

Parental Attitude

AARAMBHA: LEAVE NO GIRL BEHIND

Learning Brief | Feb 2024

INTRODUCTION

Since 2018, PIN Nepal has been executing the Aarambha-Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB)¹ project in the Bara and Rautahat districts of Madhesh province under the FCDO/UK aid's Girls Education Challenge (GEC) programme². The project has been implemented in 21 palikas of Bara and Rautahat reaching 9,497 girls in collaboration with Aasaman Nepal (ASN) and the Social Organization Development Coordination Committee, Parsa (SODCC). Aarambha-Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB) specifically targets out-of-school (OOS) adolescent girls (10-19 years) in remote palikas across the province, which have 49.54%, highest illiteracy rates in Nepal³.

Aarambha aims to enhance the life chances of targeted marginalized girls by providing basic literacy, numeracy, and life skills sessions in non-formal education (NFE) settings specifically through accessible Community Learning Centers (CLCs). Under the project, 462 CLCs were conducted in 21 palikas of Bara and Rautahat, and upon successful completion of accelerated learning courses at these centers, graduates were either able to transition into formal schooling in 1st to 9th Grades or get upskilled through market-needed technical/vocational skills with the necessary equipment. Both learning and employability interventions have been successful in addressing early marriage and breaking down harmful social norms. Project cycle data shows that 9,497 OOS girls have been educated on literacy and numeracy skills under the project, with 4,896 successfully transitioning to school and 2,347 to technical and vocational education and training (TEVT). The project has also consistently tracked the learning progress of girls through assessments in both formal education and TVET pathways to ensure positive returns.

LEARNING

The project had a significant educational impact on the girls, particularly those who lacked basic literacy and numeracy skills or who had stopped attending school due to various challenges like marriage, pregnancy, or poverty. Through the project's CLC class, these girls had the chance to acquire fundamental literacy and numeracy skills, which proved invaluable in their daily lives. Moreover, the project created an opportunity for girls to re-enter formal education after completing the CLC programme. They had the opportunity to return to school at a level that matched their abilities, rather than getting restarted again from the primary grades.

¹ <https://nepal.peopleinneed.net/en/our-work/civil-society-inclusive-governance>

² Girls Education Challenge (GEC) is the UK FCDO's largest girls education programme focused on provision of education to marginalised girls across the world. <https://girlseducationchallenge.org/>

³ National Population and Housing Census (2021)



The collective data from eight municipalities across two districts representing all four cohorts revealed a significant positive impact on the learning outcomes and societal perceptions following the project implementation. The Community Learning Centers (CLC) had a positive impact on communities, particularly in transforming their perspectives on education. CLC classes equipped daughters and daughters-in-law with cognitive abilities and other life skills, leading to financial independence. The project's success was evident in breaking barriers and empowering parents through education.

While a majority of the parents mentioned the project's positive impact, a few parents revealed challenges in formalising skills acquired after the CLC classes into businesses due to inadequate training and societal pressures. However, even under such circumstances, the parents were supporting the girls.



Improvement in girls' self-confidence



Improvement in girls' decision-making



Decrease in child marriages



Increase in school attendance

TRANSITION

In the Aarambha-LNGB project, the term "transition" refers to "the state of being involved in any stage/phase after graduating from the Community Learning Centre (CLC)," where the girls pursue either school enrolment or vocational training. CLC-graduated girls have the flexibility to transition either to school or vocational skills based on their interests.

1. School

Parents from many municipalities claimed that all girls smoothly transitioned to schools and expressed a desire for them to continue their education, achieve financial independence, and pursue jobs of their interest. On the other hand, the parents still emphasised the decision to marry off their daughter if she was not willing to continue her education in the future.

2. Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

The parents interviewed across eight municipalities showcased commonalities in the emphasis on vocational training, while distinctions also arose like the challenges faced by different respondents.

