low level tables, painted walls and display of materials. SMC, PTA and teacher's meetings were held frequently and they mainly deliberated on physical and academic environment of the school. It seems that the outlook and joyful environment initiated at lower grade has made impact on the overall performance of the school.

One of the important things maintained in the successful schools was the average number of teaching days -- near 200 days which was close to 220 working days as mentioned in Education Act and Education Regulation. Continuous assessment of students and its feedback to students and parents was another important feature. Planning was given importance; the SIPs of successful schools were more elaborate and practical. Their plans have all the essential components listed by the directives given by DOE along with the additional indicators that they felt are necessary. These three aspects – school operation days, continuous assessment and feedback, and school planning are important factors and could be established as measurable norms.

Finance is important aspect of better performance. In most of the successful schools the teachers' salary ranged from 60 to 80 percent of the total budget. Apart from the salary the budget allocation covered instructional and play materials, co-curricular activities and extra-curricular activities, and repair and maintenance of physical facilities. Obviously, there is a need to ensure adequate financial provision for non-salary components to enforce a budget framework where non salary budget allocation is ensured. Government allocation as well as local resource mobilization should address the budget inadequacy.

Physical facilities such as availability of adequate space as per the norm, drinking water facility and toilets were found inadequate in some of the schools. Inadequate number of teachers and high student-teacher ratio (STR) were reported as major impediments for quality assurance in the teaching-learning process. In some of the schools even the textbooks were not found distributed to the students in the first month of the academic session. Similarly, in some of the schools the TGs were not available. Teachers with only SLC level qualification felt difficulty in teaching upper primary grades (Grades IV and V) compared to the teachers with Higher Secondary or Proficiency Certificate Level (PCL) qualifications. This shows that the schools in Nepal including better performing have scope for improvement. The government-set norms for deciding teacher quota as per number of students still need to be accounted. There is a need to review the teacher qualification and upgrade the primary school teacher qualification to at least higher secondary in education or higher secondary level in other stream and with one year training. Head teachers need to be dynamic and respected as the leader, she/he should be better qualified for that, Bachelor's level is expected by most of the respondents.

Most of the schools did not have the provision of formal evaluation of teachers. Provision of regular teacher evaluation would help achieve better performance. Most importantly, there is very high scope for sharing of the successful stories, cases and experiences to other schools.

4. Classroom Transformation for Better Conditions of Pedagogical Processes and Student-Centered Learning

Quality education for all is a cherished goal of the national education programs of Nepal. In this regard, students' learning is getting prominence in the educational endeavor. Improvement in the classroom teaching learning is required for the improvement in the quality of education and students' learning. However, studies show that classroom teaching-learning practices in most of the schools failed to meet the pedagogic needs and appeared non-responsive to the needs of children. The practices were mostly found limited to reading from the text by the teacher with intermittent and unplanned use of blackboard. Student activities mostly limited to reciting from the textbook. In order to improve classroom teaching learning at the primary level grades there have been a number of efforts including government programs and piloting of innovative programs by several other organizations. Many successes were reported in such programs. Keeping the issues and the potential efforts to address the issues in view this study was conducted with the research questions as follows:

- What are the successful cases of pedagogical processes adopted by various innovative programs?

- What are the requirements for classroom transformation?
- How have the local stakeholders been involved in the transformation process?

The research questions were related to understanding issues and ways for the classroom transformation towards better pedagogical processes such as a child-centered approach.

This study gauged the contribution of various innovative projects undertaken by Save the Children, Norway, UNICEF, Nepal, UNDP, World Education. The projects conducted by these organizations include Child-Friendly Schools, Innovative Child-Centered Teaching and Learning Process, COPE and Quality Education Resource Package respectively. These innovative projects demonstrated that collaboration with government organizations and partnership with NGOs and other civil society organizations for the implementation of project-based activities signified as a prompt move specifically for monitoring and professional backstopping for better pedagogical processes.

