

Researching livelihoods and  
services affected by conflict

# Education services and users' perceptions of the state in Rolpa, Nepal



Working Paper 37

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# About us

Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) aims to generate a stronger evidence base on how people make a living, educate their children, deal with illness and access other basic services in conflict-affected situations (CAS). Providing better access to basic services, social protection and support to livelihoods matters for the human welfare of people affected by conflict, the achievement of development targets such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and international efforts at peace- and state-building.

At the centre of SLRC's research are three core themes, developed over the course of an intensive one-year inception phase:

- State legitimacy: experiences, perceptions and expectations of the state and local governance in conflict-affected situations
- State capacity: building effective states that deliver services and social protection in conflict-affected situations
- Livelihood trajectories and economic activity under conflict

The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) is the lead organisation. SLRC partners include the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) in Sri Lanka, Feinstein International Center (FIC, Tufts University), the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in Pakistan, Disaster Studies of Wageningen University (WUR) in the Netherlands, the Nepal Centre for Contemporary Research (NCCR), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

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# 1 Introduction of SLRC, background and objective

The Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) is a six-year global research programme established in 2011 to explore livelihoods, basic services and social protection in conflict-affected situations. It is funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) and is currently undertaking research in seven countries: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and Uganda. Nepal Centre for Contemporary Research (NCCR) is undertaking the SLRC programme in Nepal. NCCR conducted the first round of a longitudinal survey in 2012 to generate baseline data on livelihoods, basic services and social protection.

The Nepalese state provides free education through the primary levels and charges minimum fees for secondary and higher secondary education. Education is a fundamental right of citizens and every citizen must be able to acquire it for as low cost as possible. Many people in the rural areas cannot afford the education provided by private institutions and rely on public schools. With this view, this paper seeks to understand people's perceptions of the overall education services provided by public schools in the two Village Development Committees (VDCs) of Rolpa District namely Liwang and Budagaon.

A total of 52 in-depth interviews were conducted with householders to probe the accessibility, effectiveness and accountability of public education services. The study explored how people's experiences and their expectations of education influenced their views about government at different levels in the post war period. The study focused on whether good experiences with education have led to more positive perceptions of government and its legitimacy and whether negative experiences have conversely undermined trust in government.

This study contributes to the SLRC research theme on the links between service delivery and state building. It builds on a quantitative survey carried out in 2012 which explored people's perceptions and experiences with public education service delivery and linked those to the perceptions of government at different levels. This study takes a more detailed qualitative look at some of the issues emerging from that survey by comparing the results from the quantitative survey.

## 2 Education service delivery in Nepal

Formal school-based education in Nepal dates back to the nineteenth century when the Durbar high school was established by Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana in 1854 (Government of Nepal: Ministry of Education, 2009; Kulung, 2008). With the downfall of the Rana regime around a hundred years later, education began to enter modern times (Upreti et al., 2012) and private schools flourished (Poudyal, 2013).

Nepal is currently focused on meeting the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of 100 per cent universal primary education by 2015, which has led it to scale up educational services. Private education is affordable only for the few, so it falls to the government to ensure that people receive a quality affordable education in rural areas.

The government's commitment to achieve 100 per cent enrolment in primary education is expressed in the MDGs and the School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP). Primary net enrolment rate increased from 64 per cent in 1990 to 95.3 per cent in 2013 (GoN and NPC, 2013). There are 41,959 public (state) schools and 10,477 private schools across Nepal (FEC, 2011). The quality of teaching methods and facilities in government schools is lower than in private schools, and most parents would prefer to send their children to private schools (Pherali et al., 2011). In 2009 about one-fifth of school-going children attended private schools (Caddell, 2009).

In 2012 the government issued a directive to monitor and regulate all the schools (co-ed and separate) across Nepal.<sup>1</sup>The schools are to have a big playground, one toilet and one drinking water tap per 50 students (toilet separate for both males and female), one water filter per 25 students, one library per 500 students, quality food and a monthly food-inspection report, no sale of textbooks and stationery, and no more than two sets of uniforms per student. The directive also stipulates that if one school fails to meet the standard, two will be merged, and that private schools should contribute 1 per cent Education Service Tax to the government.

Bilateral and multilateral assistance supports primary education (NPC, 2012) and development partners have been supporting teacher training, capacity building and nutrition programmes for children in primary schools.

After the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) was signed in 2006, the Ministry of Education (MoE), UNICEF, UNESCO and Save the Children Nepal joined hands to promote 'education for peace' (Save the Children, 2010). Programmes such as 'Schools as Zones of Peace' and 'Children as Zones of Peace' were first introduced by Save the Children Norway in 2001 to support children from the conflict areas and to reintegrate them into education. This campaign spread all over the country with the help of organisations such as Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Centre, the Institute of Human Rights Communication Nepal and Save the Children USA (CWIN, 2003).

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<sup>1</sup>Institutional School Criteria and Operation Directives (2069 BS).

Prior to the CPA, during the time of conflict many private and public schools were shut and damaged. About 3,000 teachers left their jobs in districts where conflict was extreme, and 700 public schools across the country closed (Gyawali, 2009). Schools were used as camps by the warring parties which vitiated the school environment, generating a sense of hatred, denial and frustration among these children. In a nutshell, children whose age should have entitled them to education were deprived of their rights through strikes, school bombings, calls for *bandhs* (general strikes) of educational institutions, or sabotage of the educational territory.

Interestingly, not only the Maoists but also the state exacerbated the education crisis in Nepal. Data shows the Maoists killed about 60 teachers and 66 students, caused the disappearance of 151 teachers and abducted 516 students and 62 teachers. On the other hand the state killed 44 teachers and 172 students, detained 158 teachers and 115 students and aided the disappearance of 14 teachers (Upreti 2006).

In 2004, UNICEF established the 'Welcome to School' campaign (Lawoti, 2007). This programme supported children affected by conflict to reintegrate into schools. Between 2007 and 2011, 1,650 children were supported to access education and training (World Education, 2011). The Government of Nepal (GoN) endorsed schools as Zones of Peace in 2011 to ensure that schools would not be disrupted by strikes and other political constraints (Pant et al., 2012).

Expenditure on the education sector has increased over recent years. These increases have been made in the name of the MDG and Education for All (EFA) commitments, as well as the desire to raise literacy rates and provide better facilities and learning environments to students (NPC, 2012). The budget increases have applied above all to primary education, congruent with the MDG to attain 100 per cent enrolment (NPC, 2012). The government allocated 15.65 per cent of the national budget to the education sector in 2014. Nepal's 2014 education budget is Rs 80.95 billion compared to Rs 60.13 billion in 2013. Of the total sum, Rs 10.46 billion was provided through foreign grants and Rs 475 million from foreign loans. A total of Rs 26.41 billion has been allocated to pre-primary and primary education, Rs 13.5 billion to secondary education, and Rs 26.16 billion to the higher and non-formal education sector. Every year, the education sector ranks first in the national budget allocation (GoN, 2014a).