The commonalities included a recognition of the importance of vocational training, challenges (such as limited market access and industry saturation), and reduced household expenses by saving their household expenses. Overall, the findings indicated that the CLC classes not only impacted an individual's understanding and confidence, but also influenced the broader family dynamics including livelihood and household decision-making. In most cases, the daughters-in-law had positive changes, gained skills, and contributed to household income.

FINANCIAL LITERACY

The overall assessment examined the OOS girl's knowledge, attitude, and practice of financial literacy through a set of questions on financial planning (banking, saving, and borrowing). The parents responded positively to the girls being financially active and independent. On the other hand, it is important to note that the final financial decision remains with male members.

Even though some progress was observed, deep-rooted gender norms still affected the financial dynamics and decision-making processes within these communities. The parents did not give the girls financial autonomy in most of the municipalities. Sustained efforts are imperative to challenge deep-rooted gender norms and foster genuine financial autonomy and decision-making parity within households.

FAMILY PLANNING

The parents across all eight municipalities expressed their diverse perspectives in terms of family planning and further elaborated on their family planning knowledge, attitudes, and practices including the gaps between children, the use of contraception, and access to contraception. The majority of parents acknowledged the importance of limiting the number of children due to financial constraints, with many preferring to have only two or three children. Despite this, most of them had five to six children on average, which they could not afford to look after due to high inflation. They expressed their intentions to share this knowledge with their daughters and daughters-in-law. Furthermore, all of the consulted parents highlighted that the decision-making regarding family planning primarily rested with male members, which limits female autonomy.

SELF-EFFICACY

The social skill tool was designed to gauge OOS girls' self-belief to successfully navigate a difficult situation and make good decisions. Parents from some of the municipalities highlighted a transformative impact on the confidence and intellectual capabilities of girls and a shift in terms of decision-making capacity of their daughters-in-law. Final evaluation of the project reports, decline in cases of child marriages as girls learned about expressing their views during CLC life skill sessions.

The information is further highlighted in the following three sections – Confidence, Decision making and Child marriage:

- ❖ **Confidence:** The parents reported an increase in their daughter's/daughter's in law confidence when initiating conversations with strangers. The daughters and daughters-in-law felt assured when talking with others and were comfortable going outside the community.
- ❖ **Decision Making:** The consulted communities portrayed distinct gender roles, that outlined household responsibilities and decision-making dynamics, reflecting deep-rooted social norms and familial structures, attributed to the customary practices of male absence in domestic tasks. The traditional gender roles and expectations continue to influence the division of labour within households and underscore the importance of societal changes towards a fairer distribution of household responsibilities irrespective of gender.

- ❖ **Child marriage:** There was a notable decrease in the incidents of child marriages across different locations after the project implementation. It was agreed that the age for marriage was 20 years for girls. Furthermore, strict governmental laws shaped parental decision-making and served as a deterrent. This legal framework, coupled with heightened awareness initiatives, played a pivotal role in dissuading parents from engaging in early-age marriages.

SAFEGUARDING

The primary beneficiaries of the project were marginalised out-of-school adolescent girls aged between 10-19 years, who lived in a relatively insecure community. The project interventions were designed to raise awareness regarding not only family planning and early marriages, but also gender-based violence.

The findings of the overall assessment indicated a mixed picture regarding the prevalence and response to Gender-Based Violence (GBV). While some areas reported a notable decrease in GBV, others noted persistent instances of GBV within their communities. The project interventions have notably reduced GBV in several areas and continued awareness programs and targeted support for reporting mechanisms could be vital to sustain these positive trends.

OVERALL COMPARISON

The findings of the parental information from different municipalities depicted both similarities and contradictions in societal norms and practices concerning gender roles, child marriage, decision-making dynamics, and perceptions of female empowerment.

Similarities were observed in the acknowledgement across communities of the importance of delaying the marriage of daughters until after the age of 20. This consensus was driven by factors such as legal implications, health concerns, and changing societal norms influenced by governmental laws against child marriage. Additionally, there was a common trend of daughters-in-law taking on significant household responsibilities across most communities, while male members were predominantly engaged in tasks outside the home, reflecting traditional gender roles.

