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Adolescent Girls' Access to Secondary Education in Rural Nepal

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This working paper series focuses on education policies and programs in developing countries, featuring research conducted by guest scholars at the Center for Universal Education at Brookings (CUE). CUE develops and disseminates effective solutions to the challenges of achieving universal quality education. Through the Global Scholars Program, guest scholars from developing countries join CUE for six months to pursue research on global education issues. We are delighted to share their work through this series.

Babita Rana is a guest scholar of the Center for Universal Education at Brookings.

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CONTENTS

Overview 1

Education in Nepal 2

Adolescent Girls’ Education in Nepal 3

The Need to Focus on Rural Adolescent Girls 4

Situational Analysis of Adolescent Girls’ Access to Secondary Education
in Nuwakot District 7

The Challenges to Adolescent Girls’ Secondary Education in Nuwakot District 9

Approaches by the Government and Donor Approaches to Providing Access to
Secondary Education for Adolescent Girls in Rural Areas 14

The Proposed Intervention 17

Conclusion 21

References 22

Adolescent Girls' Access to Secondary Education in Rural Nepal

Babita Rana

OVERVIEW

Today, 1.2 billion adolescents stand at the challenging crossroads between childhood and the adult world. Nine out of ten of these young people live in the developing world and face especially profound challenges, from obtaining an education to simply staying alive—challenges that are even more magnified for girls and young women.

—UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2011*

Nepal has made tremendous progress toward the goal of providing education for all, in keeping with the Millennium Development Goals for 2015 and the Education for All initiative, as shown by the girls' primary school attendance rate of 93.6 percent (MOE 2010-11). However, despite this progress,

the quality of education in Nepal remains a challenge. Due to the overwhelming focus of national and international efforts on meeting the goal of universal primary education by 2015, the challenges faced by adolescent girls living in rural areas of Nepal in accessing secondary school have been understated. This study addresses the various challenges faced by adolescent girls in accessing secondary school in Nuwakot District, which is plagued by armed conflict and human trafficking.

Because of the poverty and gender discrimination that exist in Nuwakot District, adolescent girls are vulnerable not only to early marriage and child labor but also to human trafficking. Given that poverty cuts across all gender, caste and ethnic groups, adolescent girls from poor, disadvantaged households face particularly severe challenges in making the transition from primary to post-primary

school due to high fees for secondary school and the poor quality of the education offered in the public schools. Due to these factors, the opportunity costs of school become more important than the perceived potential benefits education for parents living in poverty. Adolescent girls tend to be disproportionately affected by these conditions and therefore they often drop out before completing secondary school.

Adolescent girls in Nuwakot District need support to make the transition from primary to postprimary school and to complete secondary school with critical skills. This study proposes an intervention with three components: comprehensive scholarships, life skills training and career counseling. The establishment of a learning center that involves parents, teachers, schools, and community leaders will help to ensure the program's sustainability and effectiveness.

This paper is organized as follows. First, it examines the educational situation in Nepal and explains the importance of adolescent girls' education for overcoming poverty as well as avoiding early marriage, early pregnancy and child labor. Second, it explains the need to focus on adolescent girls living in rural areas and the challenges they face, in particular in Nuwakot District. Third, it examines the various approaches initiated by the government and donors to provide access to secondary school for adolescent girls in the rural areas of Nepal. Fourth, it identifies the gaps in the approaches that have been taken. The paper concludes by proposing a

solution: A pilot program that would enable the adolescent girls in Nuwakot District to transition successfully from primary to post-primary school and to complete secondary school with the skills they need to make healthy choices and have a better future for themselves and their family members.

EDUCATION IN NEPAL

In Nepal, education was acknowledged as a fundamental tool for overcoming poverty as early as 1951. However, it was not until 1990 that the Constitution recognized girls' right to education as a way to promote female participation in national development (MOE 2004). Similarly, to provide equal access to education for all children and youth in primary and secondary school by 2015, the country committed to achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals and the goals of the Education for All (EFA) initiative in 2000 by developing the EFA National Plan (2001-15). This plan seeks to provide equal access to education for disadvantaged and marginalized groups, particularly girls, by allocating 3.8 percent of the country's gross domestic product and about 17 percent of its national budget to the education sector (UNESCO 2008a). However, despite various efforts in the education sector, the Nepal Living Standards Survey for 2011 (CBS 2011a) reveals that half of women and girls are illiterate, in comparison with 72 percent of the male population.

In Nepal, a person's status is determined largely by his or her birthplace, sex, age and caste/ethnicity, apart from levels of ed-

ucation and income (CBS 2009). Due to the country's patriarchal society, women and girls lag far behind men in all aspects of life and bear the impact of discriminatory practices. As a result, women's representation and participation remain lower than that of men in all socioeconomic, political and professional sectors. For example, out of 255 judges, only 5 are women (Moser 2010). However, in recent years, Nepal has made significant progress in terms of women's access to membership in Parliament through the quota system (which mandates that 33 percent of members must be women), and thus women took 32.8 percent of seats in 2008 (IPU 2009).

ADOLESCENT GIRLS' EDUCATION IN NEPAL

Adolescence is regarded an important phase for Nepal's young population. Children and youth in the age group from 10 to 19 years need to develop themselves to face the challenges of living an independent and successful life. The country's adolescent population makes up approximately 25 percent of its total population of 27 million (CBS 2011c). Due to poverty and gender discrimination, girls are often forced to drop out of school and to enter the labor market or to marry without even having the chance to enroll in secondary school (UNICEF 2011). According to a report published by UNESCO and PLAN in 2011, the plight of adolescent girls is exacerbated by the country's violence, internal strife and widening social and cultural gaps. In addition, it is a group that has been an in-

visible population for most of the last century, and thus adolescent girls' needs for protection, development and space to participate in society have been neglected (UNESCO and Plan 2011). Illiterate adolescent girls are more vulnerable than their better-educated peers to gender-based violence, abuse, exploitation, trafficking and HIV/AIDS (UNICEF 2007). Studies have shown that adolescent girls living in extreme poverty lag far behind in accessing basic human rights to education, health and life expectancy and are three times less likely to receive a secondary education (UNICEF 2011).

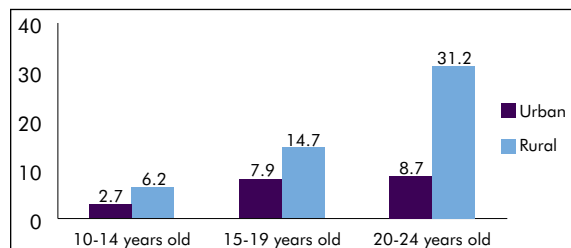
Although secondary education is being addressed by some as an important factor for adolescent girls, in order to create healthy and cohesive societies and spur economic growth, the overwhelming focus on achieving universal primary education by 2015 has led to an under appreciation of the educational challenge faced by adolescent girls. This is in spite of the fact that almost half the world's adolescent population does not attend secondary school (UNICEF 2011). In the case of Nepal, adolescent girls, and particularly those from disadvantaged and marginalized groups, also face a similar situation, with fewer opportunities for secondary education due to poverty and gender discrimination. Nepal has made significant progress in terms of primary school enrollment (the net enrollment rate for children in grades 1 through 5 has increased from 83.5 percent in 2003 to 94.5 percent in 2010) and in secondary school enrollment (which has increased from 29.5 percent in 2003 to 46.5

percent in 2010) (UNESCO 2011). Despite this progress, due to poverty and the lack of opportunity to explore their potentiality vis-à-vis secondary education, adolescent girls from the rural areas get caught in the trans-generational cycle of poverty passed on from their mothers and are more likely to pass it on to their own children.

