

Stories of Impact



Strengthening Inclusive Education in Nepal (Sikai) Project



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Ayan studying with his sister and brother

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Project Summary

Sikai (Strengthening Inclusive Education in Nepal project), supported by the Australian NGO Cooperation Programme (ANCP) and implemented in partnership with World Vision International (WVI) Nepal, Handicap International (HI), World Education (WE) and Rastriya Rojgar Prabardhan Kendra (RRPK) is a five-year project. The project aims to have the most vulnerable children access and participate equally in education, and achieve equitable learning outcomes in basic education. To achieve this goal, Sikai Project intervened with various approaches integrated to strengthen the inclusive education system. The other intervention areas are strengthening child-centred & inclusive teaching pedagogy which is used in the classroom using equipped supplementary/inclusive education learning materials. Likewise, improving accessible & safe school infrastructures; including Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities, playgrounds, and school governance. To increase access to the most vulnerable children in education (Children with Disability and out-of-school Dalit girls), assistive devices and education supplies has been supported to the children with disabilities and out-of-school children. Likewise, the project engaged community groups & networks to address the barriers of Inclusive Education and support to functionalize protection mechanisms at the local level.

The project works within 81 Schools (58 community schools and 23 registered Madrasas); children inside the schools, out-of-school children, and the entire community from four target Municipalities namely; Haripurwa Municipality, Parsa Rural Municipality, Chandranagar Rural Municipality, and Brahmapuri Rural Municipality of Sarlahi District. Local government, Education Units, Schools, organization of People with Disability (OPDs), and School Management Committee (SMC), women's group, youth, and child clubs are coordinated and engaged to monitor the Inclusive Education system and practices influenced by multiple aspects of the society. The Parents are also supported to create a supportive learning environment at home and encourage fathers and other men role models in the community to become ambassadors of change to reduce inequalities within their community.



Adarsha studying at home with his mother

Adarsha achieved the first position

Adarsha, a six-year-old from Sarlahi, ranks first in his class. His mother, Sheila Devi, expressed her happiness by saying, "Previously, his academic rank was very low, he did not enjoy going to school. However, after he began attending school regularly, his is doing significantly well."

Adarsha, who had developed a deformity in his legs, is now fully recovered and studying in grade one at a basic school in his village. His parents became worried when Adarsha was born with a clubfoot diagnosis. They consulted doctors at different medical centers but right treatment was still far to find.

One day, Adarsha participated in a health screening camp at his school that was organised by the Sikai Project. The medical team identified him as having a club foot (a defect affecting muscle and bones in the feet) and provided his parents with the Sumo Molelor Orthosis (SMO) braces that are designed to treat lower limb injuries particularly those affecting the ankle and foot. His parents were provided knowledge and skills to use the braces properly. After using the SMO for a year, the project organised a direct home-to-home re-assessment and follow-up camp, where Adarsha was found to have fully recovered. The medical team recommended that he no longer needed to use the SMO.

This situation made Shila Devi, Adarsha's mother, happy and emotional. She expressed her gratitude for the project, saying, "if it was not for Sikai, my son would not have recovered. The project has become a real god for my son." The project also supported educational materials. Now, Adarsha can go to school easily and live more comfortably. As a result, his future is now headed towards a brighter path.

Ayan's inspiring journey

With a bright smile, Ayan was preparing to go to school in his light blue school uniform shirt. Community Schools in Nepal have light blue shirt in the school uniform. Four year old Ayan is able to wear this uniform and dream for his bright future with the support of Sikai Project. The Sikai project has supported his incredible journey, which highlights the transformative power of positivity and community involvement in the lives of children with disabilities.

Ayan was born into a humble family facing economic challenges, and he faced additional hurdles when his right leg was amputated at six months due to cancer symptoms. Despite the adversity, Ayan's story takes a positive turn through the intervention of the Sikai project, which is aimed at ensuring equal access to education for vulnerable children. Engaging families initially presented challenges, but Srijana, a dedicated Mobile Teacher of Sikai project, played a pivotal role in identifying Ayan's situation. Through her persistence and dedication, Ayan's parents, who were initially hesitant to share information, were convinced of the screening process's importance.

Ayan's subsequent journey with the Sikai project became a beacon of hope. The collaborative efforts of physiotherapists, prosthetists & orthotics (P&O) teams led to the provision of a prosthetic leg, marking a turning point in Ayan's life.

Today, Ayan is not just attending but thriving at his school's Early Childhood Development Center. His regular attendance, with the support of his parents and independently with friends, reflects not only his resilience but also the success of the Sikai project in breaking barriers to education.

