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# Advocacy by NGOs for Literacy in Nepal

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in the

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## Gap in National policy and Government’s Performances in the field of literacy and poverty alleviation in Nepal

The National Census report of Nepal (1960) stated that about half of the working population are illiterates i.e. 46.7% illiterates and the 53.74% of the six years as above population are literate. The same report said that among literates 41.88% came from the primary schools (one or two class pass). The lower secondary passed were 20%, secondary passed were 8.0% and only 9% have passed more than S.L.C, but only 2.68% were graduates among the literates. The Census Report certainly gave credit to the primary schools, but it also pointed out that many school going children drop out after grade one or two and other school system also do the poor job. Looking at the literate population, it is quite clear that Nepal is nowhere near the production of International Standard Labor Force and compete in the age of Globalization.

Recently the Non Formal Education Center, Ministry of Education and UNESCO Kathmandu jointly prepared and presented “**The Comprehensive Literacy Program of Nepal**” under the UNLD. It mentioned that there were about 76,69,754 illiterate persons (6 years and above) in Nepal in 2006 (page 34). In that pool, the primary school will add about 466,310 children and youth illiterates every year. This conclusion was reached based on the analysis of the performance of primary schools now.

The same “**Comprehensive Literacy Program of Nepal**” also said that there are about 16,54,665 children of the age group 6 year to 14 years who were out of schools. They need to be provided out of school primary education.

The data given in the **Comprehensive Literacy Program of Nepal** are mentioned below:

### Total person to be made literate by 2015 through Non Formal Education (Mention in the Comprehensive Literacy Program in Nepal)

	Total	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>Total</b>	7669754	383488	383488	536883	690278	997068	1073766	1073766	920370	843673	766975
<b>Mountain</b>	640638	32031.9	32031.9	44844.7	57657.4	83282.9	89689.3	89689.3	76876.5	70470.2	64063.8
<b>Hill</b>	2903995	145200	145200	203280	261360	377519	406559	406559	348479	319439	290400
<b>Tarai</b>	4125120	206256	206256	288758	371261	536266	577517	577517	495014	453763	412512

### Total person to be made literate by 2015 through non formal education for 6-14 years group

Total	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
1654665	82733	82733	115827	148920	215106	231653	231653	198560	182013	165467
Distribution of Illiterate Number by ecological regions										
Mountain (6%)	4964	4964	6950	8935	12906	13899	13899	11914	10921	9928
Hill (14%)	33921	33921	47489	61057	88194	94978	94978	81410	74625	67841
Tarai (53%)	43849	43849	61388	78928	114006	122776	122776	105237	96467	87697

(Mention in the Comprehensive Literacy Program in Nepal)

The **Comprehensive Literacy Program of Nepal** mentioned that Nepal need to make 7.6 million illiterate people need to be made literate. At present Nepal could increase literacy at the rate of one percent per year, but the population increase rate in Nepal is 2.5 percent each year. It is obvious that the population increase rate is over taking the literacy rate increase. If we continue to increase the literacy at the present rate, the literacy rate will reach to 72% in 2015, but the absolute number of illiterate population will be 9 million in 2015, because the population in 2015 will reach to the level of 30772,071 according to Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS).

### **Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) Projection**

	<b>Population*</b>	<b>Target (%)</b>	<b>Literacy Rate (%)**</b>	<b>Illiterate Population</b>
2001	23,151,423	-	53.7	10,719,109
2006	25,886,736	-	59.0	10,613,562
2009	27,504,280	EFA, Medium Term -76.0	63.0	10,176,584
2015	30,772,071	EFA- 90.0	72.0	About 9 mil.

### **Over Expectation of the Primary Schools.**

The School Level Educational Statistics of Nepal 2003(B.S 2060) in the ( page21) said that the Net Enrollment in the Primary schools was only 83.5 % in spite of many campaigns of school enrollment drive launched by the government with a great fan fare in recent years. The same Report in the (page 36) reported that the transition rate between Grade I to II was only 50.8%.The primary cycle completion rate was only 50.4% (page 29). This means the Primary Schools will generate about 466,310 children and youth illiterate every year. (This was mentioned in the first paragraph of this write up). If the Primary Education which is the Priority Program of the Government and Bi-lateral and Multi-lateral Donor Agencies which is consuming more that 50% of the Education Budget goes on doing such a poor job, it is very unfortunate and disastrous for the country. If the Primary Education cannot stop new illiterates coming out of the primary schools and instead it goes on adding the illiterates of children and youths in the pool of illiterates already exiting in the country, the task of making the people literate would be an impossible job. If Nepal goes on in this way it will take 107 year (Literacy Watch Bulletin No. 5, NRC-NFE, Nepal, 1998) to make every body literate.