The 2014 budget allows for an award of Rs 500,000 annually to two community schools from each district with the highest exam results. Around Rs 1.87 billion has been allocated in scholarships to around 60,000 girls, talented and disabled students, and those from marginalised and Dalit communities. A total of Rs 1.85 billion has been allocated to provide free textbooks and Rs 1 billion to provide access to information technology and computers. A total of Rs 760 million has been allocated for skill development training to 153,314 teachers and over Rs 630 million to be invested to provide technical training to 31,500 young people. The government aims to bring around 60,000 street children and children affected by HIV and AIDS into the school system and provide them with free basic education (GoN, 2013a).

There has been a move towards community management of schools. Between 2003 and 2009, 8,002 public schools were transferred to community management. The government retains the final authority over these schools but management responsibilities are transferred to the communities in the interests of efficient and effective operation and the development of local ownership. Even in war-affected areas schools are doing relatively better. This reform has increased primary school enrolment and decreased school dropouts (World Bank, 2009). The School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) of 2009 was introduced to support its continuation with a budget allocation of US\$2.6 billion for five years (Pherali et al., 2011).



Rolpa District has 299 schools (GoN, 2014b). The number of private and public schools in Rolpa is not given. Rolpa District was where the conflict started in Nepal. The conflict had a huge impact on education as schools were destroyed and people were forced to join the Maoist insurgency. School buildings and infrastructure were demolished; this had major impacts on the physical aspects of the schools. Furthermore, teachers were threatened or even killed if they continued teaching. Likewise even greater numbers of students were forced to join the rebellion. However, these cases were found only in the rural parts of the district. Thus in order to understand the situation of the education services, this research was conducted in two schools of Rolpa District: one in Liwang (Bal Kalyan Higher Secondary School) and one in Budagoan (Jana Kalyan Secondary School). Liwang is the district headquarters of Rolpa, while Budagaon is more rural, located more than 100 kilometres from Liwang by road. The school in Liwang is a higher secondary, whereas in Budagaon it is a secondary.

# 3 Analytical framework and methodology of the study

## 3.1 Analytical framework

The framework developed for the study by SLRC hypothesises that people's perceptions of the government depend on their ability to access and utilise services. In other words, people are more likely to have a positive perception of government if they can easily access and utilise services and if these services help them satisfy important needs. Conversely, if people have difficulty accessing or utilising services, it is highly likely they will form a negative opinion about the government. There may be differences in the experiences and perceptions of individuals from different social and demographic groups, and this study aims to pick up on these differences. A number of dimensions must be researched in order to understand the barriers to access and utilisation. These include:

- **Physical access** – the availability of education services, distance and time to reach the state school.
- **Financial access** – the extent to which cost (formal/informal fees and indirect charges in admitting children to the school, monthly and yearly fees and other payment required) creating barriers to access education.
- **Socio-political barriers** – the extent to which discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, caste, religion or politics presents a barrier to access education.
- **Administrative barriers** – the extent to which administrative hurdles, bureaucratic red tape and corruption create barriers to access education.

People's perceptions of services (and of government) will depend on

- the effectiveness of services (service quality and reliability), and
- their accountability, which can be assessed on two levels:
  - i. the extent of transparency, accountability and responsiveness, and the effectiveness of grievance redress and
  - ii. the ability of citizens to influence local government and exact accountability through various formal and informal channels.

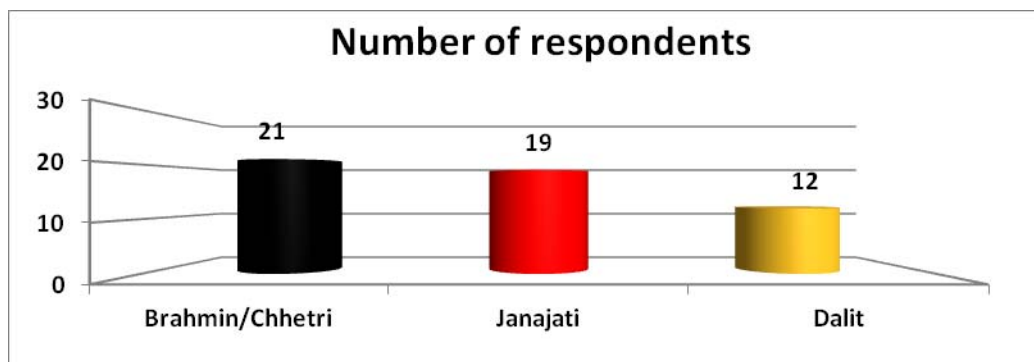
Finally, peoples' assessment of the central government and state legitimacy can be influenced by:

- pre-existing expectations about the role of the state and whether its service delivery capacity matches people's expectations and
- the ability of the central government to ensure effective and accountable delivery at the local level.

### 3.2 Methodology

This study is preceded by a longitudinal survey conducted in 2012 among 3,175 households of Rolpa, Bardiya and Ilam Districts. To conduct qualitative research, efforts were made to build a working rapport with the Local Development Officer and the Chief District Officer of Rolpa District. The Village Development Committee (VDC) was also consulted before the fieldwork and thus Liwang and Budagaon VDCs were selected for this study as Thawang, the other study area, was difficult to access. The socio economic condition of the people in both areas was very weak and people had difficulties in fulfilling their basic needs as well. A qualitative protocol was developed.

**Figure 1: Number of respondents, by background**



The study explores people's perceptions of public schools. A total of 52 respondents (29 from Liwang and 23 from Budagaon), evenly divided between male and female, were interviewed to understand their perceptions of basic services (health, education and drinking water). Of these, 21 were from Brahmin/Chhetri backgrounds, 19 Janajati and 12 Dalit.<sup>2</sup>

The interviews focused on taking in-depth perceptions of the basic services provided to local people by the government, and were conducted with the general population of the two villages selected. Most respondents were the guardians or parents of students from the two schools. The students' perceptions were not recorded, but were asked informally about the schools. Additional interviews were conducted with members of the School Management Committee (SMC) of each school and with the headmaster and a male teacher in Liwang. No female teachers from either school were interviewed as the researchers were not able to get time with them.

The interview notes were transcribed and coded, and the themes generated were used to prepare the report. Exploring people's perceptions of education services in Rolpa District generated a few challenges. First, the questions were mainly asked to households that sent their children to public schools, so the perceptions of those sending children to private schools are missing. In some cases, respondents could not answer about the schools properly due to lack of awareness about the institutions engaged in managing schools. Moreover, the study was limited to only one district, so the findings cannot be generalised for public schools further afield, although some inferences might be made.

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<sup>2</sup> Dalits are the most disadvantaged groups within society, and they are ranked lower than Janajatis, Chhetris and Brahmins respectively.

## 4 Findings: People’s perceptions on access, quality, affordability and accountability

This section addresses findings on the physical, financial, administrative and social barriers to accessing education services.