Despite the challenges of growth affecting the fit of his prosthetic leg, Ayan's parents remain steadfast in their commitment to reassess and ensure continued access to education. Ayan's positive strides are a testament to the Sikai project's success, illustrating how community engagement, awareness, and unwavering support can empower children with disabilities to overcome obstacles and pursue their dreams.



Ayan on his way to school with his mother

Now I can see it clearly from any corner of the class

Rika, a class 10 student from Sarlahi, is excelling in her studies. She says, “earlier, I could not see anything written on the board, but now I can see it clearly from any corner of the class. As a result, I am confident that I will get good marks in the next exam and succeed.”

Previously, Rika had difficulty devoting enough time to her studies because she could not see objects clearly, everything was blurred for her and she got headaches. She says, “when I looked at the book, tears flowed from both eyes.” This affected her academic performance and discouraged her. Consequently, she started attending school less often and eventually dropped out.

During early screening conducted by the Sikai project, functional limitations were identified in her vision. In addition, when they were examined at the project’s direct assessment camp for children with vision impairment, it was revealed that she has low vision in both eyes. The technical team recommended eye glasses for Rika to see clearly.

Now, with the regular use of the glasses provided by the project, she can see clearly and without any difficulties. As a result, her school attendance has increased, and she has also participated in the Rupantaran classes and learned helpful life skills.

Rika’s mother says, “my daughter was not paying much attention to studies earlier due to her difficulty in vision. Gradually, she dropped out of school. The support of the glasses has proved to be a godsend. Now, she has started spending more time studying at home than before. She also goes to school regularly.”

Rika happily says, “now I do not have any problems with studying and writing. I am determined to study further towards a brighter future.”



Rika studying at home

The gift of hearing: how a hearing aid transformed Saleha's life

Saleha, a third-grade student from Sarlahi, loves attending school regularly and has many friends there. However, this was not always the case. Saleha could not hear or speak, making it difficult for her to communicate with others and make friends at school.

When Saleha was one year old, she was given medication for ear pain, which caused her to lose her hearing gradually. As a result, she was unable to speak or hear properly, making it challenging for her to study. Her schoolmates and teachers found it difficult to communicate with her, which caused her to feel left out and isolated.

Saleha's mother revealed, "my daughter always yearned to ride a bicycle, just like the other children she watched. However, due to her hearing impairment, we were afraid of her getting hit by a vehicle from behind." She explained, "There was a time when I got angry with her for not responding to my calls. But then I realised if Saleha could hear, she would have come to me without any trouble."

Fortunately, the Sikai project identified Saleha and provided her with a hearing aid, which helped her slowly regain her hearing and speech. This has made a significant difference in her life. She can now attend school regularly and make friends.

Saleha is now happier, more confident, and interested in school. She even rides a bicycle, which makes her mother happy.



Saleha happily cycling at her home

Remedial class helped Nazmin to learn

Nazmin, a fourth-grade student from Sarlahi, struggled with foundational literacy skills like recognising letters, reading and writing words, and constructing sentences. The children in Terai use Maithili as their first language, so their academic performance in Nepali is poor. Nazmin's weaknesses were particularly evident in Nepali, and she often sat at the back of the classroom. However, her learning journey changed positively, thanks to a 15-day remedial class on Nepali subjects organised by the Sikai project. A remedial class in Nepali was conducted to increase students' reading and comprehension skills and learn the Nepali language.

During the remedial class, Nazmin learned foundational literacy skills through different game models, role-playing, and the use of materials. She received supportive motivation and encouragement, and the small class size helped build her confidence in participating in different games and teaching-learning activities. As a result, Nazmin began attending school regularly and showed remarkable improvement in her overall writing skills.

Now, Nazmin can identify letters, read and write words, compose the names of her friends and family, actively participate in classroom discussions with her peers and teacher, write phonics, and study and assist her friends when the teacher is absent. Expressing her joy, Nazmin said, "I am thrilled because I can now read and write. I can share my knowledge with my peers and parents."

Nazmin's success story is a testament to the power of remedial programs to help students like her overcome their weaknesses and unlock their full potential. The Sikai project's efforts to provide equal access to quality education for all students, regardless of their socio-economic or linguistic backgrounds, are commendable. The Sikai project enhanced the learning abilities of 1358 children by conducting 80 remedial classes for students in grades 4 to 8. By investing in the education of young minds like Nazmin's, we can create a brighter future for our communities and our country.



