Copy of Main Document- REVISED and accepted Education 3-13

Angela Daly*, Sara Parker, Samden Sherpa, Umesh Regmi

Corresponding author A.Daly@ljmu.ac.uk

Federalisation and education in Nepal: contemporary reflections on working through change.

Abstract

This paper presents reflections from recent research on the opportunities and barriers for education in Nepal in the context of federalisation. Public administration of services including education is subject to major reorganisation as a national priority. By 2019, new structures of local governance will be established, presenting an opportunity for improved coordination of education, health and social work at regional and municipality levels. Drawing on interviews with academic, school based and NGO stakeholders, findings offer a contemporary commentary on processes, power and possibilities to improve educational inclusion and progress towards the Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education.

Keywords: Nepal, education reforms, federalisation, primary education, inclusion

Introduction

Federalisation presents a significant change of context for education in Nepal. Public administration of services including education in Nepal is subject to major reorganisation with the adoption of decentralisation as a national priority since the formation of the Democratic Republic of Nepal in 2015. In 2017 the establishment of new local governance structures in Nepal presented an opportunity for improved coordination of education at the local level and progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) including SDG 4: quality education (United Nations, 2015). Implications of federalisation for national, regional and local governance of the education system is subject to keen debate among those engaged in education provision

in a post-civil war, post-earthquakes and new democracy context. However, limited research on the role of education in the new regional states has been conducted to inform governance at municipality and local level (UNESCO/UNPFN 2014). This paper presents findings from interviews with ten stakeholders on the perceived impact of changes in structures and responsibilities for education and as such offers a contemporary commentary of education in Nepal in a dynamic context. Academics, school based and education leads in Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) stakeholders reflect on the opportunities and barriers presented by current changes and consider potential for coordination between actors at local authority level to improve education and inclusion to contribute to progress towards SDG 4: access to quality pre-primary, primary and basic education including gender equality.

The Government of Nepal embarked on a two-year planning phase for the reorganisation of governance structures under federalisation that began after the elections in 2017, and that will end by May 2019. By this time "the entire Nepal sub-National Government will be restructured." (DfID, 2017:1). Federalisation in Nepal comprises of a three-layered governance structure: Central, Provincial and Local, each with relationships to each other and shared responsibilities to uphold rights (Aryal, 2014). Central Government manages the major affairs of the state. Centralised Ministries will reduce in capacity as seven new Provinces are established, moving the centre of power from the Singha Durbar in the capital Kathmandu, to governments in the regional states and local municipalities. Nepal has been administratively divided into five development regions including ecologically protected areas. Within these are fourteen zones, seventy-five districts encompassing one hundred and thirty-five municipalities, and three thousand eight hundred and thirty-three Village Development Committees, each with municipality and ward governance structures (Central Bureau of

Statistics, 2011). Under federalisation, seven hundred and fifty-three Municipality and Rural Council governments have replaced the existing local governments of District Councils and Village Development Committees.

Nepal's current population is estimated at 29.3 million people (DfID, 2018). As a country, it has never been colonised and was relatively contained until 1947, when the independence of India stimulated wider engagement with neighbouring countries. Nepal's population has always been diverse reflecting the range of people living across the Himalaya (Shields, 2013). There are fifty-nine ethnic groups in Nepal, with one hundred and twenty four languages, and distinct dialects spoken (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2015).

Quality of life indicators have undoubtedly improved in Nepal (Tandukar et al. 2015). Absolute poverty reduced dramatically from 42% in 1995 to 23.8% in 2015. However, income inequalities remain entrenched for women, ethnic groups and for those living in remote areas (National Planning Commission, 2015). Life expectancy has increased from 55 in 1990 to 68 years for men and 71 years for women in 2015 (UNICEF, 2015). While a dependence on foreign aid has been the norm for the national government since the 1950s, an increasing trend of remittances from overseas workers to families has contributed to a rise in GDP to $761.59 per capita in 2016 (UNDP Nepal, 2018). Currently around 1500 people a day migrate from Nepal to work in Gulf States, Malaysia or India (DfID, 2018).

