Putting Child Sensitive Social Protection into Practice in Nepal

APPROACH PAPER









Child Sensitive Social Protection is a Save the Children initiative in South Asia aiming to reduce vulnerability and poverty of children by ensuring that social protection measures lead to meaningful investment in children. Currently the programme is being implemented in Nepal, Bangladesh and India. This paper is part of a series of working papers being developed on the programme with the purpose of sharing practical approaches for implementing Child Sensitive Social Protection (CSSP).

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	WHY WORK WITH CHILD SENSITIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION (CSSP) IN NEPAL?	5
2	OVERVIEW OF THE CSSP PROJECT	7
3	ACCESS OF THE POOREST AND MARGINALISED TO SOCIAL PROTECTION	9
	Social protection in Nepal	9
	Promoting transparency and accountability	10
	Establishing the Child Endowment Fund – A cash transfer programme	11
	for orphaned children	
4	ENHANCING CHILD SENSITIVITY FOR INCREASED INVESTMENT IN CHILDREN	13
	Sessions for enhancing child sensitivity	13
	Capacity building of Village Development Committee (VDC) officials	14
	Mass awareness	14
5	INFLUENCING SOCIAL PROTECTION POLICY AND PROGRAMMES	15
6	WHAT DOES IT ALL ADD UP TO?	17



oto: Sabina Lama

WHY WORK WITH CHILD SENSITIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION (CSSP) IN NEPAL?

epal's estimated GDP per capita is \$470, making it the poorest country in South Asia. This is in spite of significant progress in poverty reduction¹ from 41.8 percent in 1995-96 to 30.8 percent in 2003-04,² a surprising trend given that it took place during the conflict period³. Poverty fell in part as a result of an average economic growth rate of 3.1 percent from 2002-07, and of the increase in employment opportunities for Nepalese overseas, primarily in the Middle East and East Asia. The number of households receiving remittances grew from 23.4 percent in 1995 to 31.9 percent in 2003-04.⁴

During the same period, the net enrolment ratio of primary education increased from 67.5 percent in 1995 to 89.1 percent in 2006⁵ and the ratio of net enrolment of girls to boys increased from 70 in 1995-96 to 98 in 2006.⁶ Health outcomes have improved as well, with the maternal mortality ratio coming down from 538 per 10,000 to 281 per 10,000, while the infant mortality ratio has fallen from 79 to 48 per 1,000 between 1996 and 2006⁷. Although significant progress has been made on various fronts, more than a third of all Nepalese children still live below the national poverty line with

more than two-thirds deprived of at least one of the seven basic human needs.⁸

In 2010, Save the Children initiated a series of studies and assessments to understand the key issues that plague development prospects of children and the reasons thereof. A child poverty and vulnerability mapping covering 720 households in 12 Village Development Committees (VDCs) of Sindhupalchowk district revealed some alarming statistics. 38 percent of children were irregular to school; 25 percent were engaged in different forms of labour and 19 percent were orphans. Vulnerability and deprivation was mostly prevalent among children belonging to households that were either chronically poor or where an incidence such as death, accident, ill health in the household, or marital breakdown had taken place.

While the abysmal situation of children in Sindhupalchowk can be largely related to poverty, vulnerability and lack of comprehensive services and programmes by the government to respond to the situation, it is also clear that parents' attitudes, behaviour and practices play a key role in shaping the lives of children.¹⁰

¹ Poverty data in Nepal is based on Nepal Living Standards Survey (NLSS) exercises conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics in 1995/96 and 2003/04 with donor support. A third NLSS exercise is planned for FY 2009/10.

World Bank, DFID and ADB (2006) Resilience amidst Conflict: An Assessment of Poverty in Nepal 1995-96 and 2003-04. Kathmandu: World Bank, DFID and ADB

³ The armed conflict between government forces and Maoist fighters in Nepal which lasted from 1996 until 2006.

⁴ It is estimated that the remittance share of GDP in Nepal is currently 17.4 percent - compared to 12 percent in the Philippines, 10 percent in Bangladesh and 8 percent in Sri Lanka.

⁵ UNDP (2007) Human Development Report 2007/08. New York: UNDP

⁶ World Bank, et al (2006)

NDHS (2007) Nepal Health and Demographic Survey. Population Division Ministry of Health and Population, Government of Nepal, New ERA, Macro International Inc. Kathmandu, Nepal.