In the innovative projects instructional materials displayed and used in the classroom and provision of flexible seating arrangement was made (such as carpeting or low benches) which helped to bring about visible improvements in the classroom situation.

These projects on quality education showed that collaboration with government institutions and partnership with NGOs and other organizations contributed to monitoring and providing technical backstopping for better pedagogical processes.

In the project schools, the time allocated for each period was found varying depending on the subject, lesson and unit to be taught; some periods were found to be of half an hour and some others were found continuing even for one and half an hours. The teachers in the project schools were using curriculum for the preparation and delivery of the lesson in the class.

Frequency of interactions between teacher and students were found higher and students were found highly involved in their learning activities.

Training and orientation programs for the SMC and PTA members, community people and parents were found broadening their insight regarding better classroom practices. It also led them to visit and observe the teaching learning activities in the classroom which was found helpful in building shared vision and understanding about child-centered pedagogy.

Focus on building shared vision, and knowledge and understanding among the stakeholders (district educational personnel, school/teacher, parents, SMC, PTA, community, etc.) on the child-centered pedagogy was found as a crucial factor for classroom transformation.

Micro training basically geared towards building teachers' capacity in using curriculum, developing lesson plans, preparing and using instructional materials, including songs and games in the classroom was found effective for classroom transformation. The training was found to have emphasized on using discussion, demonstration and simulation methods.

As a result of the training and change in the classroom practice the project school teachers were found contributing to bring about changes in their behavior and belief

regarding improvement in the pedagogical process such as ‘no corporal punishment’, ‘group work’, ‘more interaction’, ‘play way’, ‘less rote memorization’, etc.

There is a scope for institutionalizing the successful experiences of classroom transformation by adapting the project activities in other schools. It would be helpful to form a ‘consortium’ of the organizations involved in innovative teaching-learning programs for establishing working relationship and collaborations for the sustainability of the best practices. Many of the successful experiences of training programs and training modalities could be incorporated in the on-going teacher training programs. Most importantly there is a need to disseminate the experiences of classroom transformation of highlighting the important aspects of the project activities such as shared-vision initiatives and training.

5. Rights-based Education and Structural Reforms in Basic and Primary Education: A Study on Institutional Needs and Community Readiness

Nepal is committed to the Millennium Development Goals which aim to ensure ‘By 2015, all children--particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities--have access to complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality’. According to the new structure proposed by the government of Nepal, for the first time, eight years of uninterrupted primary education, instead of the current five years primary education will be introduced. The constitution of Nepal has clearly stated that all people have the right to receive education in their mother tongue. However, there are many challenges to ensure the implementation of rights-based education. The crucial questions in this regard are:

- What are the preconditions for rights-based education?
- Where does the country situate in terms of such preconditions?
- What does it take to implement rights-based education and structural reform to ensure expanded access to basic education?
- What policy strategy and programs are needed to achieve such changes?

This study was undertaken to seek answers to these questions.

The research approach included school observation, classroom observation, and interviews with parents and guardians, FGDs with head teachers, teachers and SMC members, and stake-holder’s workshop in the selected districts. The study was conducted in five districts covering mountain, hill and Terai as well as Kathmandu Valley. Three schools from each of the selected districts were visited for the study. Interactions were carried out with the students who represented *dalits*, ethnic groups, female and persons with disabilities and conflict-affected children.

The findings of the study basically cover the notion of rights-based education and the requirements that need more attention to make rights-based education a reality and difficulties that lie on the way to realizing rights-based education.

Accessibility, acceptability, adaptability and appropriateness/relevance of the provision to the concerned children and people are important aspects of right based education. This calls for awareness, sensitivity and mindfulness among the stakeholders – teachers, headteachers, educational personnel, and the community. Most of the respondents (HTs, teachers, parents and SMC members) were found not

being aware of the concept of rights-based education. Secondly, teacher training programs have not directly adopted the rights-based education component.

