

# ***NEPAL***

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## **Country Report On Utilization of ICT and Educational Support for Children with Disabilities in Nepal**

### **Background**

The Himalayan kingdom of Nepal is located between China to the north and India to south, east and west. Nepal spreads from the top of the world, Mount Everest with 8848 meters to the Gangetic planes with less than 200 meters from the sea level covering a total area of 1,47,181 square kilometers. Nepal is divided into five development regions and 75 districts. The districts are further divided into smaller units such as Village Development Committees (VDCs) and municipalities. Currently there are 3915 VDCs and 58 municipalities. The total population of the country is 23.2 million with the growth rate of 2.3% per annum.

Nepal is a country with immense diversity. There are more 100 ethnic and caste groups. Nepal's biodiversity presents a unique case in the world. Nepal is well known for its natural resources and human heritage. However, Nepal is striving for its infrastructure development and social transformation. Over some years Nepal is facing insurgency situation in the country. Intensive efforts are being made to build peace and promote harmony among the people.

After the restoration of democracy in 1990, Nepal has made a significant progress towards increasing children's access to basic and primary education. However, 19 per cent of children are still out of the primary school system. A significant portion of such a hard-to-reach population consists of the children with disabilities. In order to ensure educational services to the special needs children, the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is crucial. ICT based education can prove instrumental to cater to the needs of these children and ensure their reach in education with a view to attaining the Millennium Goals of education and providing quality Education For All by 2015.

In order to respond to national and international commitments to Education For All, His Majesty's Government of Nepal (HMG/N) has prepared a National Plan of Action in the light of the Dakar Framework. Based on this, the Ministry of Education and Sports has developed a core

document for EFA 2004-2009 implementation with special focus on the special needs education. Nepal's 10th Plan has placed emphasis on providing education to all disadvantaged and marginalized population in the country. However, ICT has not yet been fully recognized as a key intervention for the expansion and consolidation of special needs education in the country.

## **Present Scenario of Disability in Nepal**

### **Data on disability in Nepal:**

The 1971 census of Nepal estimated 1.5 percent of the total population over 10 years of age having disabilities. The disability sample survey 1980 reported a prevalence of about 3% disability among the total population while population census of 1981 stated only about . 5% disability among the total population. The household survey conducted in eight districts of Nepal by the Special Education Unit of the Ministry of Education in 1995 reported about 4.55% disability in those districts.

The situation analysis of disability in Nepal (2001) reported 1.63% as the national prevalence rate of disability, which comes to be the total of 371442 people with disability in the country. The findings of the latest population census of 2001 are in question about representing the true picture of disabled persons in the country. The different surveys and censuses show different figures and rates of disabilities that may be due to lack of standard definition of disability and scientific criteria.

### **Policies on ICT:**

ICT policies are becoming visible in the National Planning Commission (NPC) documents. The statement below, for example, shows importance of ICT based technologies in Nepal:

- A policy document of the National Planning Commission states that Nepal will establish a center for information and research regarding disability in the country, and an information system will be developed so as to maximize the access to information.

The policy statement recognizes the role of ICT to expand special needs programmes to reach the people with disabilities. However, the policy has not been implemented yet. Also, the Ministry of Education and Sports has yet to develop a sectoral policy on ICT based technologies in order to address the disability issues in the country. Although the Government Policies on Information Technology 2000 are in place, they do not seem to address the issue related ICD based technologies in the interest of the disabled children. Nonetheless, it is a welcome step towards formulating policies and developing national strategies for the promotion Information Technology in the country. HMG/N has taken initiatives towards introducing ICT based technologies in the country.

### **ICT for Development Project:**

This project has been launched jointly by UNDP and HMG/N. The project is being implemented by the Ministry of Science and Technology. The project aims at establishing 15 tele centers in nine district of Nepal.

The tele centers will provide e-mail and Internet facilities to the general public. These facilities will be free of cost. The project does not specify whether the disabled persons will have access to these facilities. Yet, it mentions that the wave camera placed in the tele centers will benefit the disabled persons by diagnosing the illness of the disabled in the center. This project has been implemented from August 2002 on a pilot basis. The project will be in effect until July 2004. And, for the sustainability of the ICT inputs, HMG/N will merge project activities in Government's regular programmes.

Moreover, the Ministry of Information and Communication has placed emphasis on developing hardware, and the Ministry of Science and Technology has given importance to the software side of the ICT programmes. But there is lack of coordination between these two Ministries.

**Programmes targeted to the disabled:**

The programmes regarding information and communication for disabled persons are as follows:

S.No	programmes	Agencies involved	Target group
1.	Voice of the disabled (monthly magazine) and radio programme	Nepal disabled human rights center	Disabled persons
2	Disabled Manch (Disabled forum)	Annapurna (Mountain) FM, Pokhara	Disabled persons
3	Dristi Chetana (Vision awareness)	Himchuli (Himalyan) FM, Pokhara	Disabled persons
4	Samanata ka swar haru (Voices of equality)	Radio Sagarmatha (Radio Everest)	Disabled persons
5	Apang Manch (Disabled forum)	Radio HBC	Disabled persons
6	Hatemalo radio karyakram (Holding hands radio programme)	KATH97.9 FM	Disabled and other people
7	Sahas (Courage)	Metro FM	Disabled and other people
8	Braille news	Nepal Television	Disabled persons
9	Computer training	Apanga sahayata kosh (Disabled support fund)	
10	Computer training and secretarial services for disabled women	Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare	Disabled women
11	Publications	News published national newspapers	

In order to promote and develop the programme for ICT based technologies, the National Planning Commission has formed a committee for the preparation of the World Summit for Information Society to be held in Geneva in December, 2003. It is hoped that the summit will certainly provide guidelines for the development ICT in Nepal.