⁸ National Planning Commission, UNICEF and New Era (2010), Child Poverty and Disparities in Nepal: Towards escaping the cycle of poverty.

Absent for 135 or more number of days in a calendar year.

¹⁰ see e.g. Thompson Nepal Pvt. Ltd, 2011, A Qualitative Research on Knowledge, Attitude and Practice Among selected population of Syaule and Thokarpa VDCs of Sindhupalchowk District

Recognising that social protection¹¹ is increasingly perceived as a key area that has the potential to reduce child poverty,¹² Save the Children initiated the Child Sensitive Social Protection (CSSP)¹³ project in Sindhupalchowk district of Nepal. The CSSP project's objective is to mitigate the negative effects of stress, shock and/or chronic poverty on children and to provide them with avenues and prospects

to grow and develop in a safe and encouraging environment and to their best potential. The project has a geographical spread of 98 VDCs in Sindhupalchowk and Kavreplanchok districts, reaching out to 37,252 children. This paper is an effort to explain the approaches adopted in the CSSP project in Nepal in order to achieve positive results for children.



¹¹ The most common forms of social protection programmes include social assistance (cash or kind transfers), social insurance (e.g. health, disability or accident insurance) and measures designed to promote and protect employment (e.g unemployment insurance, maternity cover).

¹² see Unicef, 2012 http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/iwp_2012_06.pdf

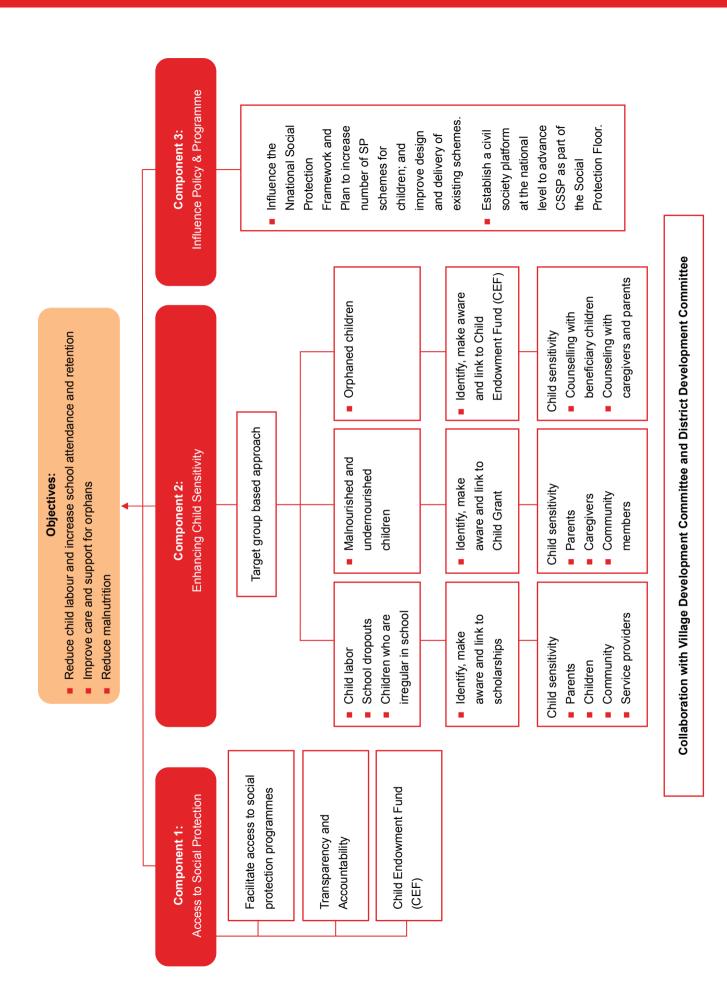
¹³ The CSSP project is being implemented in Nepal by Save the Children international in partnership with Tuki Association Sunkoshi in Sindhupalchok and Nangshal Association in Kavrepalanchok districts.

OVERVIEW OF THE CSSP PROJECT

he CSSP project in Nepal is based on a set of interventions that aim to i) improve access of poor and marginalised households and their children to available social protection programmes, ii) sensitise parents/caregivers to invest in the education, health and nutrition of their

children and iii) work at the national level to influence social protection policy and programmes to be child sensitive. The focus of the project intervention is on families whose children are either irregular to or dropped out from school; involved in labour, and, not being provided proper health and nutrition support.





