Winning People’s Will
For Girl Child Education:

Community Mobilisation for
Gender Equality in Basic Education
Since 2000, UNESCO and the global community including Nepal have been striving to attain the Dakar Education for All (EFA) Goals. Considering the fact that education for girls and women is an urgent priority, the Dakar Framework for Action contained a time-bound goal (Goal 5) devoted specifically to gender parity and equality in education. Moreover, special attention has been paid to women and girls in other goals: for example, Goal 2 stipulates that we must “ensure that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities have access to a complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality”.

Against this background, the UNESCO office in Kathmandu conducted an action-research project in 2004 and 2005 to work on the access and retention in school of girls from Dalit (or untouchable) castes. Given the social and cultural complexities relating to this most deprived caste group, our activity was focused on community mobilization and gaining “people’s will” on girls’ education. In order to achieve EFA, particularly for such a challenging target group, access to education provided through political and administrative commitments does not suffice. Parents and the community must be fully convinced of the importance of education and motivated to send their children, particularly their daughters to school, or our commitment to universal primary education will not be fulfilled.

The present case study attempts to document the process, the outcomes and the lessons learnt from UNESCO’s project to “Win People’s Will” to educate girl children in two communities in the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal. We hope that this document will serve as a good reference material for those communities and organizations who will be undertaking future projects throughout Nepal.

On behalf of UNESCO, I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the project’s consultant and social mobilizer, Ms. Sushila Shakya for having shown her devotion and care to the project and to the community involved. Even after the conclusion of the project, she continued to monitor the progress and guide the community. I greatly appreciate Ms. Melissa Jenkins who took great efforts to recount the project in writing and to make this case study publication possible. I would also like to express our appreciation towards various organizations and NGOs, including NRC-NFE for being generous in sharing learning materials and also providing literacy training classes for free. I would also like to thank the Rotract Club for having taken up these communities’ education issues to ensure the sustainability of this project.

Last but not least, we are also indebted to the community of Teta and Kumbeswor of Lalitpur district of Nepal for showing their enthusiasm and their devotion to making the educational environment of their communities better. I am confident that this document will be of use to those working in community level to win people’s will in education.

Koto Kanno
UNESCO Representative to Nepal
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The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation’s office in Kathmandu (UNESCO/KTM) developed the project under the banner of the “Winning Peoples Will” (WPW) UNESCO initiative. In order to reach the Education For All (EFA) goal to achieve Gender Parity by 2005, the project addressed the question of what could be done in pockets of communities with very low enrolment of school age girl children. The project time span was December 2004 to May 2005.

In December 2004 two target areas, Teta Tole and Kumbheswor, were identified through statistical analysis and site observations. Both are dalit, or ‘untouchable,’ communities of the Dyola and Khadgi castes. The WPW staff began informal meetings and discussions to encourage the communities to become aware of the need to educate their girl children. By January 2005 Participatory Rural Assessment (PRA) and interviews allowed the participants to recognise those girls most in need of support:

Teta Tole
25 Girls, ranging from 4 to 17 years of age were identified

Kumbheswor
6 Girls, ranging from 5 to 22 years of age were identified

A concentrated series of home visits, formal meetings and trainings identified many of the perceived barriers to the education of dalit girl children:

- Parents and guardians generally illiterate, with little awareness of the importance of education, particularly for girl children
- Financial constraints, including avoidance of dalit Government scholarship because of the stigma attached
- Pull factor of domestic responsibilities, coupled with ability to earn money from 13-14 years of age
- Difficulty to reconcile situation at home with need to study, i.e. no parental support, densely populated houses with bad lighting
- Peer pressure from non-school going friends
- Lack of aspiration as the only professional option is the traditional sweeping job
- Parents and guardians unable to follow the school application process
- Discrimination, or the perception of discrimination, by higher caste peers and teachers at school
- Finances drained by other sources (religious festivals and in some cases alcohol) rather than education of children
The process of problem identification, and subsequent discussions led parents and guardians to revaluate their perceptions of girl child education. The increased family support allowed a number of children to return to school. In Teta 6 girls were sent to school for the first time in April 2005, and 8 girls chose to return to education after dropping out. In Kumbheswor 3 previously unschooled children joined Kumbheswor Technical School (KTS), and 2 girls returned to attend the new school year. In addition four Dyola boys from Teta were admitted to KTS. Local Education Committees (ECs) were established to assist with the enrolment process and to offer support to those girls returning to school.

The project staff worked closely with the target communities and applied a flexible approach as a tool to achieve the primary objective. Many of the causal factors affecting school enrolment were deeply entrenched social problems related to the dalit caste and associated financial and empowerment issues. These require long term, sustainable initiatives to help develop the perception of women within the community. In Teta income generating training and health education activities were undertaken, and Kumbheswor saw the launching of a six month women’s literacy programme. To ensure the success of these programmes the municipalities need to change their approach to the hiring of underage dalit girls, and allow their mothers the flexibility to attend Non Formal Education (NFE) classes.
By the end of the first phase in May 2005, the WPW Project had succeeded in sensitising many community leaders, elders, parents and the girls of the need for girl child education. A number of previously unschooled girls started the new academic year and mechanisms were in place to help keep them in school. Unfortunately by August 2005 a number of the newly enrolled WPW children had dropped out of school, citing a variety of reasons:

Teta Tole
5 of the 14 Teta girls have dropped out. Two left almost immediately as they did not have the proper uniform, and did not report the problem to the EC. One 12 year old girl had rejoined Grade I and was much older than her fellow classmates. She left because she was ashamed of her age. A fourth child who had failed grade VI and was re-enrolled in a new school left because ‘the uniform did not include a belt and tie’. 12 year old Anu Dyola couldn’t face attending school because she also worked as a sweeper there. All the girls left because of self-esteem issues. Complaints about a uniform may seem trivial, but returning to a less prestigious school, with a visibly less impressive uniform is enough to prompt a child’s withdrawal from school.

