NCE
NEPAL

SPOTLIGHT ON SDG4: A CIVIL SOCIETY'S REPORT FOR HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM

Abbreviations

AI: Artificial Intelligence

ASPBAE: Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education

CEHRD: Centre for Education and Human Resource Development

CLCs: Community Learning Centres

CSOs: Civil Society Organisations

ECD: Early Childhood Development

HDI: Human Development Index

I/NGO: International/Non-Governmental Organisation

ICT: Information and Communications Technology

LEG: Local Education Group

MoEST: Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology

NCE Nepal: National Campaign for Education Nepal

NER: Net Enrolment Rate

NPC: National Planning Commission

OOS: Out of School

OPDs: Organisation of People with Disabilities

SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals

SESP: School Education Sector Plan

TVET: Technical and Vocational Education and Training

VNR: Voluntary National Review

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Executive Summary

Nepal faces significant barriers to achieve SDG4. Systemic inequalities, slow economic growth, political volatility, civil unrest, and frequent disasters continue to pose challenges to improve education access and outcomes. Education budget has also remained stagnant with limited signs of growth to fuel transformation. Implementation of plans and policies also is weak. NCE Nepal has been regularly monitoring progress made by Nepal with regards to SDG4. Data for the report was gathered from stakeholder consultations and document review of government and CSOs reports and academic studies. With just five years remaining to achieve the SDGs, Nepal has progressed 66.1% towards attainment of SDG4. In view of socio, economic, and political climate, the government faces immense challenges to fulfil its SDGs commitment. In recent years, Net Enrolment Rates have decreased and that of girls, Dalits, and children with disabilities have suffered more decline. Similarly, survival and completion rates of girl students and their access to TVET education again lag behind boys, adding to more challenges to the lives of an already extremely marginalised group. Reach of non-formal education is also constrained by resource, capacity and awareness. ICT infrastructure and education in community schools is uneven with students and youths in remote areas and belonging to marginalised groups more disenfranchised from it. Despite the critical importance of youths, state initiatives for them are limited. The study recommends that the government must increase the budget for education along with its meaningful utilisation and ensure provisions of equity and inclusion targeted for girls, people with disabilities, marginalised groups, and youths are truly implemented in all sub-sectors within education.

Country Context

Nepal is a new republican democracy in South Asia nestled between two world powers China in North and India in South. It boasts multi-ethnic, muti-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-religious citizens with a wide array of ecological zones from mountain to flatland. According to Census Report (2021)[1] there are approximately 30 million people (51.1% female) in Nepal with 142 different ethnicities. Among them Chhetris comprise 16.45% of the population, Brahmans-Hill 11.29%, and rest are marginalised and minority groups such as Magars 6.9%, Tharus 6.2%, Tamangs 5.62%, Bishwakarmas 5.04%, Muslim 4.86%, Newar 4.6%, Yadav 4.21%, Rai 2.2%, and others. Total of 2.2% of the population are people with disabilities. The linguistic diversity of Nepal is also huge with 124 different languages spoken. Nepali is the most predominant language with 44.86% of the population speaking it. The second most spoken language is Maithali at 11.05%[2] with the remaining other languages. People in geographically difficult zones and of ethnic and linguistic minorities have been structurally disenfranchised from socio, political, and

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[1] https://censusnepal.cbs.gov.np/results/downloads/national?type=report

[2] https://censusnepal.cbs.gov.np/results/downloads/caste-ethnicity?type=report

economic sphere in the country, resulting in their lower access and participation in education. Their marginalisation is further exacerbated by poverty and political volatility of the country.

Nepal has been experiencing frequent power struggles between political polars such as monarchy, political parties, and interest groups. Recurrent changes in political system, leadership, and insurgencies have kept severely disrupting any meaningful progress in public education, especially that of girls, women, and marginalised communities. Strikes, protests, and political conflicts have often led to school shutdowns, interrupting students' education and delaying exams. During Nepal's Maoist insurgency (1996–2006), schools were forcibly closed, teachers were targeted, and children were abducted for recruitment into armed groups. This not just severely disrupted people's education, whose impact is still reverberating as evidenced by lower literacy rate, but it also violated basic tenets of human rights. Political instability has hindered long-term educational planning, leading to outdated curricula, poor infrastructure, unequal access to quality education, and poor learning outcomes of students. While since 2008, the political system has remained largely stable after establishment of democratic republic, changes in government leadership and occasional protests and strikes from political parties, civilians, and interest groups has been impacting teaching-learning processes.

Similar to 2024, community school teachers in 2025 organized a month-long protest, disturbing the academic calendar and examination schedule. This negatively affected the right to education of students and is bound to have consequences towards access to schools as annual school-led enrolment campaigns were not conducted on time. In addition, a new minister was appointed for the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST) after the resignation of the previous minister. This makes the new minister the 11th person to hold the post since the implementation of SDGs in 2015.

Along with the temperamental political scenario, natural calamities such as flood, landslides, earthquakes, forest fires, etc have also been interrupting the right to education in a safe and secure learning environment. Recently, in 2024 monsoon related flooding impacted regular schooling in Nepal; 162 schools sustained some level of damage to building[3] and disrupting schooling of more than 11,000 children[4]. Moreover, there were multiple day school closures in flood affected regions, making the impact wide spread. In addition to impacting children's and people's life and education, disasters have been adding financial burden to the state's treasury due to costs associated with relief, rehabilitation, refurbishment, and rebuilding.

Nepal's economic outlook has progressed from the last fiscal year. The Asian Development Bank has projected Nepal's economy to grow by 4.4%. This is a slight improvement from last year's

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[3] https://giwmscdntwo.gov.np/media/pdf_upload/img224_rvtbbmx.pdf

[4] https://reliefweb.int/report/nepal/nepal-least-14-children-killed-and-schools-closed-after-floods-and-landslides-triggered-record-breaking-rain

growth of 3.87%[5]. In the first half of 2025, Nepal's economy grew by 4.9%[6]. The progressing economic scenario could bode well for the public education budget as well, which shrunk to 10.95% in 2024 from 11.27% in 2023 due to the dampening country's economy. Despite the lower budget earmarked for the education sector, MoEST has only been able to utilize 39% of its budget till the second quarter of the fiscal year 2024/25[7].