ACCESS OF THE POOREST AND MARGINALISED TO SOCIAL PROTECTION

Social protection in Nepal

Social protection programmes are not new in Nepal, as a range of social protection instruments – such as cash, in-kind and food transfers, as well as insurance, subsidies and public works programmes – have been implemented over the years in the country. However, the concept of social protection as a comprehensive approach to reducing poverty, vulnerability and risk is new. The objective of social protection as stated in the National Development Strategy Paper (NDSP) is to "provide social protection to very poor, economically vulnerable and socially marginalised, individuals, groups, and communities as well as enable them to better manage risks and vulnerabilities." To date, government led social protection initiatives in Nepal have focused mainly on tax-financed social assistance in the form of social security: cash transfers to the elderly, widows and disabled. 14 There is confusion as to the objectives and types of projects and programmes that can be defined as social protection, 15 and there is a fragmented approach to social protection programming by various actors within the country including donors, governments and NGOs16 leading to incoherent and inefficient social protection programmes in Nepal.

Although government social protection schemes are available in Sindhupalchowk, access to them by the poorest does not have a very good record. Barriers include lack of awareness about available services and schemes and eligibility criteria; inability to produce reliable data, requisite documents;

lack of transparency, which increases the possibility of corruption and favouritism; direct and indirect monetary costs linked to claiming benefits; and procedural requirements for registration for certain benefits which pose additional challenges to those who are illiterate.

There are no established information flow-back mechanisms to the applicant on the status of his/her application; thus the responsible government official has no sense of accountability towards the claimant. Local Government also lacks commitment and skills to provide adequate and easily accessible information about social protection schemes and initiatives. Moreover, district and local governments are unable to organise social audits, public hearings and periodic monitoring visits of the SP beneficiaries.

In order to address these gaps and improve the access of poor households and their children to social protection schemes, the CSSP team, in active collaboration with local government, undertakes identification of households that are eligible for different social protection schemes. Once the identification process is over, the households are organised into groups and informed regarding the process to be followed for receiving an identity card; the benefit size and distribution time. They are also supported in preparing and organising the requisite documents to apply for a particular scheme.

Eighty-two "Single women's groups"¹⁷ have been formed and capacitated in the project area to help

¹⁴ Government of Nepal, 2009

¹⁵ Samson 2008

¹⁶ Holmes and Upadyha, 2009; Author's interviews

¹⁷ "Single women groups" is a terminology essentially used for groups of widows in Nepal.

them access social protection schemes, especially keeping in mind that their children are more vulnerable and deprived. After identifying all the single women in a VDC, single women's groups are formed and linked to the district level single women's federation so that they can get the required support.

The project has also helped to streamline the process of filing applications and disbursements of social protection benefits. One-day camps are now being organised, at the village development committee (VDC)¹⁸ level, by the District Development Committee (DDC) for distributing social protection benefits. This arrangement works as a win-win situation both for the beneficiary and the service provider – the beneficiaries can assemble on a prescribed date and venue for receiving their entitlements while the service providers save a lot of time and resources besides averting the possibility of any robbery while carrying cash to the beneficiaries homes. To date, the CSSP project has supported 2990 families to successfully access social protection schemes they are entitled to.

Promoting transparency and accountability

To promote transparency and accountability, especially at the local government level, three key interventions have been initiated:

Capacity building at the local government level on computerized vital event registration:

The District Development Committee (DDC) and Village Development Committee (VDC) are being supported to maintain computerized vital event registration data (birth, death, marriage, divorce, inout migration). This is contributing to maintaining correct and relevant data for identifying eligible social protection beneficiaries in a systematic and

transparent manner. The project has supported establishment of a computerized vital event registration system in 62 VDCs. The vital event registration system has already started to show great benefits – it has helped identify a significant number of "false beneficiaries", i.e. people who were accessing certain social protection benefits that they were not eligible for.

Support and capacitate district and local government bodies to effectively monitor disbursement of social protection schemes: The Social protection district coordination committee (SPDCC) and local social protection coordination committee (LSPCC) are Government bodies responsible for monitoring the social protection implementation mechanism at the local level in Nepal. Through the CSSP project, these bodies have been revived, and trainings have been provided to them on social protection program design, delivery, and orientation on social protection program implementation as per the prescribed guidelines of the Government of Nepal. The project staff supports and facilitates the SPDCC in carrying out monitoring visits to ensure smooth disbursement of social protection benefits to eligible beneficiaries and for conducting meetings to review the progress of social protection programmes at district level. Similarly, the 100 LSPCC's revived by the CSSP project are being supported to undertake their functions effectively at the VDC level.

