ENHANCING PUBLIC EDUCATION IN NEPAL

learning from
CHARTER SCHOOLS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BS	Bikram Sambat
CDC	Curriculum Development Centre
CIAA	Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority
CNAS	Center for Nepal and Asian Studies
CSSP	Community School Support Project
DC	District of Columbia
DCPS	District of Columbia Public Schools
DDC	District Development Committee
DoE	Department of Education
GPA	Grade Point Average
JSSK	Janak Shiksha Samagri Kendra
LEA	Local Education Authorities
MoE	Ministry of Education
NPR	Nepali Rupees
PCF	Per Child Funding
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
SA	Social Audit
SAC	Social Audit Committee
SLC	School Leaving Certificate
SMC	School Management Committee
SNHSS	Shree Namsaling Higher Secondary School
SSPR	School Sector Reform Project
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPSFF	Uniform Per Student Funding Formula
US	United States
USA	United States of America
USD	United States Dollar
VDC	Village Development Committee
UNDP	United Nations Development Plan
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals

The Nepali year is based on the Bikram Sambat (BS) Calendar and is approximately 57 years ahead of the Gregorian calendar. (2062/1/1 = 2005/4/14)
1 USD = NPR 106.58 as of August 9, 2016 (issued by Nepal Rastra Bank)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public schools in Nepal have had a history of producing dismal student performance in national examinations (Nepal Education in Figures, 2010-15). They have also been plagued by intense political infiltration, becoming active breeding grounds for political activity (Loo Niva Child Concern Group Nepal, 2013). This results in management of these schools becoming subject to nepotistic appointments when politics makes its way into School Management Committees (SMCs). One of the most pressing concerns this creates is that teacher appointments then become subject to nepotism rather than qualification. The absence of local elections for almost two decades has caused School Management Committees to become desirable positions to exert influence and exploit public funds.

The course and curriculum taught in these schools have come under fire for being outdated and poorly edited (Sharma, 2015). The course book publishing monopoly is exercised by Janak Shiksha Samagri Kendra, and reporting of its irregularities have become common place (The Kathmandu Post, 2015). An absence of a bridge between local communities and district state organs responsible for public education is discernible.

These realities beg questioning – particularly when seen in juxtaposition to the amount of money poured into the Nepalese public education sector year after year. The fiscal year of 2016/17 saw the Nepalese government allocate NRs. 116.36 billion to the education sector out of the total budget of NRs. 1.048 trillion rupees (Budget Speech, 2016/17). Does this not ask for a careful reassessment of the manner of spending and operations of this sector?

The world is rapidly innovating new and better practices in education. A relatively new practice, gaining steady but widespread prominence, is that of charter schools. Simply put, charter schools are publicly funded but privately managed schools. A 'charter' is commonly understood as a legal

document that describes how a particular entity will operate. In reference to a charter school, a charter describes the modality of operation of a school where an interested party signs a legal document either to establish a new school or take over the management of a public school (Hoxby, 2005). The 'interested party' here could be a group of teachers, parents, a mixture of both or even business persons looking to open specialized schools to create skilled human resources (Finn et.al, 2000). Charter schools are characterized by a lower regulatory burden than public schools but with effective internal and external monitoring mechanisms (Finn et.al, 2000). In exchange for greater flexibility and independence of operation, charter schools must be more accountable for results and meet the requirements of the agreed "charter."

National news agencies in Nepal report time and again of community schools being merged because students are present in negligible numbers. For instance, 11 community schools were merged in Dhading due to the previously stated problem in 2016 (The Himalayan Times, 2016). If so many schools are being closed causing large infrastructural property to go unused, these could instead be used in ways that ensure better management and student performance. Creating a policy that allows for interested parties to approach the government to take over management of one of the failing public schools would be an effective starting point. For the trial period, the state can consider allowing 5 year-long charters that can be reissued once the school is extensively examined in terms of management and student performance. Frequent monitoring can be undertaken by locally elected bodies. This allows the DoE to monitor the school's progress only at the end of the lease period unless informed of malpractices by locals or elected officials.

Certain charter school characteristics such as funding allocations determined by per pupil enrollment rather than by number of teachers in an institution could be effective in making public schools more competitive. Being able to hire and fire teachers when necessary will be an important change in charter schools from traditional Nepali public schools.Teachers may be easy to hire in public schools by School Management Committees (SMCs) but they are extremely difficult to remove because of political affiliations.

Thus the flexibility to fire (upon malpractice or non-performance by the teacher) – which can be stated in the contract itself– will be an important addition. Increased independence in pedagogy also make charter schools desirable.

Pilot projects for experimenting this management system to overtake schools that are to be merged/closed could allow the state to scrutinize this idea better. Private schools have flourished in Nepal precisely because their management is perceived to be more efficient. There is a way of allowing the same to prosper in public education through charter schools.

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INTRODUCTION

A large number of studies have given weight to the claim that education plays a fundamental role in supporting human development and prosperity (notably including the Human Development Index[1] and the World Development Indicators[2]). At a country level, it is also seen as one of the major responsibilities of the state. Most countries nowadays guarantee their citizens access to free public education. Nepal's Constitution 2072 (2015) also upholds access to education as a fundamental right of its citizens, and has promised free and compulsory education until grade 8; it further speaks of continuing attempts to make education free until secondary level. Social mobility is greatly eased by access to education - proven both by rigorous research (Nazimuddin, 2014), and increasingly, the importance ascribed to it by our own belief systems.

A 2011 study titled 'Enumerating Migration in Nepal: A Review' cited the lack of education opportunities at the place of origin as one of the main causes for rural to urban migration. Is there then, a lack of sufficient number of schools in rural areas? Does this mean the government should be building more schools in such places? In fact, as of 2015, there were 29,133 community schools in Nepal (operating grades 1-12), meaning there is far from a dearth of educational institutions in the country (Nepal Education in Figures, 2015). A more pertinent matter of concern, therefore, is whether we have 'good' schools or not.