Social inequalities have been exacerbated from the mid-twentieth century aided in no small part by a national education system that excluded minorities' cultures, religions and traditions. Schools and government privileged Nepali as a national language in an attempt to promote a sense of modern Nepal and national citizenship (Shields, 2011). The positioning of Nepali speaking Hindus at the top of a social

hierarchy alienated and marginalised many other Nepali ethnic groups from education and political or civic participation (Parker and Standing, 2007; Shields, 2013). Inequality, poverty, marginalisation and the caste system fuelled discontent resulting in the emergence of a people's movement inspired by Maoist ideologies (Pherali, 2011; Parker, Standing and Pant, 2013). Nepal as a constitutional monarchy held its first democratic elections in 1992, establishing the Nepali Congress as a form of government. Continued disenfranchisement and political protest continued until 1996 when the Maoist movement made gains under a civil war that was to last until 2006. Opposition to a system of constitutional monarchy charged with upholding an unjust and corrupt government, culminated in the massacre of the Royal Family in 2001 (Parker, 2005; Caddell, 2006). No longer a Kingdom, Nepal established a first interim government in 2006. Elections in April 2008 resulted in the 1st Constitutional Assembly, with the Maoist party forming the largest group in government. A second interim government called elections in 2013 and a 2nd Constitutional Assembly proposed a national Constitution. Nepal became a federal democratic republic by promulgation of the Constitution by the 2015 Constitution Assembly.

The education system as a site of social and political discontent was not immune to the impact of the 'People's War' as the ten years of civil war from 1996-2006 became known (Pherali, 2011). Schools were sites of conflict implicating teachers, children and communities in ideological and physical combat (Caddell, 2006; Parker and Standing, 2007; Pherali, 2013). A generation of children were taken as combatants (Parker, Standing and Pant, 2013). Teaches were blamed or feted by opposing groups, and many were killed during the insurgency (Pherali, 2011). The legacy of the civil war continues to have resonance with current political tensions and demands for equality in the education system (Pherali, Smith and Vaux, 2011; Shields, 2013; Parker, Standing

and Pant, 2013). Despite welcome increased government spending and improvements in education across Nepal, particularly in access to basic education, the governance of schools remains a contested space with recurrent political power intrusions (Pherali, 2013; Tandukar et al. 2015).

On 28th April and 15th May 2015, two major earthquakes shook Nepal causing significant loss of life; an estimated 9000 people died and a further 23000 people sustained extensive physical injuries and psychological trauma. Post-traumatic stress disorder is estimated to have affected a third of the population (Action Aid Nepal, 2015). Disruption to education, health and social infrastructures was devastating with significant damage to public buildings including schools. Over 30,000 classrooms in 8,304 schools, and nearly 1,000 health centres were destroyed (Action Aid Nepal, 2015). Responses by local populations, Government of Nepal departments, Nepali Non-Governmental Organisations and international support were swift but hampered by unclear mechanisms and access to emergency and reconstruction finance. Supplies for reconstruction were further hampered by a fuel crisis and cross-border trade blockage in December 2015 that resulted in further shortages, compounding difficulties in people's day to day lives (DfID, 2017).

Remarkably, the desire for political process continued during this time with the Adoption of the New Constitution in September 2015 and an announcement to hold Local Government elections in 2017. Post-earthquake infrastructure responses including construction of roads and technical support for public services at municipality level helped improve access to remote areas. Increased employment and restoration of services led to a commitment and demand for education across the country (DfID, 2017). To prepare legislation, reforms and restructure of responsibilities under federalisation, a consultation and development period began in earnest post-elections,

with a deadline for resolution of the reorganisation of state, regional and local governance structures, including for the education system, to be completed by May 2019.

Education in Nepal

It is in this social and political context that Education as a fundamental right became enshrined in the Nepali Constitution. The Education Act 8th Amendment (2015) embedded educational opportunity into a national system of provision from early childhood education to higher education (Government of Nepal, 2015). Early childhood education at child development centres and pre-primary playgroups offer one to two years of provision for children aged three to six. Basic education covers Grade 1 to Grade 8 and is provided though five years at primary level for pupils aged from 6 to 11 years, and three years at lower secondary level education for pupils aged 12 to 14 years. Secondary education from Grades 9 to 12 is comprised of two years at lower secondary and two years at higher secondary levels for pupils aged 14 plus. Alongside secondary school provision is alternative non-formal education offering 3-year Technical Diplomas. Higher education is validated through eleven universities, with the majority of students registered at largest three, and is provided across the country by a network of affiliated colleges attached to one of the universities. Higher education with no tuition fees can be offered to students with impairments and those from very low-income households (Daly, Parker, and Regmi 2018).