### 4.1 Physical access

Nepal’s topography is an important feature affecting access to services. Geography has always been a major challenge, with most people needing to walk a long way to access services. The government schools with the best facilities tend to be established in district centres rather than in peripheral settlements. In order to access better services people must move to the headquarters and settle there. This presents a great need for the government to spread its services more widely so that rural people get opportunities to access them.

The study found that people thought that the time required to get to school has decreased. People in Liwang thought they have better access to school as the roads had been made more easily accessible and they required less travelling time, typically up to 30 minutes to reach the school. This is supported by findings from the quantitative survey as 82.8 per cent (boys) and 84.5 per cent (girls) of respondents perceived that it takes up to half an hour for students to reach the school as shown in Table 1.

In the case of Budagaon, both males and females perceived the travelling time to school as taking a bit longer, typically around 60 minutes. However, physical access was not preventing people from going to public schools, as the choice of public or private was a matter more related to financial capabilities.

**Table 1: Time taken to reach school, Liwang**

Sex	Up to half an hour	31 minutes to one hour	More than one hour
Boys	82.8%	12.8%	4.4%
Girls	84.5%	11.5%	4.0%

Source: Adapted from Upreti et al. 2014

Respondents’ comments varied widely:

*My son has been admitted to Bal Kalyan Higher Secondary School in grade 1. I take him to school every day and it takes us 25 minutes to reach there (one way). It is not that far. (Respondent 6, male, Chhetri, 23)*

*Sometimes my son does not go to school. He is in class 8. The school is in another VDC and he has to walk for an hour and half. If it rains or if there is a lot of household work he does not go to school. What can we say? The school is far. (Respondent 51, male, Dalit, 51)*

*It takes my daughter 5 minutes to reach school. Bal Kalyan School is very good. There are people living hours away who send their children to that school. We have to think about children’s future. (Respondent 39, male, Chhetri, 31)*

Proximity, type of road and weather were among the factors determining physical access to school. Even in Liwang the weather can make the roads worse. People go to school on foot and no easily accessible public transportation exists, like that found in some urban areas. Both male and female respondents, however, thought that getting to school was easier than it once was, thanks to the extensions of roads in both VDCs.

## 4.2 Financial access

In terms of financial access, respondents thought that the fees they were paying were nominal in comparison to private school fees in surrounding areas, which explains why they had opted to send their children to the public school. People in Liwang were satisfied with their public school, but people in Budagaon were less pleased with the services they were getting, but felt they had no alternative as they did not have higher secondary schools. Additionally if people from Budagaon want to educate their children, they must send them away.

Most of the schools' annual budgets come from the government budget and only a small portion from student fees. Primary education (up to grade 5) is free and all educational materials are provided by the schools. In both secondary schools studied, the students must pay an examination fee based on their grades, an admission fee and identity card charges, and they must buy a tie and belt. The medium of instruction is Nepali, but Liwang conducts some classes in English. The fee charged in both schools is Rs 1,440 a year, a sum respondents say they can afford. Both schools provide scholarships to students from marginalised groups (Dalits, the handicapped) and on a merit basis.

The quantitative survey showed that in Rolpa around 55 per cent of boy respondents said they had to pay fees for their education while only 49 per cent of the girls said they had to pay school fees. Respondents in this study said:

*We pay around 1,000–2,000 per annum in schools. We need to cover registration charges, absent fees, examination fees, calendar fees, identity card, tie and belt and when there is event in the school. (Respondent 3, female, Chhetri, 30)*

*We have to pay Rs 40 for identity card, 75 for registration and exam fees but we do not need to pay for books. (Respondent 2, male, Chhetri, 21)*

*We do not need to pay money in the school. I only give money for belt, tie and buying copy and pencils. (Respondent 50, female, Dalit, 35)*

The low cost of the public school in Liwang is a key reason why people send their children there rather than to the expensive private schools; in Budagaon there is no alternative as the private schools only go up to the fifth grade. The other reason people in both VDC's were not able to send their children to expensive schools was their economic status, as most respondents were from lower economic status groups. However, some respondents in Liwang were economically well off and still using the public school, showing a degree of trust in the public service. Dalits were provided scholarships, and so encountered no financial barriers accessing education services. In Budagaon, however, some other groups felt unable to afford the cost of education and felt it was discriminatory that scholarships were only provided to Dalits.

An extra cost that people incur is in sending their children for extra coaching or tuition classes as School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examinations approach. This shows people's appreciation for the importance of investing in their children's education despite it being difficult for them financially.

### 4.3 Administrative barriers

Public schools have their own administrative procedures and documentation requirements for students. Both male and female interviewees in the study areas thought that procedures to admit children to school were not difficult. People were able to complete the paperwork easily, and if help was required, people in the administration would assist them. Parents were required to be present during admission, which they felt helped establish and maintain good relationships. In the case of transfers from other schools, students were required to submit their mark sheets and related documents before admission. Administrative procedures were praised to some extent by the respondents as contributing to the better management of the school. Access to school is guaranteed and political patronage networks do not play a role in admitting one's child to school. Instead, in some cases, females face psychological barriers.

One female respondent did experience difficulties in getting her child admitted to school. She said that during admission, her husband was needed, but he was not there:

*I had a difficult time admitting my son to school. His father was not here at that time. The school said both the parents have to be present for the paperwork. It was tough at the beginning, but later the headmaster helped in managing the things.* (Respondent 17, female, Chhetri)

This shows that women can face particular administrative barriers. This study found only one case, but examples can be found in other parts of the country. Even though women have been given authority and have equal rights with men, still they face barriers in admitting their children to school. These issues need to be given proper consideration even though only one case was found in the study areas. The study did not find any other kind of administrative barriers, and no cases of discrimination against ethnic minorities. No corruption or favouritism was reported.

### 4.4 Social barriers

The study did not find any social discrimination in accessing education. Dalits, low-caste groups and handicapped students were given preference in both schools. They were provided with scholarships to encourage them to acquire education.

In one case a principal discriminated against married girls. According to one female respondent, the principal of the school in Liwang opposes young married girls being educated. He thinks that married students distract other students from their education by talking about marital life, including matters of intimacy or how they do not have to work much as the husband earns money. He fears this could result in girls dropping out and getting married. So because of this, the principal has stopped admitting married girls, even if the girl students are willing to study. This presents a case of married girls being deprived of their education.

While direct gender discrimination by the schools was not found, some form of it persisted within families, with boys more likely than girls to be sent to private schools. The number of girls was higher in both schools in the study because more boys were sent to private schools. This shows clear discrimination as parents opted to send girls to the public schools, which are far cheaper than the private schools. Some respondents, however, preferred to send their sons abroad to work instead of educating them, because labour migration is becoming a major source of livelihood in the study village and almost every household has a migrant worker.