What is a 'good' school, then? To a certain degree, the answer is subjective and colored by ideas of our own schooling experiences. But there are also certain elements that are present in almost all of our definitions. P. Sammons (1995) identifies a number of key attributes that make schools

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1 *The Human Development Index (administered by UNDP) is 'a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living' (UNDP, 2015).*

2 *The World Development Indicators (administered by the World Bank) is a collection of development indicators and their data-sets that includes quality education and in 2016, has been crafted to monitor progress of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).*

effective: (1) professional leadership; (2) shared vision and goals; (3) a learning environment; (4) concentration on teaching and learning; (5) purposeful teaching; (6) high expectations (of both teachers and students); (7) positive reinforcement; (8) monitoring progress; (9) pupil rights and responsibilities; (10) home-school partnership; and (11) a learning organization. An addition to this could be how much weightage is given to incorporating local knowledge in our courses.

'Good schooling' in common Nepali rhetoric is often marked by how well a student fares in national examinations. These scores alone are hardly a holistic indicator of knowledge gained, but the mechanism is easy to administer and compare – making it a frequent reference point for those interested in education. The national pass percentage in the 2015 School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examinations stood at 47.49 percent, with only 39.74 percent of community schools' students in contrast to 89.80 percent of private institutional schools' students passing the tests (Nepal Education in Figures, 2015).

Parents of school-going children have two choices – free public education or private education that comes at an economic cost. Parents opting to send their children to private schools, paying tuition fees, signifies that there is greater benefit in doing so, compared to free public schooling. More and more parents sending their children to private schools - as evidenced by increasing enrollment rates (Nepal Education in Figures, 2013-15) - is a manifestation of the fact that parents perceive private schools as better educators. SLC pass rates, if taken as an indicator of quality of education delivered by the two models, also lends support to such decision by parents. There is also a clear lack of political infiltration in the classroom, while politics dominates community school operations. Low-cost private schools are being continually favored in Kathmandu, where fees are more affordable and education more accountable (Samridhhi Foundation, 2015). Community schools certainly own larger infrastructures compared to private counterparts – with bigger playgrounds and sizeable classrooms and even better trained teachers – but with the continual failure of the public education system to deliver at par with its private counterpart, the money being poured every year into these schools seems to be doing

little good in regards to the broader community as a whole.

With this in mind, this study aims, first, to understand the current structure and management model of the community school system; and second, to understand what needs to change and what good practices can be borrowed from global education innovations. In this process, we have studied a number of public schools in the country and analyzed their structure and operation to understand what intervention could be applied to change Nepalese public education system for better. While there are a number of interventions under the 'school choice' model the world over (including voucher education systems), this study looks at the possibility of drawing lessons from the charter school movement. Could establishing charter schools or borrowing charter school qualities help our public schools? This is the question we explore in this study.

OBJECTIVE, METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

OBJECTIVE:

The general objective of this study is to outline the current challenges of community schools and try and provide solutions based on field and literature examination.

Specific objectives of the study are:

a. To outline the structure and management of chosen community schools as case studies and compare these with non-community school management systems (such as institutional schools, collaborative schools[3] and charter schools[4]).

b. To understand the feasibility for changes in the public school system by borrowing from the international charter school movement.

There have been no traditional charter schools established in Nepal so far. One collaborative school however, does exist - Shree Jana Uddhar Secondary School in Budhanilkantha, Kathmandu.

METHODOLOGY:

A primarily qualitative approach was taken in conducting and completing this study. Beginning with literature review on policies, Acts and guidelines that govern the education systems in the country, the researchers then identified and engaged in formal and informal deliberations with a number of education experts of the country. Snowball method was used to identify the experts during this phase. The context and areas highlighted by experts in these consultations were used as background information for the study. The second phase was a 10-days long field visit to Namsaling, Ilam where

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3 Collaborative schools in this study can be understood as community schools that are being operated partly or fully by private individuals but are characterized by lesser pedagogical freedom compared to charter schools (Charter schools' operations is explained in detail in section 4).

4 Charter schools are schools that are publicly funded and managed by private entities. The management, however, remains more autonomous than traditional public schools. More on the same will be highlighted in the study.

the researchers studied three community schools and one private school operating in the area. We also engaged in consultations with a number stakeholders, including but not limited to: government officials, school heads and teachers, parent-teacher associations, school management committees and school inspectors. Information on the schools community and state-defined development plans and prospects for the area was collected using semi-structured interviews.

The third phase involved more consultations with experts on how to use and present collected data. Commonly identified themes and responses were structured to create broader ideas that are discussed in the paper. The strategy assisted in the identification of problems and the researchers' attempt to provide workable alternatives to improve community school practices in the country.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

The following study is largely a qualitative examination of community schools and is centered on data collected from schools in Namsaling VDC in Ilam of Eastern Nepal, which was the primary study area.

Shree Namsaling Higher Secondary School (a community school) of Namsaling, Ilam District was the focal school for the study with two other community schools – Shree Nepal Jyoti Lower Secondary School and Shree Sharada Lower Secondary School – being used as schools for further study and insight. Pashupati English Academy, in the same area, an institutional school, was also studied.

In Kathmandu, a collaborative school — Shree Jana Uddhar Secondary School — was studied for its innovative practices. In Bhaktapur, another school by the name of Medha Secondary School was also examined.

Because this study relies on case studies and specific field data and other secondary literature sources, it may not be completely representative of the entire geography and corresponding educational landscape of Nepal.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN NEPAL

Formal education has not had a very long history in Nepal. Prior to 1951, education opportunities for the general public were restricted, owing to the Rana autocracy (Sharma, 2008). Most children received normative and/or religious education either at home or religious centers such as 'Gurukuls', Buddhist 'Gumbas', 'Bahals', Muslim 'Madrasas' or Guthis (Sharma, 2008).