THE NEED TO FOCUS ON RURAL ADOLESCENT GIRLS

In Nepal, adolescent girls in the rural areas face more challenges to obtaining a quality secondary education than with adolescent girls in the urban areas. According to the latest Living Standards Survey report (CBS 2011a), the number of adolescent girls who have never attended school in the rural areas is much higher in comparison with adolescent girls in the urban areas (see figure 1). Even if they get a chance to go to school, due to various sociocultural, economic and geographical factors, few girls transition from primary to post-primary school and most drop out before completing secondary school.

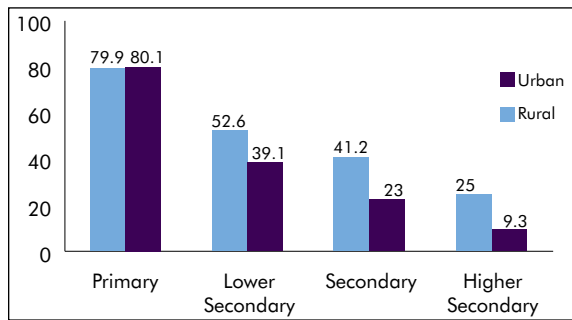
FIGURE 1: PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE POPULATION WHO NEVER ATTENDED SCHOOL IN NEPAL (URBAN VS. RURAL)



Source: CBS 2011a

In Nepal, a large regional disparity can be observed in the net enrollment rates of girls in secondary school from grades 6 to 12 between urban and rural areas (see figure 2). Adolescent girls' net enrollment rates in urban areas are 52.6 percent at the lower secondary level, 41.2 percent at the secondary level and 25 percent at the higher secondary level. Whereas in rural areas, these rates are 39.1 percent at the lower secondary level, 23 percent at the secondary level and 9.3 percent at the higher secondary level (CBS 2011a). Hence, in rural areas, the net enrollment rate of adolescent girls in secondary school decreases while their age and responsibilities at the household level increase. In addition, a large gap can be noticed in the transition of adolescent girls from primary to post-primary school and from lower secondary to higher secondary school. More than half the adolescent girls who make it through primary school do not get a chance to make the transition from primary to lower secondary school, and only few of them make it to higher secondary school (grades 11 and 12). This situation remains a major challenge, as evidenced by the disturbingly low net enrollment rate of 9.3 percent in rural areas and 25 percent in urban areas. The majority of the 1.4 million adolescent girls living in rural areas have less access to secondary school, in comparison with the 200 thousand adolescent girls living in urban areas (CBS 2011a, 2011c).

FIGURE 2: PERCENTAGE OF ENROLLMENT OF GIRLS IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION IN NEPAL



Source: CBS 2011a

There are four main reasons that adolescent girls drop out of secondary school. First, they are heavily engaged in household chores in comparison with urban adolescent girls and boys—that is, cooking, cleaning, taking care of a sick family member, helping their mother with farming and fetching firewood. It is estimated that 60.8 percent of adolescents between 10 and 14 years of age in rural areas are involved in agriculture and 39.2 percent are involved in the nonagriculture sector. Likewise, 32.3 percent of adolescent girls between 15 and 24 are involved in agriculture, and 67.7 percent in the nonagriculture sector (CBS 2011a). Hence, adolescent girls in rural areas spend more time doing household chores and farming activities. Thus, they end up performing poorly in their studies, having to repeat grades or dropping out. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), it is estimated that 2.6 million Nepali children are working in different aspects of labor and that 56 percent of them are adolescent girls (Tuladhar 2009).

The second factor that forces adolescent girls to drop out of school is child marriage. In

Nepal, although child marriage is illegal, adolescent girls living in rural areas get pulled out of school to get married at the age of 13 to 16 years, much earlier than adolescent girls living in urban areas (MOHP 2005). As girls enter adolescence, this and other pressures increase, resulting in an increasing drop out rate: 5.9 percent drop out of primary school while 8.1 percent drop out of secondary school (MOE 2010-11). And by dropping out of school, adolescent girls in the rural areas fail to acquire a lifetime capacity for critical thinking and problem solving and the analytical skills that can only be acquired through secondary education that goes beyond basic literacy and numeracy skills (World Bank 2006).

Third, due to the severe poverty rate, which is 35 percent in the rural areas in comparison with 10 percent in the urban areas (DFID 2011), as adolescent girls and boys grow older they are most likely to discontinue their post-primary education so they can go to work to support their family and earn household income. Hence, due to a lack of opportunities to access post-primary education in rural areas, and given the high cost of secondary education in comparison with free primary education, adolescent girls and boys are pushed into early marriages (girls in particular) and child labor is prevalent (IREWOC 2007).

Fourth, children are pushed into forced labor that curtails any possibility of continuing their education. According to a 2009 study, 12 percent of households in selected districts were affected by forced labor. Similarly, there

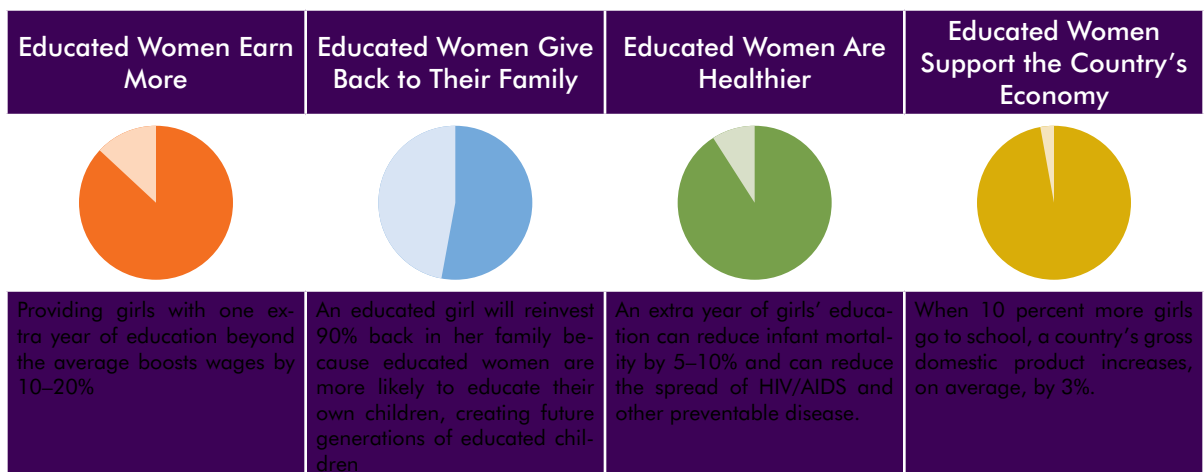
were 89,545 working children between the age of 5 to 17 years, and one-third of them were found to be in forced labor situations (ILO/IPEC 2011). Hence, both adolescent girls and boys in the rural areas bear the impact of being out of school and are forced into working as domestic laborers and commercial sexual exploitation (mostly girls), or into working in brick kilns and in the embroidered textiles industry (mostly boys). Adolescent girls in the rural areas are more vulnerable to such situations when they are pulled out of school. It is estimated that more than approximately 15,000 women and adolescent girls, in particular from the rural areas, are trafficked annually to India and that 7,500 are trafficked domestically for commercial sexual exploitation. In addition, about 20,000 to 25,000 Nepali women and adolescent girls annually become voluntary domestic workers within Nepal (Basnyet 2011). Poverty and a lack of education, especially secondary education, foster an environment conducive to child trafficking, and particularly for adolescent girls living in the rural areas. Girls are