However, contradictions arose when considering the dynamics of female empowerment and decision-making within households. While some communities highlighted instances where daughters-in-law were depicted as confident decision-makers and actively engaged in activities outside the household, others, maintained stricter control over female family members' mobility and decision-making processes, with mothers-in-law assuming more authoritative roles.

The increase in daughters' confidence and assertiveness, coupled with a decline in child marriages, underscored the positive impact of educational initiatives and legal provisions aimed at promoting gender equality and protecting the well-being of girls. Despite lingering challenges and cultural nuances influencing household decision-making, there is a discernible trend towards greater awareness of the importance of girls' education, health, and autonomy in marital decisions.

I'm more confident in reading and writing. If I get a chance, I'd like to continue studying, and hope to find a good job and work hard to support my daughters even more.
(Parent in KII, Pipra Birta)

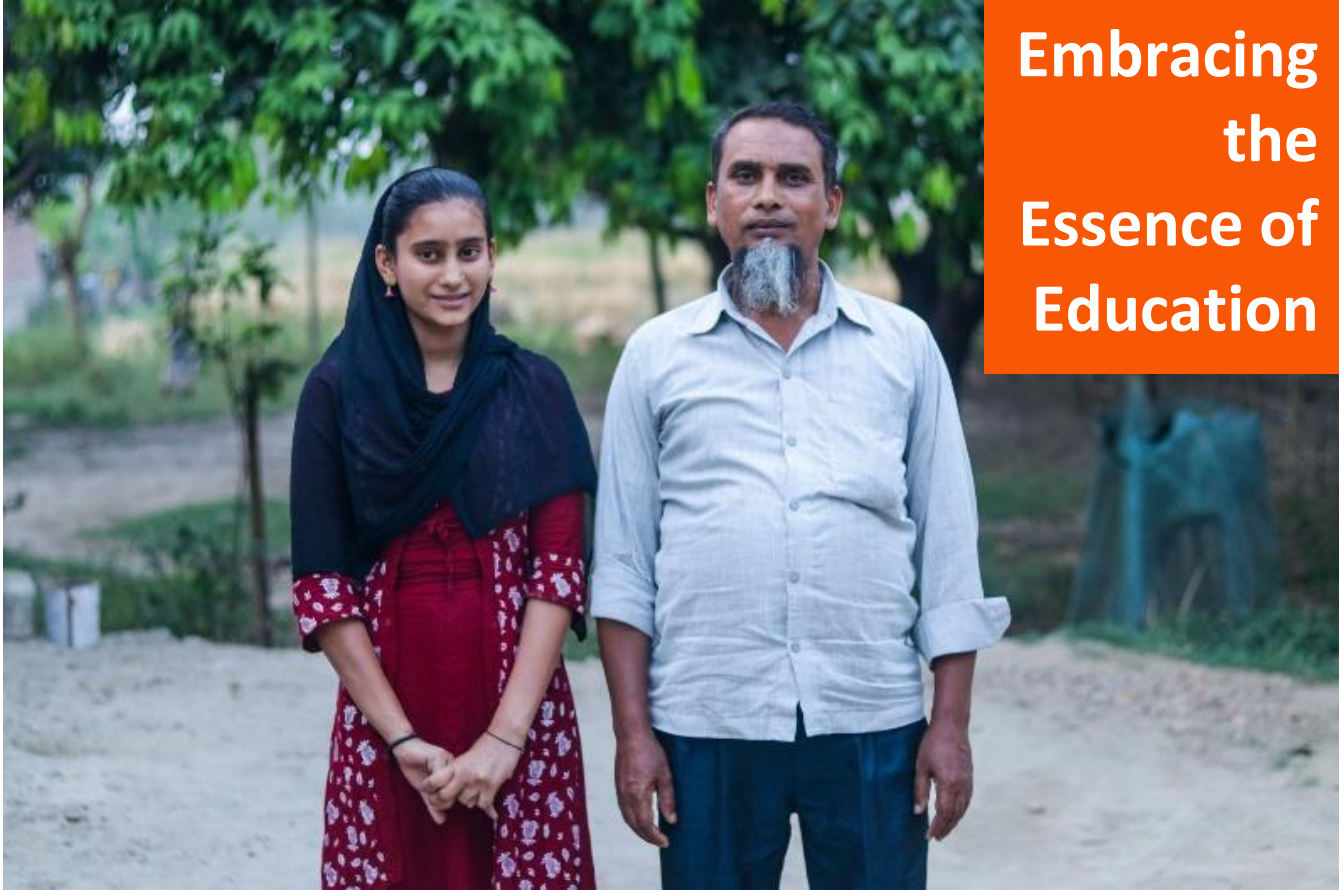
OVERALL CONCLUSION

Based on the extensive consultations conducted across eight municipalities, it was evident that the CLCs had a multifaceted impact on the communities, particularly in empowering girls and influencing broader familial dynamics. Parents overwhelmingly highlighted the positive transformations witnessed in their daughters and daughters-in-law post-CLC classes, ranging from increased confidence to financial independence.

One of the most significant observed outcomes was the shift in the community's perception of education, especially regarding the importance of educating girls. Parents noted a remarkable increase in school attendance, which is also reflected by the thematic assessment conducted by the project. 60% of the girls have an attendance rate exceeding 50% over a three-month average. They also mentioned a decrease in child marriages post-CLC classes, emphasizing a deeper understanding of the harmful effects of early marriages and the importance of education in shaping girls' futures. Moreover, the project's focus on vocational training enabled girls to acquire valuable skills such as sewing and bangle-making, contributing to household income and fostering economic independence. On the other hand, challenges were identified, particularly in formalising these skills into sustainable businesses due to inadequate training and societal pressures, highlighting the need for ongoing support and skill development initiatives.