Community schools, synonymous now with schools receiving public funding in Nepal, emerged as schools that local communities managed. It began with locals 'hiring' teachers by raising money from parents and providing for the teacher's food and shelter (Sharma, 2008). As Sharma (2008) writes on the inception of active community participation in education in Nepal:

> Only after the dawn of democracy in 1951 people were free to open schools for their children. Communities all over the country started to open up schools with their own resources and initiative. The government gradually joined hands with the community in the development of schools with the provision of grants. Majorities of the schools set up under the popular initiative were operated mainly on the basis of different types of support available from the people in the communities.

1954 saw the establishment of the National Education Planning Commission and 1968 saw the formation of a National Education Advisory Board (Graner, 1998). A 'National Education Systems Plan' designed in 1971 was one of the state's first streamlined plans for education development (Graner, 1998). It led to nationalizing all existing schools in the country. However, this act was met with severe political resistance leading to numerous student rallies and other associated undertakings in the late

1970s (Bhattarai, 2009 as cited in Samriddhi Foundation, 2015). It was only in the 1980s – with the third amendment to the Education Act – that private schools were allowed to open, echoing early sounds of liberalization entering Nepal (Bhattarai, 2009 as cited in Samriddhi Foundation, 2015).

A main objective of the policy was to organize schools into three levels: primary, lower secondary and secondary. These plans gave the Ministry of Education (MoE) oversight authority over all public schools and led to the 'introduction of a national curriculum, textbooks, standards for teacher service, and supervision system for schools as well as an intensive financial commitment to education and educational management by the MoE in the national budget.' (Kafle et. al, 2012)

A 2012 World Bank report scrutinizes the effects of centralization in education in more detail and offers explanations on how the devolution of management to local bodies took place:

> In the decade after this policy of centralized education was implemented, locally-based initiatives were systematically dis-incentivized and community-level capacity to manage and supervise school activities, generate resources, and monitor education quality deteriorated. In an attempt to revive and enhance local ownership in school management, the 1999 Local Self Government Act articulated a policy that, for the first time in Nepal, transferred school management to local bodies, including District Development Committees (DDCs) and Village Development Committees (VDCs). The seventh amendment to the 2001 Education Act furthered this devolution to the community level by empowering School Management Committees (SMCs) and renaming all government schools "community schools." This community school system is the main mechanism for providing basic education in Nepal.

THE DIVISION OF EDUCATION SYSTEM IN NEPAL:

Three types of education institutions are officially recognized in the country[5]: government/community schools, institutional schools and religious schools. Government schools are further divided into three subcategories: that of being community aided, community managed and community unaided (ESP Working Paper Series, 2013).

Community-aided schools receive regular government grants in the form of teachers' salaries for approved positions, earmarked grants (example: for infrastructure), block grants and incentives grants. Community managed schools receive government grants but these grants are managed by locally elected school management committees. Community unaided do not receive regular government grants but receive fixed basic teacher salary grants and block grants (ESP Working Paper Series, 2013).

Institutional schools (also popularly known as private schools) are divided into being privately funded or managed by a trust board. Religious schools are segregated into Madrassa, Gumba/Vihar and Ashram/Gurukul (ESP Working Paper Series, 2013).

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5 *The eighth Amendment to the Education Act now requires new private schools to be registered as educational trusts.*

TYPES OF SCHOOLS IN NEPAL

Govt. /Community Schools	→	Community Aided	→	Govt. grants received
		Community Unaided	→	Partial Govt. support
		Community Managed	→	Govt. grants received but managed by community

| Institutional Schools | → | Private | → | Not funded by govt. & Profit making |
| | | Trust | → | Not funded by govt. & not Profit making |

Religious Schools	→	Madrasa	→	Partial govt. support & managed by Muslims
		Gumba/Vihar	→	Partial govt. support & managed by Buddhists
		Ashram/ Gurukul	→	Partial govt. support & managed by Hindus

Figure 1: Division of the education system in Nepal

Source: ESP Working Paper Series, 2013

Community schools can thus be understood as being interchangeable with public schools in this paper.

FUNDING OF COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN NEPAL

A large number of central and local governments are involved in the public education system. There is an established hierarchy and a number of key set roles assigned to each of these organs. Accordingly, their roles signify the amount of funds they will directly control:

Table 1. Budget Allocations by level of Educational institutions.

Total Education Budget is 63,918,839,000 NPR for the year 2011/12 or approximately US$718 million. Conversion US$1= 89 Nepalese Rupees.

Level	Institutions (Total Number)	Key Roles	Amount/Percentage of Education Budget Managed
National	Ministry of Education (1)	Formulate education policy	1.2% total education budget 768,412,000[6] NPR or approximately US$8.6 million
National	Department of Education (1)	Implement and monitor education program throughout country	
Regional	Regional Education Directories (5)	Monitor DEO's within the region.	
District	District Education Officer (75)	Provide support to schools with management and instructional issues Review social audit reports Serve as link between communities and the DoE and MoE	28.75% of total education budget. 18,377,646,000[7] NPR or approximately US$ 206,490,404[8]

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6 *Accurate calculation: Rs.767,026,068*
7 *Accurate calculation: Rs.18,376,662,212.5*
8 *Accurate calculation: Rs.206,425,000 (of 718 million USD)*

Village	Resource Centers (1091)	Provide support to schools with management and instructional issues Supervise social audit activities Supervise financial audit activities	50,000 NPR or approximately US$ 560 per RC for innovative work (example: instructional material prepared by the teacher at local level) and recurrent cost from DEO to run RC
Village	Village Development committees (39360)	Allocate budget for all sector development in VDC. Allocate 10 percent for educational development from the total 3 million budget of each VDC. Support community schools with additional resources form VDC	300,000 NPR or approximately US$ 3,370 per VDC or for VDC children's education
Community	School management committees (33160)	Assume overall responsibility of school management with financial support from DEO Generate additional resources for required facilities, buildings and teacher	14,029,000 NPR or approximately US$ 157, 530 (This figure also includes locally generated resources by the SMC to pay for additional physical buildings and salaries of locally-recruited teachers).
Community	Social audit committees (16500)	Assess school activities using format provided by DoE Submit report to head teacher to send to DEO No budget for SAC	1,000 NPR or approximately US$ 11.2 per school for financial audit.