Current provision of scholarships was not found substantially contributing to enhancing the learning of children from marginalized background because the scholarship amount was considered inadequate.

Maintaining appropriate school and classroom environment is important for ensuring that the rights are addressed. One of the important factors in this regard relates to the inappropriate student-teacher ratio-- crowded classroom is a serious challenge. Inabilities of the current system provisions to meet the basic needs such as supply of children's learning materials including the textbooks, provisions of basic health and safety measures give rise to the question of system capacity to ensure the provision of rights-based education. There is a need to reflect on the school provisions from rights based perspectives and develop framework for ensuring the basic requirements.

Pedagogic approach sensitive and appropriate to the background of the children in terms of their mother tongue, culture, and socio-economic background are important to ensure rights based education. Provision of primary education in mother tongue has already been provisioned in the interim constitution of Nepal. There is also a provision of adapting the curriculum to the local contexts and needs. However most of the schools seem unable to adapt to the local needs. School teachers and management need insights, capacity and sensitivity to be able to focus on the local contexts. There is a need for consultation with the local community regarding school curriculum. There is a need to consult/interact with the children to understand their contexts and the needs. Training and recruitment of teachers locally and from among the local community would help address the issue. Training/orientation is also necessary for the local community, particularly the SMC members.

6. Institutional Scope and Need of Mainstream Education in Madrasas and its Autonomy

Madrasas are playing important role in educating Muslim children in Nepal. Earlier FRP study in 2004 (CERID, 2004) indicated that of total primary school age Muslim children who are engaged in study, 40% were studying in Madrasas, and only 20% were in the mainstream schools. Remaining children were out of any type of schooling. FRP study in 2005 (CERID, 2005) reported that Muslim community want modern school education for their children, but they cannot miss Madrasa education which is important for acquiring religious education considered as a primary duty of every Muslim. In this context Muslims were looking for support from government. However they are also apprehensive of government intervention in the sense that it may hamper the nature of Madrasas, which are their main religious and cultural institution. The study helped to start dialogue and develop understanding.

Recently, the government of Nepal has provisioned basic and primary education through Madrasa. According to this provision, a Madrasa in Nepal can be registered as a primary school, if they include mainstream subjects in their curricula. The Madrasas are recognized as an autonomous community institution providing primary school education, they are free from any registration fees.

This provision has opened hope and aspiration but not without hesitation and dilemma, the dilemma of preparing and mobilizing such institutions for modern education. The concerns relate to guarantee of autonomy, ensuring that the

characteristics of Madrasa are not deviated or altered by the inclusion of state regulated primary school system. This study was intended to suggest the strategies to bridge the gap between the feelings of Madrasa organizers and the effort of government to recognize Madrasas as the school of mainstream education. Specifically this study was intended to seek answer to the following questions:

1. What do Madrasa organizers mean by autonomy of Madrasa?
2. How do they think the autonomy of Madrasa should be guaranteed?
3. How they perceive the government provision to register Madrasa as an agency of mainstream education after the inclusion of mainstream subject?
4. What it takes to ensure quality education in Madrasa schools?

The views of Madrasa organizers were analyzed in order to explore the possibilities of utilizing Madrasas as an institution of mainstream education. The respondents for this study were selected from Rauthat, Banke and Kapilbastu districts, which were the leading three districts of Nepal in relation to Muslim population. Two Madrasas from each district were selected for interviewing Madrasa stakeholders such as Madrasa heads, chairpersons and secretaries of Madrasa management committee. An FGD was also conducted in each Madrasa catchment area with Muslim community, Muslim intellectuals and community leaders. A seminar was also held at the district level with the participation of district level policy people, Muslim intellectuals, and the people with deeper understanding of Muslim education.

This study largely intends to accredit Madrasas as potential educational institutions which provide the scope for adopting mainstream curricula thereby contributing to gearing up the expansion of mainstream education and eventually propelling significant thrust to meet the EFA goal on access to basic education.