In 2025 Nepal's Human Development Index (HDI) increased to 0.622 from 0.575 from 2015, but the rank has remained unchanged at 145[8]. The gender wise HDI gap remains huge with 0.567 of women and 0.661 of men and an average 0.487 gender inequality index. The gender gap and high inequality index is a reflection of socio-economic disparities faced by women in the form of violence, abuse, and discrimination.

It has been 10 years since SDGs have come into implementation and only 5 years is remaining to achieve the set target. With political, economic, and environmental fluctuations and their effects in education, it remains ever more vital that CSOs' role as watchdog of the government is heightened. In this regard, NCE Nepal, in collaboration with Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE), has been annually monitoring the progress made by Nepal in SDG4 through sSDG4 spotlight report. The report supports as evidence for NCE Nepal's advocacy on the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) and contributes towards the regional report of ASPBAE.

The objectives of the report are:

1. Monitor the progress made in SDG4 by the Government of Nepal
2. Explore gaps and challenges in school and non-formal education
3. Review practices and progress of inclusion and equity in education

Method of Report Preparation

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed to prepare the report. NCE Nepal led a series of consultations with government and CSOs representatives, education experts, rights activists, political parties, students, youths, teachers' and parents' associations, School Management Committee Federation, Organisation of People with Disabilities (OPD), marginalised communities, women, and journalists. The consultations were held in the form of dialogues and interactions. Moreover, NCE Nepal carried out document analysis. NCE Nepal reviewed and analysed previous SDG4 spotlight reports, government reports, red books, academic

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[5] https://www.spotlightnepal.com/2025/04/09/nepals-economy-will-likely-to-grow-by-44-in-fiscal-year-2025-adb/

[6] https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nepal/publication/nepaldevelopmentupdate

[7] https://moest.gov.np/content/13414/automatically-publishing-activity-under-notice---jan/

[8] https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/global-report-document/hdr2025reporten.pdf

studies, and CSOs reports. The analysis has been carried out under the study framework of ASPBAE.

The report also went through three stages of thorough review and revision. Firstly, NCE Nepal's internal team, board, and members provided constructive feedback and comments on the report which were all incorporated. Due to diversity in NCE Nepal's membership and board, the report has been able to reflect similar diverse voices as it has strongly presented gender, social equality, and intersectional perspective. Secondly, the report was assessed by ASPBAE and the feedback was again incorporated. The report was again reviewed by the NCE Nepal team and finalised.

Progress Towards the Achievement of SDG4

Overall Progress of SDG4 in Nepal

According to the 2024 VNR completed by the government, Nepal has attained 66.1% of its target of SDG4 and is set to achieve 71.1% of the set target by 2030. Quality education is the 6th most progressed goal among the 16 contextualised SDGs in Nepal[9] (see annex 1). In comparison with other goals, the progress of SDG4 seems satisfactory; however, it is an extremely slow progress.

Despite the SDG4 indicators being complemented by annual policy and programmes, annual budget, national periodic plans, and education sector plans which ought to expedite the attainment of the SDG4. Nevertheless, the government has still fallen short to meaningfully progress the goal

> *"Nepal still is struggling to make promising strides to achieve SDG4. Underachievement of SDG4 just does not mean that the country has failed to live up to its international commitment but also has failed most marginalized learners that it has constitutional duty towards."*
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> Education CSO Representative
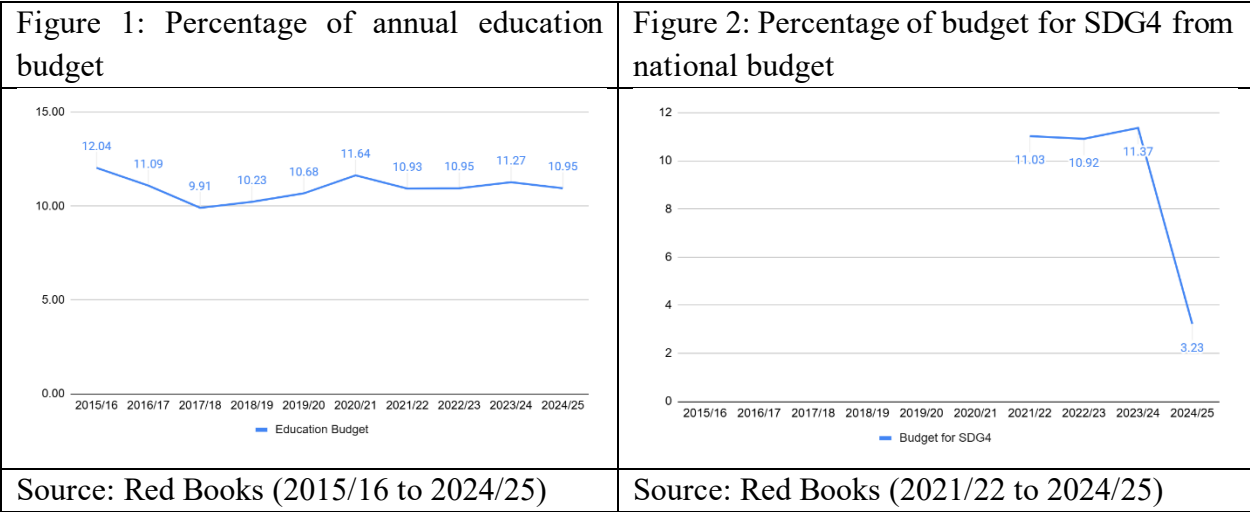
(see annex II for full progress in SDG4 indicator).

To add, the progress of SDG5: Gender Equality is concerningly low at 57.9%. This low progress suggests that gender disparity in education still persists at a significant level and bars their equitable participation in the education processes[10].

The limited progress of SDG4 can be explained by stagnant investment in education. Since 2015, the education budget has averaged 11% of the total annual national budget as illustrated in figure 1 with yearly fluctuations. From 2023/24 to 2024/25, the education budget declined from 10.95%

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[9] SDG14: Life Below Water was not adapted by Nepal.

[10] https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2024/VNR%202024%20Nepal%20Report_0.pdf

to 11.27% and the budget for SDG4 dropped sharply from 11.37% to 3.23% as shown in figure 2.