Nazmin reading a book in front of her friends



Bandana teaching at school

Improved learning through teaching materials

The children's learning achievements at Chitra Gupta Community Primary School have drastically increased due to the support of educational materials provided by the Sikai Project. Bandana, the head of the school, and her team were struggling with traditional teaching methods and a lack of resources before the project was implemented.

Sikai Project provided Bandana and her team with Early-Grade Learning (EGL) training. During the training, they learned about inclusive teaching pedagogy and, approaches to use educational materials to enhance their students' learning experience. Since then, the school has used EGL materials that are compatible with the subject. The children are now engaged in learning through play, and their learning achievement has significantly increased.

Regularly using educational materials has also enabled the school to support multiple classes and give time to other children. Bandana even participated in a maths workshop in Kathmandu, where she interacted with various maths teachers from the Madhesh Province. This experience boosted her confidence, and she can now confidently speak up in front of a crowd and at head teacher meetings organised by the municipality.

The parents are pleased with the educational materials supported by the project. The community members and parents also appreciate Bandana's leadership in improving the school environment. She believes this is just the beginning, and they have a long way to go. However, with the support of the materials provided by the Sikai Project and capacity building training, she is confident that her team will continue positively impacting their students' lives.

Saroj's journey of hope and success

Saroj, 18, a student at a school in Sarlahi, is an inspiring example of transformation shaped by the Rupantaran Class.

A short while ago, Saroj faced obstacles in his academic journey and struggled with learning. His mother Radhiya, who was raising two sons and two daughters on her own after the death of her husband, witnessed Saroj's battle with irregular school attendance and behavior challenges. He engaged in substance abuse with his friends, and his future appeared to be leading him to a path of uncertainty.

However, Saroj's life improved when he regularly attended Rupantaran Classes. He gained essential life skills, ranging from distinguishing good and bad choices to learning about responsible money management. Most importantly, Saroj made the critical decision to abandon substance abuse and rediscovered his commitment to education.

Rupantaran Classes improved Saroj's life and resonated within the community. His mother Radhiya perceives this transformation as a miracle. Saroj became a role model among his peers and fostered a collective stand against drug abuse, creating a positive environment in the classroom.

Today, Saroj is a testimony of the Rupantaran Class's transformative potential. He has overcome his struggles and has become a positive force within his community. He shares, "I had a habit of substance abuse, but I quit after joining the Rupantaran class. Now, I am like going to school and learn new things. I want to pursue my career as a technician."

Following Saroj's transformed life, the focus now shifts towards sustaining and expanding such impactful initiatives. The Rupantaran Classes aims to continue being a beam of hope, guiding more students like Saroj towards a joyful, and focused future. The journey from present success to future aspirations embodies the essence of transformation, one student at a time!



Niva and her friends working to raise awareness against child marriage

From isolation to inspiration: Niva's journey towards inclusive education

Niva, a young student, overcame her fears and challenges to become an inspiration for her peers. At the young age of four, Niva had a rough start when she was diagnosed with muscular atrophy in her hands. Despite her parents taking her for medical treatment in Nepal and India, her condition showed no sign of improvement, and she was left feeling isolated and alone.

However, Niva's life took a positive turn when she was identified for support through the Sikai Project. Her participation in the Rupantaran sessions, which provided life-skills training, helped her find a sense of acceptance from her peers. With her classmates' resolute support, Niva began to build her confidence and interact with other students. She even started asking questions to the facilitator, demonstrating her newfound confidence and eagerness to learn.

Niva shares, "my friends, who were also part of the Rupantaran class, inspired me to attend school regularly and report teasing incidents to the teachers." Today, Niva is a motivated student who aspires to become a bank officer. Her story symbolizes the power of supportive environments and the importance of inclusive education.

The Sikai project has achieved its goals of providing life-skills training and creating a supportive environment for students like Niva. Through the Rupantaran sessions, Niva overcame her challenges and became an inspiration for her peers, demonstrating the positive impact of inclusive education.



Unveiling courage

Rubaida is a 35-year-old mother of four children and an inspiring example of women's leadership within her community. Although hailing from a community where women are restricted to interacting solely with their family members and are limited within their household, Rubaida has been an epitome of change. Rubaida's journey towards empowerment began when the Sikai project formed a community change (C-Change) group in her community.

Fighting against the traditional gender norms, Rubaida's participation in door-to-door campaigns and interaction programs has strengthened her confidence in social campaigns within her community. Her advocacy did not confine within the community, Rubaida led a delegation team to raise issues of women including domestic violence, polygamy, and others in the municipality office.

Nowadays, women in community seek her support when they endure any problem including gender-based violence, as she guides them through the process of filing cases with the police or the local government.