Kumbheswor
Of the five WPW girls who enrolled in April 2005, one has left. 14 year old Nagma Dyola refused to return to school at the end of her first term (July 2005), despite good parental support. The Kumbheswor EC is currently looking into her end of term results, and whether there are other factors affecting Nagma’s academic career. The other girls are doing well, although one is yet to return from the Terai (southern Nepal). Dil Kumari Oli had gone to take part in Teej, a Hindu festival, but was late returning to Kathmandu. All four boys dropped out of Carpentry Training. They had found it difficult to settle at school and other friends were playing or working at home so they had little incentive to remain in education.

Whilst it is to be expected that there would be a drop out rate, a longer full time commitment from the WPW project could have kept the numbers down. More time in the field would have allowed WPW staff to further develop the capacity of the EC members, and increase their ability to support the school going girl children. However, for communities addressing so many obstacles, the change in the self belief of the women of Teta and Kumbheswor is tangible. Their ability to cooperate and build alliances, and to deal with official bodies has greatly improved. Most importantly the WPW girls who have remained in school are excited by the opportunities open to them, and are keen to continue their studies.

“I like school. I enjoy being with my friends, and I plan to study until I have my School Leavers Certificate (SLC)” Samita Dyola, a Grade 7 Prabhat High School student, Teta Tole.
Education in Nepal

Nepal’s approach to education is changing and recent developments towards increasingly child-friendly education, and inclusive schooling are encouraging. The growth in NFE initiatives has allowed for greater access to education for many people traditionally excluded, or beyond the reach of formal education. Nepal’s Tenth National Development Plan (2002-2007) focuses on the need for poverty alleviation and looks upon education as a pivotal factor in this initiative. There is a very real need for such an approach in a country where 19% of school age children do not attend school. That figure jumps to 40% at secondary level (MOES school based data, 2003).

“Education is a means to bring change: it goes hand in hand with development” Mr. T.M. Shakya, National Resource Centre for Non Formal Education (NRC-NFE) President.

Multilateral and bilateral organisations, as well as Non Governmental Organisation’s (NGOs) and International Non Governmental Organisation’s (INGOs), together with His Majesty’s Government of Nepal (HMG/N), are contributing extensively to the development of the education system.
Naturally the problems of school enrolment and school attendance in Nepal are more pronounced in some communities and the figures vary according to gender, location and social status. The archaic caste system has left its mark on education, and continues to influence it today. Traditionally confined to the elite, education has only recently been recognized as a fundamental right, and in many areas this attitude has yet to become the norm when considering girl children. The education of women has a considerable influence on society, resulting in healthier, more empowered children. However, girls are required to fulfil a vital role within the home and are often unable to attend school as well as complete their domestic tasks. Often considered ‘temporary property’ as girls move to a husband’s home after marriage, it is not thought to be economically sound to invest in their future.
Education for All (EFA)

The 1990 World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand launched the EFA initiative and inspired much of the progression within the Nepali Education system to date. A review session of EFA achievements was held in 2000 (Dakar, Senegal) and identified that many countries faced specific obstacles to attaining the Jomtein EFA goals. Six goals, to be reached by 2015, reflect this:

1. Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
2. Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality.
3. Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programs.
4. Achieving a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.
5. Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girl’s full and equal access to and achievement in, basic education of good quality.
6. Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

Nepal has chosen to add a further seventh goal to this list, to reflect the rich ethnic, social and linguistic diversity present in the country:

7. Ensuring the rights of indigenous people and linguistic minorities to quality basic and primary education through their mother tongue.

In order to achieve these goals HMG/N is working in partnership with INGOs, NGOs and local community based organisations (CBOs).
Impact and Influence of Gender and Caste

‘Children’s access to school and their achievements in the classroom are affected by poverty, disability, ethnic minority and gender’ DFID, Reaching the Poor- the Costs of sending children to school. As six country comparative study (2002)

From an early age Nepali girls are expected to assist rearing younger siblings, and share in the arduous day to day tasks of running a household. This frequently means that even if enrolled in school, a girl child may not have enough hours in the day to complete her domestic tasks and attend class. Even if she manages to do both, the physical and mental strain is not conducive to learning.

As women traditionally join their husband’s household after marriage it is considered more economically viable to spend money educating a son who will remain at home, than to expend hard earned funds on a child who will leave. Even educated women find it hard to break the cycle of being treated as second-class citizens, as they are expected to eat last and show deference to men.

The environment within schools can deter girl children from attending; lack of female teachers and fear of abuse does not encourage them to stay in school. The MOES is driving to recruit more women into the teaching profession, but it will take time for this initiative to influence the current school going population.

Difficulties faced by low caste communities and minority groups are endemic in a society that has been ruled by a hierarchical system for centuries. In spite of Nepal’s 1959 Constitution declaring caste equality, there has been no positive discrimination programme such as was seen in India. The sense of exclusion prevails today and there are scant opportunities to break out of the system.
UNESCO’s Vision: Winning Peoples Will (WPW)

School enrolment rates in Nepal steadily increased from 1980, but have slowed down in recent years (EFA: National Plan of Action, 2003). This implies that there is an unreached section of society yet to be affected by national broad-spectrum initiatives, and that requires a different approach. The WPW project was designed to achieve the EFA goals after UNESCO identified the need for grass roots community mobilisation for gender equality in basic education.

To increase the school enrolment rate in some of the worst affected areas the task of sensitising community leaders, elders, parents and the girls to the importance of female education needed to be addressed. Identification of problems and needs related to school attendance prior to the start of the academic year in April would be a key factor in the success of the project. In order to achieve this a six month integration phase was devised, beginning in December 2004 and running through May 2005.

Contact with key community leaders and extant groups would be the first step in the process. Through discussion and Participatory Rural Assessment (PRA) determining factors influencing the enrolment of girls would be identified, and subsequently addressed (where possible) through open dialogue and structured support.

Objectives

- Education awareness and sensitising of local people and all stakeholders to ensure they understand the advantages and benefits of women’s education
- Relationship building through a continuous process of dialogue to create trust between and among the various groups of stakeholders
- Participation of all stakeholders, including empowerment of communities, to take responsibility to educate girl children
- A flexible and adaptable process in the face of the prevailing social perception of the education of girls education and disadvantaged communities
- Monitoring of successfully enrolled/re-enrolled children in school.
Identifying the Target areas

An initial assessment of the School Level Educational Statistics of Nepal, issued by the MOES (2003), identified areas with low girl child enrolment. As the project’s success was dependent on its high level of community interaction and feedback, Village Development Committees (VDCs) within the Kathmandu Valley were considered. The relatively short project duration and the security situation beyond the valley dictated to some extent the location of the target areas. In order to better monitor results, the WPW project looked at target areas that did not already have extensive education programmes run by other organisations.