#### 4.4.1 Perceptions on dropping out

Dropping out of school is common in every school across the country. Reasons are lack of facilities, low pass rates, lack of proper teaching, unqualified teachers and lack of interest in school (CERID, 2002; Kushiyat, 2007). Both male and female respondents perceived that fewer students are dropping out now compared with past years. The major reasons for decreasing dropout rates related to people's growing awareness of education, improvements in school management and people's trust in the school (in Liwang).

Among the 45 respondents interviewed in Liwang and Budagaon who sent their children to public schools, 37 perceived that their children went to school regularly except at times of sickness, when they had household work, and during rainy seasons. Both male and female respondents said that when they had urgent work at home and in their farms, they tended not to send their children to school. They expect their children to help them at home.

Eight respondents had family members drop out of school. The researchers did not find any differences between rural and urban settings; dropouts in both study areas tended to be boys leaving to work or girls getting married. Boys tended to go abroad for work because of the desire and motivation to earn money rather than to gain education. They were more highly motivated to earn money than to study. These cases were mostly found with Dalit children; meeting their household requirements was a priority over gaining education. In the case of girls, the trend of early marriage affected their studies and made them drop out. Furthermore, married girls had additional household responsibilities, which forced them to drop out.

One of the respondents said his reason for dropping out of school while in the seventh grade was his additional responsibilities for household chores after the demise of his mother. Other respondents said their sons dropped out because they were older than their classmates:

*One of my three sons dropped out of school because he is 17 years old studying in class 7. He was very shy to go to school because all his classmates were younger than him. I tried to convince him but he did not listen to me. (Respondent 10, male, Janajati, 33)*

*My son stopped going to school because he said he was the oldest in his class. He was embarrassed to study because his classmates teased him. (Respondent 13, male, Brahmin, 71)*

Other boys opted to work, some of them abroad:

*My son did not have any interest in going to school. I told him many times but he said he wanted to go abroad and earn money. (Respondent 43, male, Janajati, 69)*

*My son did not want to study at all. He was already 20 years old when he was about to sit for SLC exams. He chose to go to India and work. (Respondent 41, female, Chhetri, 32)*

*One of my sons left school in the third grade and the other one left in fifth grade because they were not motivated at all to go to school. When I asked them why they wanted to leave then they said they wanted to earn money without continuing their study. (Respondent 44, male, Dalit, 48)*

Similarly a Dalit male perceived that the desire to work and the influence of peers was also causing problems in the continuation of education in the study areas. People who had earned money were never motivated to go back to studying.

Marriage was a reason for girls dropping out:

*I did not want to go to school because I got married when I was 17 years old. I gave birth to a baby and my friends teased me when I went to school. So I decided to stay home and help my parents. (Respondent 50, female, Dalit, 35)*

*My daughter did not show any interest to go to school. So we married her off. My girl child left school because she got married. She then had her own responsibilities. (Respondent 40, female, Janajati, 35)*

For others, media campaigns played a role in making them understand the value of education. The school in Liwang forged a positive image and the good management of the school made people more confident about sending their children there.

Where dropouts do occur, a lack of communication is apparent between parents and teachers or school committees (SMCs). Previous findings suggest a similar issue (CERID, 2002).

## **4.5 Perceptions on attendance and satisfaction**

### **4.5.1 Perception on regularity of attendance in school**

This section presents people's perceptions of the service delivery mechanisms, quality of the services, resource availability in the schools, and the way they felt about the services being provided by the schools.

The school in Liwang has improved enrolment and attendance among both students and teachers. In the past, teachers and students were often late to school and left early without any notice. After the appointment of a new headmaster in 2065 BS, attendance increased among the students. The student register started to be checked twice a day, and if any students failed to remain in school after lunch they would be marked as absent and fined. The school day started earlier, requiring students to be in class by 10 a.m. The school philosophy is that discipline is vital to a quality education. It has therefore come up with strict approaches to punish students and teachers and so cut down irregular attendance. Teachers have received warnings or salary cuts for irregularities in school. Students are fined Rs 5 for being absent without a valid reason and there are further harsher punishments that could lead to expulsion. In this case poor people had no complaints about being unable to pay the fines; they thought it was a good provision as it made their children attend school compulsorily.

Some of the respondents discussed this in interviews:

*I also studied in Bal Kalyan School and I have admitted my child there. I send him to school regularly. The school also runs regularly. The school is very strict and I usually get updates about my son's performance from the school. When the students are absent without proper reason they are charged absent fees. So we try never to have our son miss school. (Respondent 6, male, Chhetri, 23)*

*If children do not go to school they are fined. I am happy because my son always used to make excuses to skip school. Now I tell him I do not have money to pay if you miss your school. He understands and goes to school. But sometimes he does not and I do not force him. He is a child. (Respondent 3, female, Chhetri)*

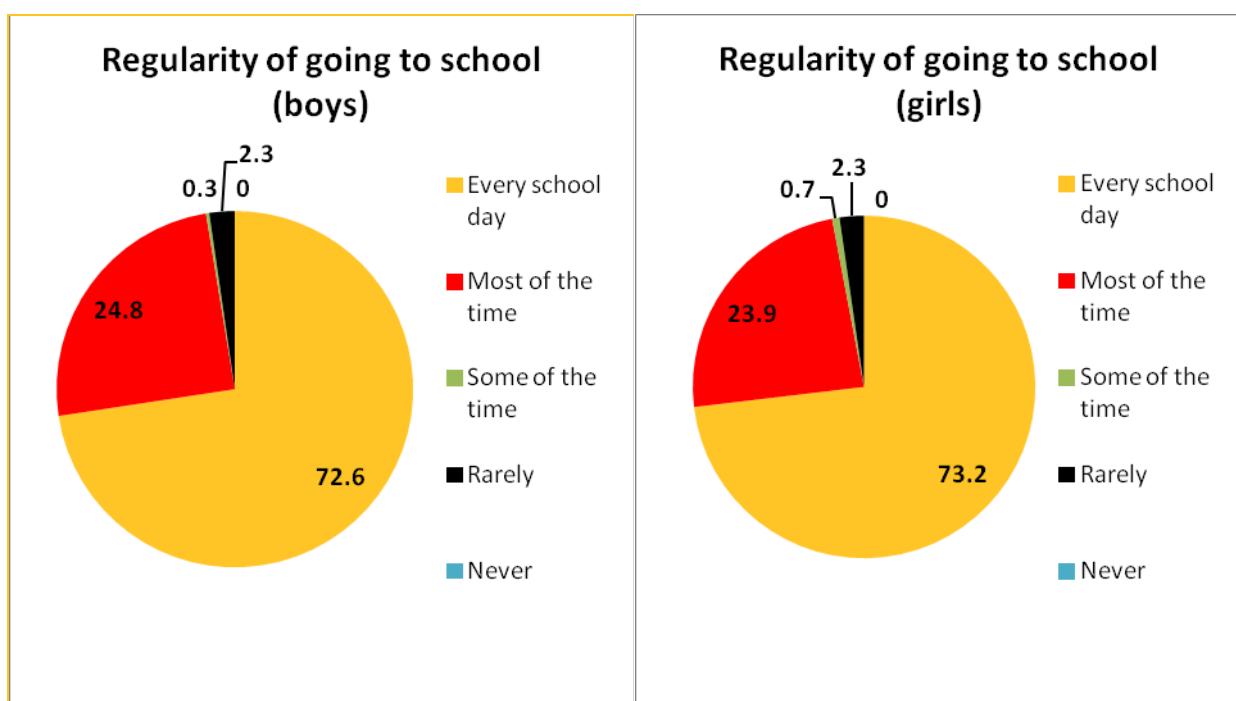


*If my child does not go to school, I try to convince him. If he is stubborn and does not go, he misses. The school also does not care. If they had proper rules, teachers and facilities they would be good. (Respondent 21, female, Janajati)*