Is it that because it is a difficult task, the Government and the Donors are taking the hands off policy in the field of the literacy?

If the Nation is determined it could solve the problem of illiteracy. I would like to quote Mr. Xinsheng Zhang, the present Chairman of the UNESCO Executive Board, Vice Minister of Education PR China said “We have been making great strides since 1978, and in the 21st century, we are reducing illiteracy at the rate of 2 million people per year. Our recipe is simple, our government places a high priority on two tasks-eliminating illiteracy

and providing nine years of compulsory education for all. Our government enables people to see the benefits of literacy by linking it to family life, agricultural production, economic development and indigenous tradition. We also encourage women's literacy, because if a women becomes literate, her whole family benefits".

The number of illiterate adults in china has decreased by over 140 million in the past twenty-five years. At present China has less than 10 percent illiterate in the country. It shows that if the Nation is serious about solving the problem of illiteracy, it could be done and then only the problem of reducing poverty becomes possible. (Education To day, UNESCO, Paris Feb-May 2006). China is also very successful in poverty reduction according to the Report of the "Asia: Sustainability of Growth and Poverty Alleviation" jointly published by DEID, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. The Report says that the contribution of China is 75 percent of the total poverty reduction in Asia.

### **The Illusion**

Governments as well as donors in Nepal have been victim of a false illusion that formal primary education is only will way to educate the people It is not necessary to educate the present working people who are mostly girls, women and disadvantaged people. That is the reason the government and the donors are investing high proportion of money in primary education alone. About 60% of the total Education Budget is spent on primary education whereas the literacy and NFE programs gets only 0.67% in 2002 according to the Report of the Ministry of Education. But the progress of the primary education is not satisfactory at all due to the high non enrollment rate, high drop rate, high repetition rate and low graduation rate in the primary schools. If Nepal cannot prevent the emergence of new illiterates in the society from the primary schools, the elimination of illiteracy and poverty reduction will be an impossible task. Nepal is facing such problem for long time and still it is there.

### **The Non-Formal Education Center of the Ministry of Education's Capacity**

If we look at the performance of the Non Formal Education Center (NFEC), Ministry of Education as reported in the Report called "the Status of Non formal Education", it is decimal to tell the least. In that Report of the NFEC (page 21), in the fiscal year 2059-2060 (2002-2003), the Government made a plan to enroll about 89,360 persons providing classes and money, but it could enroll only 48,896 illiterates. Among them, only 42,532 survived to the end of the literacy class. It shows that the Government Office has no capacity to provide literacy for all. The Government of Nepal has set a target to make 8,16,430 persons literate between 2001 and 2004, but it could enroll only 635,272 people in the literacy classes and among them, only 492,359 had completed the classes. Following Table illustrates its performance:

**Target and passers of Government NFE Programs (2001-2004)**

Year	Out of School Program			Adult literacy Program			Women literacy Program			Total		
	Target	Enrolled	Passed	Target	Enrolled	Passed	Target	Enrolled	Passed	Target	Enrolled	Passed
2000-01	34365	30345	23746	187470	157992	94622	41475	36270	28188	263310	224607	146556
2001-02	27560	24297	18704	166720	107164	81300	33935	29556	23104	228215	161017	123108
2002-03	25625	22520	19680	89360	48896	42532	40550	33079	26733	155535	104495	88945
2003-04	28650	24484	20581	96570	85202	83199	44150	35467	29970	169370	145153	133750
Total	116200	101646	82711	540120	399254	301653	160110	134372	107995	816430	635272	492359

Source: Status of Non-Formal Education (2002-2003), MOES, Nepal

From the above table, it could be seen that there is a big gap between Government's target and its performance in the field of literacy program and OSP program. The NFEC's performance had been very disappointing for many years. One of the reason for its poor performance is also that the Government assign very inefficient and untrained person for literacy and NFE program and it spends very small amount of money for Literacy and NFE Program from the Education Ministry's Budget.