often steered by parents or immediate family members into exploitative situations (UNESCO and Plan 2011).

The returns from primary education have long been established, but recent research on the benefits of investing in adolescent girls' secondary education in low-income countries has demonstrated high returns in terms of wage growth and the country's increasing economic growth (see figure 3). Investing in girls' education is an important strategy in a country where 80 percent of the population resides in rural areas and where 40 percent of the population is living in poverty (CBS 2011a).

According to a study by the World Bank, raising girls' secondary school enrollment by 1 percentage point boosts annual per capita income growth by .3 percent. The incremental increase in per capita growth associated with the same increase in boys' secondary enrollment was far less (Jejeebhoy 1996; cited by Herz 2006). Similarly, studies have found that in addition to delaying marriage

FIGURE-3: BENEFITS OF INVESTING IN ADOLESCENT GIRLS' SECONDARY EDUCATION



Source: Room to Read 2010.

and early pregnancy, reducing infant mortality and reducing the risk of HIV/AIDS with primary education; secondary education empowers women in both the household and political arenas, increases family income and lowers the rate of domestic violence (Jones, Harper, and Watson 2010).

Hence, to lift up the socioeconomic status of women and girls living in extreme poverty as and to improve the country's economic growth, there is an urgent need for policymakers to address adolescent girls' access to and retention in secondary school. This will benefit not only girls but also society and the nation as whole. To do so, it is also important to acknowledge the need to change social attitudes and cultural practices related to gender roles and acceptable behavior for women. Such changes are possible, as prove by Bangladesh, where girls outnumber boys in secondary school attendance (UNESCO and Plan 2011). Increasing the enrollment of adolescent girls from marginalized groups and the quality of secondary school, particularly its relevance to the labor market, is the next challenge for Nepal.

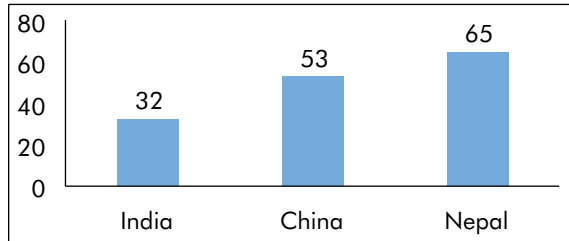
SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS' ACCESS TO SECONDARY EDUCATION IN NUWAKOT DISTRICT

Nuwakot is one of 75 districts in Nepal listed as affected by armed conflict and human trafficking (ILO/IPEC 2011; Watchlist 2005). It is situated in the central hilly region of Nepal and spans 1,121 square kilometers. The total population is 278,761,

of which 144,690 are female and 134,071 are male. The adolescent population of Nuwakot District is one-fourth of its total population (CBS 2011c). Although the district borders the capital city, Kathmandu, in the south and east, its proximity has not substantially enhanced adolescent girls' ability to access their rights to an education, health care and economic opportunities. Of the total population of Nuwakot District, 92.7 percent reside in rural areas and 37.4 percent are living below the poverty line, with 4.4 percent living in extreme poverty (CBS 2007).

Agriculture and forestry are the main sources of income in the district. Of the 71.6 percent of the population that is engaged in agriculture, women and girls contribute more labor than men (77 percent of women are in the agricultural labor market, compared to 66.4 percent of men; CBS 2007). According to a recent study by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO 2011) on the role of women in agriculture both globally and in developing countries, women and girls in rural areas contribute more time in agriculture and their labor burden exceeds that of men. In Nepal, women and girls comprise 65 percent of the agricultural workforce, much more than in neighboring countries such as India and China (see figure 4). In Nuwakot District in particular, due to the high poverty rate, 25.99 percent of adolescent girls between 10 and 14 years of age and 52.86 percent between 15 and 19 are economically active (CBS 2007). Due to their increasing responsibilities for household chores and agriculture work as they grow older, they are less likely to continue their secondary education.

FIGURE 4: PERCENTAGE OF LABOUR SUPPLIED BY WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SOUTH ASIA



Source: FAO 2011.

As studies have shown, ownership of property, especially land and houses, is crucial in determining a person’s status. The district profile of Nuwakot for 2007 reveals that its 61,950 total households are predominantly headed by men and only 11 percent of households are headed by women. Likewise, only 9.8 percent of women have ownership over land and 4.3 percent over a house. Out of 12.7 percent of household heads owning livestock, women have only 20.9 percent ownership (CBS 2007). Similarly, with regard to women’s health, of 1,480 people with a disability, 58.3 percent are women, in comparison with 41.7 percent who are men. Also, more women than men are physically disabled and blind.

With regard to women’s representation and participation in the socioeconomic, political and professional sectors, in Nuwakot District women’s share remains much lower than that of men. The 2007 district profile demonstrates that the major economic and skilled occupations are predominantly held by men (see table-1). The number of women in high-level decision making positions in the government is much lower in comparison with men, with 32 women and 267 men. Similarly, in

the professional sector women have a much lower participation rate than men, with 489 females and 2,155 men. Hence, in Nuwakot District, due to poverty and a lack of access to education, health care and economic resources, women and girls are much more disadvantaged in comparison with men.

TABLE 1: SKILLED-BASED OCCUPATIONS

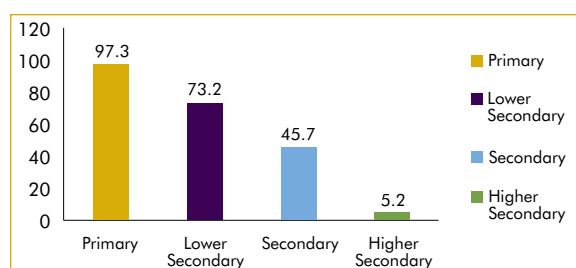
Occupation	Female	Male
Lawyers and high-level government officials	32	267
Professionals	489	2,155
Technical service	211	1,559
Clerk and office assistant	278	2,397
Service providers, marketing and shopkeepers	2,675	5,809
Mechanic (operation and fitting)	110	1,309

Source: CBS 2007.