Both male and female respondents have similar perceptions about students attending more regularly than in the past. The reasons are the school's strictness, increased communication between the parents and the school, and the school's responsiveness towards the students. Female respondents said they had been trying to motivate their children to go to school rather than just leaving them on their own.

The quantitative study showed that 72.6 per cent of boys and 73.2 per cent of girls in Rolpa attended school every day, and 24.8 per cent of boys and 23.9 per cent of girls attended school most of the time. However evidence suggested that boys and girls in Rolpa tend to stay away from school during the rainy season when the roads and the high hill tracks are in bad shape.

**Figure 2: Regularity of attendance in school**



Source: adapted from Upreti et al. 2014

People credited the improvement of the Bal Kalyan School in Liwang to the headmaster and school management committee (SMC). The headmaster was previously a teacher and vice principal, promoted after the death of the former principal. He has worked closely with the SMC, and together they are committed to developing the school into one of the best in the district and have been recruiting only qualified teachers. The school has also been receiving financial support from international and local NGOs as well as from the government. One of the male respondents said,

*Before I did not like Bal Kalyan School and I sent my girl to private school. But ever since the new headmaster (Madhusudhan) came, the school has changed. Most households started sending their children to his school. He has set strict rules on attendance, studies and also brought facilities to the school. I then brought my girl back*

*to Bal Kalyan from private school. This school is now cheaper with better facilities than the private school. (Respondent 5, male, Chhetri, 43)*

This shows that people's perception of and trust in the school changed. Some people have moved their children to the public school. In Budagaon, however, people had less choice and felt compelled to send their children to public school despite its lower standards of quality. Generally people had a good understanding of the importance of sending their children to school.

Respondents thought that student attendance in Budagaon is not regular because of weak school management. The students are often seen in their school uniforms outside of school during school hours, despite teachers noticing them. This problem has not been controlled by the school management, which has also been unable to maintain disciplined teachers.

Some respondents thought that enrolment at Liwang had improved thanks to improved facilities such as toilets and drinking water. Respondents said,

*In the past, my daughter did not go to school for four to five days when she had menstruation, because the school did not have proper toilet at that time, and they were shy. But after the school constructed new toilets with water facilities, my daughter did not have problems going to school and I am very happy with that. (Respondent 34, male, Chhetri, 30)*

*Few years back, there was no drinking water facility in the school and even if they did, it was not good. Children returned home falling ill. But now things have changed and drinking water has been managed. (Respondent 36, female, Janajati, 38)*

In Budagaon, on the other hand, there were no such improvements:

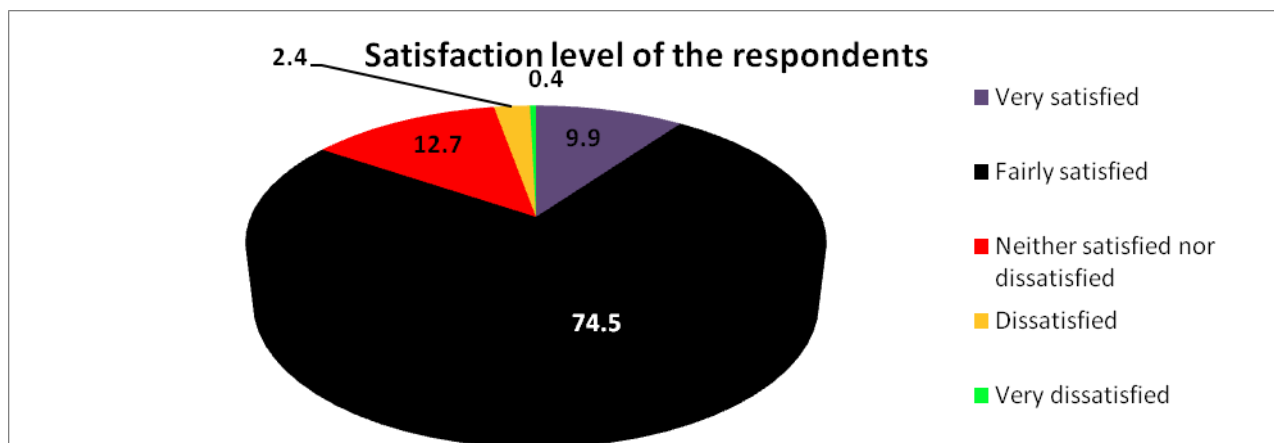
*There is no drinking water and toilet facility in this school at all. You have seen it, haven't you? There are faeces all over the playground. But who cares? Me and my sisters have to go to school anyway. (Respondent 26, female, Dalit, 19)*

In some cases, poor attendance by students could be directly linked to the lack of basic infrastructure.

#### **4.5.2 Satisfaction with the school**

The study has found that majority of respondents were satisfied with the education services provided in Liwang and Budagaon. Of the total, 32 respondents were fully or partially satisfied with the services they received from the school. In general, people did not have negative feelings towards the school. This reflects the findings of the quantitative survey in which 74.5 per cent of respondents were fairly satisfied in Rolpa. Only a few respondents were dissatisfied with the service provided. People felt fortunate about having a school to go to. In Budagaon, people were satisfied too, although they had complaints about water and other facilities.

Figure 3: Respondents' satisfaction level



Source: adapted from Upreti et al., 2014

Both male and female respondents in Liwang said that they were highly satisfied with the public school based on its management and facilities, which they saw as equivalent to those found in private schools. The school's fees remained low. Respondents said,

*The teachers are very good nowadays, and the students can share how the school is if we ask them now. My children say the teachers help them a lot. They are also given time to play and children love to play. They are being trained very well. I am very satisfied with my children's growth. (Respondent 6, male, Chhetri, 23)*

*Before, the school was not very good. The children did not go to school regularly. But as the new headmaster came in, things have changed. We can see it too. He has taken responsibility in shaping our children's future. (Respondent 5, male, Chhetri, 43)*

Both the male and female respondents of Liwang thought that the headmaster had transformed the school into one of the best in the district. The SMC had taken the school to new heights, setting an example for public schools in Nepal. The SMC was created to develop and maintain quality education in the school as well as enhance its physical infrastructure. It has also been able to monitor teachers' attendance and their activities in school. Both schools' SMCs have been making efforts, but the Liwang SMC has accomplished more.