Figure 1: Percentage of annual education budget	Figure 2: Percentage of budget for SDG4 from national budget
Source: Red Books (2015/16 to 2024/25)	Source: Red Books (2021/22 to 2024/25)

More concerningly, the report from Office of Auditor General (2024)[11] has shown that the government has failed to implement programmes that promote participation of students under technical stream in undergraduate level at development planning. Likewise, initiatives such as expanding the reach of broadband internet connectivity and digital education under the SDG4 were not implemented[12]. **Underfunding of education coupled with irregular implementation of the programme demonstrates that Nepal faces immense difficulties to achieve its targets for SDG4.**

Nepal has committed to invest 15-20% of its annual budget towards public education in international platforms such as the Dakar Agreement and Incheon Declaration. These commitments have been reaffirmed by the state in national school sector plans and international level at Global Partnership for Education's replenishment pledge. Despite these continuous
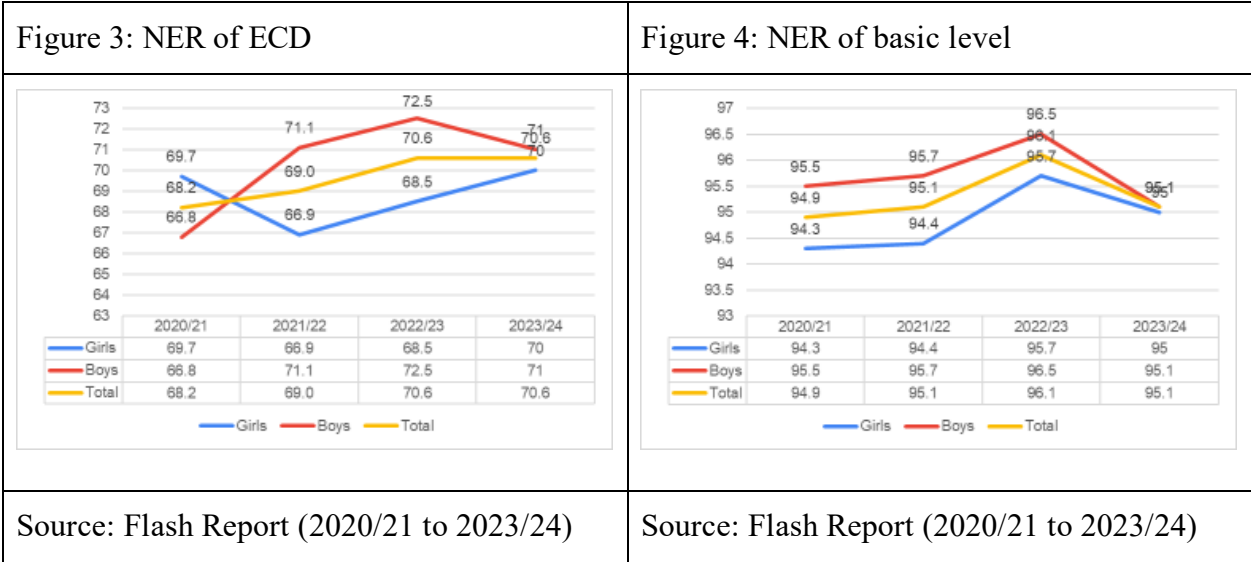

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https://oag.gov.np/uploads/files/6Ph-%E0%A4%AE%E0%A4%B9%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%B2%E0%A5%87%E0%A4%9
6%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%AA%E0%A4%B0%E0%A5%80%E0%A4%95%E0%A5%8D%E0%A4%B7%E0%A4%95%E0%A4
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https://www.oag.gov.np/uploads/files/hAv-%E0%A4%AE%E0%A4%B9%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%B2%E0%A5%87%E0%
A4%96%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%AA%E0%A4%B0%E0%A5%80%E0%A4%95%E0%A5%8D%E0%A4%B7%E0%A4%95%E0
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0%A4%A8,%20%E0%A5%A8%E0%A5%A6%E0%A5%AE%E0%A5%A7.pdf

promises, the government has failed to meet them leading to underachievement of SDG4 and declining quality and access to education.
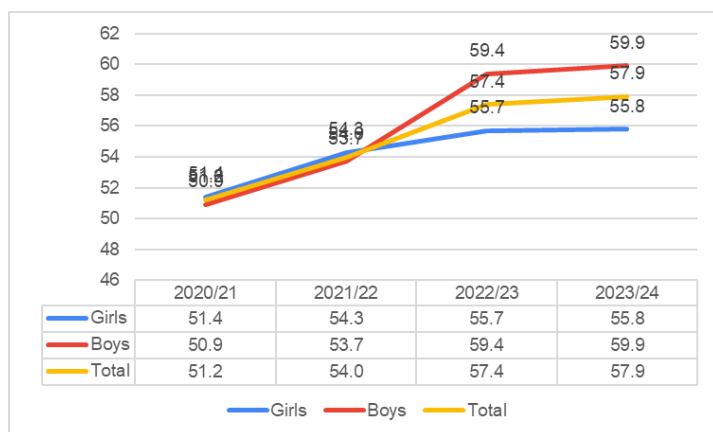
ACCESS to Formal Education

The data illustrates an overall rising access to formal education with fluctuations. As illustrated in figure 3, the Net Enrolment Rate (NER) of Early Childhood Development (ECD) has increased from 2020/21, but the NER significantly dipped from 2022/23. The enrolment rate of boy students has surpassed that of girl students and their enrolment remains below the national average. The data highlights that girl children are being deprived of their right to education from their formative years which is critical for their holistic development.

Figure 3: NER of ECD	Figure 4: NER of basic level
Source: Flash Report (2020/21 to 2023/24)	Source: Flash Report (2020/21 to 2023/24)

In basic education, access is near-universal, with total enrollment exceeding 93% throughout the period. Both genders showed consistent growth, though boys maintained a slight advantage e.g., 96.5% in 2022/23 vs. girls' 95.7%). Similar to NER of ECD, there was a dip in total enrollment (95.1%). Again, the NER of girls has consistently fallen behind boys at basic level

Figure 4: NER of secondary level

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Girls	51.4	54.3	55.7	55.8
Boys	50.9	53.7	59.4	59.9
Total	51.2	54.0	57.4	57.9

Source: Flash Report (2020/21 to 2023/24)

NER of secondarily level has demonstrated most growth as shown in figure 4. Total enrollment surged from 47.6% to 57.9%, signalling improved access. Nevertheless, the gender gap has exacerbated significantly in the last two years despite it being nearly equal to boys in the initial two years. The average difference in NER between girls and boys is 4 with boys at an advantage.