Support Village Development Committees (VDC): In collaboration with District Development Committee, the CSSP Project supports the Village Development Committee (local government) to undertake social audits and public hearings on social protection besides helping them organise vital event registration camps and social protection benefits distribution camps.

¹⁸ VDC is the lowest rung of the governance structure in Nepal. It is the lower administrative part of its local development ministry.



Establishing the Child Endowment Fund – A cash transfer programme for orphaned children

In Sindhupalchowk, only two social protection schemes target children – the education scholarships and the child grant. However, given an extremely high number of orphan children, viz, at least 25 in every VDC, a cash transfer programme for orphaned children is being piloted by establishing the "Child Endowment Fund" (CEF).

The CEF is a fund created at the village development committee (VDC) level, with a matching capital fund investment from Save the Children and the VDC. The total value of the capital fund is Nepali Rupees 300,000 (appx. USD 3000), which is invested in safe bank deposits, and the interest earned on it is used to provide cash transfers to a maximum of two orphan children¹⁹ per family.

The amount to be disbursed as "cash transfer" is based on a calculation of critical inputs required for such children to continue education and avail nutritious food. In addition, the replicability and scalability aspects of this cash transfer are also factored in so that it can be easily adopted and implemented by other agencies, primarily the national Government.

The selection of the beneficiaries is done in a transparent manner in line with a "guideline" developed by the Village Child Protection Committee (VCPC).²⁰ According to the guideline, the Village Child Protection Committee (VCPC) calls for applications through public announcements via schools, child clubs, by advertising at public places and word of mouth through service providers. Once all applications have been received, a screening process follows which includes short-listing the ten most vulnerable orphaned children and visiting the screened children at their homes to corroborate

¹⁹ Children with either both parent dead or those living with a single parent or other caregivers.

²⁰ The local government body which is responsible for protecting child rights as per the Child Rights Act 1992.



Photo: Sabina Lama

the details provided in the application. Parents/ caregivers of selected children are informed about the selection and the VCPC distributes the benefit to the selected beneficiaries during the one-day social protection benefit distribution camps organised by the Village Development Committee (VDC). There is a provision for a monitoring committee also, which is responsible to oversee the impact of the CEF cash transfer on beneficiaries.

In addition to the cash transfer, another strong component of the CEF is to enhance the sensitivity of parents/ caregiver towards the needs and rights of children and counsel beneficiary children e.g., regarding the importance of education and ill effects of child labour. The caregivers and children are provided planned sessions by the local partner NGO on the importance of education, nutrition, negative effects of child labour and the need for care and support for children etc.

The CEF is currently being implemented in 88 VDCs of Sindhupalchowk and Kavrepalanchok districts in Nepal. Currently 900 children are benefiting from the CEF among whom at least 50 percent are girls. The project aims to establish the CEF in a select number of VDCs, after which the aim is to encourage the District Development Committee (DDC) to help VDCs establish the CEF on their own with Save the Children providing technical support.

The CEF is clearly demonstrating how even small size cash transfers, when coupled with a strong child sensitivity component, can bring significant positive impact in the lives of orphaned children. Once the programme has been able to successfully demonstrate the same, the aim is to advocate for a national level social protection scheme for orphaned children in Nepal, who, unfortunately, do not significantly figure in the present social protection framework of the Government.

4

ENHANCING CHILD SENSITIVITY FOR INCREASED INVESTMENT IN CHILDREN

that accessing social protection benefits by a household does not necessarily translate into improved well-being of its children. Limited understanding of parents and caregivers and sometimes even of the service providers, regarding the developmental needs of children results in nonconducive decisions for children. Very often such decisions put children in a very vulnerable situation ultimately preventing them from developing to their fullest potential. It is therefore imperative that improved access to social protection for the most vulnerable children and their families is combined

with enhancing sensitivity of parents, caregivers and other critical service providers if we want to achieve lasting positive changes for children. The CSSP project has developed a comprehensive and strategic set of interventions for enhancing child sensitivity, which are being used with different target groups.