An area which seems to be the source of some satisfaction is the opportunity to get feedback on their children's performance in school. A male respondent in Budagaon said,

*Nowadays when we ask about our children's education, the teachers tell us how they do in school. Though I am not that educated, I get to know how my children are performing. If they are doing well I tell them to do better and if they are not doing good, I tell them to do so. (Respondent 6, male, Chhetri, 23)*

Parents at the two government schools were getting regular updates on their children, which is rare in other schools. They appreciated understanding their children's performance in school, which reflects changes in the social dimensions of education.

One area where respondents were not very satisfied is in performance in SLC exams. There is still a lot of work required in improving the quality of results so public schools can compete with private schools. One of the female respondents said,

*Actually, there is room for improvement. The quality of education must be improved still, especially in the 9th and 10th grade because this is where children need the most attention. The SLC results are not very good. Many students fail still. I believe it is because of lack of proper management. The main gateway is SLC or else our children will not be able to get proper jobs. (Respondent 17, female, Chhetri, 67)*

A female respondent who is sending her child to the private school said,

*Everyone around said government schools are not as good as private schools. That is why I sent my daughter to private school. (Respondent 16, female, Chhetri, 35)*

Improvements are needed to make people believe that the government schools are equally able to deliver a high-quality education.

Satisfaction with schools and quality differs between individuals. For example, parents might judge quality on the institution's and their children's results, while students may perceive the quality of school based on teachers' availability and ability to teach (Chua, 2004; Shrestha, 2013). The survey findings somewhat reflect this phenomenon. Parents, despite being uneducated, seemed concerned about their children's studies and gauged school quality based on their children's performance.

Most parents expect better management of the education sector from the government. Public schools have always been widely considered as low quality. Inadequate resources, crowded classrooms, low teacher qualifications and poor attendance are major criticisms (Parker et al., 2012). Children in public schools are thought to be predestined to 'fail', as reflected in the low SLC pass rate (Vaux et al., 2006: 21). Opinions expressed by respondents include:

*People say the boarding schools are better, so government must be able to recognise how boarding schools are better managed and such management must be implemented in the government school as well. (Respondent 17, female, Chhetri, 67)*

*The local government must be able to guarantee quality education free of cost in the district through the district education office. (Respondent 18, male, Chhetri, 38)*

*In the education sector there have been improvements from the government and it is very good. (Respondent 20, male, Janajati, 37)*

Both males and females perceived that private schools were better than government schools because of their facilities and infrastructure.

This shows that increased enrolment should not be the only means for measuring progress in education. As Aryal (2013) argued, an increasing failure rate in SLC exams in public schools challenges the impression of progress in enrolment rates. This poses questions for the current policies, which side line quality education and teaching systems in favour of enrolment rates (Schiffman et al., 2010; Shrestha, 2013).

People expect the government to improve the quality of public schools by taking private schools as an example. Some efforts that schools have been making to improve the quality of education include the initiation of English as the medium in schools up to grade four and examining students as frequently as students in private schools are. Furthermore, students have to take and retake exams until they pass

and are able to move up to a higher grade. To make students study harder, examination fees are taken from children who fail, and this compels them to study. Furthermore, teachers give extra coaching classes to weaker students to bring them up to the level of other students. Thus people in Liwang have come to expect public schools to be as good as the private school. This shows that public schools' reputations can be good if they are managed well. This could be replicated by the school in Budagaon.

*My son used to study in private school before. Now, I have shifted him to public school because the school is far better than private schools. It has better management than the private school. (Respondent 35, male, Chhetri, 50)*

Parker et al. (2012) noted that private schooling increased because of the prestige of being taught in an English-medium school. Public schools are not usually English-medium in Nepal, which is one reason those studying in public schools often fail SLC exams. Bal Kalyan Higher Secondary School, however, has been successfully running an English-medium system up to fourth grade and plans to extend the system to higher grades gradually. It has established itself among the top five schools of the whole district and has been competitive even with the private schools, and in doing so it has set an example to all public schools across the country.

## **4.6 Resource and service availability**

Rolpa is considered to be one of the more remote districts of Nepal in terms of infrastructure and other services. This study explores the human and other resources available at the schools.

### **4.6.1 Human resources**

In Rolpa district the human resources available in the schools appear to be adequate. In addition to the teachers allocated by government, the school in Liwang recruited extra staff using other sources such as donor funds. Through this additional budget, the school has been able to employ extra staff and teachers to monitor and evaluate the classes, student performance, and the teaching style of the school.

The SMCs have also been trying to meet human resource requirements on a voluntary basis. Both schools have formed committees comprising key people representing the voice of the community and who help maintain quality education through regular monitoring of teachers, students and other staff. Thus state services have been accountable to the local people through an autonomous body of the schools in both areas. However the schools' functions and activities need to be actively monitored by the state as well for better service delivery.

### **4.6.2 Teacher quality and qualifications**

The quality of teaching and teachers' qualifications in public schools have always been debated. Measuring and judging quality differs between individuals and is more subjective than objective (Schiffman et al., 2010). Most people tend to judge the quality of teachers based on their children's performance in schools.

Respondents generally perceived teachers' qualifications and their ability to teach their subjects positively. Although there were exceptions, most teachers in the school were seen as qualified to fulfil their tasks. One male respondent from Chhetri caste said,

*The majority of teachers are good. Around 75 per cent of the teachers are quite good and 25 per cent are not so good. They are just beginners, may be that is why. But I think all the teachers are qualified for their jobs. (Respondent 1, male, Chhetri, 30)*

Another male respondent, who sent his children to private school, got his knowledge about the schools from the students who came into his shop for lunch. He said,

*I hear the students who eat at my shop say some teachers are good and some are not so good. But while listening to the queries and information of the students it has been clear that the school management is very good and the teachers are also qualified and very good. (Respondent 4, male, Dalit, 48)*

Other respondents said,

*The teachers are very good in the public school and this school is even better than the boarding school. The results are also good. (Respondent 17, female, Chhetri, 67)*

*Yes most of the teachers are good. They must be, otherwise, how can they teach and how can children get promoted from one grade to another? Also, the schools situation has changed over the years, due to the new head master. (Respondent 18, male, Chhetri, 38)*

*I think the teachers are qualified. The school management committee looks after the capacity, qualification, and quality of the teacher regularly. And because of this, there is no need to worry about the qualification of teacher. (Respondent 20, male, Janajati, 37)*

There were cases in Liwang where people had shifted their children to the public school from the private school because they perceived the school was good. In Budagaon people knew less about the qualifications of teachers, but they generally perceived them to be good.

#### **4.6.3 School facilities and infrastructure**

In the study areas there was no reported destruction of school buildings and other infrastructure during the conflict. However most of the improvements in infrastructure have been in the post-conflict period.