Source: DoE 2011/12 in Kafle, et. al (2012)

CURRENT SCENARIO

The eighth amendment to the Education Act in 2016 has made a number of changes in the structure and management provisions related to education. Primary, lower-secondary and secondary schools have now been re-categorized into two tiers: basic education (grades 1-8) and secondary education (grades 9-12). School Leaving Examinations (SLC) which the students took in grade 10 will now be taken in grade 12. The Office of the Controller of Education has also introduced a new grading system in SLC examinations; instead of subject-wise marking system, the new system ranks examinees under a Grade Point Average (GPA) system. The new grading system, however, faced much criticism when first unveiled. The 2016 SLC results show that 97 percent students (425, 580 students of 437, 326 total number of appeared students) passed the exam while 'those scoring below D+ (GPA 1.2-1.6 equivalent to 30-39 percent) in at least one subject in their respective faculty' did not qualify for further education (Ghimire, 2016). A student now has to achieve at least GPA 2.0 to qualify for studying Science. New requirements require GPA 1.6 to study Management, Humanities and/or the Education stream. Similarly, according to HSEB, one must have at least D+ grades in five compulsory subjects - English, Nepali, Mathematics, Social Studies and Science - to get admission in Grade 11 (Ghimire, 2016). The new system has come under fire for limiting students in their access to certain streams (Ghimire, 2016). Confusion regarding the implementation of the new system has been rife – because the grading system was put in place without internalizing the practice in students (Shrestha, 2016).

Public education in Nepal has long been criticized for a number of reasons, primarily on the basis of its failure to deliver good results in national examinations. A large volume of secondary literature is continually found questioning the quality of education produced by public schools in Nepal. The World Bank (2001) finds high politicization of the teaching force, frequent transfer and changes of District Education Officers and changes in education rules and regulations, loss in local ownership of 'community' schools, a centralized education system and poor teacher management (as

cited in Samriddhi Foundation, 2015) as problems that have contributed to the deterioration of public schooling in Nepal.

By July 15, 2016, a total of 1339 public schools were merged (Aryal, 2016). Two major criteria given by the government to entail mergers/closures have been: zero enrollment/poor enrollment and/ or when schools are identified as ghost schools (Aryal, 2016). An increasing attraction to private schools has also been informally identified for the poor enrollment rates (Aryal, 2016). Consultations with experts[9] have revealed major problems with the public education system which we aimed to better understand with in-depth studies in numerous public schools. This led us to examining schools in Kathmandu and Eastern Nepal – data from which we discuss in the next chapter.

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9 *Samriddhi Foundation reserves the right to not reveal personally interviewed sources*

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN NEPAL

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY SITE

Ilam, which lies in the Eastern Development Region of Nepal, is one of the three mountain districts of the Mechi Zone (Ilam Municipality, 2013). It covers an area of 1,703 square kilometers and is nationally recognized for production of quality tea. The 2011 Nepal census reported Ilam to have a household population of 64,502 and total population of 290,254.

Namsaling VDC is located in the middle-east part of Ilam district. The VDC was reported to have 1,299 total households with total population of 5,752 people (2,778 males and 2,974 females) (Census Bureau, 2011).

SHREE NAMSALING HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL (SNHSS)

Shree Namsaling Higher Secondary School (SNHSS), established in 2006 BS (1949 AD), has a total of 312 students (182 female students and 130 male students) as measured by the last academic year (within 2016 March).

SNHSS, like all community schools in the country, receives its money from the government which is channeled to the school via the District Education Office (DEO). The DEO provides money to community schools in four installments throughout the academic year (beginning in April of each year). The fund is categorized under different headings. The number of teachers (appointed at different levels) primarily determines the amount of funding received.

Table 2: Total grant given to SNHSS for 2071-72 (2015) academic year

Stipulated headings	Funds received
Primary School Salaries	535078
Primary School Relief Salaries	167570
Secondary/ Lower Secondary School Salaries	2353071
Higher Secondary School Salaries	508660
School Miscellaneous Expenditure (Non-Salary)	50000
Basic Level Girls Scholarship Amount	37500
Basic Level Dalit Scholarship	12500
Primary School PCF Non-Salary	10050
Lower Secondary School PCF Non-Salary	19720
Secondary School PCF Non-Salary	26640
Basic Level Textbooks	8599
Lower Secondary Level Textbooks	40010
Secondary Level Textbooks	43976
Class 11/12 Textbooks for Dalits and Girls	19000
Secondary Education Scholarship	17000
Scholarships for those belonging to 'endangered' castes – Basic Level	2000
Scholarships for those belonging to 'endangered' castes – Secondary Level	3400
Scholarships for the Disabled - Basic Level	1000
Scholarships for the Disabled - Secondary Level	28000
Class 8 Examination Improvement Program	4534
Higher Secondary PCF Non-Salary	6600
Secondary School Dalit Scholarship	6000
Total	3978303.5