Statistics for semi-urban VDCs within the Kathmandu Valley led to the discovery of several communities (Sunaguthi and Thecho) with satisfactory girl enrolment and higher than average primary literacy rates. This may be due to the fact that their location has allowed the communities to become socially less restricted than their urban counterparts, and thus more receptive to the concept of female education. During interviews with the communities it transpired that girls and families compete for employment opportunities with urban Newar girls, and hence valued education. It should be noted that this is not the case outside the Kathmandu Valley (i.e. Terai and hill areas) where rural communities are more likely to have low girl enrolment and literacy rates, and few employment opportunities.
Focussing closer to home, UNESCO began to look at squatter and slum districts within the Sub Metropolitan City of Lalitpur (SMCL). The profile of squatter communities is comparatively high, and they tend to be socially well organised. This helped to further reduce the proposed target areas. Teta Tole and Kumbheswor ‘slum’ communities were identified as having very high levels of girl child drop out and low girl child enrolment. Both areas lie within Lalitpur municipality and are populated by Newars, the original inhabitants of Nepal. Newari life is centred on two important institutions: the family and the guthi (all male socio-religious groups that advise on religious or ritual and development oriented social issues). Both the family and the guthi are greatly influenced by the Hindu and Buddhist caste system. Most Newars practice a hybrid form of both religions and virtually every aspect of Newar life is dominated by these religions. With their own language and caste system, the Newars exist in a society entrenched in tradition that can be difficult to access as an outsider.

Particularly extreme short fallings in education of the girl children stemmed from a variety of sources, but were exacerbated by the fact that Teta and Kumbheswor are Dyola and Khadgi, or “dalit” communities.

“It is where inequality is least attributable to the individual, that transformation can be attained through organised intervention” Lumanti Support Group for Shelter (Lumanti)
A Fine balance: finding a suitable WPW Project Facilitator

When developing the project, UNESCO discussed their needs with long-term collaborators, an NGO called National Resource Centre for Non Formal Education (NRC-NFE). The success of the project was dependent on the degree of interaction and trust generated by the WPW facilitator within the communities. It was therefore essential that the candidate be female, Newari, and had a proven track record of working in gender and education development.

Sushila Shakya was born in Patan, the eldest of three children. Her mother died when she was young and Sushila was raised by her father and later by her second mother in Nuwakot district. Sushila’s father, Dharma Ratna Shakya (Trisuli) is a well known social worker and Buddhist scholar, decorated for his services to society. As a founder member of Trisuli high school and champion of female education, he encouraged his daughter’s studies. When Sushila passed her SLC, and prepared to graduate to further education, she experienced fierce opposition from her great grand parents who expected her to marry. After confining herself to her room and refusing food for 3 days (apart from that covertly provided to her by her father) her relatives relented and allowed her to enrol in Patan College. With a list of 30 rules and regulations issued by her great grandmother, and an iron will, Sushila embarked on an academic career. She obtained a diploma in Education, and a Masters in Public Administration from the Management faculty of Tribhuvan University. Her specialisation in rural development led to successful career in development and education.

Having begun her career as a teacher, the facilitator had worked for over two decades on a variety of development projects in the eastern hill districts of Nepal with the Swiss Development Cooperation Nepal (SDC/N). Previous roles as sector head of women’s affairs and NFE were influential in the decision to ask her to lead the WPW Project. Crucially the facilitator lives within walking distance of the communities, and had contacts with teachers in local CBOs. A member of the Rotaract Club of Lalitpur was recruited to assist the facilitator with documentation of meetings and interactions.
The Newari caste system traditionally grouped people by occupation. Newar castes range from priest or astrologer caste representing the top to the lowest castes such as tailors, and nail cutters. The untouchables, or dalits, are at the bottom of the spectrum, and the term dalit essentially connotes oppressed people. However, as can been seen in the two WPW communities, there are numerous ethnic subdivisions amongst those termed ‘dalit’ and they do not represent a homogenous group.

The current system is attributed to the reign of Sthiti Malla (1382-95), and was codified in the 1854 ‘Maluki Ain’ (Law Code). A highly stratified document, it dictated the professions each caste could perform and imposed numerous social restrictions on them. Legally the code is no longer relevant, yet it has may social implications in present day Nepal. The old order is particularly influential within the present day Newari communities of Patan, Kathmandu and Bhaktapur.

The Dyola and Khadgi castes occupy the lowest positions in the hierarchy in spite of the vital role they play in the dharmic equilibrium of society. Through the tasks they perform professionally they ‘absorb pollution, thus ensuring order and decency’ (Declan Quigley, 1998). The Khadgi are historically butchers, milk sellers, drummers and town criers (David N. Gellner, 1984) whilst the Dyola were the ‘sweeper’ class, originally responsible for the disposal of human waste, hence performing a polluting but essential task. They were considered ‘unclean’ and contact with higher castes led to spiritual ‘pollution’. Both communities were expected to occupy segregated areas on the outskirts of cities; with Dyola occupying land outside the city boundaries.

Dyola and Khadgi settlements remain essentially segregated, and whilst it is no longer illegal to search for alternative work, their traditional professions are rarely deviated from. The degree of social mobilisation is increasing amongst the middle castes, but the Dyola continue to be considered by many as being beyond the boundaries of social respectability.
The stigma of the dalit label leads to many children refusing to enrol in school, particularly if the schools lie outside their immediate neighbourhood. In the school context discrimination can stem both from peers and teachers. In extreme cases this can range from segregated seating in class and whilst eating, to physical and mental bullying of dalit children by their peers. Teachers may claim to be unbiased, but it is unlikely they would be seen visiting a dalit household and they would certainly not allow a dalit pupil to enter their own homes. It is this kind of customary discrimination that is most difficult to eradicate.