The Government of Nepal School Sector Reform Plan 2009-2015 aimed to ensure an inclusive and equitable education system for Nepal (Ministry of Education, 2009). However clear analysis on the relationship between state and private sector schools is largely absent from national planning (Pherali, Smith and Vaux, 2011; Ezaki, 2018). Schools in Nepal are known as two main types; community schools that are

government-funded and institutional schools that are privately funded and therefore attract fees from pupils (Lal Bhomi and Suwal, 2014). Basic education from Grades 1 to 8 is compulsory and has no formal fees when delivered in community schools, while secondary level education, Grades 9 to 12 is not compulsory but is free. While discrepancies in quality of teaching and learning in private and government schools is debated, the private school sector's contribution to learning and livelihoods beyond exam results has had limited attention in research (Caddell, 2006; Pherali, Smith and Vaux, 2011; Ezaki, 2018). The burgeoning of the private school sector has been dramatic in Nepal, with concentrations in the rapidly growing urban cities in Kathmandu Valley and Pokhara (Dev Regmi, 2017). This is matched by an increasing number of private nurseries and pre-primary schools with a focus on early childhood education and school readiness in order to gain access to the best government funded or private primary schools (Caddell, 2006; Dev Regmi, 2017).

Progress is evident in the Nepali education system as a whole, where primary school enrolment increased to a net enrolment rate of 96.2% by 2015 (National Planning Commission, 2015). Of 1000 pupils entering basic education at Grade 1, 86.5% complete Grade 5, but only 70% complete Grade 8. Girls fare less well than boys in completion of basic education, and gender gaps continue to increase through secondary and tertiary levels (Ministry of Education, 2015). Interventions to raise the quality of teaching include targets to increase the number of teachers employed in primary schools who have completed Grade 12 secondary education and a one-year Teacher Preparation Course. Requirements to teach at secondary level were increased to completion of a Bachelor and/or Master Degree plus a one-year Teacher Preparation Course (Lal Bhomi and Suwal, 2014). Gender disparities persist in the availability of female candidates for Teacher Preparation Courses, due to lower completion rates of

basic education (National Planning Commission, 2015). Improved transport links increased access to government schools in rural and hilly regions, and have facilitated mobility to a wider range of employment opportunities for teachers, including female teachers (National Planning Commission, 2015).

The SDGs are embedded in Nepal's development planning for education (National Planning Commission, 2015). By 2030 targets for SDG 4.1 include to ensure 100% primary completion rate and to ensure all teachers in primary and secondary schools are trained. A focus on early education is a government priority, with a target for SDG 4.2 to ensure 90% of children have access to quality early childhood education, and that low income families are supported by child grants for pre-primary education. Since 2015, coordination to support area based Early Childhood Centres with a holistic focus on child health, early education practice, parental education and home-school relationships is becoming more evident in practice (UNICEF, 2015; Satis, Devkota and Upadhyay, 2015; UNICEF Nepal, 2018).

The central role of education in socio-economic regional development and in effective delivery of a future federal system in Nepal, while acknowledged, has been neglected in recent studies of governance structures and operations (UNESCO, 2014). There has been limited attention given to analyse implications for educational provision or planning for changes envisaged under a new federal system. Local governance of education viewed as an important site for addressing inequalities and inclusion for remote and disadvantaged groups (Satis, Devkota and Upadhyay, 2015). In 2014, UNESCO Nepal and the UN Peace Fund for Nepal (UNPFN) commissioned discussion papers on key themes of teacher deployment, education initiatives and comparative studies of the role of federal government in education systems (UNESCO/UNPFN, 2014). These highlight the role of government in coordinating fiscal policies at all

levels and ensuring sufficient funds for state education (Bhatta, 2014), to uphold quality education through good initial and ongoing professional development of teachers (Lal Bhomi and Suwal, 2014), and to promote equity throughout the education system (UNESCO/UNPFN, 2014). This research provides a space for reflection for educators working through this context of change.

Research design

This research was conducted by a small research team comprised of two UK based and two Nepal based researchers. The research team worked collaboratively sharing resources, data collection, writing and dissemination of research in the spirit of Sustainable Development Goal 17, partnerships for development (Daly, Parker, Sherpa and Regmi, 2018). The objectives of the research were:

- To understand potential changes to education under federalisation at national, regional and local levels.
- To explore potential barriers to coordination of education under federalisation at national, regional and local levels.
- To explore potential opportunities for coordination of education under federalisation at national, regional and local levels.