### **Difficulties in the field of disability**

#### **Policy level:**

The national policy on ICT has not been fully functional yet. However, the National Planning Commission has prepared a draft on ICT policies. The Ministry of Science and Technology has developed general policies for Information Technology in the country. However, these policies are not meant for the disabled persons in the country.

#### **Planning level:**

The role of the disabled persons as stakeholders is still very limited in the planning processes. Likewise, there is inadequacy of reliable and valid data for ICT planning for the disabled.

#### **Miscellaneous:**

Besides, the disabled persons face problems in receiving ICT services in the country due to the following:

- Inadequate and limited transportation services in the remote areas
- Inadequate media and telecommunication services except for Radio Nepal in the remote locations.
- Lack of electricity in the remote areas
- No access to computer facility in rural areas and distance locations.
- Inadequate resources to promote and develop ICT programmes.
- ICT is still a low priority in terms of resource allocation.

### **The role of ICT in the field of disability in Nepal**

The role of ICT in Nepal is extremely crucial to widen educational opportunities for the disabled and ensure their equitable access to quality education. Below is a brief account on ICT in the country.

#### **Utilization of ICT to overcome difficulties due to disability:**

The ICT can prove instrumental to overcome the difficulties faced by the disabled persons in Nepal. Modern technologies can be utilized to address the problems to diagnose the disabilities and cater to educational needs of the disabled persons through formal and non-formal channels of education. Technologies can be used for children with mild and/ or severe disabilities. Efforts are being made to facilitate children's learning through various means.

Nepal has introduced the “judge for windows” programme for the blind. This programme has been developed with the help of Nepal Engineering College and has been effective for the disabled persons. The utilization of ICT can help overcome the difficulties by:

- Increasing the disabled persons' access to information and communication
- Raising people's awareness about the use and effectiveness of ICT in the delivery of education.
- Improving the quality of educational inputs and services.

However, ICT facilities are limited to urban areas of Nepal. Remote and mountainous areas are still deprived of ICT services. Therefore ICT facilities need to be expanded to rural areas of Nepal.

### **Research and Development of ICT- based assistive technologies:**

The Government has not made much effort to carry out research in ICT for the disabled. However, private sector has shown visible presence in ICT services because of Government's liberal policies.

The research and development activities shown below illustrate ICT endeavour in the country:

- Introduction of computer education in school and college curricula.
- Offering ICT at educational institutes and training programmes.
- ICT has been recognized as a component in Education For All programmes and secondary education support schemes.
- Rapid expansion of computer training centres and cyber cafes.
- Initiatives taken to formulate ICT policy.

### **Alternative Communication devices:**

The means of communication mentioned below have contributed to enhancing the role of ICT for the disabled population in Nepal:

- Publication of newspapers representing the disabled community in the country
- Radio broadcast both in government and private sectors through medium wave and FM services
- TV programmes for disabled persons
- Monthly journals for disabled persons.

### **Teacher training and ICT:**

Teacher training programmes for primary or secondary school teachers conducted by the Ministry of Education and Sports do not include ICT elements. Training manuals do not incorporate ICT inputs. The ICT component has yet been endorsed in the training programme.

### **Distance Education and ICT:**

The Distance Education programme does not incorporate ICT elements for the disabled population. The ICT component has not yet been an integral part of the programme yet.

## **Conclusion**

Nepal has been experiencing difficulties in introducing ICT programme for the disabled persons in the education sector. ICT so far has not been an integral part of school education and teacher training institutes. However, in recent years initiatives have been taken towards formulating policies on ICT expansion. Yet, the services need to be focused on the special needs and disabled population.

Unless disabled persons' educational needs are addressed through ICT interventions, Education For All is likely to remain a distant dream. For disabled children's equitable access to quality education ICT can prove instrumental. Therefore, ICT needs to receive priority in government programmes and should be endorsed in policy documents. Schools and teacher training institutions should have access to and willingness for ICT inputs.

In order to translate the ICT visions into reality, there is a need for building partnerships both at national and international levels between government and private sectors. Transfer of technology, however, should not limit to the urban and well-off areas of a country, benefits of ICT should reach the poor and should be aimed at facilitating teaching learning processes of the disabled population. In order to ensure disabled persons' access to ICT interventions, the technologies should be affordable and appropriate to suit the local needs. To make this happen, there is a need for willingness and commitments at local, national and international levels. To make ICT a reality for the disabled persons in the countries like Nepal, it is important to combine global perspectives with local solutions.