Opportunities for the WPW children have improved considerably compared to their parent’s generation; but the long history of discrimination has inevitably created self-esteem issues. When there is pressure from home not to attend school the drop out rate naturally increases. The result is that very few female dalit children remain in formal education to complete their School Leaving Certificate (SLC).

National Education plans have long since recognised the need for dalit targeted education programmes. HMG/N and the MOES are addressing many of the issues that affect the education and livelihoods of such disadvantaged groups. The dalit government scholarship system was introduced in 1990 and provides a small amount of financial support to help keep children in school. Unfortunately such blanket policies cannot take into consideration the different cultural groups within the dalit community. Many other organisations are assisting the development of a more inclusive education system, which will improve the situation in the long term. UNESCO WPW project targeted those children currently of school age needing immediate support to facilitate their continuing education.
Teta Tole

Located in Wards 7 and 17 in the Lalitpur Sub Metropolitan Committee (LSMC), Teta Tole is a busy commercial area comprised of narrow three to four storey concrete houses, the ground floor of which is often a small shop. 41 Dyola households are home to a population of 262 people, 132 male and 130 female. The blacktopped roads and close proximity to the southern edge of the Kathmandu ring road mean that it is an easily accessible area. A number of families own motorbikes and all the houses have toilets, thanks to the Urban Management Programme (UMP), a joint UNDP-Municipality initiative. Despite this the community experiences water shortages for much of the year, resulting in long queues.
Key Community Based Organisations (CBOs) are Lumanti, the Teta guthi and the Tole Sudhar. Lumanti established women’s Saving and Credit Group (SCG) that was operating as a credit facility, but was not fulfilling the requirement of holding monthly meetings. A Children’s Universe Club and Teta Youth Club were similarly non-functioning. Lumanti provide the salary for a Dyola after school tutor, and a small mobile library. An open meetinghouse is built on guthi owned land, with support from the UMP, but it was in need of some renovation. This space provides a forum for women’s meetings, trainings and community activities.

Prabhat High School is located in Teta Tole, and educates over 1,000 pupils from Grade I to XII. The school employs 29 teachers, of whom 14 are women, and aims to promote gender and caste equality. One drawback is that there are currently no designated female toilets, which can intimidate girls, although this is being addressed. As a public school the staff salaries and the cost of the physical infrastructure (electricity, water, guards etc) are covered by HMG/N, with students covering the remaining costs.
Kumbheswor

Kumbheswor is a Dyola and Khadgi community of approximately 500 people in a total of 80-85 households. It falls in Ward 20, to the east of Patan Durbar Square and is less accessible by vehicle than Teta Tole. 46 toilets have been constructed by Lumanti but the traditional brick roads are in need of maintenance. Domestic buildings are three to four storeys high, generally of brick and mortar, with some concrete structures. Daily life for women is conducted around two public waterspouts: Aalko Hiti and Wasaa Hiti, both of which provide water all year round.

A buffalo bone-processing warehouse is located on the eastern edge of the area, a constant reminder of the traditional Khadgi profession, which can pervade the community with a strong smell. Despite the legal marriage age of 18 for girls the marriage age in Kumbheswor is low, with instances of 14-15 year olds giving birth, and in one case a 12 year old boy has a wife.
As in Teta the local guthi has a strong influence in Kumbheswor, and here has provided a small public hall for meetings and NFE courses. Kumbheswor Youth Club operates from the guthi hall, as do two Lumanti run SCGs (Aalko Hiti Group and Wasaa Hiti Group), both with 40 members. Lumanti provide a salary for two after school primary school tutors, one of whom is Dyola, and a portable library. Kumbheswor Technical School (KTS), a private school, is located north of the settlement and provides free education up to Grade V. It began operating in 1987 and addresses the needs of socially and economically deprived pupils. It offers educational and training opportunities and provides allowances for poor young people. This has been achieved by running income-generating projects such as weaving and knitting on the site. All the income is directly used to fund the social activities. Today a popular Early Childhood Development (ECD) Center shares the site with the school, training rooms and shop.
Orientation and Interaction

Initial community visits were conducted on foot in December 2004 (Teta) and January 2005 (Kumbheswor). Discussions were as much to familiarise the communities with the WPW staff, as to assess the target areas. The informal approach allowed the project facilitator to get a feel for the communities without them having a pre-conceived idea of her role as a UNESCO facilitator. Both communities were initially suspicious of an outsider asking questions, but the distrust was pronounced in the less accessible Kumbhesowr settlement. Over the course of the first street meetings the key community leaders were identified and contacted. This led to invitations to join formal meetings held in the local guthi houses in order to explain the WPW project. Local CBOs in the target areas were contacted, and their agreement was sought before further WPW initiatives were launched.
Integration and Research

The aims of the WPW project were conveyed to the communities in meetings, discussions and interviews. General discussions confirmed a widespread lack of awareness regarding girl child education and identified the need to work closely with all levels of the community. Due to the sensitivity of the people involved gender and caste could have influenced answers to questions in interviews and discussions. The Kumbheswor women did not express awareness of any problems in the early stages of the project. They were so accustomed to their second class status that they did not consider it an issue. A very careful approach to group meetings and discussions by the facilitator allowed the women to come to their own conclusions about their expectations, and particularly about their hopes for their daughters.

The next step was to obtain detailed information on the social makeup of the areas, looking particularly at families with out-of-school children. It became apparent that the two target areas required different approaches, as the Kumbheswor community was less receptive to the project outline.

Participatory Rural Assessment (PRA) in Teta Tole

The first formal meeting gave rise to the suggestion that the women’s SCG monthly meeting should be reinstated and used as a forum for discussion. Weekly visits from the project facilitator to local leaders were established and the PRA concept was introduced.