FUNDS RECEIVED BY SNHSS

Shree Namsaling Higher Secondary School, Namsaling

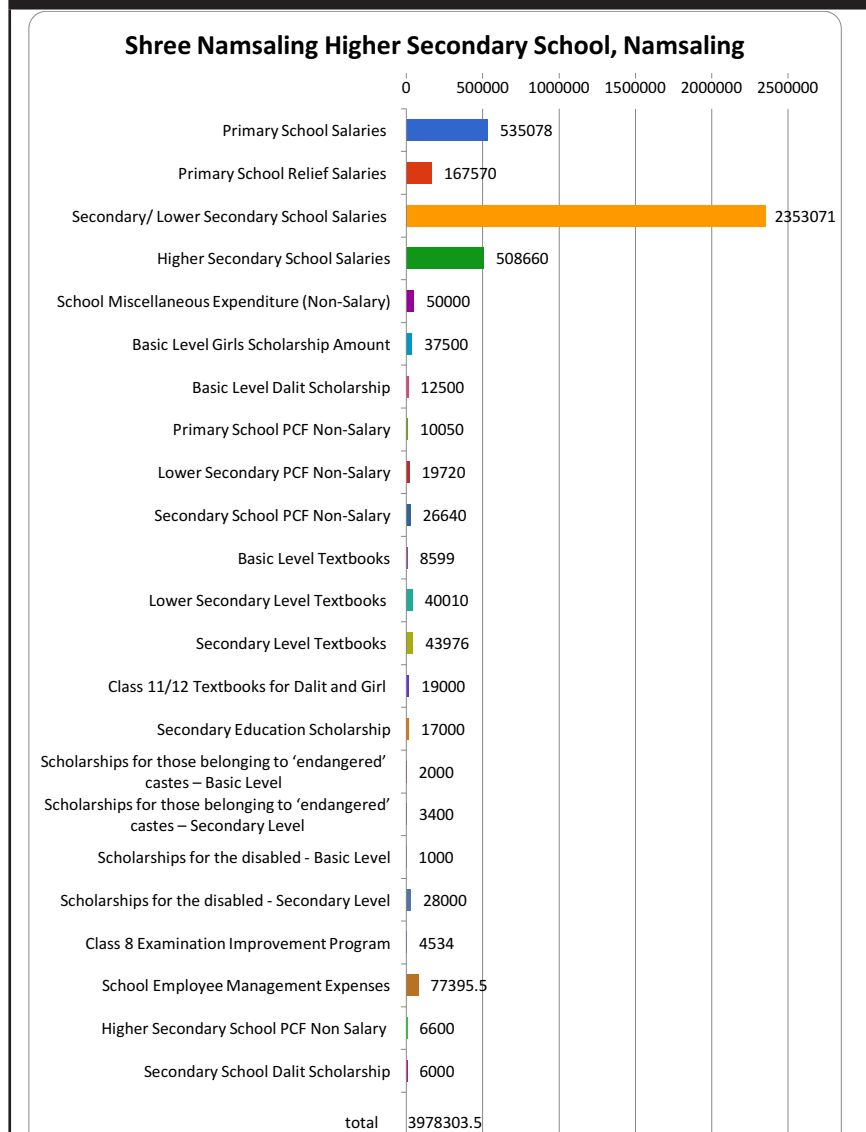| Category	Amount
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Secondary School PCF Non-Salary	26640
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Secondary Level Textbooks	43976
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Scholarships for those belonging to 'endangered' castes – Secondary Level	3400
Scholarships for the disabled - Basic Level	1000
Scholarships for the disabled - Secondary Level	28000
Class 8 Examination Improvement Program	4534
School Employee Management Expenses	77395.5
Higher Secondary School PCF Non Salary	6600
Secondary School Dalit Scholarship	6000
total	3978303.5

Figure 2: Funds specifications as allocated to SNHSS for 2072/73 (2015/16)

As can be seen from the figure 2, 89% of all funds are given under headings pertaining to salary – primary school salary, primary school relief, lower secondary/secondary school salary and higher secondary school salary. Scholarships make up less than 5% of the total funds. It is evident that most of the grant is taken up by recurrent expenditure, leaving little room for expenses other than immediate necessities (such as rebuilding dying infrastructure) or investing in improving pedagogy (for instance: by re-stocking the library and/or investing in extra curricular activities). While schools are allowed to request for more grants during the school year for infrastructural needs, schools visited complained of having insufficient funds even for putting doors in all classrooms.

THE MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE
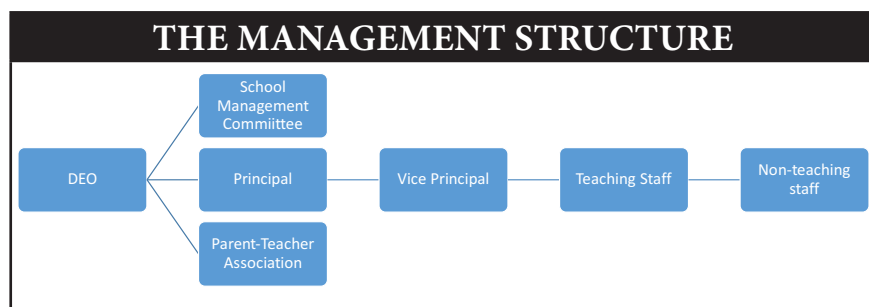
Figure 3: Operation-management structure in community schools

The DEO lies at the apex of the management of education on a district level. The school is headed by the Principal, also colloquially known as the Headmaster. School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) flank the Principal in making important decisions regarding the school. The SMC exercises considerably more power over school decisions than the PTA, including hiring teachers and overseeing school financials, details of which will be discussed later in the paper.

TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND TRAININGS

The eight amendment to the Education Act states that teacher recruitment shall be overseen by a Teachers Service Commission (governed by the Teacher Service Commission Acts, 2015). The

service commission is designed to oversee teacher and/or other staff appointments and promotions whenever/wherever necessary in public schools. When the school is defined by community management, this role can be fulfilled by the SMC when the TSC is unable to do so.