### **Big Commitments and No actions**

Since, 1990, two international conferences have been organized. The first conference was held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 to make the World Declaration on Education for All achieving quality education, and adult literacy for all. The government of Nepal made commitment to follow up of the Conference Declaration in the Conference. But it did not do any thing to fulfill the commitment. Similarly, another International Conference was held in Dakar in 2000, setting target to increase literacy rate by 50% to the present level of literacy rate by 2015. It has become a common policy of Nepal Government to make big commitments in the International Conferences and National Conferences, but to do nothing to fulfill the commitments. Same are the cases of the International Agencies. During the last several decades, the literacy rates increased by one percent on an average and the primary schools are also doing very poor job. If the present trend continues, Nepal will never be able to provide literacy for all and the illiterates will not be able to participate in the effective economic activities. So, the poverty alleviation will be an impossible dream for Nepal. Therefore, the International Organizations and the Government Organizations who are in word committed to reduced poverty alleviation should be aware of the hard facts the illiteracy of the poor people make them not able to take part in the economic activities actively adopting new technologies. The poor people become unable to be self motivated and self sufficient. In stead they would become more and more dependent on handouts and they loose the self confidence and self image and they think that it would be impossible to overcome poverty, because the government just give them false hope all the times, and they are never serious about them. This is what happening in Nepal all the times. Therefore the people never believe the Government and the International Organizations.

### **Intimate Relationship between Adult Education/ Literacy and Poverty Alleviation.**

Much talked "**Millennium Declaration at the largest ever Summit Meeting of the United Nations (UN)**" was approved by 189 Member States in UN General Conference in September 2000. Since then all the UN Agencies including the World Bank, OECD countries and the International Organizations beating their drums that they are very serious about it and committed to fulfill the **MLD Goals**. But their performances do not match their claims.

One African Economic Development Expert, the Resident Representative of the African Development Bank named Mr Pierre Thizier Seya wrote in a very frank way and I quote his saying "The role of education in development is multidimensional. Indeed, as one of the building blocks of human development, and not just a basic right, education including adult education is a foundation for progress in area such as human capital, health, nutrition and development of institutions and democracy".

He goes on saying "Adult Education also plays a major role in social development. It is now widely admitted that growth will not reduce poverty unless poor people are able to actively participate in it. Such participation can become effective to a large extent through adult education."

This sincere statement was made by none other than the Development Expert in Africa. It is a true and very bold statement. His saying is equally true for Nepal as well as for whole South Asia. But the so called the Development Experts working both in the National and International Agencies do not understand such undeniable truth. The so called Experts working in the International Banks and Bi lateral and Multi lateral donor agencies in Nepal are so out dated that they think that Adult Education is not important for poverty alleviation.

I would also quote the Report called "Writing the Wrongs", International Bench Marks on Adult Literacy based on Research Funded by the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2006 and UNESCO , November 2005 to make my point more clear.

The Report says "There are nearly one billion adults who cannot read and write, according to UNESCO statistics. The real number is probably nearer to two billion and still more if numeracy and actual use of these skills are taken into account. Most of these are people living in extreme poverty. Almost two third are women, and nearly 1 to 5 is a young person between 15 and 24. Yet these people have been abandoned in recent decades" ... "the illiteracy among parents undermines health and education of children"... "Lack of illiteracy skills is holding back development and economic growth in the world's poorest countries" Therefore Fe Y Alegria, Peru says "Literacy is defined by us as the beginning of an empowerment process for the disadvantaged men and women, which will over time enable them to participate as citizen, actively creatively and equally in the development process"

The Report in the Conclusion stated, "In most countries youth and adults especially girls and women's literacy program have suffered from years of under-investment and poor quality provision. Yet there is growing recognition that the realization of a wide range of poverty reduction and development goals depends on countries making significant progress to wards adult literacy of all."(Adult Education and Development,IIZ/DVV,2005)