PRA was used in Teta Tole as an integrated method of obtaining details of the socio-economic status of the community. 18 CBO members were invited to participate in the activity and were quick to take responsibility for the event. The aim was to assess the Teta Tole population by gender, the education status of school age girl children, sanitation and schools, clubs and organisations in the target area. Using local materials (stone for houses, corn for men, soybean for women, red beans for school going girls and black for dropout girls, etc.) a comprehensive map was constructed, then transcribed onto paper. The event helped verify information obtained through discussion, and provoked further debate within the community. A list of names of girl children requiring support was compiled, together with their parents or guardians.
Discussions in Kumbheswor

The Kumbheswor community took longer to become receptive to the aims of the WPW project and were suspicious of PRA. Community leaders were initially openly hostile to the project and there was an embedded disrespect of girl child education. Previous interventions by NGOs and INGOs were not felt to have been effective, or to have resulted in any real change. The women did not feel they needed any external assistance, other than Lumanti SCG management. Small discussion groups were considered the best way to win trust, and the facilitator chose to respect the community’s wishes not to undertake any quantitative assessment. By the time of the first formal meeting the low-key approach began to pay off, as many key community members were beginning to realise the importance of educating the girl children. 22 members of the Aalko Hiti SCG and representatives from the guthi participated in the meeting and addressed the real meaning of girl education, the role of women in the house and in the community, assessments of dropout rates, causal factors and possible supports. Essentially the community began to recognise that there was a problem, and that it should be addressed.

In both communities very low girl child enrolment was evident and high drop out figures prevailed. In Teta Tole, with a girl child population of 46, 19 were school dropouts and 6 had never been sent to school. In Kumbheswor only 5 women had completed their SLC, and only one has pursued her studies to college level. Although a child is not legally employable until the age of 14, they frequently obtain a contract sweeping job from the age of 13. In addition, when sweeping is the only viable professional option there is little impetus to remain in formal education. Parents and guardians do not insist that their drop out children aged 14 and above return to school because by then they have earning capacity and have reached ‘marriageable age’ (although the legal age for a girl to marry is 18). There was a widespread disregard for female education and low self esteem amongst the women, with initial meetings plagued by a chronic lack of experience of self-expression.

A girl sweeps outside her former classroom. She dropped out of school in 2004, although her adoptive parents had committed to sending her to school. They later changed their minds.
The Home Environment

Discussions with the WPW target children showed that the lack of family support has a very significant affect on their education. The negative influences range from active disruption of study by unsupportive parents, to basic logistical issues such as the lack of space or light for studying. Entire extended families traditionally share one roof and pressure on space is high.

Alcoholism is not uncommon amongst the male members of the Dyola caste, and the WPW team met with inebriated community members on a number of occasions. Such behaviour was attributed to religious reasons, and Shiva was cited as sanctioning the use of alcohol. Inevitably this abuse leads to problems within the home, and contributes to the breakdown of marriages.

Lower caste Newari couples have been identified as experiencing higher rates of separation, divorce and remarriage (Geller, D. N., 1998) than their upper caste peers. A frequent cause of dropouts in Teta and Kumbheswor was the removal of finances due to marriage breakdown and multiple marriage practice. If a couple fails to have a male child a second wife may be taken, and 50% of the children identified in Kumbheswor came from such homes. There were also instances where women had left their children with former husbands.

“Lord Shiva used alcohol as ‘Amrit’, the pure water which makes god immortal. So why should his disciples not take as much as we want?” The response of a male member of Teta Tole when asked about health problems.
Ruji Dyola was a promising student, who had studied until Grade VII. One of six daughters, her father remarried when she was in Grade V, after her mother had failed to give birth to a son. Ironically her mother gave birth to a son after her father took his second wife. Both parents are municipality contracted sweepers, but due to lack of support and the pressure to help her mother at home, Ruji dropped out. Her father would hide her books and ask her to do extra chores that did not give her enough time to attend school. Ruji’s school fees had been unpaid for three years, adding to her self-esteem issues. Ruji would not participate in formal WPW meetings and avoided informal contact, but was identified by the Teta community as someone to talk to and approach via family and friends.

Rituals and feast days play an important role in the life of Teta Tole and Kumbheswor. Children may be kept at home to help prepare special meals, and attend the feast. In some cases they are expected to travel long distances to take part in festivals in their parent’s villages, which naturally disrupts their education. In environments where education is not prioritised a single day of authorised absenteeism can lead to a child dropping out of school permanently. One day stretches to two, and onwards and if there is no push from home. Similarly if children live close to school, and return home to eat, it is unlikely that they will return to school that day. Friends playing and chores at home will keep them out of the classroom. Parents and guardians must nurture the fragile concept of education if their children are to succeed at school.
The Financial Burden of Education

The provision of scholarships for girls and dalit children creates its own problems. HMG/N’s dalit scholarship programme aims to motivate parents to increase enrolment of dalit children in schools, and to decrease the drop out rate due to financial constraints. Refreshingly all of the children who took part in the WPW project said that teachers at school treated them as equals, but this only increased their embarrassment of being categorised as ‘dalit’ by the scholarship. Discussions with the parents and guardians made it clear that they do not feel comfortable with the dalit label, and therefore many will not apply for the funds. Such supports were felt to provoke resentment from others and enhance segregation.

In addition the scholarship runs to 250 NRS per annum, and does not represent a significant percentage of the cost of education. The average salary of a municipality employee is 4,000-4,500 NRS per month, whilst the cost of enrolling a new student in primary school is c. 700 NRS, dropping to 600 NRS for continuing students. Although basic primary education is theoretically free and mandatory, many schools are not able to operate on the minimal governmental provision. Additional costs are levied for textbooks, stationary, clothing and the right to sit an examination. Ruji Dyola, of Teta Tole had to request her Education Committee to provide 110 NRS to allow her to register for the SLC. Her father, who is not supportive of her studies, refused to pay the small sum of money.

Both Kumbheswor Technical School and Prabhat High School agreed to admit Grade I pupils without charging the children the 600 NRS yearly fee. KTS has extended its free education programme to Grade V, and Prabhat High School will review the performance of students at the completion of the year. With large families to support, and a tendency towards high expenditure on ritual and religious functions, the financial strain of education is high. Even when money is available, there is no guarantee it will go towards the education of girl children.

In order to help the families financially the WPW facilitator and local schools discussed applying a flexible approach to the HMG/N dalit scholarship programme. It has been suggested that the money is used to provide prizes and incentives to hard working pupils, rather than to offer them as an inadequate scholarship. This kind of positive initiative can greatly encourage an insecure child to stay in school. If the home environment does not provide support, in-school incentives can be the determining factor in a child’s education.