The dwindling access to education of girl students indicates that there are more out of school girls than boys and girls are still facing systemic barriers to access education. Girls from remote areas and belonging to Dalit, marginalised, and disability background face additional challenges as barriers in form of poverty, gender and caste-based discrimination, abuse, lack of gender/disability friendly infrastructures and practices, safe learning environment further add limitations to their already disproportionate social barriers than their counterparts.

Table 1: Enrolment and share of Dalit and students with disabilities in school education

	Disaggregation	2021/22	2023/24	Decline from 2021/22
Enrolment rate of Dalit students in ECD	Girls	19.3	16.3	-3.0
	Boys	18.7	15.9	-2.8
	Total	19.0	16.3	-2.7
Enrolment rate of students with disabilities in ECD	Girls	0.2	0.22	0.02
	Boys	1.0	0.23	-0.77
	Total	0.6	0.22	-0.38
Share of Dalit students in total enrolment in basic education	Girls	18.6	18.0	-0.6
	Boys	18.1	17.4	-0.7
	Total	18.4	17.7	-0.7
Share of students with disabilities in total enrolment	Girls	0.5	0.2	-0.3
	Boys	0.6	0.3	-0.3

in basic education	Total	0.5	0.3	-0.2

Source (Flash Report 2023/24)

Despite rising total enrolment, access to education of marginalised learners such as Dalits and students with disabilities have been decreasing. For Dalit students in ECD, enrolment rates dropped significantly—from 19.0% to 16.3% overall, with a steeper decline among girls (3.0 points) than boys (2.8 points). Similarly, the share of Dalit students in total enrolment in basic education decreased by 0.7 points. For students with disabilities, the trends are mixed but concerning nevertheless. While the

> *"Reach of Dalit, marginalized, and girl students in education is still low. They also face intersecting challenges such as poverty, abuse, and discrimination. Due to these, retaining them in schools is of immense challenge. To make any meaningful changes in lives of the students we need to simultaneously address these barriers as well."*
>
> Dalit CSO Representative

enrolment of girls with disabilities in ECD saw a slight increase (from 0.2% to 0.22%), boys with disabilities experienced a drastic fall from 1.0% to 0.23%, leading to an overall decline of 0.38 points. In basic education, the share of students with disabilities declined for both girls and boys by 0.3 points each, dropping the total from 0.5% to 0.3%.

The concerning trend of lowering access, especially of girls, CwD, and marginalised learners point towards systemic obstacles including poverty, gender and caste-based discrimination, unsafe learning environments, inadequate infrastructure, and social barriers. Another factor is that parents' and students' trust in public education is declining with recent data from MoEST showing that 55.53% of community schools have enrolled less than 100 students.[13] A learning assessment report by the Education Review Office also shows that there is an average of 68-point gap in marks secured by community and private school students with private schools leading.[14] The combination of systemic barriers, insufficient investment, low learning outcomes, and dwindling trust in the public education system is lowering access in education and depriving children from their fundamental right to education.

Figure 5: Completion rate of basic level

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[13] https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/over-50-percent-of-government-schools-enrol-fewer-than-100-students-44-65.html
[14]

https://www.ero.gov.np/upload_file/files/post/1614876114_221299301_nasa%20report%202077%20for%20web.pdf

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EDUCATIONOUTLOUD
advocacy & social accountability

GPE Transforming Education
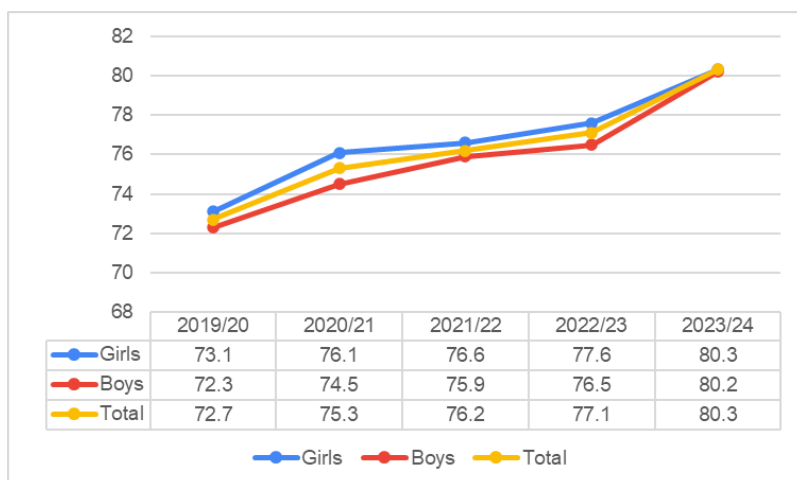
Source: Flash Report (2020/21 to 2023/24)

The basic education completion rate statistics over the period of 2019/20 and 2023/24 are showing a strong and consistent increase for girls as well as boys. Overall, the completion rate has gone from 72.7% during 2019/20 up to 80.3% during 2023/24, an overall increase of 7.6 percentage points across five years. Girls have traditionally outperformed boys in years past, starting at 73.1% compared to the boys' rate of 72.3% during 2019/20. However, the gender gap has fallen significantly over the years as in 2023/24 girls and boys had nearly equal completion rates—80.3% and 80.2%, respectively—equating to nearly gender parity.

"Community schools have been lacking even basic facilities for students. Our school lack safe toilets and changing rooms for girl students and we do not receive books on time. We do not even have subject wise teachers. It also feels like school is not concerned towards safety of girl students. How can we expect to complete our education in such condition?"

Girl student from community school

Figure 6: Survival rate to grade 12
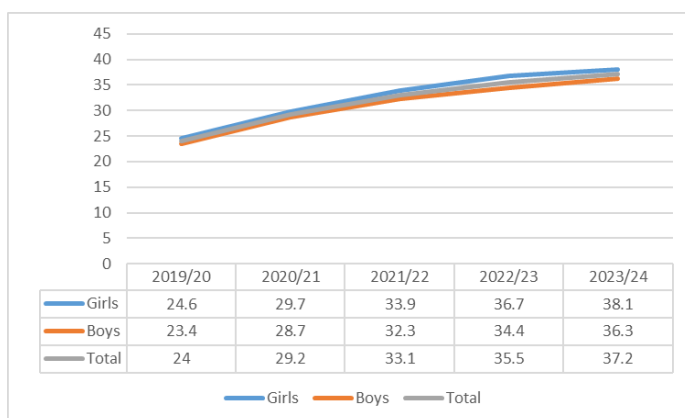
According to the Flash Report, survival rate is "defined as the percentage of a cohort of students enrolled in the first grade of a given level or cycle of education in a given school year who are expected to reach a given grade, regardless of repetition". As shown in figure 6, the survival rate has been consistently increasing with the survival rate of girl students being higher for each year. Nevertheless, around 62.8% of students who were enrolled in grade 1 in 2011/12 did not reach grade 12 by 2023/24.