In the same ways Ms Rosa Maria wrote in her Evaluation Report of EFA Program and I quote" In fact even Universalization Primary Education (UPE) cannot be achieved without paying attention to adults and to a broader Human Development perspective. Overlooking adults and their own learning implies disregarding educational demand, denying the importance of parents, the family and the community as fundamental support for children and the critical importance of overall social context where education and learning become part of everyday life and culture. These claims do not come only from the adult education .community. They come increasingly from economic and sociological

studies, many of which adopt pragmatic views and estimates vis-a-vis UPE goals, and acknowledge the need for holistic, political, including adult/parent education availability of secondary education and broader humans development strategy.” (Adult Education and Development, IIZ/DDV, 2003)

### **Nepal Government’s Policy for Poverty Alleviation**

His Majesty’s Government of Nepal (HMG/N) has implemented the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan during 2002-2007. Under the Tenth Five-Year Plan a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) was prepared. The Plan and the Strategy Paper have mentioned that NFE programs would be a means to reduce poverty in the country. Poverty does not deal only with economic condition, but it has many other aspects. It is known fact that poor people do not choose to be poor. If they were provided chance with appropriate situation, the poor people would be happy to escape from the poverty trap. So poverty needs actions not just assurances. They want to know ways and means to earn money to have enough food to eat, adequate and appropriate shelter, access to education to their children. They also want provision of good health, protection from violence, and a voice in decision making process. Therefore it is obvious that the poverty alleviation is a multi faceted and multi dimensional activities, actions in many fields may be necessary to make the poverty alleviation program a success. The NFE Program has a definite role to play to teach the people how to become self directed and able to make their own decision about choosing new technologies for production in the farms, raising animals etc marketing the products, to improve the health of the family including the children, to take care of the environment and improve it, to generate alternative energy, to manage community forest, community pastures, to form and manage saving and credit associations, to empower them through forming groups to stop social evils etc. There are many other roles the NFE could play for poverty alleviation. If we ignore the NFE, the poverty alleviation program will not succeed. The present NFE programs managed by the government and NGOs have to be improved in many ways. Therefore a lot of work needs to be done to make literacy and NFE as a means of people’s empowerment and development of the poor people. This would need able manpower and money. This is lacking in Nepal, because the government and the donors do not recognize the role of literacy and NFE for poverty alleviation. It is a very sad and unfortunate thing.

At the same time the illiteracy and poverty are the main cause for low enrollment and high drop out in the primary schools. According to the Report of "Nepal Living Standard Survey (NLSS)" conducted by CBS, Nepal in 2003/04, among the never- attendees, 33 percent reported, "parents did not want to send their children to primary schools because its teach was irrelevant to their life style". Other reasons included "the children have to work at home to help the parents" (20 percent), "the primary schools are too expensive for the poor people" (19 percent), "not willing to attend because it is not taught in local language" (13 percent) and "school far way" (3 percent). By sex groups, "too expensive and irrelevant " (27 percent) are the most cited reasons for males while "parents do not want" (38 percent) is the dominant reason for girls. 32 percent of the dropouts cited "poor academic progress" while 27 percent report "need help at home" as the primary reason for leaving school. Similarly 12 percent indicate "too expensive". From the report, it can obvious that the parent’s education is important, so that they could take part in decision making process of the schools to minimize the non-enrollment and dropouts in the primary schools. There should be good programs to make the parents literate and helpful to improve their earning capacity and quality of life. Then only they would see the value and importance to send their children to schools.

## **The Government Mechanism for literacy promotion at present**

The Government of Nepal has set up District Education Offices in every District and supervisors to supervise the schools and other educational programs. But the District Education Officers and school supervisors have a very negative attitude towards the literacy programs and other NFE Programs. Therefore, they always try to prove that the literacy classes and other NFE Programs are the waste of government money. It has also become some source of corruption for them. The District Education Officers and School Supervisors with the help of some their cronies to make a false report that all literacy programs are running in full swing and all money are spent. Actually, some of them write fake names and get the salary of the teachers even not running any literacy classes and not teaching any illiterates. The government is trying to correct the situation introducing the payment by result from times to times, which does not work. Moreover this system discourages the teachers who are working in the difficult places sincerely. More absurd thing is that the supervisors do not believe the sincere peoples and if some sincere people work well they do not like him/ her.