Recently, Rubaida led 500 women of Haripurwa Municipality in a campaign to relocate the municipality office to a more accessible location. Her leadership skills have earned her the respect of her community. She is proud of her work of speaking out against social malpractices, especially within the Muslim community. Rubaida says, "C-Change group empowered us and increased our capacity, confidence, and ability to speak to others, resulting in positive change."

Rubaida's story inspires and reminds us that individuals' collective efforts can significantly impact society and empower those who have been traditionally marginalised. Like Rubaida, many women actively engaged in the C-Change groups formed by the Sikai project are working tirelessly to eradicate harmful practices that adversely impact children and the entire community.

From failing student to a community advocate

16-year-old Gurfan from Sarlahi attends school regularly to study well and become a government officer. Previously, Gurfan used to fail his exams and was addicted to drugs due to bad influence. Worried about his future, Gurfan's family decided to send him to India at a young age to work in a garment factory so that he could let go of the bad habit and contribute to the family's economy. India, a neighboring country is the most sought destination for labor migrants in Gurfan's community.

Assessing Gurfan's distressing situation, the members of C-Change and Child Rights Committee, through the door-to-door campaign, got in touch with Gurfan and his family. Initially, Gurfan did not show interest in continuing his studies. However, with regular counseling and an understanding of child labor laws, Gurfan realised the importance of education and started attending school regularly.

Today, Gurfan has come a long way, leaving behind his dreadful past. He is sincere with his studies, and actively participates in discussions in his school's Citizen Voice and Action (CVA)¹ group. He is committed to combat harmful practices like child labour, drug abuse, and child marriage in his community, specially among the his peers, a group of adolescents.

His class teacher, Bindeshwar, says, "Earlier, Gufran wasn't interested in studying. But now, he is eager to study and regularly completes his homework and projects."

Gurfan and his family now run a local grocery store with the support of the Nutrition and Resilient Livelihood programme implemented by World Vision International Nepal. Gurfan helps in the shop after school hours, and his mother is happy to see him performing well in his studies and contributing to the family's economy.

¹ **Citizen Voice and Action (CVA)** is a social accountability and local level advocacy methodology that aims to address inadequate essential services by improving the relationship between communities and government and empowering communities to hold the government to account.



CVA group members engaging in a discussion

CVA's impact on schools

In a remote village of Brahmapuri, Sarlahi, lies Utpidit Utthan Primary School which struggled to provide quality education to its students. The school lacked sufficient classrooms to accommodate 389 students comprising 193 girls and 196 boys, which resulted in students facing many challenges. Despite various issues, no coordination or initiation was taken to address the problems and provide a solution that would benefit the students.

However, a the CVA (Citizen Voice and Action) group which was formed by the Sikai project. The group recognised the dire situation and took charge, organising various stages such as monitoring standard meetings, scorecard meetings, and interface meetings with the school administration and local stakeholders. The interface meeting identified many issues, including the lack of school buildings, book corners, trained teachers, and the inconvenience of drinking water. The CVA group reflected on the issues and prepared an action plan to meet the basic needs, including child-friendly and inclusive infrastructure. The action plan was implemented within two weeks of the decision, significantly changing the afflicted school premises. The construction of a new school building has reached its final stage. The local officials and school administration regularly monitored to ensure that the building was constructed according to the government's guidelines, including the availability of book corners, standards of students' academic performance, and the regularity and punctuality of students and teachers.

The CVA group's efforts have been commendable and have positively impacted the students' education and their lives. The new building will provide a conducive learning environment for the students, and the book corners has cultivated reading habits and enhance their knowledge. Regularly monitoring students' attendance and punctuality will infuse discipline, and the trained teachers will ensure the students' safety and protection.

The CVA group's initiative has significantly improved the management of the primary school. Their initiatives have touched many students' lives and provided an example of how coordination and proactive measures can bring about positive change in education.



New school building under construction

Improving the learning environment through feedback and response mechanism

The Nepal Rastriya Primary School is located in Haripurwa of Sarlahi district. Regular school attendance was difficult against the backdrop of poor conditions, inadequate classroom maintenance, and poorly maintained toilets and grounds. This was the result of inadequate coordination between the School Management Committee, parents, students, and teachers.

A school-based feedback and response management committee were formed at the school with the support from Sikai Project. The Committee collected feedback through the suggestion box and promptly responded to it. As a result, the toilet door has been repaired, and the walls in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) classroom were painted using the ECD centre operating fund. Nepali and English letters and numbers of different birds and animals are drawn on the wall, which has served as a guiding initiative thereby improving children's learning. The committee collects feedback every 15 days through a suggestion box, which is recorded and discussed to address concerns.