Basic level education has been provisioned as free and compulsory and secondary level as free (but not compulsory) by Constitution of Nepal (2015). But still, such large-scale deprivation from secondary education poses insurmountable challenges to the lives of students. For instance, lack of secondary education can be a leading barrier to access higher education and can be a restriction to enter a desirable job market and good quality of life. Students could also find themselves entrenched in cycles of poverty, marginalisation along with reduced civic participation, and can also impact realisations of their other human rights and freedoms.

Access to TVET

According to the Flash Report, the Government of Nepal has gradually increased funding and technical support for community schools that conduct Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) streams in schools from grade 9 to grade 12. From 2021/22 there has been a 10.7% increase in community schools providing TVET streams as shown in figure 7. The overall access to TVET education is still limited as out of all secondary schools in Nepal only 7.4% of schools can offer TVET education. In addition, these subjects have a limited enrolment quota of 48 students, imposing further restriction to the access in TVET education

The schools that provide TVET education incorporate subjects such as Plant Science, Civil Engineering, Computer Engineering, Animal Science, and Electrical Engineering. Students can choose the subjects to study as to their linking however all TVET equipped schools cannot provide options for all subjects to students.

Figure 7: Number of TVET schools in Nepal	Figure 8: Percentage of students in TVET schools in Nepal

| Source: Flash Report 2021/22 to 2023/24 | Source: Flash Report 2021/22 to 2023/24 |
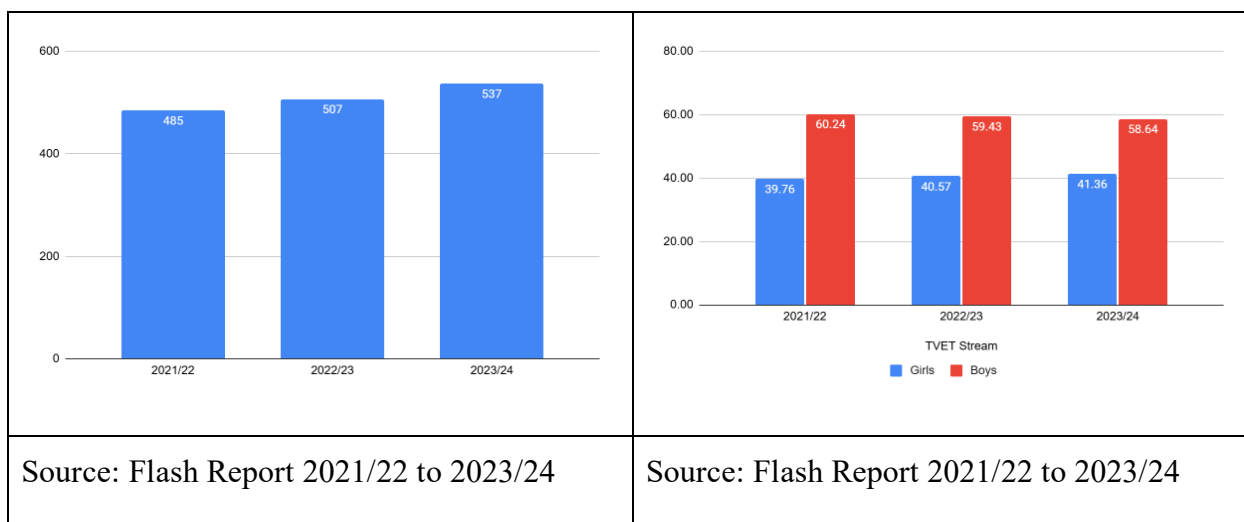
As demonstrated in figure 8, girl students have lower access to school level TVET education compared to boys[15]. Although there has been a gradual increase in participation of girls over the years, boy students still occupy over half of the TVET seats. Girl students still face barriers to actively participate in the technical stream as it is deemed more masculine and unfit for girls.

> "Integrating TVET in school level education has been great initiative of government and is receiving well with parents and students. However, as it has grown popular, we have not been able to accommodate all students who want to study TVET stream."
>
> Community School TVET Teacher

During school visits by NCE Nepal, young students studying in school level TVET stream were positive towards it. Students thought that it was a novel learning opportunity and was providing them with extra skill and knowledge that the general curriculum lacked. Moreover, the parents searched and targeted community schools with TVET streams to admit their children. The students also preferred the stream stating that they felt more confident to enter the job market after completion of secondary studies and ready to tackle higher education too.

Overall, the government's steps have been positive towards TVET education. The expansion of school based TVET has been slow but progressive. But the gender divide is stark with the stream heavily skewed towards boys. With students and parents' preference towards TVET stream being high, the initiative needs to be rapidly expanded upon with proper gendered lens to promote girls' engagement.

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[15] A complete year-by-year comparatively analysis cannot be performed as in 2021/22 and 2022/23 422 schools provided the data for Flash Report whereas only 249 schools did it in 2023/24.

ACCESS to Non-Formal Education

Nepal's primary strategy for expansion of adult learning and non-formal education has been through literacy campaigns and CLCs. The literacy campaign aims to ensure that Nepal achieves a minimum literacy threshold. Out of 77 districts, 64 have been declared fully literate after 14 years of continued effort[16]. But even the districts that have been declared as fully literate struggle with challenges such as high drop out rate of students. Additionally, the literacy rate of people aged 15 and above has increased to 78.9% from the 2015 baseline 62.2% and the literacy rate of women in the same age group increased from 51.9% to 72%[17]. The increasing literacy rates suggest that adults who were traditionally deprived from education rights have been gradually gaining literacy skills.