As Nepal has acknowledged the power of education to alleviate poverty in its rural areas and the importance of involving women and girls in its economic development, the educational efforts initiated by the government to provide educational to all have had tremendously positive results. However, with regard to the transition of adolescent girls from the primary to post-primary level, the latest annual report from the Ministry of Education reveals a decreasing net enrollment rate. Net enrollment in lower primary is 97.3 percent, while net enrollment in higher secondary is only 5.2 percent (see figure 5). Hence, with regard to the transition of adolescent girls from primary to secondary school, the enrollment rate is gradually decreasing with their increasing age and secondary education levels. Due to poverty and a lack of access to

secondary education, both adolescent girls and boys are vulnerable to the child labor and child trafficking that are prevalent in the district. However, adolescent girls bear the most impact of being trafficked because they are sexually exploited by being forced to work as prostitutes whereas boys are exploited in the textiles industry as laborers both inside and outside the country (Basnyet 2011).

FIGURE 5: ENROLLMENT DISPARITY OF GIRLS IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY LEVEL IN NUWAKOT DISTRICT



Source: MOE 2010-11.

THE CHALLENGES OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS' SECONDARY EDUCATION IN NUWAKOT DISTRICT

Studies have shown that with regard to access to secondary education, the challenges vary based on age, gender, caste, ethnic group and economic factors. In Nuwakot District, adolescent girls with their growing age factor face various sociocultural, socioeconomic and school-related challenges in transitioning from primary to secondary school.

Sociocultural Factors

Gender Discrimination

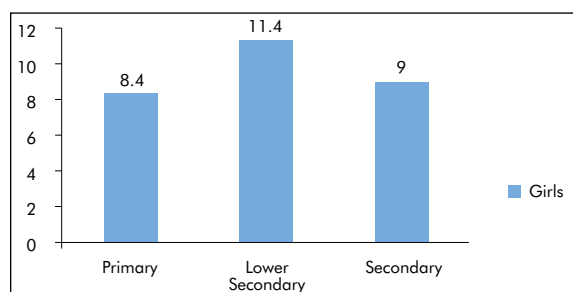
In Nepal, gender discrimination is deeply rooted in society. According to social norms

and values, girls are supposed to carry out household chores, such as cleaning, cooking, caring for siblings, collecting firewood and fodder, cattle grazing and cutting grass for the animals. Many families do not see the connection between women's education and economic development for better health, child development, family welfare and overall social progress (Bista 2004). Parents consider a daughter's education as secondary to her roles in doing household chores and farming. Due to a lack of awareness among parents, adolescent girls are engaged more in household chores and agriculture work, especially during the period of cultivation. Families tend to train adolescent girls in agricultural skills and household chores in order to equip them for their married life (Shrestha 2011). Similarly, if some family members become sick, girls are often not permitted to go to school so they can stay home and care for the ill person. In addition, during the parents' absence at home, girls in particular are expected to stay home to look after the house and cattle instead of going to school (CERID 2009a). In addition, due to the country's patriarchal system, parents prefer to invest in boys instead of girls because they do not see an economic return coming from a girl's education, especially adolescent girls from poor households. Investing in girls' education is considered a waste of resources, and girls are considered as "temporary property" because they will leave home after getting married (Thapa et al. 2001 in MOHP 2005). Furthermore, household responsibilities and seasonal agricultural work cause adolescent girls' irregular school attendance in the rural

areas and leave them less time for their studies. Hence, as adolescent girls' household chores increase and they grow older, they tend to drop out of secondary school (IREWOC 2007; UNICEF 2010; Bertini 2011). 80.7 percent of the households in Nuwakot District use firewood for cooking, which increases the workload of adolescent girls (CBS 2007). The majority of these adolescent girls involved in collecting firewood attend school irregularly in comparison with other households in the rural areas (RIRA 2011).

Due to these extraordinary burdens, adolescent girls in the rural areas often drop out of school long before completing the primary level (UNGEI 2007). The drop out rate in Nuwakot is 8.4 percent at the primary level, 11.4 at the lower secondary level, and 9 percent in secondary school grades 9 and 10. Hence, society's gender discrimination deprives adolescent girls from accessing secondary education in Nuwakot District.

FIGURE 6: DROPOUT RATE OF GIRLS FROM PRIMARY AND SECONDARY LEVEL IN NUWAKOT DISTRICT



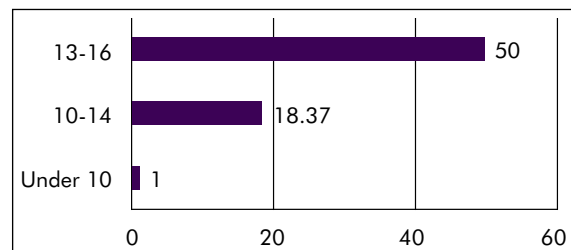
Source: MOE 2010-2011

Early Marriage

Various factors contribute to early marriage among adolescent girls, such as family pressure, poverty and the need for extra labor to

take care of domestic chores—especially in the rural areas (MOHP 2005). In the rural areas, adolescent girls usually get married before age 18 (Choe et al. 2001). Because daughters are considered “temporary property,” parents intend to marry them off early to avoid the extra economic burden and perceive only dubious benefits from educating girls (Bista 2004). According to the law, the legal age of marriage is 18 with parental consent, and 20 years without parental consent for both males and females. However, due to the law’s poor implementation, approximately 50 percent of adolescent girls in the rural areas of Nuwakot District get married between 13 and 16 years, 18.4 percent between 10 and 14 and 1 percent under 10 (CBS 2007). Hence, the prevalence of early marriage in the rural areas contributes equally to pulling adolescent girls out from school and pushing them into marriage and involving them in reproductive roles (see figure 7).

FIGURE 7: PERCENTAGE OF GIRLS MARRIED BEFORE AGE 16, AGE GROUP, NUWAKOT DISTRICT



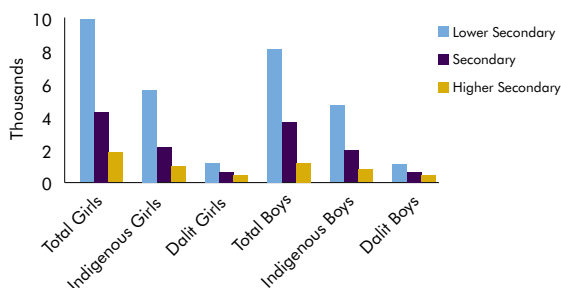
Source: CBS 2007.