In Liwang, the school has been renovated with new buildings with spacious rooms and computer and science laboratories. The school also has its own compound and an area where water for drinking is filtered. Plenty of toilets are provided for the number of students as opposed to one or two for the entire school, which is typically the case in public schools across the country. The classrooms have new benches and desks, and there is a huge playground with a volleyball court. There are employees responsible for managing and operating the facilities.

The Budagaon school's infrastructure, however, is very poor. The school appears small, built with tin, without toilets and water facilities for children. It has a playground but no compound. There are no computer or science laboratories. The lack of toilets and water facilities makes the school malodorous, with evidence of open defecation in its grounds. This raises questions about budget allocation, utilisation and monitoring in remote areas such as Budagaon.

There was no discrimination found in terms of gender, ethnicity and caste in terms of using the school facilities in either school. In both schools students are provided with free textbooks but not with other accessories like pens and copies. In the higher classes however the students have to buy the textbooks at nominal cost.

#### **4.6.4 Scholarship and other provisions**

Schooling up to the fifth grade is free of cost in public schools for all students. After the fifth grade, scholarships are provided to outstanding students and those from marginalised groups. Every Dalit child is provided free education up to class ten due to their poor socio-economic and political standing in the country. This practice has encouraged Dalit students to gain, at minimum, an education up to the

tenth grade. While in the past Dalit children faced many hurdles to access schooling (Dahal et al., 2002) because of their poor economic condition. Cases of caste discrimination were not found in either study area, although some high caste people complained about the scholarships being provided to Dalits on the basis of their caste.

The free scholarships for Dalit children were introduced through the 'Education for All' programme (Nepali et al., 2013). Significant progress has been made on access regarding Dalit children's education, but there have been problems nationally: one study in Kailali district conducted by the Department of Education revealed about 13,000 school-age children were not enrolled in school, most of them Dalits (Educational Page, 2011). But our findings do not show Dalits dropping out of school; instead, the scholarships motivated them to attend.

Schools in both Budagaon and Liwang have provisions for scholarships according to the government quota, with additional ones in Liwang enabled through internal sources. Every Dalit and disabled student received a scholarship in the study areas. Other students got scholarships based on whether they were considered outstanding and diligent. People from other ethnicities raised concerns about the need for scholarships for their children as well and harboured expectations from the government on expanding scholarship provision. One female respondent from the Janajati ethnic group asked,

*How can we get scholarships? There are scholarships for Dalits only. These days people like us will not get any support. Who is there? We are still poor. It is difficult to admit our children to school. (Respondent 9, female, Janajati, 22)*

Sending children to public schools is not free of cost. There are examination fees and other resource fees (Nepali et al., 2013; Epstein and Yuthas, 2012; Parker et al., 2012) that could be barriers to ethnic groups other than the Dalits.

#### **4.7 Accountability and legitimacy**

In this section we were concerned with accountability mechanisms and examined the extent of transparency, accountability and responsiveness. We looked at the effectiveness of grievance processes and the ability of citizens to influence local government and exact accountability through various formal and informal channels. We were also concerned with peoples' assessment of the central government and state legitimacy and the extent to which it was influenced by

- pre-existing expectations about the role of the state and whether its service delivery capacity matches people's expectations and
- the ability of the central government to ensure effective and accountable delivery at the local level.



#### 4.7.1 Behaviour of education officials

The schooling system in Nepal has always used corporal punishment. For example, if children do not do their homework, they may be beaten.<sup>3</sup> The behaviour of school officials towards their students can have an impact on the children's physical and mental development (Rimal and Pokharel, 2013; Mishra et al., 2010). This study did not encounter complaints about school officials' treatment of students. This could be because children do not report punishment they receive in school to parents or because parents see such punishment as normal. Hitting children is widely seen as acceptable (Rimal and Pokharel, 2013).

The school is perceived as strict, but this is seen as a part of maintaining discipline:

*The headmaster of the school is very strict and he has strictly managed the school and children which is the reason why our children's are disciplined. This is also the reason for betterment of the school. The credit goes to the headmaster. (Respondent 3, female, Chhetri, 20)*

The school in Liwang has an established mechanism for posing concerns and complaints about misbehaviour by teachers or education departments. One respondent explained,

*The community has to pressurise the SMC which then pressurises and influences the school for required improvements and other changes. (Respondent 3, female, Chhetri, 20)*

The only complaints about teachers were related to poor teaching, teaching styles and children's development, not about teacher behaviour or excessive punishment. But people feared that filing complaints could have negative impacts:

*There have been no complaints so far. But, if we make any complains then our relationship with the officials may go bad. They may not provide good education to our children. We are afraid of these kinds of aftermaths because this is a small area and everyone knows each other. (Respondent 17, female, Chhetri, 67)*

This suggests that cases related to punishment and teacher behaviour in schools might exist that went unaddressed.

One punishment evident in Liwang payment of a certain amount of money if children were absent from class.

#### 4.7.2 Distribution of the education budget

Most respondents did not know about the how budgets were distributed among district schools, as there is no established mechanism to inform parents of the budget of the school. They could not say how budgets were allocated within the schools and who took care of them. Only three said they thought the budget was allocated during the annual meeting but it was not clear where the money is invested.

When asked about the budget allocation, respondents said,

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<sup>3</sup>Mishra et al. (2010) identified three forms of punishment as physical (beating with stick, pulling hair or ears, making children raise hands for a long time, etc.), emotional (includes slapping by the opposite sex, scolding, giving names such as donkey, etc.) and negative reinforcement (locking in toilets, oral warning, etc.). In Nepal many students get severely punished without anyone taking action against teachers; Mishra et al. found that only a slight change in such behaviour has taken place in the context of schools and households.



*How do we know about the budget provisions? We do not know about it. (Respondent 7, female, Janajati, 60)*

*I do not know about these budgets. I do not have any stake in these things. (Respondent 13, male, Dalit, 71)*

*I do not know much about the budget. I just know that the budget comes from the central government but I do not know about any other things. (Respondent 20, male, Janajati, 37)*

*They provide information during the annual function. They say lump sum money has been allocated but they do not say where it goes. (Respondent 17, female, Chhetri, 67)*

Thus respondents were not aware of how the budget was distributed among the schools of the district. There were no mechanisms to provide information on it and they were not able to acquire information about the budgets directly. People involved with SMCs, on the other hand, said that they tried their best to share information on the budget but that most people were not keen to know about it or were too busy.