Community Learning Centres (CLCs) are government led grassroot level initiatives that aim to enhance literacy skills, provide educational opportunities to Out of School (OOS) children and offer programmes to adults such as financial literacy, income-generating skills, health and sanitation knowledge, social awareness, etc[18]. Currently, there are 2,156 CLCs in Nepal. To facilitate learning through CLCs, Centre for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD) has endorsed a series of condensed curriculum which enables adults and OOS to learn in a quick and efficient method. These materials are freely available to everyone too[19]. Additionally, the MoEST has endorsed the National Qualification Framework, through which learners from the CLCs can gain equal qualification certificates to that from formal schooling. Despite such diverse and targeted initiatives, the reach of CLCs remains low due to financial and human resource limitations, lack of capacity, geographical challenges, and lack of awareness among people of the existence of CLCs.

> *"CLCs have key role in providing life-long learning opportunities. However, we severely lack resources. Our funding mostly comes from federal government. We need to push local governments to fund CLCs so we can expand our reach and offer more opportunities for everyone."*
>
> Chairperson of a CLC

Non-Formal education plays a crucial role in promoting adult and lifelong learning opportunities. Non-formal education received around a quarter of the annual budget for education. The allocation for the education budget remains way below the benchmark of 15-20%. While there is a high demand and need for non-formal education, the volume of funding for non-formal education is

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[16] https://edusanjal.com/blog/nepals-literacy-report-progress-challenges-and-aspirations/

[17] https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2024/VNR%202024%20Nepal%20Report_0.pdf

[18] https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248135

[19] https://learning.cehrd.gov.np/mod/page/view.php?id=181

insufficient.[20] Without adequate funding, support, and partnership for non-formal education not just adults but children living in hardship also face exclusion from the education system.

The importance of non-formal education is further underscored by the provision in Free and Compulsory Education Act (2018) which has stated that any citizen who has not attained basic or equivalent level of education by mid-April 2028 are not eligible for state offices and cannot open/operate business or non-profit. It is the responsibility of the state to ensure universal basic education and with only three years left for the deadline, the effectiveness of non-formal education should be exponentially expanded.

> *"Non formal education has made me literate and independent. It has been my life savior. Programs for non-formal education should reach all corners of the country so women like me can gain new hope for life."*
>
> A woman from Myagdi

Digital Connectivity in Schools

Nepal has established national Information Communication and Technology (ICT) policies for education, including school education through School Education Sector Plan (SESP), TVET, and non-formal education. The ICT in Education Master Plan (2013-2017)[21] and the National Information and Communication Technology Policy (2015)[22] outline strategies for integrating digital tools into learning, improving digital competencies for educators and students, and expanding access to freely available education resources. These policies aim to enhance classroom delivery, increase access to learning materials, and improve governance in education. However, implementation has faced challenges, particularly in rural areas where infrastructure and digital literacy remain barriers.

According to the Flash Report 2020/21, only 35,520 community schools had access to ICT materials. Of these, just 35.8% had access to radio, 24.2% to television, 15.6% had computers (many without internet), and 19.3% had access to a digital learning portal. During the pandemic, the Flash Report 2021/22 revealed that only 24.7% of students in community schools could access e-classes. Additionally, 26.1% relied on pre-recorded YouTube videos for learning, while 34.3% used the eLearning platform Sikai Chautari. The use of online classes through video conferencing tools was significantly higher in Grade 12 (49.1%) compared to Grade 5 (12.4%).

As shown in table 2, between 2022/23 and 2023/24, basic community schools saw a slight increase in the average number of computers (from 5 to 5.2) and a significant rise in broadband connectivity

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[20] Red books from 2015/16 to 2023/24

[21]

https://martinchautari.org.np/storage/files/informationandcommunicationtechnologyictineducationmasterplan-2013-2017.pdf

[22] https://dhulikhelmun.gov.np/sites/dhulikhelmun.gov.np/files/documents/ICT%20policy%20Nepal.pdf

from 33.2% to 47.8%, indicating progress in digital infrastructure at the foundational level. In contrast, secondary community schools experienced a notable decline in digital resources, with the average number of computers dropping from 22 to 13 and broadband connectivity decreasing from 77.6% to 69.8%. Recently, select local governments such as Kathmandu and Lalitpur Metropolitan Cities have been providing smart digital boards in classrooms. However, the reach of these smart boards has been mostly limited to urban areas and model schools[23].

Table 2: ICT reach in community schools

School Level	Indicator	2022/23	2023/24
Basic	Avg. No. of Computers	5	5.2
	Broadband Connectivity (%)	33.20%	47.80%
Secondary	Avg. No. of Computers	22	13
	Broadband Connectivity (%)	77.60%	69.80%

Source: Flash Report (2022/23 to 2023/24)

Despite the passable reach of computers and the internet in schools, their actual use among students and teachers remains minimal, as per British Council report[24] . These schools primarily limit computer use to teaching the computer subject, and only a small number of teachers are proficient in operating them. There is also a significant shortage of qualified computer teachers. Most functional computers are concentrated in model community schools, where teachers are more likely to incorporate multimedia tools like projectors and PowerPoint presentations into their lessons—a practice less

> *"Although we have a computer subject, school says that they have not been able to get computer teacher. Our school also lack a decent computer lab. We have not been able to study or practice any computer skill."*
>
> Secondary level community school student

common in other schools. Additionally, 64.3% of teachers cited the lack of ICT equipment in classrooms as the main reason for not integrating digital tools into their teaching as per the report.

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[23] Model schools refer to schools that are equipped with most facilities and serve as a template for other schools to replicate the efforts.

[24] https://www.britishcouncil.org.np/sites/default/files/digital_literacy_level_in_secondary_level_teachers_-_a_baseline_study.pdf

A recent World Bank report on the EdTech readiness of community schools highlights a significant lack of preparedness to adopt educational technology[25]. Key areas such as teacher training, student access, devices, connectivity, and digital resources were rated as needing improvement, with overall indicators described as "not satisfactory" and in need of substantial enhancement. Indicating low digital literacy among schools, teachers, and students that needs to be rectified promptly.

While digital education has improved accessibility, it has also exacerbated inequalities. Many students in rural areas struggle with unreliable internet and electricity, making online learning difficult. Additionally, financial constraints prevent families from affording digital devices, further widening the gap between urban and rural learners, with girls, women, CwD, and marginalised learners facing the most impact and gap[26].