Caste Discrimination

Although caste discrimination is illegal, due to the prevalence of a deeply rooted caste hierarchy in Nepali society, adolescent girls living in remote settings who are from lower castes are even less likely to participate in education (Lewis

and Lockheed 2007). Adolescent girls in excluded social groups suffer not only as part of the excluded group but also as individual girls (Baden and Green 1994; Lewis and Lockheed 2007). Because Dalits (untouchables) are at the bottom of the caste hierarchy, adolescent girls belonging to the Dalit caste are usually compelled to withdraw from school due to the existence of caste discrimination in the rural areas (Bista 2004; Chitrakar 2009). The district profile for 2007 reveals the low level of participation of adolescent girls from Dalit ethnic groups in secondary school in comparison with those from the district's indigenous groups (see figure 8). Hence, the caste discrimination that exists in society is another factor that exacerbates the problem of adolescent girls from the lower caste being prevented from accessing secondary school.

FIGURE 8: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENT ENROLLMENT IN THE SECONDARY LEVEL BASED ON CASTE IN NUWAKOT DISTRICT



Source: MOE 2010-11

Socioeconomic Factors

Child Labor

In Nuwakot, more than 70 percent of the population is involved in agriculture. Because child labor is considered important for families' economic subsistence, more than 50 percent of adolescent girls are involved in agriculture. Girls contribute 50 percent

"Very few people in my village say that this is bad work. Many people think that it is good. They expect that the girls will return with gold ornaments and good dresses."

—Man from Sikharbesi VDC, Nuwakot

"Previously, many years back, there was no disease and girls could send a lot of money back. But now a lot of girls with the disease come back with no money and they and their whole family are in a miserable state."

—Man from Gaukharka VDC, Nuwakot

Source: Clawson 2002.

more labor than boys, and the contribution increases along with their age (Bista 2004; CBS 2007). Although the law prohibits child labor under the age of 14, due to the law's poor implementation, child labor is still very common in Nepal (UNICEF 2010). The Government of Nepal made a commitment to combat child labor (UNICEF 2008) and declared free secondary education in 2011 (Luitel and Koirala 2011). Yet, these commitments have fallen short due to poor implementation. In rural areas, fees associated with secondary education continue to force girls to drop out of school.

Nuwakot is among the 29 most trafficking-prone districts in Nepal (ILO/IPEC 2011). In addition, another study, by Save the Children in 2002, identified five village development committees (VDCs) in Nuwakot District affected with a high rate of trafficking, at 30 percent and above; Sikharbesi VDC had the highest

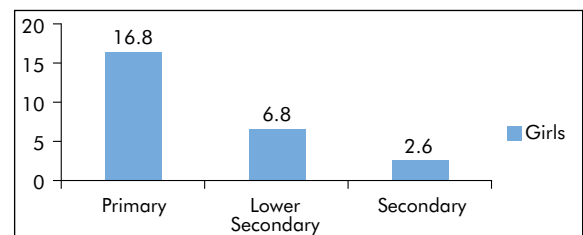
rate of 68 percent. The study reveals that to improve a family's economic status, adolescent girls are sold with the complicity or coercion of family members—including parents, husbands and other relatives—as bondage labor for commercial sexual exploitation through traffickers to India and other countries. The families generate approximately 2,000 to 20 lakh Indian rupees by selling their daughters (Clawson 2002). The study notes that poverty is a major factor that makes the adolescent girls vulnerable to trafficking, in addition to a lack of education, domestic violence, gender discrimination and a lack of economic opportunities for women and girls.

High Opportunity Costs

The opportunity costs of schooling are higher among the poor families in the rural areas because they cannot survive without involving their children in agricultural production and household activities (Bista 2004). Similarly, there is a tendency among the poor families in the rural areas to withdraw an older child, particularly a girl, from school to enable a younger child to attend school (ADB 2006). In a patriarchal society, traditionally, a family's daughters are expected to do the household chores instead of the sons, and the high opportunity costs "combined with informal fees make schooling too expensive, undermines the demand for girls' education" (Bista 2004, pg 7). Similarly, when the quality of education is poor, the opportunity costs become more important than an education, and the daughters are the first to stay home and take on paid work to help support the family. It is estimated that children in rural areas can obtain

approximately NRs. 200–300 per day, depending on their age and sex. Children from poor families are more likely to miss school and go to work when opportunities are available (RIDA 2010). However, due to poverty, parents recognize that the cost of educating a girl entails not just the cost of tuition but also the cost of the loss of her labor (Rihani, Kays, and Psaki 2006). According to the Ministry of Education (MOE 2010–11), primary school has the highest repetition rate in Nuwakot District, followed by 6.8 percent for lower secondary school and 2.6 percent for secondary school in grades 9 and 10 (see figure 9).

FIGURE 9: REPETITION RATE OF GIRLS IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY LEVEL IN NUWAKOT DISTRICT



Source: MOE 2010-11.

The Cost of Schooling

The direct and indirect costs of educating girls are unaffordable for poor families, especially those living at or below the poverty line. In addition, the cost of schooling is more expensive at the secondary level, including extra costs for uniforms, textbooks and stationery (ADB 2006). Although, as noted above, the government has declared secondary school tuition free, due to a lack of government funding, tuition fees are still being collected in both public and private schools in the rural areas (UNESCO 2008b). Hence, due to poverty and limited scholarships at the primary

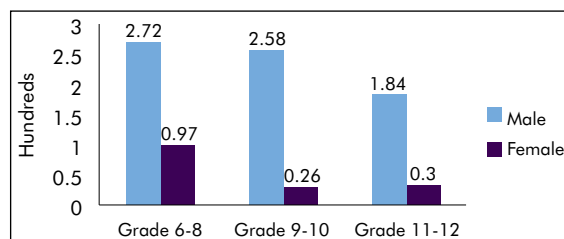
level, both direct costs (school fee, admission fees and examination fees) and indirect costs (textbooks, exercise books, stationery, school uniform, school bag and lunch money) exceed the means of poor students.

School-Related Factors

A Lack of Female Teachers

In a traditional society, an absence of female teachers can mean that a school is an unsafe place for adolescent girls a school an unsafe place for adolescent girls (Bista 2004). Unfortunately, girls' exposure to female teachers dramatically decreases in the rural areas as they make the transition to secondary school (Rihani, Kays, and Psaki 2006; CERID 2009a). Most schools in rural areas have fewer female teachers, especially at the secondary level. A report from Ministry of Education for 2010-11 reveals the scarcity of female teachers at the secondary level in comparison with the primary level in Nuwakot District (see figure 10). Hence, due to this lack of female teachers, parents in the district hesitate to send their daughters to school after they reach puberty and perceive a particularly heavy risk associated with sending their daughters to school in a male-dominated environment. In fact, parents perceive that going to school after puberty would expose their daughters to physical or sexual abuse by male teachers and boys (Bista 2004). Hence, due to the lack of female teachers in secondary schools, adolescent girls miss an opportunity to have female role models in everyday life. Due to parents' security concerns and the lack of female teachers, adolescent girls in the rural areas are more likely to get pulled out of school after reaching a certain age, in particular after puberty.