Method

Semi-structured interviews were organised with key stakeholders (n=10) in Kathmandu in April 2018 to discuss the current context of federalisation and education in Nepal. The research team identified a range of respondents with a professional role in education in Nepal and knowledge of changes posed by federalisation. Due to the period available for fieldwork the respondent sample consisted of academics (*n*=three),

practitioners (*n*= four) and specialists (*n*= three). These included academics, education leads in NGOs and head teachers in government schools. All have knowledge of planning for education at local level and detailed knowledge of primary, early childhood education and related family social work policy and practice. Interviews were conducted in English and Nepali with translation and discussion in English by the multi-lingual research team. All researchers observed the codes of ethical practice in research as outlined by the Nepal Research Council Guidelines and the British Education Research Association Guidelines. Anonymised group labels are used to report quotes in the following way. Academics are given the moniker Academic 1, 2 and 3; education leads in NGOs or head teachers are given the moniker Practitioners 1, 2, 3, and 4; and specialists are given the moniker Specialists 1, 2 and 3. The research team conducted a thematic analysis of information emerging across the interviews reflecting respondents' views on working through change in education in Nepal (Newby, 2010).

Findings

This section presents contemporary reflections from key stakeholders on changes brought about by federalisation and implications for education in Nepal. Findings are organised on the basis of themes arising out of the interview data and are presented below under three broad themes: uncertainty regarding public administration processes; opening up of possibilities and opportunities for quality education; and sustaining relationships while taking account of enduring challenges of patronage politics and power.

Uncertainty regarding public administration processes

Public administration processes and skills for a decentralised education are needed to ensure effective integration of education as part of regional development (Bhatta, 2014;

Department for International Development 2017). Respondents suggested uncertainty remained during 2018 regarding public administration processes and the up to date position of national state, regional and local governance structures and policies in relation to education planning and finance, teacher training and deployment. There is a need for specific educational policy guidelines to be developed by central state government in order to enable effective local management of education by schools and local governments (Bhatta, 2014; Lal Bhomi and Suwal, 2014). Respondents suggested that while discussion and debates have occurred in the last two years the reality of working through unknown processes reveals uncertainty and indistinctness of operational guidelines for a decentralised educational provision, as the respondents below noted.

> People are used to central guidelines and a culture of working in isolation. While the planned structures are known about as a basic idea, detailed operation is uncertain how to work in some different relationships will be new. (Academic 1).

Local governance budget setting presents a specific challenge, according to respondents, as the shift from central to local structures imply movement of staff to new areas, movement of specialists to new sectors and increased budgetary and accountability responsibilities at regional levels. In anticipation of decentralisation technical infrastructure in local authorities has been effectively supported by capacity building of local officials to gather data, and the successful implementation of data management systems (DfID, 2017). However, technical skills in planning and budget setting are viewed as potentially lacking and an area for continued tension between political and public administration handling of decentralisation. In addition, respondents noted that changes in the public sector administration structures may prove problematic if officials deployed from central departments have little local working knowledge of

local educational provision and contexts, as noted by a specialist respondent.

> Capacity of local government administration is variable. Furthermore, if someone moves to a new area, they will have little local knowledge of the area. If they are currently based in Kathmandu they may not want to move to a different region, or will need to spend time getting to know educational people in that place. (Specialist 1).

The trend towards local management of teachers' recruitment and deployment evident in the School Sector Reform Plan 2009-2015 will continue into federalisation plans. Respondents explained teacher deployment operates within a complex system, with the Teacher Service Commission (TSC) established in 2000 providing approved quotas of trained teachers regionally, alongside authorisation for local governments and schools to recruit and employ untrained teachers. A centralised quota system has resulted in a hierarchy among types of tenure held and this has caused division and demotivation among teachers (Khanal, 2011). Respondents were concerned that under potential structures for decentralisation, deployment and management of teachers across regions will require both financial and operational skills at local government levels to ensure equity of provision, particularly to remote regions. In addition, respondents working in schools lacked detailed information on resource allocation as noted below.