According to the eighth amendment, the District Education Office of the area is expected to provide the Department of Education with descriptions of teacher needs (according to subjects and numbers required) every six months. The Department of Education shall then check with the concerned school about the requirements and write to the Teachers Service Commission asking them to appoint teachers at required places.

The Teachers Service Commission then formally invites (through advertisements) applications from qualified teachers to apply for required positions. Prior to administering an open call for applications, it internally circulates this requirement asking qualified temporary teachers to apply for the posts. The Act lists the nature of temporary teachers who could be eligible applicants. If temporary teachers alone are not able fill these posts, only then is the open call administered. In selecting teachers from the open call, the eighth amendment states that there shall be a written examination, an interview and an optional practical examination.

SMCs are also allowed to hire teachers – if, as previously stated, the schools are defined by community management. Additionally, though public schools usually have 'public school teachers' (those that have passed the public school teacher examinations administered by the Teachers Service Commission), it is not uncommon to for these schools to hire private teachers. Several community school heads spoken to revealed that they continually hired private teachers (especially for subjects such as Mathematics or English). They are salaried teachers but do not receive additional benefits that public school teachers do (such as insurance and pension schemes). Their hiring is usually temporary in nature. The school usually manages these teachers' incomes by raising small amounts from students who will be taught by the teacher in question. Private school teachers are becoming more common in public schools because, as our local consultations with community school heads revealed, public school teachers have a higher propensity to apply into bureaucratic eligibility.

COURSE AND CURRICULUM

The course and curriculum of both institutional and public schools is based on the National Curriculum Framework and is designed by the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) – which incorporates suggestions from the National Curriculum Development and Evaluation Council and line agencies under the MOE.

While public schools are usually found to follow the curriculum narrowly, private schools can be found to supplement the stipulated curriculum with more books, often from foreign presses, particularly India – as found from consultations with experts.

Table 3: Curriculum Stipulation for Schools in Nepal

Level	Stage/ Stream	Major area of learning	Subject
Basic Education Grade 1-8	First stage (Grade 1-3)	Language, Mathematics, Social Studies, Creative Arts, Local need based education	Based on integrated curriculum, an activity book covering the major areas of learning should be developed and implemented accordingly.
	Second stage (Grade 4-5)	Nepali, English, Mathematics, Social Studies.	Compulsory: Nepali, English, Mathematics, Social studies. School can select two local need based additional subjects. The curriculum for social studies should be local need based and it should integrate subjects like Science, Health and Physical Education
	Third Stage(Grade 9-12)	Language, Mathematics, Social studies, Sciences,	Compulsory: Nepali, English, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science. Optional First: Language/ others Optional Second: Local subject (vocation, business and trade and others)

Secondary Education (Grade 9 & 12)	General Stream (Grade 9-12)	General Stream: Language, Science, Mathematics, Social studies, Local subject	According to single track system, necessary arrangement will be made
	Vocational stream (Grade 9 - 12)	Vocational/ Technical stream: agriculture, forestry science, medical science, engineering.	Considering the nature and specialties of the subject areas, necessary provision will be made on the basis of the suggestions and recommendations provided by the special technical taskforce

Source: National Curriculum Framework for School Education in Nepal, 2007

The current Curriculum Framework, as shown in table 3, is expected to undergo changes once work begins on implementing the School Sector Reform Project (SSRP) 2016-2023 (The Himalayan Times, 2016). The extent to which the revision will take into account local concerns remains to be seen. Talks with the School Management Committee Federation[10] emphasized that most of the course curriculum was fairly theoretical in nature with little focus on honing applicable life skills.

Table 4: Shree Namsaling Higher Secondary School 2071 BS (2014/15) examination results

Grade	Appeared in final examination (in no.s)	Passed in final examination (in no.s)	Pass percentage
1	13	6	47
2	13	9	60
3	15	10	67
4	13	13	100
5	12	12	100
6	30	29	97
7	40	40	100
8	40	36	90
9	89	89	100
10	74	16	22
11	8	2	25
12	15	3	20

10 *The SMC Federation is an umbrella organization of approximately 30 thousand community schools in the country and operates from Kathmandu.*

As can be seen from the above table 4, pass percentages at different grade levels for SNHSS are fluctuating through the years. One case in point is the difference of pass percentage between grades 9 and 10. While there seems to be a 100% pass percentage rate in grade 9, it dramatically slips to 22% in grade 10. These numbers beg questioning – are teachers to blame or is it the course structure itself?

THE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

School Management Committees (SMC)s have been a staple feature of public schools in Nepal for long, but they were made mandatory across all public and private schools only after 2001 (Rida Nepal as cited in UNESCO, n.d.). Until this amendment, there was 'little or no opportunity for true parents or local community members to be represented on the committee' because the appointments were primarily political in nature (Rida Nepal as cited in UNESCO, n.d.).

While the seventh amendment to the Education Act in 2058 B.S. (2001) brought about this mandatory implementation as stated above, the new eighth amendment of 2072 B.S. (2016) has changed the structure of the SMC.

The eighth amendment to the Education Act requires community school SMCs to be formed with the following members: [11]

(a) Four persons, including two females, selected by the parents among themselves – Members

(b) The Ward President of the concerned Ward of the Village Development Committee or Municipality where the school is situated or a nominated candidate from the ward from the ward committee – Member

(c) Two people (with one person being female) including one person nominated by School Management Committee from among the founder of the school/local intellectuals/educationists/someone

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11 (Translated by the author from the Eighth Amendment to the Education Act of 1971)

who has supported the school for a continual period of ten years OR one person nominated by School Management Committee from among donors to the school who have donated at least 10 lakh rupees or more in cash or in kind

(d) One person selected by the concerned school teachers from among themselves –Member

(e) Headmaster of the school – Member Secretary

The eighth amendment also states that the chairperson of the committee will be selected from those listed in (a), (b) and (c) sub-sections. In event of the chairperson having not been selected, the senior-most person of the committee will commence chairperson duties until a chair is elected.