With the expanding interaction based on research both the government policies and the Madrasas are evolving with more flexibility and sensitivity towards the needs of the Muslim children in Nepal. For example, Madrasa teaching now include some mainstream subjects (English, Mathematics, Social Studies). There is now a demand from the Madrasa organizers for a framework to incorporate mainstram school curriculum in Madrasa. The government has responded to this demand by recognizing Madrasa as an autonomous institution that can provide primary education.

Similarly Madrasa organizers were in favor of introducing Madrasa course in formal schools with an appropriate policy. There is now a provision of 20% local curriculum that the school management can decide. However, many Madrasa stakeholders are unaware of the government provision of including mainstream courses in Madrasas. There is therefore a need to make all the stakeholders fully aware of government's policy and provisions regarding integration of mainstream subjects in Madrasas. Awareness and interaction programs should be provisioned for this.

The emerging issue in the case of the Madrasa starting to run primary classes is that they do not have adequate provisions to address the needs of primary school education. Madrasa organizers therefore feel the need for government support to ensure good infrastructure and learning environment with adequate inputs such as furniture, instructional materials, space as well as teachers to teach mainstream subjects. Madrasa organizers were however hesitant to mainstreaming Madrasas due to the fear of loosing Islamic identity. They want clear legal provision that guarantees

the autonomy of Madrasas. Although government now provides a lumpsum amount of support to the Madrasas running primary school, the amount is rather too small to meet the needs. There is a need to develop a framework of resource provision and local resource mobilization for this.

Madrasa organizers want teaching mainstream subjects in Urdu language and therefore felt a need for translating textbooks in Urdu. They also feel that there should be a separate board to look after the educational affairs in Madrasas. They also feel a need for detail database on Madrasa education system in Nepal. There is a scope for starting a forum for starting dialogue in this regard. Regarding the data base, the existing school census and educational statistics reporting system could be expanded to address the needs.

7. Education in Gumbas, Vihars and Gurukuls in Nepal: Linking with Mainstream Education

Gumbas, Vihars, Gurukuls and Madrasas are the traditional place for receiving education. Such religious institutions have contributed a lot in providing education when there was no existence of formal educational institutions such as school. With the development of modern school education system, the scopes of such religious education institutions have been increasingly limited. However, in Nepal their role and potentials are very important, particularly in the rural areas where modern schools are still not in the list of social aspirations and that government also has not been able to bring the provisions effectively. In rural and remote areas these religious institutions are playing a significant role by providing spiritual, cultural as well as formal education. In this context, the government has made provision for the mobilization of such religious institutions to provide basic and primary education to children. The government is ready to support the religious institutions that are willing to conduct primary level classes. The institutions can keep their features and functions intact as an autonomous institution.

Although there are potentialities, some understanding of the aspirations and the recent government provisions, the understanding regarding how the institutions are being run, what are the total educational activities conducted in such institutions and whether there is alternative way to incorporate primary education remained as pertinent questions. This study was undertaken with the following specific questions in view:

- What are the educational programs that are being conducted in Gumbas, Vihars and Gurukuls?
- How, and to what extent, do the course contents of the curricula used in Gumbas, Vihars and Gurukuls relate to the formal education?
- What is the contribution of the management system? What about human resources, financial resources, materials, program management, committees or Guthis, and community participation?
- Who are the beneficiaries of the educational program?
- What is the contribution of Gumbas, Vihars and Gurukuls in the field of education?

- What are the possibilities and challenges in mobilizing Gumbas, Vihars and Gurukuls for mainstream education?

The study covered two districts. Mustang was selected to make a study on the existing educational scenario of Gumbas for formal education. There were two Gumbas selected for the study. Similarly, information required for the study on Vihars and Gurukuls were collected in Kathmandu. The study was conducted concentrating on the present educational situations of Gumbas, Vihars and Gurukuls and the modalities of linking it with the mainstream education.