> We are not fully sure of organisation in the future. Who will select teachers and allocate budgets to schools. It depends on people in power. There may be a reliance on old structures and processes for centralised guidance. (Practitioner 1)

Developing inclusive pedagogy and curricula that draw on local culture and environments is key to inclusive education (Regmi, 2018). Respondents' suggestions included increasing a supply of trained teachers for rural areas and funding for in class educational resources based on locally identified needs to support inclusion as noted below by a practitioner.

> We need to think about inclusive education and what that means from funding overall to classroom resources. All children should discover and connect with their own learning from their environments. We should think about inclusive pedagogy to ensure that social and cultural contexts for learning are right for our children. Here we need teachers who are dynamic and training to help them develop methods of teaching that supports all students regardless of ability, ethnicity or socio-economic backgrounds. (Practitioner 3).

Possibilities and opportunities to improve quality education

Respondents were optimistic that possibilities and opportunities would open up to improve quality education and to continue to work for equality and inclusion in teacher and curriculum development. Responsibility for initial teacher training will be maintained by the state under the new structures. At present prospective teachers undertake a Teacher Preparation Course for basic level that is validated by the National Centre for Educational Development (NCED) based at Tribhuvan University and delivered through Educational Training Centres via the University's affiliated college network nationally. Additionally, many International/National Non-Governmental Organisations (I/NGOs) currently offer teacher development through training in schools. Several respondents raised the issue of responsibility for improving quality teacher training and teacher development in Nepal, as the practitioner below explained.

> Teacher training for instance is national. It is likely that pre-service teacher training will focus on improving quality teaching and learning and quality education in context. However many I/NGOs provide continuing development opportunities for teachers in service in government schools. How will that expertise be integrated is not yet known. (Practitioner 2).

Teacher Preparation Courses include training on delivering the national core curriculum, the theory and practice of pedagogical approaches and additionally a regional curriculum on teaching and learning in diverse regional contexts (Joshi, 2018).

Regional contextualisation of teacher training and continuing professional training for basic, master and expert teacher development programmes may increase recruitment and deployment of teachers from the respective regions. However respondents suggested there is little consensus on a national strategy that takes into account the role of culture and language in teaching and curriculum content, particularly in a post-conflict context. The extent that access to learning through home languages in basic education may encourage learning or conversely marginalise minorities, and the extent that English as a language of instruction may or may not contribute to unified educational experiences, is not settled (Pherali, Smith and Vaux 2011). There were some concerns that organisation of regional structures may reflect, and potentially reinforce ethnic and linguistic divisions and dominance within the education system (Pherali, Smith and Vaux, 2011). Respondents noted the importance of diversity when planning for education and suggest this could be significant opportunity for collaborative working at local authority level to ensure inclusive education and to improve quality, as emphasised by the following practitioner.

> Possibilities for improving quality of teachers must take into account local contexts including languages, culture, inclusive environments and local employments and developments. These must not be exclusive or result in hierarchical value of languages and culture. (Specialist 3).

The importance of working to support vulnerable children and families and to see education in the context of wider socio-economic inequalities in Nepal was noted. Respondents recommended collaborative working by professionals to support early childhood education and development to address wider social issues and impacts on learning, such as poverty, health, impacts of parents working away from home, and gender discrimination within families, schooling and society. Early education is a specific opportunity for multi-agency work with children and their families as noted by

this respondent.

> Early education, social, physical, wellbeing and psychological development is key for sustainable development in education, health and gender equality. Early work with children and families, as holistic practice, is important and connects social work, health agencies and school based family support. Working collaboratively at local level will be an opportunity to support children and their families directly through social work in collaboration with schools. (Academic 2).

Sustaining partnerships while working through change

Sustaining local relationships while working through a changing context and at the same time being mindful of enduring challenges of power and patronage politics was important to respondents. Political and civil support for equality in education in Nepal is evident by the continued emphasis on increasing the recruitment of female teachers, and teachers from Dalit and other disadvantaged groups (Pherali, Smith and Vaux, 2011; UNESCO/UNPFN, 2014). Local elections in 2017 increased the numbers of elected women and those from ethnic minority groups at local governance level, supporting the people's mandate to continue to protect equality in education and access to education for all enshrined in the Nepali Constitution (Satis, Devkota and Upadhyay, 2015). Elected members of regional and local governments will direct officers with responsibility for education budgets and infrastructure at local level. Prioritisation of resources and planning will involve balancing demands from different groups as noted by a practitioner.