There are also additional provisions for schools providing special classes for the physically disadvantaged where at least 50 percent of members should be parents/guardians of physically disadvantaged children and at least one physically disadvantaged person is to be a member of inclusive schools.

The structure of SMCs of private schools, on the other hand, remains as prescribed by the seventh amendment:

(a) One person nominated by the District Education Officer on the recommendation of concerned school from the Founder or the Investor of the school - Chairperson

(b) One person nominated by School Management Committee from among the parents - Member

(c) The Ward President of the concerned Ward of the Village Development Committee or Municipality where the school is situated - Member

(d) One person from among the local intellectuals or educationists

nominated by the Village Development Community or Municipality - Member

(e) School supervisor of the concerned area - Member

(f) One person selected by the concerned school teachers from among themselves - Member

(g) The Headmaster of the school – Member Secretary

The tenure for the chair and members remains two years as provisioned by the seventh amendment. As noted by Rida Nepal and cited by UNESCO (n.d.), on the selection of SMC members before the eighth amendment, *"The parent representatives are elected through (direct) elections. Every school prepares the list eligible (of) voters from among the parents or guardians of children attending schools. The parent assembly finalizes the list of SMC. This prevents local elites or non-parents (from) becoming officials of the SMC."*

The functions of the SMC have been stated differently for those of community schools and those of institutional schools. Major functions, as stated by the seventh amendment, include:

a. Resource mobilization (particularly financial)

b. Records maintenance (academic, financial and properties of the school)

c. Budget sanctioning

d. Maintaining school grounds and properties

e. Assigning duties to new teachers

f. Auditing school reports on time

g. Carrying out instructions as issued by the District Education Committee and District Education Office

h. Appointing eligible candidates who have obtained a Teaching License from the Teacher Service Commission when needed on basis of open competition and arrange for the remuneration, facilities and the promotion of teachers thus appointed

i. Form Parent-Teacher Association as specified in order to enhance academic standard.

Duties of the SMC for institutional schools have been prescribed by the seventh amendment with a few differences from that of community schools:

a. Mobilize resources

b. Implement curriculum and textbooks approved by the Government and acquire approval from the Curriculum Development Center when using other supplementary books

c. Appoint eligible and qualified teachers and pay them according to the scale fixed by the Government

d. Carry out directions issued by the Government

It was noted in interviews taken that community schools' SMC elections are seen as a fairly important event. Teachers and community members of Namsaling were quick to point out that SMC elections in the local schools were no different than party elections. Getting into the SMC seemed to be a quick and easy way of reaching an influential position in the community and being able to exert influence on the way an institution (here, the school) utilizes its resources. In fact, the amount of money allocated to the school requires signatures only of the school Headmaster (Principal) and the chair of the SMC for mobilization. This gives tremendous power to these two positions in particular.

SOCIAL AUDITS

'Social audits are a process of measuring and appraising various aspects of school management through the direct participation of and interaction between school stakeholders' (The World Bank, 2012). They are a means of assessing whether schools meet set objectives as decided by the community and other interested parties who are directly or indirectly affected by the successful running of the school.

Social audits in Nepal were introduced with support of the World Bank under the Community School Support Project (CSSP) in 2003 (The World Bank, 2012). The Department of Education (DoE) developed a 'Social Audit Guidelines' document soon thereafter as a framework for the auditing process. Social audits have been mandatory in all publicly-supported community schools in Nepal since 2009 (The World Bank, 2012).

The social audit of community schools is to be carried out by a 6-member Social Audit Committee (SAC). According to the World Bank (2012), the committee is inclusive of:

- The Chairperson of Parent–Teacher Association (PTA) - Coordinator
- Two parents or guardians (including one female) of children studying in the school, nominated by the PTA Members
- The Chairperson of the Ward where school is located Member - Secretary
- A teacher, nominated by the Head Teacher Member
- An intellectual nominated by the PTA Member
- In addition, one male and one female student, each first position holders in the highest grade of the school, participate as observers.

Social audits have been envisioned by the DoE to be effective at four key levels. The tool is supposed to be more of an administrative tool that translates into a good governance tool on the policy level. However, in a study carried out by the DoE itself, their analysis on a grassroots level showed that most parents at community schools were unaware of the social audit practice. This greatly reduces its abilities as a truly democratic tool.

Social audits are carried out in the month of Bhadra (mid-August to mid-September) and submitted to the SMC and the school supervisor by the 15th of the following Nepali calendar month (The World Bank, 2012). After submission, a supervisor provides comments, if any, on the report and after incorporating them, it is submitted respective District Education Office (DEO) within one month receiving the report (The World Bank, 2012).

Social audits in Shree Namsaling Higher Secondary School had been stalled from 2010 to 2015 because of *'a lack of consensus amongst the school stakeholders'[12]* . Hence it took place after a gap of five years in presence of local political party heads and representatives, teachers, chosen students and parents (Personal Communication, Name Withheld). Interestingly, the document begins with addressing local political party heads and representatives – who are technically not to be present during social audits, but probably do so under the 'intellectual' category as stipulated by the guideline.

The social audit is supposed to be a tool to scrutinize the financial audits of the school, major decisions regarding management and administration made during the school year, and final examination results of students. While it is a commendable practice in policy, its implementation is far from active. Most parents seem unaware of the practice.