FIGURE 10: NUMBER OF FEMALE AND MALE TEACHERS IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY LEVEL IN NUWAKOT DISTRICT



Source: MOE 2010-11.

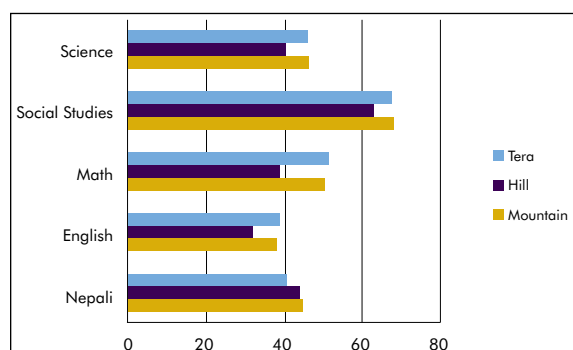
High-Quality Education and Learning Outcomes

The quality of education and learning outcomes in public school is considered very poor at the secondary level, especially in the rural and remote areas of Nepal. The public schools have the highest rate of teacher absenteeism, unqualified teachers lacking motivation and gender-biased curricula. In addition, corporal punishment is common in public schools. Thus, the poor educational performance of public schools has severely affected children from poor families by preventing them from getting a high-quality education (Bista 2004; UNESCO 2008a; Chitrakar 2009). A study of nationwide learning achievement by students at the primary level based on ecological belt reveals the mean achievement scores of students in the central hilly region in all subjects except Nepali was much lower than students in Terai and Mountain (see figure 11). Although the Nepali language is used for teaching, the students in grade 5 were very weak in using Nepali words, with a mean score ranging from about 19 to 23 percent. Similarly, the students' sentence writing based on listening and picture reading was also found unsatisfactory, with a 8.3 percent mean score. How-

ever, girls performed better than boys in all subjects except mathematics, with a mean score of 46.6 percent, whereas boys scored 48.9. However, with regard to the quality of education, private schools were found to be much better quality in comparison with public schools (FBC 2008). Similarly, another study of early reading for grade 2 revealed that 20 percent of children were not able to read the words in a simple sentence (Save the Children 2011).

Hence, due to the poor quality of teaching in public schools, girls tend to suffer more because of an ingrained gender bias (Rihani, Kays, and Psaki 2006). Because private schools have better-quality learning, parents choose private schools for boys and public schools for girls. This two-tiered system of schooling is creating a further divide in society, and is certain to increase inequality and the gender gap (Bista 2004). Thus, the poor quality of education in public schools and the high opportunity cost persuades parents to withdraw their daughters from school.

FIGURE 11: NATIONWIDE LEARNING ASSESSMENT OF GRADE 5 IN NEPAL, BASED ON ECOLOGICAL BELT



Source: FBC 2008.

Distance to School

The distance to school usually becomes a barrier, especially for children in the rural areas. Personal security becomes a concern in the rural areas where the secondary schools are limited and are located at long distances from each other. Parents are more concerned about their children’s safety, particularly of adolescent girls who must walk a long way in remote areas (Bista 2004; CERID 2009a). Parents fear that adolescent girls might become more susceptible to sexual harassment and other forms of violence while walking to remote secondary schools (Rihani, Kays, and Psaki 2006; CERID 2009b). As a result, parents do not allow their daughters in particular to attend the secondary schools “located in places that are socially unacceptable” (Bista 2004, pg. 9). Thus, the distance of secondary schools from home usually becomes an obstacle for adolescent girls.

GOVERNMENT AND DONOR APPROACHES TO PROVIDING ACCESS TO SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN RURAL AREAS

Nepal is committed to meeting the UN Millennium Development Goals and the goals of Education for All by 2015. To promote universal and equitable access to education for all, at all levels, Nepal has implemented various reforms in the educational development sector. To achieve these educational goals, the country prepared the Education for All National Plan of Action 2001-15 in

line with the Dakar Framework for Action adopted in 2000. In addition, the country's Interim Constitution, in Article 17, included a provision stating every citizen's right to free education up to the secondary level. In the last decade, under the EFA National Plan of Action, the EFA Program 2004–9 and the Secondary Education Support Program 2003–9 were implemented using a sector-wide approach. The Secondary Education Support Program (SESP) was initiated by the government of Nepal in 2003 with the support of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) to provide more equitable access to secondary education and to improve the quality of education. Similarly, to improve the governance, management and resourcing of schools, the Ministry of Education reformed the education system under School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) for 2009–15. Both the EFA National Plan (2001–15) and the SSRP (2009-15) focus on ensuring access and equity in primary/basic schools, enhancing the quality and relevance of education and improving educational efficiency and institutional capacity (UNESCO 2011).

To meet the Millennium Development Goals and the EFA goals, Nepal has used various strategies and approaches under its national programs to provide access and high-quality education for all, focusing on gender equality and parity, particularly for girls and students from disadvantaged groups. In the three-year interim plan of 2007-10, the development approach shifted from "gender mainstreaming" to "gender equality and social inclusion

mainstreaming (GESI)" to gain a better understanding of patterns of inequality (Acharya 2010). Both the EPA and the SESP adopt the GESI approach to provide access to high-quality education for all by 2015.

With regard to providing access to secondary education, Nepal has faced several challenges in the past because most of the programs particularly focused on primary education. However, several reforms have been implemented to improve and provide access and high-quality education in the secondary level, particularly among adolescent girls and students from poor and disadvantaged groups and districts (ADB 2011). Building on gains achieved through EFA and SESP, the Government of Nepal recently initiated the SSRP to make a greater impact on participation by adolescent girls and other students from disadvantaged and marginalized groups in secondary education. Following are the interventions that the government, with support from various donor agencies, has initiated to increase access to education for adolescent girls and other students from disadvantaged and marginalized groups.

Waiving School Fees

In Nepal, the provision of free primary education from grades 1 through 5 was included in the Local Self-Governance Act (1999) and the Education Act Seventh Amendment (2001). This act provided free tuition, textbooks, and additional limited scholarships for disadvantaged groups including minorities, Dalits, girls and Janajatis. Until 2007, the country

included the provision of free secondary education in the Interim Constitution as a fundamental right (FHD/RIDA 2009). Similarly, in 2009, the government formulated the SSRP to initiate free and compulsory basic education from grades 1 through 8 in 2009. To increase the participation of disadvantaged adolescent girls in secondary education, the government declared free secondary education from grades 1 through 10 in 2011 (Luitel and Koirala 2011). However, due to a lack of government funding, free education at the secondary level has yet to be implemented. Tuition fees are still collected by both private and public secondary schools (UNESCO 2008b). Because poor families are not able to afford the direct and indirect costs of educating adolescent girls in the rural areas, access to secondary education has become a challenge for poor families.