"It is easier for us to attend school than it was for our parents. They had no sanitation in their houses, and were teased for smelling bad.” Ramila Dyola, Handicrafts Committee, Teta Tole
The PRA and field observations in Teta and Kumbheswor suggest a financial advantage of the sweeping profession. Essentially it is a unique professional niche as it is inaccessible to others, and this has in some way helped to alleviate the poverty endured by the Dyola and Khadgi castes. In some cases they are better off than their higher caste neighbours, and the increasing regard for material wealth positively affects their social position. It has enabled dalits to dress in better quality clothing and install improved sanitation systems in their homes, thus avoiding the taboo of literal, rather than spiritual, un-cleanliness.

Whilst the professions allow for increased financial security they are a causal factor in the drop out rate of school children. Although a child is not legally employable until the age of 14, they frequently obtain a contract sweeping job from the age of 13. The municipality must take action to ensure responsible recruitment procedures are in place, or else be accused of perpetuating dalit discrimination. In addition, when sweeping is the only viable professional option children will stay at school until they have grasped the basics, and then leave to join their parents and friends as sweepers.

“I joined literacy class so that I can check my hours, sign my payslip and count money”  
*Samila Dyola, Women’s literacy class, Kumbheswor*
Education Committees

Meetings with students, teachers, parents and community members led to the establishment of ad hoc coordination committees comprised of representatives from the SCGs, guthis and local residents. This was an important inclusion as the trust of the community was essential to the success of the project. In addition Education Committees (ECs) were set up to disseminate the concept of girl child education, and support the children who chose to re-enrol in school. Seed money was provided to the education fund to allow for the provision of nominal financial support for the continuation of girls education.

An operational difficulty stemmed from the working schedule of those members employed by the municipality. It was difficult to identify a regular meeting time, as shifts frequently changed and clashed with the group meetings. More recently the municipality has implemented a pro-rata system, where sweepers are paid due to daily attendance. This has effectively ended the municipality employed women’s chances to attend any form of NFE class, and is symptomatic of their disregard for the women.

It became clear that failure in an end of year exam, or criticism of any kind very often led to the girls withdrawing from school. All the WPW girls who dropped out after April 2005 did so because of self-esteem issues. Often the smallest event can trigger a child absenting from school: a bad result, or mild disciplinary action from a teacher may result in parents pulling them out. The dalit girls are particularly sensitive and require constant encouragement from teachers, family and peers. Where this is not forthcoming the ECs can offer crucial support. Weekly meetings were established and the ECs took on the responsibility of monitoring the girls who joined school that year.

Renu Dyola is one of the leading lights in the Teta Tole Community. A second year Business Studies college student, she was instrumental in getting the children of her friends back to school. Renu holds the position of accountant in the Women’s Group, is an active EC member, and a Lumanti supported after school tutor for local children. She is frustrated that from a class of 41, she is now only able to teach 20 children, as the financial resources are limited. Renu believes that her community no longer values its culture, and that there is too much emphasis on financial wealth. By helping women, children and outsiders, and being a role model, she is struggling against the stereotype of a dalit woman: “Culture and Education are our best chance to progress. We feel proud of what we have achieved, and will continue”. Renu Dyola, Teta Tole, 2005
The Teta Education Committee, with Winning People’s Will Project Staff

Enrolment and Support

The ECs confirmed the list of students who had been targeted for enrolment in April 2005. Their parents and guardians were approached and encouraged to participate in open discussion, and to express their concerns. Many of these were simple administrative difficulties that could easily be solved. The literacy level of parents and guardians has proved to be a deciding factor in school enrolment. Although willing to send their children to school, the parents involved in the WPW project required assistance from the facilitator to fill in application forms. This simple procedure was enough to have discouraged families from sending children to school previously. Unable to complete the forms, and embarrassed of the dalit status hence not wishing to visit a photographic shop, many children were kept at home.

The financial and socio-cultural barriers were more complicated to address. A long process of discussion led a number of parents to develop their opinions of girl child education, and commit to enrolling them in the coming year.

In Teta 6 girls were sent to school for the first time, and 8 dropouts chose to return to education. In Kumbheswor 3 previously uneducated children and 2 dropouts were confirmed to attend the new school year. In addition four Dyola boys from Teta were admitted to Kumbheswor Technical School for a two year carpentry training, and were provided with an allowance of 700 NRS from the school.

Inevitably there have been cases of the targeted children dropping out, and sadly all four boys in carpentry training have left the carpentry course. Early indicators suggest that peer pressure had a significant influence on their decision to leave. Surrounded at
home by friends no longer participating in formal education, the male KTS students did not want to continue, despite the financial allowances. In such cases parents and guardians have very little influence over their charges. This is where the ECs could step in and make a real difference by convincing the children, as well as parents, of the advantages of attending school.

Frequently parents are too intimidated, or uninterested to liaise with the local schools over complicated administrative issues. The EC is now able to act on behalf of the children. One of the newly admitted Teta girls had not received her roll number at the start of the school year in April. The administrative mistake would previously have resulted in the withdrawal of the child due to lack of self-confidence. The EC was able to step in and liaise between parents, child and school and quickly resolved the problem.
“Unless you tackle the whole family, and the whole community, you will fail” Mr TM Shakya, President of the NRC-NFE

As the WPW facilitator became integrated with the communities it became clear that it was essential to employ a holistic approach to the problem of girl child education. The women participating in discussions on the importance of girl child education were sensitised to their own lack of opportunities, and requested assistance in addition to the children. By identifying specific needs in each community, the WPW project was able to develop training packages to be effective, with minimal budget expenditure.

**Women’s Literacy Classes**

An additional benefit of the efforts to convince families of the importance of educating their girl children was that many female members of the community expressed an interest to develop their own skills. This helped to generate an atmosphere that is conducive to study, and supportive of the WPW initiatives.

As requested by the Kumbheswor women, an adult literacy class was established in March 2005. Two women from the community received complimentary training from the NRC-NFC, and classes are now run every afternoon from the guthi house. 26 women began the six month course to learn practical literacy skills resulting in a sense of empowerment, and reinforcing the message that the girl children should be supported to go to school.