Civil Society Engagement in the SDG 4 Implementation, Follow-up, and Monitoring

One of the key forums for CSOs to actively and meaningfully participate in discussion and implementation of SDG4 is Local Education Group (LEG). Led by the MoEST and facilitated by CEHRD, NCE Nepal, CSOs, and development partners have institutionalised representation in the LEG. The LEG meeting, which is formally led by the government, meets bi-annually for Joint Review Meeting in April/May and Joint Review Meeting in December. Development partners and CSOs meet on a monthly basis for Development Partners' LEG. In the state led LEG meetings, NCE Nepal has shown consistent and strong participation by holding the government accountable for attainment of SDG4, SESP, and budget commitments done by state in national and international platforms. During LEG, NCE Nepal and CSOs formally present their evidence-based perspectives on gaps and challenges in education budget, SDG4 implementation, present way forwards, and join hands with governments and like-minded organisations to ensure successful realisation of SDG4 and goals set for SESP.

NCE Nepal's is raising grounded perspectives and demands from the grassroots level in the LEG platform. This practice has resulted in the government sincerely listening and acting on concerns raised by NCE Nepal. For instance, after learning about the restrictions posed by conditional grant[27] for the implementation of the School Education Sector Plan, which was posing immense

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[25] https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/a8d5d09196b996cc3a802810b04f76c7-0140022023/related/231016-ETRI-Nepal-Marta-Conte-Domingue.pdf

[26] https://worldyouth.org.au/about-us/media-and-news/2020/challenges-of-digital-education-in-nepal-and-its-impact-on-students

[27] Restrictive grant given by federal to local governments for implementation of specific projects

challenges to local governments to meaningfully implement their Local Education Plan, NCE Nepal raised this barrier and advocated for a more flexible grant mechanism. This issue was heard by the government which has provisioned a transition from conditional to equalisation grant in the budget speech of 2025/26.

Besides LEG, Nepal has institutionalized CSOs participation in SDGs. In 2016, the Nepal SDGs Forum was formed as a civil-society platform under the NGO Federation, bringing together thematic federations, CSOs, networks, major groups (youth, women, Dalit, etc.) and alliances. It appoints "Conveners" for each goal and major-group cluster, enabling broad CSOs input into planning and review. For example, the SDG Forum organizes an annual National

> *"NCE Nepal has played pivotal role in keep government accountable towards education and SDG4 while supporting us to find innovative solutions to the challenges in the sector."*
>
> Former Minister for Education, Science and Technology

People's Assembly on SDGs; which together the chair of Parliament's SDG Committee, NPC officials, UN representatives, CSOs, and I/NGOs to jointly assess progress and discuss priorities. Such forums have given civil society a regular, institutionalized voice in national SDG dialogue[28].

NCE Nepal also contributes through parallel reviews and advocacy for SDG4. NCE Nepal (and other CSOs) prepares CSOs led Voluntary Reviews of the SDGs and "spotlight" reports, which are submitted to NPC before UN HLPF sessions. These have become almost routine: every VNR year sees a civil society statement or report examining Nepal's SDG progress. The SDGs Forum and other networks hold multi-stakeholder consultations on SDG implementation and publish policy briefs on issues like inclusion and finance. Through these formalized channels, NCE Nepal and CSOs are systematically involved in planning, monitoring and reviewing the SDG4 agenda.

On one hand, in some forums such as LEG and SGD, CSOs participation has been institutionalised. On the other hand, civic space, particularly for grassroots CSOs, in Nepal is shrinking.[29] Although CSOs have a central role in amplifying voices of marginalised communities, the state's vision for CSOs is limited to supporting the government to implement its plan particularly to build infrastructure and deliver other services such as health and education. The government is disinclined towards CSOs role of promoting accountability and transparency in government.[30] Additionally, CSOs that are women, minority, and indigenous led CSOs are facing further

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[28] https://action4sd.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/NFN_A4SD-Peoples-Scorecard-FULL-Narrative.docx.pdf#:~:text=Nepal%20SDGs%20Forum%20was%20established,Level%20SDG%20Steering%20Committee%2C%20Thematic

[29] https://thesouthasiacollective.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/SASM2020-Nepal.pdf

[30] https://nepalpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Discussion-Paper-Shrinking-of-Civic-Space-Federal.pdf

restriction to access government-led spaces[31] and keep their views and opinions. CSOs, especially of grassroot level, already were facing challenge to access funding and with further constriction of funding from international development partners, they are further likely to face more obstacles. Social Welfare Council, the national governing body for CSOs is also known to endorse and implement rigid regulations that limit the growth and meaningful contribution of CSOs.[32]

[31] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08039410.2020.1792974

[32] Status-of-Civic-and-Democratic-Space-in-Nepal.pdf

Conclusion

Nepal has made some progress toward achieving SDG4, but ongoing challenges continue to hold back progress. Political instability, weak policy continuity, and underfunded education systems slow down reforms, while natural disasters further strain already limited infrastructure. Although enrollment has increased, deep inequalities remain. Marginalized groups—including Dalits, girls, and students with disabilities—still face significant barriers to education. TVET, ICT education, and adult learning and education are expanding but lack sufficient support and still struggle to reach the most marginalised citizens. CSOs are playing a critical role to drive accountability, but stagnant investment and fragmented implementation limit transformative change. For Nepal to meet its SDG4 goals, it must strengthen education financing, tackle inequality, expand strategic support, and build human capacity. Without urgent action, the most vulnerable will continue to be left behind from their fundamental right to education.

Recommendations

1. Allocate at least 20% of the national budget to education and SDG4, prioritizing women, CwD, and marginalized groups. Ensure meaningful participation of CSOs and all demography of citizens to discuss the budget and its priorities.
2. Implement policies that enable progressive taxation measures, regulate growing corruption, bring informal economy into the formal sector, increase scope of revenue, implement innovative financing measures, and build capacity of local governments to generate internal revenue. Redirect funds received from new and improved sources towards public education.
3. Address systemic disparities by scaling up programs, initiatives, and budgets that are responsive to the emerging needs of girls, CwD, Dalits, youths, and systematically disenfranchised communities.
4. Implement affirmative action for Dalits, students with disabilities, and rural learners, including targeted enrollment campaigns, disability-friendly infrastructure, and culturally relevant learning materials.
5. Expand TVET access by removing enrollment caps, diversifying courses, and partnering with industries. Begin the practice of tracer studies for students enrolled in TVET stream.
6. Ensure TVET programs are gender and marginalised responsive by instituting affirmative actions and quotas to expand access of girls and marginalised learners in the stream.
7. Scale CLCs with dedicated funding, mobile units for remote areas, and effective implementation of non-formal qualifications in education and employment. Start grant matching mechanism with provincial and local governments to fund CLCs.