> We have good relations with the NGO desk [coordination body] but it depends on how the village and urban education officers prioritise actions and integrate plans. (Practitioner 4)

Representation of political and ethnic groups has resulted in expansion of schooling in remote areas. Increased school building programmes and an improved road network in

rural areas previously affected by conflict has increased availability of school places and deployment of teachers (Satis, Devkota and Upadhyay, 2015). Respondents observed distance to school and safe travel as key factors in increased engagement in schooling by households living in remote areas and primarily engaged in agriculture (Pherali, 2011). Engagement with primary education by low-income groups and those in remote areas has increased as noted by a respondent.

> Going to school is more attractive in rural areas. There is more time to do agriculture and school work. Previously teachers and pupils had to travel long distances and sometimes days to schools. Now children can safely walk to primary schools and it take much less time. (Practitioner 3)

Although more young people have access to locally provided basic teacher training provision via the NCED affiliated colleges, these are largely in urban areas and there is a reluctance to return to rural areas to teach due to infrastructure issues and pay (Khanal, 2011). Respondents noted factors such as accommodation, access to markets, transport and family have specific implications for female teacher recruitment. Careful planning of opportunities in rural areas could be maximised to address gender specific barriers to encouraging female teachers as noted by this respondent.

> Female teachers feel isolated away from their families and support networks. [We can] create support networks between rural locations to help with professional development and personal challenges for women in the rural villages to break down feelings of isolation. (Practitioner 4)

Respondents suggest unequal representation by gender and ethnicity among teachers is echoed by unequal outcomes for girl children, children with disabilities and children from minority ethnic groups (Asian Development Bank, 2010). While noting there has been progress for pupils in some Government Schools and reduced discrimination, increasing access to quality education for all should form the focus of planning as noted

by a respondent.

> There is a widespread desire for inclusive affordable education. This needs to be planned for to provide good government schools based on the population in the districts. (Academic 3)

The preponderance of a private sector in education, largely in urban areas, has resulted in greater access and completion of education than in rural areas where schools and educational outcomes have lagged behind (Satis, Devkota and Upadhyay, 2015). In addition, respondents acknowledged that elites continue to engage with private schools rather than commit to a state system (Pherali, 2011). Increased access to state education should be matched by quality state education as noted by this respondent.

> While increases in access to education is important, quality of government school education across the country remains variable. There is a prevailing view that state education suffers from a lack of quality and outcomes when compared with the private schools. (Academic 1)

Structural inequality developing between the state and private education sector needs to be taken into account in education reforms. Adequate and thoughtful resource allocation to ensure inclusion and improved quality in government provided education is essential as suggested by the respondent below.

> Reforms to education need to be managed carefully to tackle the gap between private and state sector education. There is potential, but clear thinking is needed on what will be the role and responsibility for state education at national, state and local level. With federalisation, planning for education needs to be based on interest and need, with equitable distribution of resources to ensure inclusion across the country. (Specialist 2)

Discussion

As might be expected mid-way through the development of new governance structures,

emerging themes from this research suggest both a sense of taking stock and looking forward. Given the enduring legacy of political processes in holding politicians to account, the desire for representation and improved quality in education is uppermost in respondents' overall reflections.

In response to the wider context of federalisation, respondents were optimistic, despite a perceived lack of clarity on processes for devolved fiscal and governance structures for education. There was a sense that while the implementation of federalisation was still in a transitional phase, decisions regarding education were not at the forefront of policy and practical preparation. Despite dialogue between political parties on the importance of education in a newly democratic Nepal, informal patronage politics continue to exert influence on the education sector at local level. This may be perceived as a reluctance of officials to relocate from the major cities to take up municipality roles or seeming deployment of teachers to more favourable areas in response to social and political power relations at local level.

The topic of appropriation of educational opportunities by elites is widely debated in civil society, newspapers and media in Nepal. Discussion on the prevailing gap between public and private education is expected, and respondents acknowledged varying engagement the private school sector by the middle classes including those in the education profession.

The quality and outcomes of state education provision remains an important issue for debate, with opportunities and persistent barriers noted by respondents. Positive developments are evident including wider access to teacher education, enhanced availability of schools particularly in rural areas, and increased enrolments for boys and girls. However, gendered and income based inequalities of outcomes remain for pupils of state provided schools suggesting that quality of teaching decreases during

basic education in government schools. In addition, cultural and gendered roles of girls and boys continue to impact on engagement with and duration of schooling.