“I would rather eat one meal a day and be able to send my children to school!” Sabitree Dyola, Literacy Class participant and President of Alko SCG, Kumbheswor
The Literacy Class trainers were also beneficiaries of this project. Meera Dyola and Sajila Shahi were extremely shy when dealing with the NRC-NFE at the outset, but have since gained confidence significantly. Although an able student, 15-year-old Meera had failed her end of year exams and was considering not returning to school. Her parents wanted her to repeat year IX, but the humiliation of having a younger sibling in year X put her off. With encouragement from WPW staff, and a realisation of the importance of education, Meera has returned to school, trained as a literacy facilitator and become a role model for other students.

“\textit{I never thought I could do it in the beginning... I was so shy. It was out of curiosity I joined the training for the women’s group on the need of education and the responsibilities of a woman in the household as well as community. I was inspired to further my studies seriously and at the same time to do something for my community}”

Meera Dyola, Adult Literacy Facilitator
Handicrafts Training

The women of Teta Tole requested that the WPW project help establish income generating activities. Whilst this was not directly part of the WPW project it was felt that it would be a considerable trust winning initiative.

The WPW facilitator assisted the group in the drafting of a letter requesting the provision of a knot craft teacher from the Rotaract Club of Lalitpur. The women insisted that the courses were held within their community, as they did not feel comfortable outside. A teacher was provided, and materials were purchased. In addition the guthi house has been improved to provide an enhanced learning environment, with a blackboard, benches and mats.

It was decided that the participants should contribute 100 NRS each toward the cost of the training and this, together with the proceeds from selling the produce, has been kept in a local fund. After two months some tension arose between the women from ward 7 and 17. Half the women expressed a wish to split the income whilst the others preferred to save the proceeds for future projects. After several discussions with the WPW staff they agreed to open a bank account and to invest the money.

“It was only in January that she slowly started to come to our trainings of knot craft for the elder women coordinated by Ramila Dyola. Her participation in our meetings regarding education then began to increasee”. The project facilitator discussing Ruji Dyola’s acceptance of the WPW project.
Whilst participating in the Handicraft meetings, Ruji Dyola began to express her concerns about returning to school. She experienced the solidarity of the EC and the Handicrafts group and eventually chose to re-enrol in Prabhat High School. In the initial days of this academic year Ruji continued to absent herself from school. When the EC followed up it discovered that she was unaware of her own roll number, thus she was marked absent even if she was present at roll call. Too shy to ask the school authorities to rectify the problem, Ruji was able to turn to the EC for support.

The EC quickly resolved the roll number problem, and Ruji is now a conscientious Grade IX student. She is also a scout, an active member of the school community and hopes to graduate in Business Administration after completing school.

**Gender based discussions and Health Education**

A significant cause of the breakdown of marriages in Teta and KWR is the failure of a couple to have a male child. The lack of knowledge of the process of reproduction prompted a workshop to explain the responsibilities of both partners, and gender related health issues:

- Discussion about X and Y chromosomes helped dispel feelings of failure at producing girl children
- Explanations of how pregnancies occur and what causes prolapsed uterus
- Why women find speaking out difficult
- Why women are shy and behave like second class citizens
- When women feel sexually harassed
- Why women need to learn and to study
Winning People’s Will Project Key Achievements

- Girls enrolled, re-enrolled and attending school
- Awareness of the importance of education at the family and community level
- Development of women’s capacity through working together; motivating one another and their children
- Adult literacy/Health Education/Handicrafts Training
- Empowerment of women earning money by means other than sweeping
- Ability of the community to conduct formal meetings, and to minute them
- Organisation of a general assembly to present their progress and achievement in front of guthi members, club members, municipality members
- Opening a bank account to support students in the future, and manage income generating activity profits
- Creating a climate for change
- Rotaract Club follow up

Through the flexible approach of UNESCO and the WPW facilitator the project was able to adapt to address community specific needs. Supports that emphasised the importance of education of women and girls from family, community and institutional perspectives were successfully employed, creating a more sympathetic climate for the education of girl children. What is apparent is that the children themselves were generally keen to attend school, and that it is family support peer influence that is crucial to their academic survival.

Whilst the Teta and Kumbheswor communities were initially suspicious of the WPW initiatives they are increasingly aware of the importance of educating their girl children. Of those children targeted 19 returned to school in April 2005, and their communities are developing the skills to be able to support them in their studies. The younger girls have settled in quickly, but the older children have found it difficult to adjust. Their issues may have been better addressed if they had been encouraged to join NFE courses, rather than return to classes with younger classmates.

A Dyola child studies at Kumbheswor Technical School
In a short space of time the women have become increasingly able to manage and arrange events and communicate with official organisations. It should be noted that the ‘women’ in this case are often younger than generally perceived. Due to the cultural pressure to run households at a young age, and early marriage practice, they are considered adult from 15 years. The elder generation did show an interest in some WPW activities, but they did not participate fully. This illustrates the wind of change that is being felt in these communities, as the younger women are taking responsibility and becoming active social leaders. Some are becoming literate and others are now able to generate income at home. These developments will help them to support the school age children.

The community driven project approach allowed many potential problems to be avoided, but there were difficulties caused by tension amongst the different women’s groups. Misunderstandings stemmed from a lack of experience of working in a formal context, and it took time to develop the ability to work well in this environment. Eventually the women’s capacity to contribute in meetings and approach formal administrative tasks developed, but there were disputes about how the groups should be managed. Questions of finance became contentious, and the Teta Handicrafts Group became divided about how to manage generated income.

“The project has changed the women of Teta. Before, they would never speak in public. Now they are holding meetings and talking with microphones!” Roshini Joshi, Human Resource Development Coordinator, Lumanti Support Group

The Teta general assembly illustrates the level of self confidence gained by the women. Held to communicate
their achievements to the rest of the community, the women gave public speeches explaining recent activities and exhibited their handicrafts at the guthi house. Significantly they drafted letters to the municipality and Lumanti, and subsequently received a budget to provide snacks and drinks during the event.

The municipality provided cleaning materials to Teta Tole after they followed the prescribed guidelines for obtaining such supports. The Kumbheswor women did not manage to meet the deadline, but have recognised the need for planning and organisation. Cleanliness programmes are run in Teta every Saturday to help improve the environment and nurture a sense of pride.