Like in the case of Madrasa, there is tremendous scope for mobilizing Gurukuls, Gumbas and Vihars for providing basic and primary education to the section of the population unreached by the mainstream school education. Government has already recognized them as autonomous institutions that can run primary school. The government has also provisioned waiving registration fees, and provide SIP funds, as well as small grant support for the religious institutions that run primary school classes. Most of the religious institutions were however unaware of the government policies. There is therefore a need to conduct awareness and orientation programs for the religious institutions.

Most of the Gurukulas and Gumbas organizers which participated in this study have shown their willingness in designing the curriculum by themselves instead of implementing primary level national curriculum developed by CDC. Clearly, there is a need to make them aware of the national curriculum provision and to enhance their capacity to adapt the national curriculum in their educational programs.

Religious institutions were found supporting older children. Also the norms of religious institutions differed from the norms of formal schools such as in the case of school uniform, time schedule etc. Therefore they preferred flexible mode of schooling.

Gurukul, Gumba and Viharas lacked provisions and resources to address the needs of running primary school education. In this line there is need for support from the government. However, there is also hesitation to apply for the government support fearing that this will lead to loss their autonomy. To address this issue, there is a need for clear provisions of policy and regulations that guarantees the autonomy and ownership of the religious institutions and their status. A framework for resource regarding running of primary school education through religious institutions need to be developed. This should include a clear allocation guideline and contributions from the government and the ways to mobilize local resources.

A Reflection on the Study Outcomes

The main purpose of FRP is to provide research-based strategic information to the process of implementation of EFA program 2004-09. FRP research activities included i) longitudinal system indicator-based study to support with periodic data to monitor progress of EFA program implementation and trend analysis, ii) case studies to develop critical understanding of the issues in the process of program implementation, and iii) quick appraisal of the situation to facilitate addressing specific needs and issues emerging in the process of EFA program implementation.

True cohort analysis of students enrolled in 2002 followed through to 2007 is a major achievement of longitudinal system indicator study. The study has made possible cross variables analysis of many factors and indicators that has capacity to take evidence-based policy decisions regarding policy reform and development. For example, for the first time in Nepal, it has established clear evidence of the impact of ECD on student enrollment, retention and achievement. Similarly, the study on the basis of verifiable quantitative data has shown positive correlation of incentives with student enrollment, retention, repetition and dropout which is found to be high among the dalits and disadvantaged. With the additional features and provisions of tracking the children longitudinal system indicator-based study would not only help monitor the progress but also to minutely follow the issues and dilemma of ensuring quality of basic and primary education for all. Moreover, the study has brought awareness about the importance of the school-based data and its use and set examples of how schools can develop and use their data while contributing to establishment of comprehensive EMIS.

Five case studies conducted this year have generated knowledge and critical understanding relating to school autonomy, the capacity and dilemma of the organizational provisions of the system in view of the expanded responsibilities of implementing the reform programs, the aspirations and perceptions regarding quality of education and sets of norms and standards for monitoring, the ways and means of initiating classroom transformation towards better classroom through student-centered pedagogic process, and the needs and challenges of implementing rights-based education in Nepal which has been recently provisioned in the interim constitution and development plan following the movement towards inclusive democracy. These studies are important not only for understanding the current issues of implementing EFA programs but also builds bases for future engagements required by SSR activities and other reform initiatives. Some of the important insights in this line include:

Autonomy, responsibility, transparency, accountability goes together; capacity building; awareness; and sensitivity; commitment are important to overcome the resistance to/ inhibitions in the process of decentralization. Autonomy is not easily understood functionally, the barriers in the implementation of autonomy, mainly the acceptance and participation in the process of sharing of responsibilities and authorities are not easy. Nevertheless, autonomy is possible through local initiatives towards ownership of decisions, actions and commitments.