The school's principal, Lakshman Rai, says that the feedback and response mechanism supported by Sikai project has dramatically improved the school's inclusive environment. According to the head teacher of the school, "after receiving feedback from students regarding the need for sanitary pads, the school has coordinated with the Municipality to provide them."

With the coordination of parents and teachers, the school's learning environment and student regularity have improved.



Newly constructed toilet



Wall painting



Suggestion box and information poster

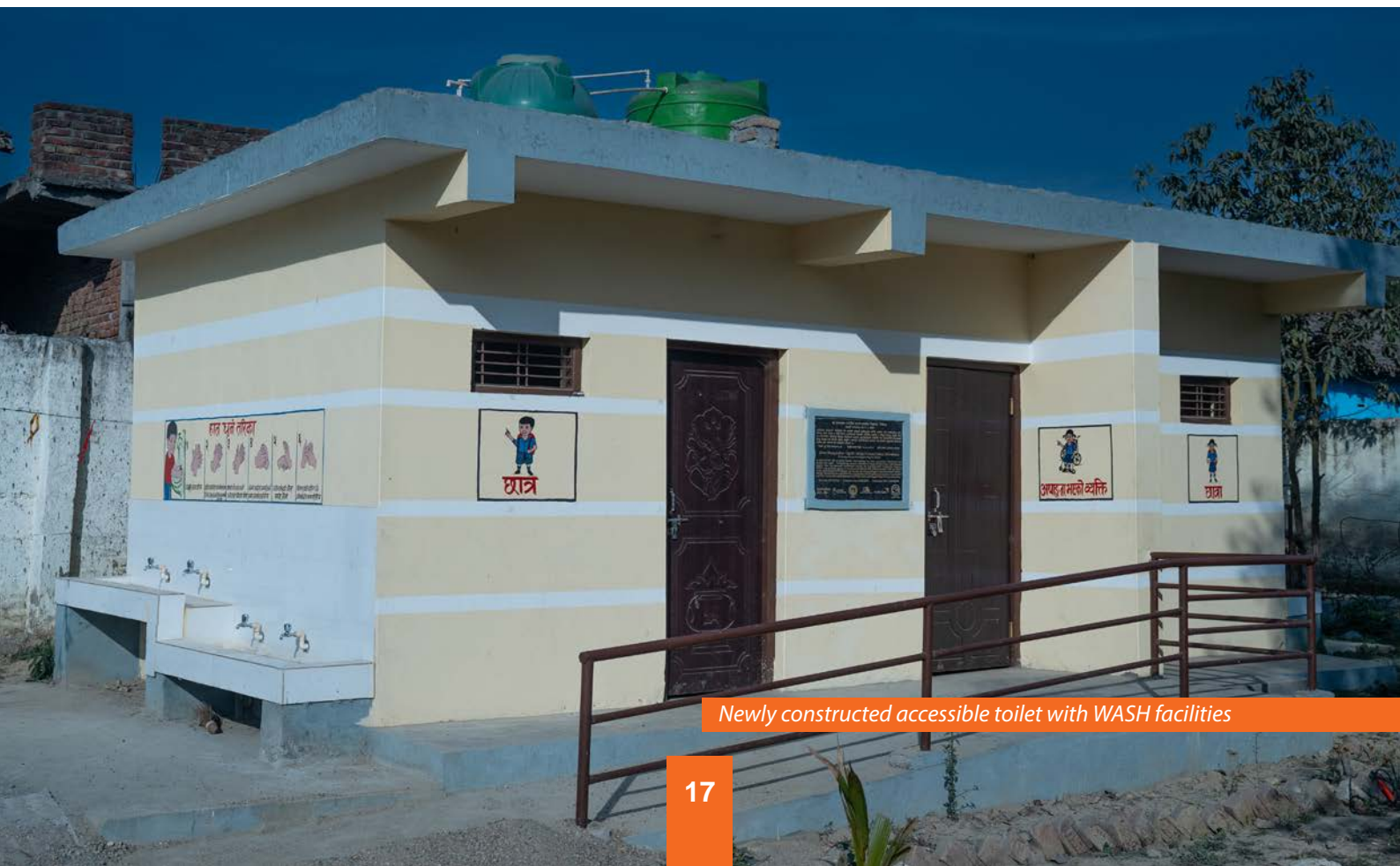
Empowering education, inclusion and growth

The Manglasthan Primary School in Sarlahi is a shining example of best practices in inclusive education projects. The school once faced numerous obstacles, including aging infrastructure, inadequate facilities, and a lack of vibrant aesthetics. However, with the help of the Sikai project, the school has undergone a remarkable transformation.