Girls' Scholarships/Incentives

To support increasing access to education for adolescent girls from disadvantaged and marginalized groups, the government initiated the "100% Girls Scholarship Program" in 2011 under SSRP to reduce the direct cost of schooling at the secondary level, particularly for adolescent girls from the Dalit ethnic group nationwide (ERDCN 2011). According to Meena Acharya, due to a lack of proper management and distribution of scholarships by the school management committees and schools under the program, adolescent girls from disadvantaged groups were deprived of scholarships. Similarly, due to a lack of proper monitoring, the targeted children were found to be en-

rolled in two or more schools to get additional funds (Acharya 2010).

A recent study on the effectiveness of the 100% Girls Scholarship Program reveals that despite the noted challenges program was effective and contributed positively in continuing and improving girls' education by enhancing their self-respect and prestige in the family and the community. The study also showed an increase in girls' enrollment, attendance and class promotion and a reduction in dropout rates. Similarly, earlier results were comparable for the "50% Girls' Scholarship Program" nationwide. However, the 50% Girls' Scholarship was noted to be more effective at the secondary level than at the primary and lower secondary levels. In total, the dropout proportion for 50% Girls' Scholarship recipients at primary level was 13 percent. The promotion rate of 50% scholarship recipient girls was higher, ranging from 86 to 100 percent at the lower secondary level and almost 100 percent at the secondary level in all the sample secondary schools (ERDCN 2011).

Alternative Learning Opportunities

To ensure access to schools for adolescent girls and other children who tend to be out of school, the Government of Nepal developed a policy to provide educational opportunities through nonformal education. It is estimated that more than 240 governmental and nongovernmental organizations and international nongovernmental plural are working in this sector. With the growing number of

national and international organizations involved in the nonformal education sector, to avoid overlapping, the National Non-Formal Council was constituted to formulate long-term policy in line with the declaration on education for all made by the Ministry of Education at the Jomtein Conference in 1990. The Government of Nepal initiated the Basic Primary Education Project (BPEP I, 1992–98) and the Second Basic Primary Education Project (BPEP II, 1999–2004), covering 40 districts with support from various international organizations (UNICEF, USAID, DANIDA) to help provide literacy and numerical skills to large numbers of illiterate women and basic education to adolescent girls. Both BPEP I and BPEP II initiated various programs to provide opportunities for adolescent girls to participate in formal school rather than literacy classes as well as life skills and reproductive health issues classes to enable them to make informed decisions. Under BPEP I, a basic education program called Girls Access to Education (GATE) was initiated to provide access to functional literacy and life skills to adolescent girls with a nine-month literacy training program. Of 33,536 girls, 81 percent of adolescent girls age 10 to 14 years participated in the program (World Education 2009). However, research on the effectiveness of nonformal education reveals that although the programs are effective, due to the age factor, very few adolescent girls are able to return to school despite being willing. The study recommends a parallel system that considers age, location and the need for flexible class times to move from nonformal education to formal school, because most adoles-

cent girls in particular do not fit into the formal education structure due to being over-age for their school year and the difficulty they face in attending a whole day of school (Tuladhar 2004).

THE PROPOSED INTERVENTION

Acknowledging the common challenges faced by adolescent girls at the secondary school level in Nepal, this study recommends the program known as Advancing Girls' Education in Africa as the best model for Nepal to support adolescent girls in secondary school. AGE Africa has had successes in Malawi that can be replicated in Nepal. For example, the adolescent girls involved in the program achieved a 100 percent retention rate and were successful in delaying their marriage age beyond the national average. Similarly, all the adolescent girls involved in the program successfully completed secondary school with a 70 percent pass rate—approximately triple the national average (AGE Africa 2012).

The main objective of this model is to create life-changing opportunities for young women through targeted initiatives in education, mentoring and leadership development, all informed by a vision of all adolescent girls having equal access to secondary education and becoming empowered through their own learning to finish school and become leaders in their communities and beyond. The model is geared toward accomplishing both short-term and long-term goals in supporting adolescent girls from disadvantaged and marginalized groups in secondary education.

The short-term goals include graduating talented and disadvantaged adolescent girls from rural areas equipped with the knowledge, resources and the self-confidence they need to make healthy and informed choices for their brighter future. The long-term goals include narrowing the retention gap and producing better learning outcomes for adolescent girls nationwide by creating a model for girls' achievement and retention in public schools that can inform public education throughout the country.

The following paragraphs lay out the proposed program for Nepal. This program will support disadvantaged but academically talented adolescent girls in secondary school and will ensure that they build the skills, resources and knowledge that they need to complete their secondary education and to make healthy informed life choices and generate income for themselves and their families. The program model includes comprehensive scholarships, life skills mentoring, and career guidance education (see figure 12).

Program Component 1: Comprehensive Scholarships

This component will provide comprehensive scholarships to students in each of the three target school communities. Scholarship packages vary based on the relative needs of each student group. Because secondary education is not free, tuition fees and indirect costs become barriers to poor adolescent girls in accessing secondary education. Hence, due to poor economic conditions, and because

these girls end up being the last in the family when it comes to the choice of who can attend school, the program provides tuition fees as well as funds to cover the girls' other costs. This provision covers the expenses of adolescent girls from disadvantaged groups at the secondary school level for seven years, from grades 6 through 12, to enable them to complete their secondary education successfully.