Sessions for enhancing child sensitivity

For social protection beneficiaries: Child sensitivity sessions are conducted for beneficiaries seven times a year. These sessions are based on



Child Sensitivity Session for parents/caregivers in Fulpingkatti village of Sindhupalchowk

the child sensitivity manual developed in the CSSP project. Besides the child sensitivity sessions, other communication tools such as radio jingles, picture books, calendars and flex printed hoardings/ posters are also used to sensitise the beneficiaries. The key messages delivered through each of these communication tools is regarding the existing social protection schemes, the need to invest in children, the negative impact of child labour, importance of education, information about scholarships and other educational support. The tools also highlight the role of nutritious food in mental and physical development of children and that they should be fed at least four times a day, with the food containing at least seven different forms of nutritional value.

Home visit and Individual counselling for beneficiaries of the Child Endowment Fund (CEF):

Orphan children, beyond doubt, are highly vulnerable. There is enough global evidence and realisation that cash transfers alone cannot ensure that a vulnerable group of children such as orphans remain in school and do not succumb to child labour and/or trafficking. Therefore, a critical component of the CEF, besides the cash transfer, is the child sensitivity sessions that are undertaken with the parents/caregivers of such children. These sessions are specially designed to sensitise and motivate parents/caregivers to keep their children in school and provide them nutrition to the best of their capacity. Special sessions are also organised, in groups but also through household visits if needed, with the beneficiary children themselves in order to motivate and keep them interested in pursuing education.

Child sensitivity with child club members:

Children are supported and facilitated to form child clubs as a part of the CSSP project. The focus is to help them articulate and realise the negative effects of child labour, importance of education in their lives, information about scholarships and other educational support and benefits of proper nutrition.

Capacity building of Village Development Committee (VDC) officials

It has been realised that building the sensitivity and capacity of the VDC and VCPC officials will go a long way in making the CSSP interventions successful and sustainable. Training sessions and workshops are therefore undertaken for them mostly through power point slides, facts, graph charts etc. During these training sessions and workshops the focus is on making them aware and informed about the Child Rights Convention and Child Rights Act; Why we need to invest in children (CSSP principle, short window of opportunity); and Nepal Government's operating guideline on allocating 10 percent budget for children at the VDC level.

Mass awareness

In addition to sessions for separate target groups, there are several communication tools that have been used for mass awareness in the project area. The tools are airing radio jingles through local FM radio, street dramas performed by child clubs, documentary shows and an annual calendar with social protection messages.

One of the key challenges in Nepal has been the limited number of Government social protection schemes, which can be leveraged for enhancing child sensitivity. The CSSP project experience has been that it is easier to galvanise and make parents/caregivers, service providers and communities sensitive towards children's needs and rights when the child sensitivity is built around different social protection benefits.

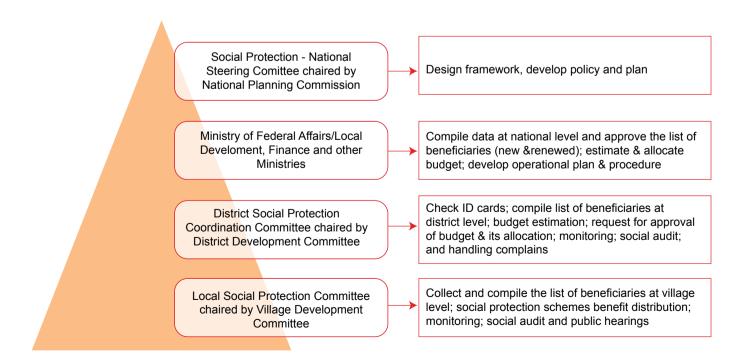
INFLUENCING SOCIAL PROTECTION POLICY AND PROGRAMMES

n Nepal, there is a growing momentum to pursue a more comprehensive and strategic approach to social protection. Government and donors are working together to develop a national level social protection framework to provide greater coherence and efficiency to social protection in Nepal. The existing mechanism for developing and implementing social protection policy and programmes in Nepal is as follows:

As stated above, social protection is gaining good momentum in Nepal, but a plethora of challenges including changing government, continued security concerns and prolonged development of the constitution plague its blossoming. Although a range of social protection programmes are being tried out, most of them have been initiated on a pilot basis, thus

limiting their scope in reaching out to and helping the most poor and marginalised children and their families at large. It can be, therefore, concluded that substantial interest is being given to social protection in Nepal, but given the multiple vulnerabilities and deprivation children from poor and marginalised households face, much more needs to be done.

In Sindhuplachowk, for example, the social protection schemes that are available are senior citizen allowance; single woman allowance; allowance for the fully disabled; and allowance for endangered ethnic groups. Social protection focusing on children is limited to a child grant for providing nutritional support for a maximum of two children under five of a dalit family, scholarships for children in school and the institutional delivery allowance.