## **NGO's Advocacy Situation in Nepal**

Nepal was almost the first country to lunch a NGO Advocacy for Literacy Program. The National Resource Center for Non-Formal Education convened a "Literacy Watch Education Committee in Nepal in 1996"

The Committee members were :

1. Mr. T.M. Sakya	Chairman (NRC-NFE/CEFA)
2. Ms. Indira Koirala	Member Secretary (IIDS)
3. Mr. Bikash Ghimire	Member (NGO Forum)
4. Mr. Chij Kumar Shrestha	Member (World Education)
5. Dr. Suman Tuladhar	Member (CERID)
6. Mrs. Prema Regmi	Member (ABC, Nepal)
7. Mrs. Kanti Singh	Member (ABC, Nepal)
8. Mr. Prakash Singh Adhikari	Member (IFCD)
9. Dr. Uttam Karmacharya	Member (CEFA)
10. Dr. Samira Luitel	Member (CERID)
11. Mr. Rohit Pradhan	UNESCO, Kathmandu
12. One representation	

National Committee for NFE, Govt. of Nepal

The Literacy Watch Committee also published a highly popular bulletin called "Literacy Watch Bulletin" from 1997-2002 (24 Issues) on different themes. But The Literacy Watch Committee is not active at present and the publication of the Bulletin was also discontinued because of lack of fund and interest.

Bangladesh needs to be congratulated for being active. The Campaign for Popular Education CAMPE formed an "Education Watch Committee". It has published a number of publications 2003 .The CAMPE has also organized a Sub-Regional Meeting called "Experience Sharing Workshop". Three persons from Nepal participated in that workshop one each from NRC-NFE, World Education and Concern for Children and Environmental, Nepal (CONCERN). The NRC-NFE sent a letter to other participants to the workshop to follow up the Bangladesh Workshop. But no participants responded. Therefore, the Advocacy for Literacy in Nepal is in a very sad condition. `

There may be a number of reasons why Nepal is not so active now. Nepal needs an umbrella organization of NGOs working for literacy like CAMPE in Bangladesh. If such organization is set up the organization could gather NGOs working for literacy in Nepal together and launch an effective Advocacy Campaign for Literacy. UNESCO office in Nepal should be the initiator for bringing the NGOs working in the field of literacy together and revive the Literacy Watch Committee and publication of Literacy Watch Bulletin again to make the UN Literacy Decade a success. UNESCO Dhaka deserves congratulation for being active in their area literacy.

### **The Community Learning Centers (CLCs) provides a hope in Nepal**

In 1996 NRC-NFE and later UNESCO Kathmandu showed the Community Learning Centers (CLC) set up by the local people especially the girls, women, and disadvantaged people and out of school education to the out of school children and youth but also the CLC program could be very successful to teach income generating skills to the poor people for improving their income. Most of the CLCs teach such skills like vegetable cultivation adopting new technologies, fish farming, fruit cultivations, bee keeping, community forest management, animal raising and milk production etc to improve their income earning capacities and quality of life improvement programs like pit latrine making, bio gas plant setting up, waste management making organic manures and recycling the waste materials, conducting health camps, immunization camps etc.

Since the Community Learning Centers (CLCs) were set up and managed by the local people, the community people themselves select the programs. Therefore they know where the illiterates reside and where the children are not going to the schools, dropouts and retention problems. They could help to solve the problems of poverty improving their income levels and programs to improve their quality of life. For this purpose they could mobilize local resources, recourses from Government programs, NGOs, INGOs and donor agencies as well. One could visit the CLCs set up by NRC-NFE at Pataria, Rajpur, Madhubani and Khudabagar and other places. Therefore the CLC set up by the UNESCO Kathmandu also followed the same pattern. Later the Government became convinced that the Community Learning Centers (CLC) could work for literacy, post literacy, out of school children and income generating programs and quality life improvement programs managing by the local people. Therefore the Government approved a program to establish about 205 CLCs in different parts of the country following the same pattern. NRC-NFE is always providing help hands to train people, developing training and learning materials. Most important thing is that the NRC-NFE is conducting the training for the local leaders to manage the CLCs by themselves. Therefore our viewpoint is that the "Comprehensive Literacy Program of Nepal" by the Government of Nepal and UNESCO could be done by CLCs only. Therefore, the Government should make regulation that the financial, technical recourses and power to be given to the CLCs. The DEOs of course should supervise the work of the CLCs. The NRC-NFE is ready to provide technical supports in the form of publicity, undertaking survey and evaluative research, training of personnel, preparation of training materials, preparation of learning materials and making reports of the success and problems of the programs.