The Sikai project recognised the school's untapped potential and devised a holistic plan addressing the root causes. The project provided low tables, carpets, and Early-Grade Learning materials, as well as training for teachers on inclusive teaching methods. A new inclusive school building with two classrooms and a dedicated handwashing corner was constructed as a testament to the project's commitment to transformative change. Furthermore, drinking water facilities were installed, eradicating the need for students to go out during school hours.

The project's success lies in its focus on inclusivity. The school's equitable approach towards children with disabilities, those with average academic performance, and children from diverse backgrounds, abilities, and gender has paved the way for an inclusive environment. Aesthetically enhanced buildings and boundary walls capture the students' attention, creating an atmosphere of inspiration. Extracurricular activities have become an integral part of the school's ethos through the infusion of inclusive sports materials.

The Sikai project has demonstrated the importance of a holistic approach to education. Addressing the root causes of the school's struggles and providing the necessary resources have created a vibrant, inclusive learning environment. The project's success is a testament to the power of transformative change and its positive impact on students and teachers alike. Through the Sikai project, the school has undergone a remarkable transformation, resulting in improved attendance, decreased illness, and a vibrant, inclusive learning environment.



Newly constructed accessible toilet with WASH facilities



Teacher Ranjana Kumari teaching with EGL materials

Inclusive education

Educational opportunities for children, especially those with disabilities and vulnerability, were once limited in Utpidit Utthan Primary School of Sarlahi. The lack of resources and inclusive policies resulted in the classrooms running without the necessary tools to engage children with diverse learning needs. Children with disabilities were teased and excluded from educational and sporting activities.

However, the Sikai project intervened, bringing an innovative approach to inclusive education. EGL materials were introduced to classrooms, including dice, letter sheets, stories, poems, and other educational resources. Thematic educational materials were also provided, and teachers were trained to use these tools to ensure that every child, including those with disabilities, could learn in a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment.

Teachers began using EGL materials regularly, and classrooms became more engaging and interactive. Children with disabilities were no longer excluded from educational and sporting activities but were included in all aspects of school life. This school is now a unique example of what can be achieved through inclusive education policies and practices.

Ranjana, a school teacher, shared her experience, saying, "When using EGL materials, I feel that the children's educational activities have improved, and I have been teaching children with disabilities in the front rows of the classroom."

After the Sikai project's intervention, children in Brahmapuri Rural Municipality now have access to an inclusive education that values diversity and promotes equality. The project's success serves as a beacon of hope for other communities facing similar challenges and a reminder that inclusive education is not only possible but necessary for a better future.

Policies created an inclusive environment

Implementing inclusive policies has created an inclusive and uplifting environment for children with disabilities, enabling them to study alongside their peers. In Sarlahi, the Sikai project played a pivotal role in formulating policies related to inclusive education, child protection, and local curriculum development in four Municipalities: Chandranagar, Bramhapuri, Parsa, and Haripurwa. Out of all the local governments in the Madhesh province, only these four Municipalities have inclusive education policies in place.

Janak Kafle, the Head of the Education Department in Haripurwa, explains that after implementing inclusive policies, the myth that children with disabilities cannot study alongside children without disabilities has been debunked. With appropriate materials and an inclusive environment, children with disabilities can learn together with their peers, reach their potential, and gain life skills. The families, communities, and municipalities have been convinced of this approach, and the dropout rate has decreased significantly. There has been improvement in the dropout rate which was 45% before project implementation, and now 97% of children regularly attend school due to the implementation of policies and programs to reduce the number of school dropouts.

Raj Kumar Mahato, the Chairperson of Chandranagar Rural Municipality, Sarlahi, also praised the Sikai project for its impact on developing inclusive education policies and infrastructure. The project aims at creating an inclusive environment, and as a result, the infrastructure became disability and child-friendly. The project has enhanced accessibility by implementing inclusive practices. Furthermore, the best practices of the project have been incorporated into the annual policies and programs of the Municipality, ensuring that the project's impact continues long after its completion.



Janak Kafle showing policies

Asha goes to school

11-year-old Asha from Sarlahi now attends school regularly, completes her homework, and can recite the alphabet, numbers up to 50, and two-letter words.

Asha's father used to travel to India for work due to their poor financial situation. Sadly, when Asha Kumari was very young, she lost her father. Within three years of her father's death, her mother also suffered from paralysis. The family had endured a major crisis as none were earning enough to afford food. Asha and her family made a living by tending goats and cleaning other people's houses.