The WPW steps have helped Teta Tole and Kumbheswor girls in the short term, but a longer project would enable the communities to develop the growing wish to educate their girl children. Although the project addressed the immediate needs of re-enrolling the children the gradual development of trust is very fragile and requires nurturing. A more developed follow up procedure would help to keep the children in school, and support them in their studies. Ultimately the quality of the education that the girls receive at school needs to be addressed: if they overcome the many obstacles to gain access to education only to find overcrowded classes, under qualified teachers and an outdated curriculum they will not be inspired to continue their struggle for education. Without the full support of the municipality and government bodies, the chances to expand their horizons will remain scarce.
Since the completion of the community integration phase of the project in May 2005, the WPW facilitator has spent time with both communities in order to follow up on the attendance of the girls and community management. The members had progressed well in a short space of time, but without the influence of the WPW staff they were finding it harder to function as a group. Power of unity and power of organisation had begun to take effect, but the stresses of everyday life were taking their toll. A longer period of guidance from WPW staff may have helped avoid this regression. Importantly the will to regain the sense of unity was evident, and with further assistance this motivation should develop.

The facilitator discovered that the girls who were continuing to attend school were doing well both academically and socially. Teachers were encouraging when asked about the WPW girls, and the children seemed to have settled well. The Education Committees continue to function, but in both Teta Tole and Kumbheswor they appear to be operating due the determination of certain active individuals, rather than through the efforts of the all the original members. The WPW facilitator is planning a formal introductory meeting between principles and teachers of local schools and key EC members. This should help maintain momentum and enable all parties to better support and monitor the girls’ progression.

The numbers attending the Kumbheswor literacy class have dropped significantly in recent weeks as the sweeping shifts have been changed. The municipality employees are paid on a daily rate, rather than by the hour. There is little that can be done to avoid this problem, unless HMG/N reverses the policy. Participants will have to catch up when time allows.

**Rotaract Club**

In order to provide a more comprehensive follow up the Rotaract Club has agreed to continue to provide support to the communities in line with the methods employed by the WPW project. The Club is a Rotary club-sponsored organisation of young men and women whose purpose is to provide an opportunity for their peers to enhance the knowledge and skills that will assist them in personal development. They have agreed to monitor the children who have returned to school, and assist with the handicraft training in Teta and Literacy Classes in Kumbheswor. By continuing with follow up visits to the target areas and supporting the development of links within the community, the Rotaract Club hopes to sustain the motivation created by the Winning People’s Will Project.
Rotaract Club Memorandum of Understanding

The Rotaract Club of Lalitpur and Mrs Sushila Shakya, Consultant “Winning People’s Will for girl child education- Community mobilization for gender equality in Basic Education” under UNESCO hereby resolve to associate with each other under a mutual understanding of cohesion, co-operation and confidence.

This MOU is specially made to assure continuation of the project initiated by Mrs Sushila Shakya under UNESCO, hereafter to be taken up by the Rotaract Club of Lalitpur. Both agree to provide input and serve the community for achievement of better results towards girl child education and spin off effects thereof.

Essentially, following shall be the major responsibilities to be taken up by Rotaract Club of Lalitpur with assurance of input by Mrs. Sushila Shakya as and when required:

1. The areas of Community Service activities of the Rotaract club of Lalitpur will be prioritised at Kumbheswor and Teta Tole, to follow up on the continuation of the enrolled girl children with the concerned schools and the community
2. Shall look after the continuation of mobilised activities such as well as the handicraft training at Teta Dyola Community
3. Shall promote and encourage products of handicraft trainings by generating a market through various programs, club functions and networking with other organisations
4. Shall follow up and support necessary activities in promotion and continuation of women literacy class in Kumbheswor
5. Solely the SAP (Special Area Project) Director and office bearers of Rotaract Club of Lalitpur shall deal with any problems and resolving the same to upkeep the motivation as well as social mobilisation of the target communities
6. Rtr. Rajesh Bajaracharya shall be the Chief Coordinator/Facilitator for further initiatives of the club and will act as the convener to consult and work closely with Mrs. Sushila Shakya wherever possible for better and effective results.

The date of the understanding shall be from July 2005 till the end of Rota year 2005/6 (June 2006) and in the coming years as necessary.

Signed on: 25th June 2005 at the 7th Installation ceremony held at Patan, Ashok Party Palace, Lalitpur


*Department for International Development (DFID)*, Reaching the Poor- the ‘costs’ of sending children to school. As six country comparative study (2002)


Tribhuvan University, Research Centre for Educational Development (CERID) (1999), *Social Assessment of Educationally Disadvantaged Groups: A Study conducted for Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP)*, CERID Press, Nepal.


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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>APPEAL</td>
<td>Asia Pacific Programme of Education for All</td>
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<td>CBO</td>
<td>Community Based Organisations</td>
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<td>CLC</td>
<td>Community Learning Centre</td>
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<td>EC</td>
<td>Education Committee</td>
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<td>ECD</td>
<td>Early Childhood Development</td>
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<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education for All</td>
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<td>HMG/N</td>
<td>His Majesty’s Government of Nepal</td>
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<td>IHDP</td>
<td>Integrated Hill Development Programme</td>
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<td>INGO</td>
<td>International Non Governmental Organisation</td>
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<td>LMSC</td>
<td>Lalitpur Sub Metropolitan City</td>
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<td>MOES</td>
<td>Ministry of Education and Sport</td>
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<td>NFE</td>
<td>Non Formal Education</td>
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<td>Non Governmental Organisation</td>
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<td>NRC-NFE</td>
<td>National Resource Centre for Non Formal Education</td>
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<td>NRS</td>
<td>Nepali Rupees</td>
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<td>PRA</td>
<td>Participatory Rural Assessment</td>
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<td>SCG</td>
<td>Saving and Credit Group</td>
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<td>SDC/N</td>
<td>Swiss Development Cooperation Nepal</td>
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<td>SLC</td>
<td>School Leaving Certificate</td>
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<td>UMP</td>
<td>Urban Management Programme</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO/KTM</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation/Kathmandu Office</td>
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<td>VDC</td>
<td>Village Development Committee</td>
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<td>WPW</td>
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