There have been many reform programs in education in Nepal since past several decades, particularly since 1990. Consequently the implementing organizations such as DEO, and RC have added responsibilities. Earlier FRP studies indicated that one of the issues regarding the reform programs relate to inability of the implementing organizations such as DEO, and RC to perform the designated tasks with efficiency

and effectiveness and on time as expected. The study shows that there is indeed a need for enhancing the capacity of the implementing organizations particularly in the area of managing information and communication system, record keeping and operating system, and most importantly in responding to the concerns of the schools and the general public. Evidence based provisional arrangements and program implementation need to be developed to ensure just and equitable implementation of the policies. Proactive measures are needed for the implementation of many program components such as school development and incentive distribution.

There is need for policy rethinking to ensure that reform program initiative come with complete package that includes communication strategy and required personnel as well as institutional capacity building. Communication and feedback system should be in place and this should tie up with the capacity building scheme. The current FRP activities of initiating communication as the core area of institutional and personal capacity building in MOES and DOE have a scope for expanding to the DEO and RC levels.

Quality of education has been a central issue of expanding basic and primary education in Nepal. One of the challenging aspects of the issue is a lack of well defined norms and standards expressed in terms of measurable/observable indicators for quality assurance and monitoring that are easily understood and could be acted upon by the concerned stakeholders. Towards addressing this issue the study indicated that high retention rate, high success rate, high cycle completion rate and relevant contents for meeting daily life needs of students were considered as major indicators of quality education by the respondents, more so by the policy level people. These indicators are well understood by all, could be reported on regular basis, and therefore need to be made main indicators for monitoring. At the early grades, preprimary and grade 1-2, child friendly environment with carpeted floor, low tables, painted walls, display materials and plenty of play materials are considered important indicators. Number of working days/class days, continuous assessment and feed back provisions, and most importantly school improvement plan, are potential and effective indicators to ensure quality. Similarly, there is scope for indicators like budget/fund allocation for instructional activities, materials and physical facilities. Teacher provision including STR, qualification and provision for teacher evaluation have been identified as the important indicators. There is still a need to develop clear norms and standards and a measure to ensure that they are monitored and followed.

Innovative projects on quality education showed that collaboration with government institutions and partnership with NGOs and other organizations for program implementation contributed to better monitoring and technical backstopping for better pedagogical processes and better quality assurance. Training and orientation programs for the SMC and PTA members, community people towards building shared vision and understanding about quality and child learning were found as crucial factors for classroom transformation. Similarly, micro training basically geared towards building teachers' capacity in using curriculum, developing lesson plans, preparing and using instructional materials, including songs and games in the classroom were found effective for classroom transformation. These aspects need to be incorporated in teacher training programs.

Awareness, sensitivity and mindfulness are important aspects that need to be developed among all the stakeholders – teachers, head teachers, educational personnel, and the community to ensure the provision of better learning for all,

particularly for the school aged children. These aspects are also important to ensure that rights to basic and primary education as provisioned by the new constitution of the country are addressed. Madrasa, Gurukul, Gumba and Vihar, the three types of traditional educational institutions are potential for mobilization for ensuring the rights to quality education of the different sectors of the society in different parts of the country with different religious backgrounds. There is however a need for full awareness of the diversities, mindful and sensitive to their potentials, limitations and scopes. This includes the aspirations of these institutions to remain autonomous, to be free to continue their traditional activities/undertakings while supporting the major endeavors of EFA in the country. They need resource support as well as professional support within the scope and limitations of being autonomous traditional institutions.

The FRP studies including the longitudinal system indicator study and the case studies have unfolded many issues and opportunities in Nepal regarding EFA. The studies also generated recommendations based on the critical understanding of the situations and the practical realities. Participation of the stakeholders in the FRP activities at the various crucial stages such as in the identification of the issues and research questions and in the generation of recommendations through sharing of the outcomes and discussions helped to ensure the quality and relevance of the research activities. This also helped in formulating the action steps from the recommendations on the basis of their priority.

The detailed reports and the action steps are published by CERID and are also made available in its website (www.cerid.org).