Despite these successes, the consultations also revealed persistent challenges relating to traditional gender roles and societal norms. While some communities showed progress in empowering females in decision-making processes and reducing gender-based violence (GBV), others still struggled with deep-rooted gender disparities and a few instances of GBV. Additionally, there were mixed levels of awareness and understanding regarding family planning and climate change/disaster risk reduction (DRR) across different communities, indicating the need for targeted educational efforts in these areas. Overall, while the CLC project made significant strides in empowering girls and fostering positive changes within the communities, a need for the following remains – sustained efforts to address underlying socio-cultural barriers and ensure comprehensive support for girls' education and empowerment initiatives.

Community learning center helped me become literate, and with hard work, I overcame the challenges. After studying at the learning center, my family was able to build a house and open a store. (Parent in KII, Gadimai)



Embracing the Essence of Education

One long day, Mustikam from Bara came home tired from work. His son was studying, and his daughter Rani, 12, was helping in the kitchen. He asked Rani for water, then surprised everyone by asking his son to write his name. The son struggled, but Rani confidently wrote and read back his name. This amazed Mustikam. He always thought girls shouldn't focus on their studies. But Rani, who had been going to a learning centre established by the Aarambha project for just 3 months, proved him wrong. He decided to support Rani's education.

Many families in their village believe, that boys' education is more important than girls' education. They prepare girls for marriage young, limiting their opportunities. Mustikam defied tradition. Thanks to the learning centre, Rani was able to transition from the learning centre to Shree Janta Secondary School where she is studying in Grade 7. This was made possible by UK Aid's Girls' Education Challenge programme supported Aarambha project.

Mustikam was worried about her safety and thought sending her to school would make it hard to find a suitable groom. He also believed that sending Rani to school would be too expensive for their poor family and that boys could help financially when they grew up, unlike girls. The learning centre changed their minds. Mustikam also learned about the importance of girls' education and the dangers of child marriage through the Parenting Education Program run by the CLC every month. Now, Rani even helps Mustikam with his medication. In a community where girls marry young, this is a bold decision. Rani hopes to inspire others to follow her path.