#### **4.7.3 Perception of the roles of the VDC and the state**

The respondents were asked about the role of the VDC and the state in the education sector. Most respondents thought that neither the VDC nor the central government had any role in managing the schools and influencing education. People knew that the budget came from the central government via the VDC, but they did not have a positive impression of the VDC's role in education:

*No, the VDC does not regulate it; I think the VDC needs to take care of all the responsibilities of providing services to the people. (Respondent 1, male, Chhetri, 30)*

*VDC has not given any serious considerations in these issues and have not paid attention to the need of the people . . . this is the reason why we do not know about how much influence the VDC can play in delivering basic services. (Respondent 17, female, Dalit, 67)*

Respondents were not satisfied with the work that the VDC contributed in terms of extending the education sector in either of the study areas. They thought the VDC should regularly monitor the improvement of the schools in both areas, but in the absence of this they felt that the schools were not accountable. They thought the schools would be better if the VDC regularly monitored them:

*The VDC has to be involved directly and monitor the situations regularly to be held accountable towards providing services. (Respondent 1, male, Chhetri, 30)*

*Even though we are not satisfied, we must admit and convince ourselves and be satisfied with the services that we are getting. (Respondent 4, male, Dalit, 48)*

*The VDC has not been able to provide better services and we have not seen fulfilling of these responsibilities by the state. (Respondent 5, male, Chhetri, 43)*

*What can VDC do about it? . . . Nowadays the work of VDC is to distribute money. (Respondent 18, male, Chhetri, 38)*

*The VDC has not been able to pay proper attention. . . . People themselves do not complain a lot, which is why they do not pay much attention addressing the needs of the people. . . . But they have done other works such as providing money for toilet construction to the villagers. (Respondent 20, male, Janajati, 37)*

Female respondents were especially unaware of the role of the VDC.

This shows that neither the VDC nor the central state has been visible in terms of contributing to the education sector. There have been no local-level elections since 2002 in Nepal (Upreti et al. 2012), which has also created distance between people and the VDC.

#### 4.7.4 Role of SMCs

Both schools have school management committees (SMCs) consisting of nine members as mandated by government. The main work of the SMC is to monitor the teachers and students, enhance physical infrastructure and deliver a better education service.

The Liwang SMC has accomplished more than the SMC in Budagaon. It has been playing a major role in formulating plans, hiring teachers, looking for extra funds and building teacher capacity.

Overall, the role of the SMC is generally appreciated by the locals who know about it. But most people were not aware of the role of the SMC even though it has been functioning for a long time. For example:

*Actually, I do not know about these committees much but they must necessary have done some good work for our children betterments. (Respondent 5, male, Chhetri, 43)*

Some respondents were familiar with the existence of the SMC and had varying views on the roles that it has been performing:

*The school management committee helps follow the rules and regulations / protocol (ACHAR SAMHITA) by all the teachers as well as the students. Yes they have been performing well. (Respondent 8, female, Brahmin, 22)*

*The teacher's qualifications must be duly concerned but this has not been done. They have to make the education system better but have failed. The unqualified teachers must be trained well. (Respondent 17, female, Chhetri, 67)*

*The school has done a great job. All the people including the principal, teachers and the parents themselves have been committed to enhance the quality of school. (Respondent 18, male, Chhetri, 38)*

*The SMC has been able to make schools better. This committee's responsibilities towards the school have satisfied us since the results of the SLC examination have also been good. When these management committees conduct regular monitoring then there are improvements in education. (Respondent 20, male, Janajati, 37)*

In these study area the SMCs play a major role in addressing people's concerns and complaints regarding education. Both schools have an SMC as the governing body to manage conflict and maintain educational quality through regular monitoring and supervision of the school staff. One male respondent from Liwang said,

*Yes people can pose their queries and concerns regarding the education sector, if they are unhappy. The SMC listens to people and helps solve problems. In the past, parents have complained about children leaving school and going elsewhere. And the SMC has*

*helped address the problem by making standard timings to school with the help of the headmaster. Now that problem has been solved. (Respondent 20, male, Janajati, 37)*

There are cases where problems and complaints have been addressed by the SMC, but in both study areas not everybody knew about this mechanism.

## 5 Conclusions

Rolpa District was the origin of the armed conflict, which greatly affected all the service sectors, including education. Schools were vandalised, teachers and children were abducted, school buildings were used as ~~military~~ camps for the rebels and schools were not able to operate properly. However, the education sector in Rolpa has recovered since the peace agreement. Despite the prolonged effects of conflict, poor resource management and weak governance of the education sector and a bleak political scenario, schools are committed to the children they teach. But much more needs to be done to improve access, quality and resources.

This study has found tangible improvements have been made in the government-provided education in the cases concerned. The Liwang example suggests that dynamic school leadership can enable real quality public education provision. People seem to have reasonably high levels of satisfaction with the education services being provided, and some good progress on accountability has been made, with the SMCs playing a valued role. People do clearly expect the state to play a role in education and would like public provision of education to more consistently be of a high quality and able to compete with private provision. Significant progress has clearly been made in rebuilding education services after the disruption of the conflict but some serious quality issues remain to be tackled. What's less clear is if any of these positive aspects are leading people to view the government (at any level) as more legitimate with positive perceptions at the technical level of service delivery not necessarily compensating for wider governance failures.

In line with the objective of this research, access was analysed according to physical, financial, social and administrative factors. Physical access to school has been made easier because of better roads. Respondents had difficulty sending their children to private schools as they had limited incomes and public schools were financially very cheap. There were no social barriers to accessing education and no reported cases of direct discrimination against low caste, marginalised or deprived groups or women. Dalits were given preference in attaining education through scholarships and other benefits. Some indirect discrimination happened, such as with boys being sent to the private schools and girls to public schools. In addition, married girls were discriminated against in Liwang. Administrative barriers to school did not exist, as the staff were cooperative and helpful, and there was no corruption. However, having access to education is not sufficient for ensuring quality education. This was reflected in both schools. But people have positive views of the schools even though lots of challenges remain in the remote areas.

In terms of the effectiveness of the services being provided, the study found that people were generally very satisfied with the services they were receiving. The Liwang school had achieved major improvements in quality and students were attending regularly. This was not the case in Budagaon. The Liwang SMC played a significant role in managing the school. People were very much satisfied with the services that they were receiving from both the study areas. Even though the schools were public, their quality was good enough for people to be satisfied and send their children there, in some cases even moving their children from private schools. Liwang had better resources than Budagaon. The human resources (including teachers) were adequate, qualified and were able to perform their work efficiently. The schools had recruited experienced teachers. The schools were also providing scholarships. These

findings clearly showed that the public schools were rivalling the private schools in meeting all the facilities required as well as maintaining the quality of the school.

The schools were accountable to local people. Teachers were seen as responsive, friendly and dedicated to improving quality. No bad behaviour towards students was reported. The school management believes that rather than punishing students, the school is creating a friendlier environment for students to grow. The SMC has played a key role in maintaining accountability of the schools towards the people. This was not so much the case in Budagaon.

People had little perception of the role played by the VDC in terms of providing educational services. In the case of Liwang, the initiatives from the SMC played a key role in overshadowing the state's role in providing services. These are positive signs for the education sector of Nepal, as these practices can be replicated in other schools of the country, as well for improving the government education service delivery in the whole country.

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