Asha's community showed little interest in sending their children to school. However, Sikai project identified a group of readers and writers who had never had the opportunity to attend school. Asha was among them; she always wanted to study but could not. The project provided *Tole Shikshya* (informal community classes) for three months, which helped her to enroll in a school's second grade. The project also offered stationery, which enabled her to attend school regularly. Expressing her gratitude, Asha says, "I always wanted to study, my family was not able to afford my education. With the support, I am now able to study." The project has enabled out-of-school children to enroll by conducting *Tole Shikshya* classes.



Asha in her class



Impact of Reading Awareness Workshop (RAW session)

Doing the right way: committing to children's progress

Residing with her family of six, including three daughters and a son, Pancha's life revolved around managing household affairs while her husband worked as a labourer in India. In the past, the demands of daily life left little room for her to actively support her children's education. School uniforms, homework, and academic performance were often overlooked, leading to her children's irregular attendance and a lack of educational support at home.

Pancha, who had not received a formal education, faced difficulties providing her children with academic guidance. The turning point arrived when she attended a seven-month RAW (Reading Awareness Workshop) session that emphasised the pivotal role parents play in their children's education.

After participating in the awareness classes, Pancha reorganised her priorities. Ensuring school uniforms, copies, and neatly arranged books, she instilled a sense of discipline, and her children began attending school regularly. Dedicated to their education, Pancha now allocates at least an hour each morning and evening to assist her children with their studies. A specially crafted reading corner in their home, adorned with drawings by her children, fosters the children's love for learning.

Not stopping there, Pancha actively involves her children in family discussions and decisions, nurturing a sense of empowerment. She visits the school every 15 days, conversing with teachers to stay updated on her children's progress. Despite her busy schedule with household chores, she consistently monitors her children's academic achievements. Pancha's commitment extends beyond her children's education. Embracing the opportunity to learn, she joins her children during their study time, gradually mastering the Nepali alphabet and acquiring the ability to sign her name. Reflecting on her newfound skills, Pancha shares, "I did not get a chance to go to school, but now I am learning to read and write with my children. I used to feel uncomfortable when I had to admit I did not know how to sign in meetings and banks, but now I can do my signature, and I feel very happy."

Her journey is a testament to personal growth, improved communication skills, and heightened awareness about the significance of education. Pancha's story exemplifies the profound impact that community-driven initiatives can have on transforming lives and nurturing a culture of lifelong learning.



Pancha supporting her daughter's studies in the Reading Corner

Empowering parents for inclusive education

In a locality nestled in Sarlahi, mothers were the only ones who were invested in their children's education. Fathers were less interested in education, resulting in a poor standard of education. But Nurain started to change this practice.

Sikai project started to raise parents' awareness of their children's education progress through Reading Awareness Workshop (RAW) sessions. These sessions discussed various issues, including establishing a study corner for children at home, sending children to school regularly, and maintaining cleanliness.

After attending RAW session, Nurain started paying close attention to his children's studies. Previously, he had

married off his son and daughter who never got to obtain a proper education. However, after participating in the RAW session, he has now decided to educate his remaining four children well and consider marriage only after they complete 20 years. Nurain now supports his children's education, checks their homework, and manages the reading corner.

The Sikai project's initiative has significantly changed the village's education system. Fathers from the community have also started taking an interest in their children's education. They have realised the importance of education for their children's future and have started supporting them in every possible way.

Participation in RAW sessions has also helped to create a sense of responsibility among the parents. They have started taking care of their children's health and hygiene, which has resulted in a cleaner environment. Moreover, the children attend school regularly, and the dropout rate has decreased significantly.

The project has also helped to improve coordination between parents and teachers. Parents are now aware of their children's progress in school and are actively contributing to their children's education. They are providing feedback to teachers, which has helped them identify their students' strengths and weaknesses and improve the education system accordingly.

Sikai project has changed the education system in four municipalities of the Sarlahi district of Nepal. The project has improved the education standard and infused a sense of responsibility among parents.



Nurain sharing the importance of children's education

RAW session helps mother prioritize children's education

Nirma is a resident of Sarlahi. She participated in a RAW session focused on the importance of education. Along with other parents of school-going children from grades 1-3 in her community, Nirma actively participated in this discussion, sharing her views on how she can support her children's learning at home.

Nirma runs a small grocery store in the community, and her husband works in a factory. She believes the RAW session has sensitised her to the significance of her children's education for their better future. She manages her grocery store on her own while supporting her children's education.