The CSSP project has contributed to amending two Government policies: i) the three year plan of the Government of Nepal (2011-2013) and the 10 year National Social protection Framework. The project has been successful in influencing the national Government to amend the government's ten-year social protection framework by adopting CSSP as one of the working principles. It has also successfully influenced the three year plan (2011-13) of the National Planning Commission to provision for a separate chapter for children in the Social Protection Working Policy stating that "all social protection provisions will be made child sensitive and existing

social protection will be strengthened and expanded to mitigate child poverty and vulnerability".

In addition to this, the project has supported the establishment of a national level social protection civil societies network where 14 civil society organisations are actively participating in awareness raising and building capacity of civil society on social protection. The network has now expanded its district level chapters and has been actively engaging in national level advocacy for influencing social protection policy and programmes to become more child-sensitive.



Photo: Max Holm

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WHAT DOES IT ALL ADD UP TO?

he CSSP project in Nepal has been in place for about three years, which means that some additional time is needed to scale up and sustain the changes brought about in the project. Nevertheless, when visiting the field, encouraging results can be found when talking to both children and parents, which suggests that CSSP is an approach that holds great potential for children, especially the most vulnerable and deprived.

Thanks to the Child Endowment Fund, Mao Thapa, a potential child labour is regularly attending school



MAO THAPA'S mother died of uterine cancer when he was one-and-a-half years old. Seven years later, his father died of tuberculosis. An orphan, Thapa's grandmother supported him with her old-age allowance of Rs 500 a month. Last year, she too died at the age of 95. Thapa is now 17, in ninth grade, and all alone in his grandmother's house at Fulpingkot in Sindhupalchok district.

Thapa does have two elder brothers and two elder sisters, but all of them live in Kathmandu and rarely visit him in the village. His siblings do not want him in Kathmandu; neither do they send him money for household and educational expenses in the village. Born with clubfeet –

which were surgically corrected when Thapa was eight years old, his brothers and sisters consider him a disabled and think education will do him no good.

Thousands of vulnerable children like Thapa live on the edge in communities nationwide, who without proper intervention at the right time, could end up on the streets or in orphanages. A simple endowment fund, created, managed and owned by Village Development Committees (VDC), could forestall that predicament.

In 2010, with an aim to make parents, communities and the local governments more sensitive towards the issues of children, an international organisation, Save the Children, together with its local partner, Tuki Association Sunkoshi, decided to create a child endowment fund in every VDC.

According to Raju Bhai Shrestha, a program officer of DDC remarks "since every VDC receives around Rs 1.5 to 3 million in annual budget from the government, 10 percent of which must be reserved for children, local bodies, if committed to children, have no problem raising the fund required". Fulpingkot was one of the first three villages in which the project began in 2010/2011. "The fund is a to keep the children at risk in school. Not every child in a community is entitled to scholarships provided by the government," says Shrestha.

"When applications for the endowment fund allowance opened, we received 138 letters from Fulpingkot alone. We could not help everyone, but it shows the tremendous need in communities," says Sabina Lama, a social mobiliser at Tuki.

Currently, 112 girls and 120 boys, most of them orphans, from 25 Sindhupalchok VDCs receive Rs 300 every month from such funds. Fifteen VDCs are in the process of disbursing the allowance and the rest are setting up the fund. The Kavrepalanchok district committee has also shown an interest in establishing the fund.

At present the government hands out scholarships to all Dalit, female and disabled students. It also provides financial aid to children from marginalised communities in a district and merit-based scholarships to exceptional students. The scholarship amount varies from Rs 400 a year (to a Dalit child) to Rs 17,000 a year (to a completely disabled child). Children like Thapa are not covered.

Although Rs 300 a month is not a large sum, Thapa says, it helps. "I buy notebooks and pens and also pay exam fees with the money," he says. Moreover, the child sensitivity sessions undertaken with beneficiary children and their parents/ caregivers, as part of the CEF, plays a critical role in convincing both the children and the caregivers of the benefits of keeping children in school and not sending them to labour.

At the central level, the government is piqued by the scheme's success in Sindhupalchok. Usually the 10 percent of the local budget allocated for children is spent on physical infrastructure, as "the children too need roads and buildings".

Tarak Dhital, executive director at the Central Child Welfare Board, hails the fund as a good initiative.

The above case study was published in the Kathmandu Post, a national daily newspaper on April 2, 2014.



Photo: Save the Children