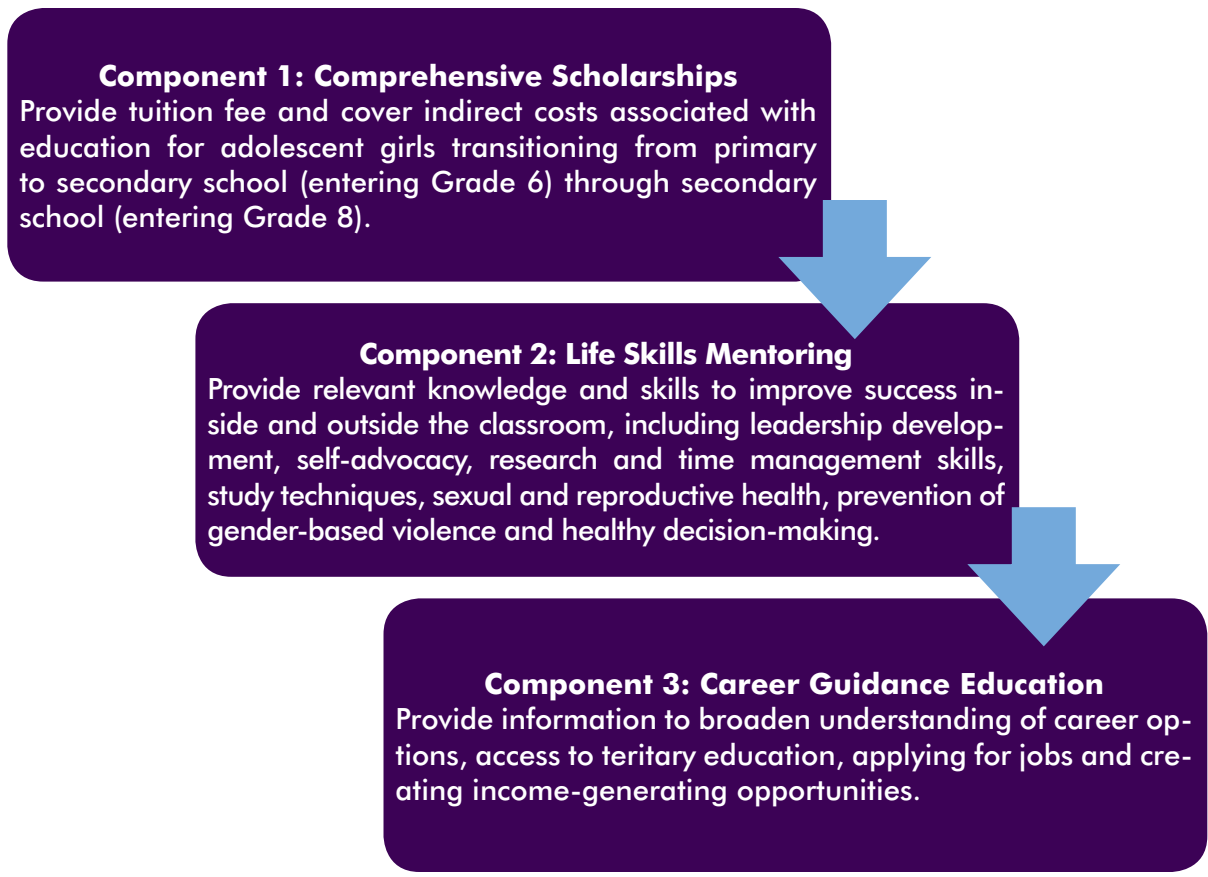
Program Component 2: Life Skills Mentorship

Because access to high-quality education goes hand in hand with the skills and information necessary to translate education into positive life opportunities, the program includes after-school extracurricular programming in the selected public schools. Under the life skills component, it will provide information to adolescent girls on sexual and reproductive health, rights, time management, training in self-advocacy, how to avoid early pregnancy, gender-based violence, the contraction of sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS, and how to resist pressure to marry young.

Program Component 3: Career Guidance Education

The program will provide career guidance education in order to motivate adolescent girls to continue their postsecondary education beyond subsistence agriculture. Hence, the program supports adolescent girls not only in completing their secondary education but also in the pursuit of economic and/or continuing postsecondary educational op-

FIGURE-12: COMPONENTS OF THE PROPOSED PROGRAM MODEL



opportunities to enable them to have a successful career in their chosen field.

To make the program effective and sustainable, it will include the stakeholders as major players, such as the community, the teachers' and parents' association, local leaders and women's groups. Similarly, to impact girls' education at multiple levels, the program will partner with different schools in the target areas. Over time, the program will impact regional school communities and build constituencies in localized areas. Critical to this model is expansion into multiple schools in order to reach a broader population and begin to engage in capacity building work at the

school level and facilitate inter-school cooperation within regions. In doing so, the program will be well positioned to work across the spectrum of school environments and develop best practice and replicable program models as well as policy recommendations for education reform.

Because this model has proven successful in supporting adolescent girls cut in rural areas, this study recommends piloting this project model in Nuwakot District. By implementing this project model in Nuwakot, adolescent girls will be given an opportunity to access secondary education with scholarship funding. Similarly, the life skills component

will help the participating adolescent girls acquire the knowledge and information described above. In addition, career guidance education will help them to get motivated to continue their postsecondary education. As inter-school link is critical for promoting educational development throughout districts, the program implementation will facilitate dialogue and partnership between schools in order to share skills and resources. Thus the program will maximize its opportunity to positively impact adolescent girls' education at individual, school, community, district and national levels (see figure 13).

Outcomes at Individual Level:

The program aims to produce scholars with better retention and graduation rates and with better learning outcomes at an individual level. The scholars should be able to delay their marriage and early pregnancy and decrease their health, emotional and financial risks. Programming will aim to increase their ability to make healthy choices for

themselves and their family members. Similarly, the scholars will gain increased self-confidence and ability to self-advocate their needs. In addition, the program will help the scholars to increase their economic opportunities and access to postsecondary education opportunities to enter into tertiary education.

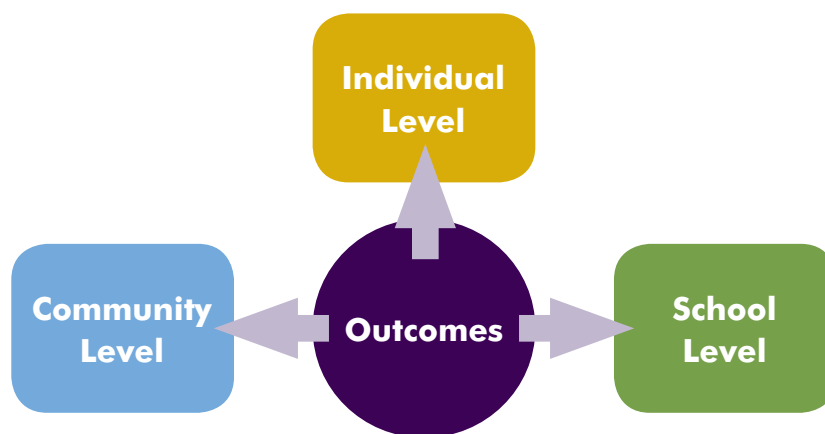
Outcomes at School Level:

The program will increase the cooperation and skills sharing between schools in the target areas resulting in improved quality of education outcomes for all the students. The schools will have better trained faculty members with improved curricula tools resulting in increased pass rates.

Outcomes at Community Level:

The program will help to reduce the poverty of scholar's families. It will contribute to policy discussions by providing a best practice model for adolescent girls' secondary education in Nepal.

FIGURE-13: IMPACT OF ADOLESCENT GIRL'S SECONDARY EDUCATION AT MULTIPLE LEVELS



CONCLUSION

This study has sought to build a case for increasing access to high-quality secondary education for adolescent girls living in rural areas of Nepal, in particular Nuwakot District, who are not only vulnerable to early marriage and child labor but also to human trafficking. Secondary and postsecondary education can equip adolescent girls with the knowledge and skills they need to make informed life choices and to prevent them from succumbing to early marriage, early pregnancy and other negative health outcomes related to human trafficking. There is an urgent need to address adolescent girls' deficient secondary school attendance for

their benefit and that of the whole country's economic development. Although the country has made tremendous progress in increasing the net enrollment of girls in primary school, many adolescent girls from disadvantaged and marginalized groups in rural areas are deprived of making a successful transition from primary to post-primary education due to the high cost of secondary education and society's gender discrimination. Because Nepal is one of the poorest countries in South Asia, the smartest investment is in girls' secondary education, because of the great potential economic and social benefit to individuals and to the country.

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