Before attending the RAW session, Nirma used to send her children to school without putting much thought into it and was more focused on her livelihood. She had limited knowledge of supporting her children in their learning and the idea of consulting their teacher never really occurred to her. As a result, her children were performing below average in their academic ranks. Nirma says, "Before, my children were not interested in doing homework or revision. They just used to throw their bags and run to play with other children, and they were also irregular at school." She adds, "I was always busy with the shop and household work, so I did not pay enough attention to my children's education."

The RAW session has brought significant changes in Nirma's life. She has created an enabling learning environment in her home for her son and daughter, giving proper attention to their learning outcomes and engaging herself in their education. She has also created a reading corner at home, supporting a joyful environment for their studies. Nirma regularly visits the school, interacts with teachers, and is updated on her children's studies. She ensures that her children are equipped with the necessary educational supplies and are accustomed to following a daily routine. This impact has been positive, making her children more inclined towards education. She shares, "Before the RAW session, I was not aware of the ways to support my children's education. After participating in the RAW session, I have been spending quality time with my children and developed a great relationship with them."



Nirma in her grocery shop



Rahna supporting her children's studies

Empowering parents: the impact of community awareness in Sarlahi

Rahna, a resident of Sarlahi, is delighted to witness her children's academic performance transform.

Rahna says, "I have created an enabling learning environment at home and occasionally visit school to be updated on my children's learning. This has led me to be informed about their improved academic performance."

In the past, many parents from the community did not pin high hopes on education, resulting in poor academic performance among students. Some children even dropped out of school due to the lack of a conducive learning environment at home. However, since the Sikai project conducted parent awareness classes in the community, parents like Rahna have become more focused on their children's education. The classes aimed to enhance access to education for vulnerable groups, especially children with functional limitations, disabilities, and the most marginalised, and parents were taught about issues related to learning, the importance of education, and managing children's learning.

After attending the awareness sessions, parents have become more aware of issues such as child marriage, stigma and social barriers, and drug use. Rahna shares, "Our family is impoverished, and we do not own any land for cultivation. We earn our livelihood by working as wage labourers in other people's fields and sewing. However, these children are the centre of our future and hope. We are determined to educate them well and help them become a better version of themselves."

Seema's journey to support her son's education

14-year-old Sanjit from Sarlahi has physical, hearing, and communication impairments. This has made it difficult for him to participate fully in educational activities. However, his mother Seema, and their family have been supportive of his academic journey.

Seema actively participated in a RAW session, discussing school topics with the teachers and explaining Sanjit's hearing issues. They emphasised the importance of paying more attention to his learning needs in the classroom and moving him to sit in the front row to ensure he fully gets information and support from a teacher when needed. Seema applied what she learned from the RAW session at home, dedicating a significant amount of time to her son. This commitment was necessary as her son had difficulty in hearing. Sanjit has shown tremendous progress in his studies after being supported with a hearing aid from the Sikai project. The barriers he was facing have been gradually removed. He also enjoys making new friends. His mother Seema, shares, "I visit his school every 1–2 weeks to monitor his progress, and the teacher brief me that he studies regularly now."

Sanjit participated in various educational, and sports programs organised by the Strengthening Inclusive Education in Nepal (Sikai) project. These programs helped him receive education and rehabilitation support. The materials provided by these organisations include educational and sports equipment, which have proven beneficial for his overall development.

Seema has witnessed how Sanjit has been actively engaging with the supported materials and enjoys playing games using them. She is grateful for the support received, which has contributed to Sanjit's academic achievements and improved his quality of life. She is also aware of Sanjit's success in various sports and games, in which he not only actively participates, but also excels.

Seema has arranged a dedicated learning corner for Sanjit at their home, where he keeps his educational materials and sports equipment. She acknowledges that during school closures for various reasons, these programs and educational materials have been a lifeline for Sanjit, helping him continue his education and ensure he does not fall behind. These programs have not only boosted his confidence but have also inspired others.



Seema meeting her son's teachers at school

Overview of Sikai Project

Total beneficiaries reached

66325



Technical support provided for policies: Inclusive education policy, Protection policy, Local curriculum



Construction
32 classrooms
12 WASH facilities
12 gender friendly and accessible toilets



Total children reached **25328**

Girls **14456**

Boys **10872**



Total children with disability reached **526**

Girls **254**

Boys **272**



Total schools **81**
(community school-58, madrasa-23)



Total parents/caregivers reached **10148**



RAW session participants **9599**



Total C-Change group **58**



Total CVA group **58**



Early grade teacher trained **379**



Children empowered on life skills by Rupantaran **911**



Total ECED facilitator trained **62**





Anisa teaching her daughter Nuraisa