8. Invest in rural and youth accessible ICT infrastructure, subsidize devices for low-income households, and train teachers in digital pedagogy. Develop offline learning platforms such as pre-loaded tablets and solar-power devices, etc to bridge technological divides and limitations. Prioritize marginalized groups in ICT and digital education.

9. Formalize CSOs' role in SDG4 monitoring through parliamentary committees and budget oversight. Allocate funds for CSO-led research and community awareness campaigns on education rights.

Youths

Currently, Nepal is experiencing a youth bulge as youths aged 16-25 years old make up 20.8% of the country's population[33]. Despite this, the government has not been able to cater to the emerging youth needs. Estimated 750,000 youths left Nepal in 2022/23 and 2,000 youths leave the country daily[34]. Among them 4% leave for higher education and 80% for employment[35]. This has been a concerning trend that CSOs, citizens, and media have been drawing attention of the government towards. However, the government seems ambivalent to it. For instance, the demand of IT education and IT sector has boomed in Nepal[36] and with recent exponential growth of Artificial Intelligence, the trend does not seem to be lagging. In this background, the government has

> *"Agenda of youth has been of least priority of government. Current education system is not centered towards youths' need and fails to make us young people capable of competing in the international market. Without concentrated effort to update education system, youths will continue to leave the country to seek better opportunities."*
>
> NCE Nepal's youth constituency member

repeatedly failed to usher in policies that sustainability joins youths to a digital future. In this year's (2025/26) annual policy and programmes, the government's initiative towards youths has been limited to promoting their participation in agriculture, sports, volunteerism, and entrepreneurship. Creating accessible digital technology usage and its integration in education is missing. Although the state has tried to implement ICT based education through education sector plans and ICT policies, and programs such as Smart Classrooms and one laptop per child exist, but their equitable distribution remains uneven[37].

> *"We did not have a computer subject teacher while in school. It made me unprepared for the job market as they all were looking after computer skills. I had to pay for computer classes from a private institution. If school education cannot give us basic digital skills, then what is its worth in our life?"*
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> A Dalit youth from Parbat

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[33] https://nepal.unfpa.org/en/news/young-people-young-people

[34] https://nepjol.info/index.php/sjsst/article/download/72594/55384/210863#:~:text=Current%20Situation%20in%20Nepal,Hari%20Bansh%20Jha%2C%202023).&text=unemployment%20rate%20drives%20the%20youth,job%20possibilities%20within%20the%20country.

[35] https://samriddhi.org/blog/youth-migration-a-curse-or-a-boon-for-the-economy/

[36] https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/nepal-s-booming-it-sector/

[37] https://education-profiles.org/central-and-southern-asia/nepal/~technology

Youths, particularly in rural areas and from poor backgrounds, face additional challenges to access technology in education. As detailed in the Digital Connectivity in Schools section of this report, many rural and remote areas still lack reliable internet, electricity, and digital devices. Youths without access to smartphones, laptops, or stable internet are left behind their peers from urban and more affluent backgrounds. Still, many teachers are not adequately trained to use digital tools, limiting the effectiveness of tech-based learning thus limiting the knowledge transfer to youths. Moreover, youth with disabilities or from marginalized groups like Dalits and indigenous communities often face compounded exclusion due to a lack of inclusive digital tools that are accessible for them to use. Female youths often have less access to digital technologies as they are burdened with household chores and still the negative mindset of not investing in girls' education persists in many parts of the country.

While remote youths and students lack good access to digital education. In urban areas, use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has exploded. A UNICEF report found that education was a predominant area where students have been using generative AI.[38] Despite this booming use, the government has been slow to enact any policies that regulate the use of AI in academics. Studies that show the impact of AI in students' learning and critical skills have not begun in Nepal. However, teachers have been reporting that student's use of AI, especially in their home assignments, is rampant. Dhakal (2024) states that AI can pose risk to student's creativity, problem solving skill, and emotional intelligence[39] as use of AI among students grow. AI also can exacerbate digital divide due to its rapid advancement in urban and slow procession in rural areas (Xia, 2024)[40] coupled with already slow penetration of digital services and education in rural and marginalised areas. With such widespread and unforeseen risks of AI in students' learning, it is vital that use of AI is immediately regulated with students and teachers informed of safe AI use in education.

Recommendations

1. The government should formulate and implement a youth-centered digital strategy that meets the contemporary needs of youths. Collaborate with development partners, CSOs, and grassroot organisations for its successful implementation.
2. Update and integrate school level curriculum for ICT and digital learning.
3. Make a distinct multi-year programme for ICT education targeting teachers and learners. Firstly, include an infrastructure component such as installing computers in school, updating curriculum, ensuring disabled friendly computers for hard of hearing and sight.

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[38] https://www.unicef.org/nepal/media/24156/file/No%20ai%20safeguarding.pdf

[39] https://stargc2024.kusoed.edu.np/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Book-of-Abstract-in-person-conference-as-of-date-Dec-11-2024.pdf

[40] https://stargc2024.kusoed.edu.np/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Book-of-Abstract-online-Confernece-as-of-date-Dec-9-2024.pdf

Secondly, include a software component which includes teacher training on ICT use, pedagogy, and instruction to students with disability.

4. Prioritise ICT education from remote and traditionally marginalised areas first and then to urban areas in the final phase. Specific disaggregated indicators should be developed to ascertain if the tech education is reaching the marginalised learners and the target population.

5. Endorse and implement policies that regulate use of AI in education. Capacitate teachers and educators on use of AI and integrate lessons regarding ethical use of AI in curriculum from school level.

6. Promote policies that expand and subsidise youth led digital entrepreneurship and create youth-friendly tech spaces.

7. Ensure that National Youth Council, grassroot youths, clubs, and youth led CSOs are consulted on education legislations and policies and incorporate their feedback.

Call for Action

1. Partner with CSOs, development agencies, and grassroot organisations to ensure equitable access to all levels of education for everyone.

2. Strongly advocate with all three tiers of government to take complete ownership for public education.

3. Demand for a transparent, accountable, and just education system that is heavily responsive towards girls, people with disabilities, marginalised community, and youths.

4. Integrate youths as agents of change and active citizens to completely realise the SDG4 goals.