Importantly for respondents, the emphasis on state promotion of an inclusive education system that takes into account culture, languages and multi-agency holistic engagement with families are noted as positive policy and practice areas to support Nepali children develop their full potential. Building capacity of existing teachers through government and NGO teacher training is considered a way of improving quality education by drawing on available expertise in regions or nationally. However, clear strategic policy approaches to partnership work is not, as yet, forthcoming.

Conclusion

There is a lively debate about the future of federalisation in Nepal. There are useful academic papers on education and federalisation commissioned to support consultations, for example, the UNESCO/UNPFN resource document mentioned earlier (UNESCO/UNPFN 2014). Contemporary research papers are emerging in academic journals on the topic of federalisation and education in Nepal. This paper contributes to the debate by offering a contemporary snapshot of the perceived opportunities and barriers for education presented by the current context from the perspectives of academics, education specialists and practitioners.

While there appears to be political and civil will to support federalisation, legislative and regulatory frameworks appear insufficiently developed for the administration of a national education system under new structures. The role of education in promoting unity, respect for diversity and equality in education is an important factor in the newly democratic Nepal. Although discourse on the characteristics of quality in education is often dominated by an emphasis on high stakes examination outcomes, respect for diversity and culture are equally considered essential

components of a quality curriculum by Nepali educators. Potential partnerships for curriculum development, teacher training and professional development between the state, universities, colleges and NGOs, is a contested area worthy of resolution in order to benefit from the range of education expertise available in Nepal. At local levels, multi-agency innovations between schools, families, communities, social work organisation and education NGOs and local educational governance has potential to support Nepali children's outcomes in early education, health and gender equality and progress towards Nepal's Sustainable Development Goal indicators.

This paper contributes findings from a moment in time, and will inform future research into contextual factors surrounding the coordination of education, health and social work professional practice at municipality level, to improve sustainable outcomes for children in Nepal. While this research offers a snapshot commentary on education and federalisation, the debates will continue at the Martin Chautari Conference in 2019 that has a special theme on Education in Nepal (Martin Chautari Research Centre, 2019). The authors hope through this dialogue to debate opportunities and implications for improved quality and equality of education for children in Nepal.

References

Action Aid, Nepal (2015) *Earthquakes in Nepal.* Kathmandu: Action Aid Nepal.

Aryal, D. (2014) The Role of Federal Government in Education: A comparative Study, in UNESCO/UNPFN (2014) *A Resource Material on Education and Federalisation in Nepal. Pp 13-48.* Lalitpur, Nepal: UNESCO Nepal.

Asian Development Bank (2010) *Overview of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in Nepal.* Manila: Asian Development Bank.

Bhatta, P. (2014) Federalism and Education in Nepal Mapping of Ongoing Initiatives, in UNESCO/UNPFN (2014) *A Resource Material on Education and Federalisation in Nepal. Pp 1-12.* Lalitpur, Nepal: UNESCO Nepal.

Caddell, M. (2006) Private schools as battlefields: contested visions of learning and livelihood in Nepal. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education.* Vol. 36: Iss. 4, 463-479.

Central Bureau of Statistics (2015) *Population of Nepal Census 2011*. Kathmandu: Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Nepal.

Central Bureau of Statistics (2011) *Nepal's regions.* Kathmandu: Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Nepal.

Daly, A., Parker, S.L., and Sherpa, S. (2018) *Opportunities and barriers for public services presented by federalisation in Nepal.* Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Exchange, Liverpool John Moores University, 24th May 2018.

Daly, A., Parker, S.L. and Regmi, U.R. (2018) *Education Reforms in Nepal: a critical moment for change?* Centre for Educational Research Seminar, School of Education, Liverpool John Moores University, 12th September 2018.

DfID (2018) *DfID Nepal Country Profile: July 2018.* Strathclyde: Department for International Development, UK Government.

DfID (2017) *Nepal Local Governance Support Programme: Annual Review 2017.* Strathclyde: Department for International Development, UK Government.

Dev Regmi, K. (2017) World Bank in Nepal's education: three decades of neoliberal reform. *Globalisation, Societies and Education.* Vol. 15, No. 2, 188-201.

Ezaki, N. (2018) Enrolment patterns of individual children left behind in the trend towards 'quality education': a case study of primary education in Nepal. *Education 3-13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education.* DOI: 10.1080/03004279.2018.1504100.

Government of Nepal (2015) *Education Act- 8th Amendment.* Kathmandu: Ministry of Education, Government of Nepal.

Joshi, P. (2018) Identifying and investigating the "best" schools: a network-based analysis. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education.* Vol. 48: Iss.1, 10-127.

Khanal, P. (2011) Teacher management in a decentralised school context in Nepal: Fuelling tension and dissent? *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education.* Vol. 41: Iss. 6, 769-784,

Lal Bhomi, A. and Suwal, R. (2014) Teacher Management and Development in Federal System of Government in Nepal in UNESCO/UNPFN (2014) *A Resource*

Material on Education and Federalisation in Nepal. Pp 55-75. Lalitpur, Nepal: UNESCO Nepal.

Martin Chautari Research Centre (2019) *Martin Chautari Annual Conference: Special theme Education in Nepal.* Available at: http://www.martinchautari.org.np/

Ministry of Education (2015) *Administrative records for National Planning.* Kathmandu: Ministry of Education, Government of Nepal.

Ministry of Education (2009) *School Sector Reform Plan 2009-2015.* Kathmandu: Ministry of Education, Government of Nepal.

National Planning Commission (2015) *Sustainable Development Goals 2016-2030 National (Preliminary) Report.* Kathmandu: National Planning Commission, Government of Nepal.

Newby, P. (2010) *Research Methods for Education.* Essex: Pearson.

Parker, S. (2005) *Reflecting on REFLECT in Sikles, Nepal: A dialogical inquiry into participation, non-formal education and action oriented research.* PHD Thesis, Liverpool: Liverpool John Moores University.

Parker, S., Standing, K. and Pant, D. (2013) Caught in the Cross Fire: Children's Right to Education During Conflict -The Case of Nepal 1996–2006. *Children and Society.* Vol. 27: Iss. 5, 372-384.

Parker, S. and Standing, K. (2007) The impact of Conflict on Schooling in Nepal. In Fiona Leech and Mairead Dunne (eds.) *Education, Conflict and Reconciliation: International* Perspectives. Pp 51-64. Oxford: Peter Lang.

Pherali, T. Smith, A. and Vaux, T. (2011) *A Political Economy Analysis of Education in Nepal.* Strathclyde: Department for International Development, UK Government.

Pherali, T. (2011) Education and conflict in Nepal: possibilities for reconstruction. *Globalisation, Societies and Education.* Vol 9: Iss.1, 135-154

Pherali, T. (2013) Schooling in violent situations: the politicisation of education in Nepal before and after the peace agreement. *Prospects.* Vol. 43, 49-67

Regmi, U. R. (2018) *Inclusive Pedagogy: A Quest of the Day.* Kathmandu: National College of Education Development.

Satis C. Devkota & Mukti P. Upadhyay (2015) What Factors Change Education Inequality in Nepal? *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities.* Vol. 16: Iss. 2, 287-308.

Shields, R. (2013) *Globalisation and International Education.* London: Bloomsbury.

Shields, R. (2011) ICT or I see tea? Modernity, technology and education in Nepal. *Globalisation, Societies and Education.* Vol. 9, No. 1, 85-97.

Tandukar, A., Sony, K.C., Upreti, B.R., Paudel, S.B., Acharya, G. and Harvey, P. (2015) *Could do better: Education in Nepal and users perceptions of the state. SLRC Briefing Paper No. 16.* London: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium, Overseas Development Institute.

United Nations (2015) *Sustainable Development Goals.* Available at: www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment /sustainable-development-goals/

UNICEF (2015) *Why Early Childhood Development?* New York: UNICEF.

UNICEF Nepal (2018) *Letting Children Flourish from an Early Age: Early childhood care and development in Nepal. UNICEF Nepal Working Paper Series WP/2018/001.* Kathmandu: UNICEF Nepal.

UNDP Nepal (2015) *Country Statistics.* Kathmandu: UNDP Nepal.

UNESCO/UNPFN (2014) *A Resource Material on Education and Federalisation in Nepal.* Lalitpur, Nepal: UNESCO Nepal.