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12   *Language translated from Nepali as presented in the 2071/72 (2015) school audit document*

AN EXAMINATION OF THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL SYSTEM

This section aims to provide an in-depth examination of problems as identified in the field, and those identified by education experts. It is thus a deliberation on issues which will later move on to trying to understand if innovative education ventures could address these issues.

Analysis has been carried out primarily in terms of thematic analysis – with overarching themes being identified and examined. Larger themes were identified first in the questionnaire designing phase itself, which was cross-examined once data was collected. Literature review, consultations with sectorial experts and examination of field data led to the formulation of a number of themes that will be covered in this section.

A. HEAVY POLITICAL INFILTRATION IN SCHOOLS

One of the biggest problems identified was the absolute stronghold that local politicians and political party representatives had over the school. As previously mentioned, the school (SNHSS) was seen as an active ground for political breeding. SMC elections in a large number of community schools are treated as important as local body elections. One of the main reasons for this is because local elections have not been held in Nepal since 1997. When the then Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba 'dissolved municipality and village councils without new local elections in 2002, cartels of unelected local politicians (began to) make all decisions' (Nepali Times, April-May 2016). Because local office positions could not be contested over due to lack of elections, most party representatives set sights on other authority wielding bodies – one amongst which is the SMC. Another similar example is political infiltration in Community Forest User Groups (The Rising Nepal, n.d.).

Interviews with locals revealed that prospective candidates spent a lot of time and money to ensure that parents and guardians vote them into the SMC. The SMC, as seen previously, is given a lot of power over re-sources of the school – including human and financial resources. It has the

power to hire teachers in particular (when deemed urgent). As one report in The Rising Nepal (n.d.) on SMCs notes:

> The SMCs can exercise significant clout in hiring, giving promotion and firing teachers. Moreover, the SMCs have been instrumental in employing teachers who have similar political affiliations to their own. The material and local political motivations and incentives are some of the key reasons, as to why the SMC elections are contested in the fiercest manner.

News on SMC elections in more rural areas is far from unusual. One news clipping cites how prospective candidates hailing from different political parties fought for these positions while engaging in spending personal financial resources for the same (Republica Daily, September 2016).

B. NEPOTISTIC APPOINTMENTS AND LACK OF TEACHER ACCOUNTABILITY

Heavy political infiltration into the SMCs which have the power to hire teachers then results in a number of nepotistic appointments. Teachers are hired not based on what they know but who they know.

In a 2013 study by Transparency International on education, there is a short discussion devoted to understanding corruption and nepotism in Nepal's education system. It notes how SMCs hire teachers as 'relief teachers' when the need arises – usually citing urgent needs of placements before school session begins:

> In Nepal, the Teachers' Service Commission is responsible for the selection of teachers. In practice, however, school management committees exercise authority to appoint teachers in local schools, especially when there is no confirmed limit on allocated positions or when there is a need for temporary arrangements. Temporary arrangements take place primarily through the Rahat Darbandi, a subsidy quota that can be used by local school management

committees, by local school management committees and endorsed by the relevant district education office (D.E.O.), until a confirmed appointment is made. Under the subsidy quota, teachers are appointed by the local school management committee, which typically consists of parent representatives, the ward president of the village development committee (VDC), local intellectuals and educationalists, the founder of the school, a donor representative, a teacher from the school and the school headmaster.

Although the hiring decisions of such committees are supposed to be overseen by the local DEO, indifference on the part of the DEO's can result in school management committees being monopolized for the self-interest of a few. This often leads to a school headmaster exerting undue influence over other committee members, on the assumption that the headmaster has a greater (authority) insofar as the selection of teaching faculty is concerned; this gives rise to situations in which recruited teachers do not meet the qualification criteria, with no scrutiny whatsoever being carried out to validate the process.

Source: Global Corruption Report: Education by Transparency International – 2013

There is thus little guarantee that these nepotistic appointments result in good teachers being hired. This is also a probable cause for decreased performance in community schools – for a number of these positions are filled by those hired according to political affiliation.

C. OUTDATED CURRICULUM

One of the major grievances of the teachers spoken to was directed towards an outdated course and curriculum. The curriculum of most subjects, they stated, had not been revised for more than the stipulated time frame in law (which states that the course would be revised every 5 years and completely updated every 10 - Education Act, 2002). The biggest problemsthat the teachers cited had to do with the lack of competent material in the course, an absence of development of technology-aided approaches to teaching, and the course material itself. English in particular seemed to have chapters that were 'too easy' or 'too hard', according to a

local English teacher. The quality of the textbooks was also demotivating, with the books having too many spelling errors and the paper quality also being substandard, when compared to those provided by private schools.

A major problem lies with the editing, or lack thereof, of course material (Mani, 2000). Teachers often have to make necessary corrections to the materials on the textbook. Textbooks seem to be mass-produced with little or no editing (Mani, 2000).

Virility

The feeling of proudness on having children is called virility. Many people show their society being successful in life by giving birth to a child. Sterile people are hated by society. Such couples are always dominated by the couples or persons who have child or children. A parent having children feels proud which leads to numerous children.

Flourishing family's prestige

Family void of son is trivial. The concept of male birth in a family is an orthodox view of traditional people. They are running after such belief so does not accept the existence of that family which lacks son. Due to son preference, many couples wait for son though they have already a half dozen of daughters. Son is supposed to flourish the family's prestige.

Source: Mani, 2000

D. LACK OF ACTIVE MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The Ilam DEO, when visited, insisted that school inspections were carried out on a monthly basis. School inspectors – also more formally known as school supervisors – are responsible for a host of duties when it comes to monitoring community schools. Education Rules, 2059 (2002) clearly lays down the roles and responsibilities of School Inspectors which are inclusive of:

a. Supervise/cause to supervise the school at least once in a month and hold discussions with the Headmaster and SMC about supervision and monitoring

b. To hold discussions with the Headmaster, Parents, Teachers Association and teachers as to whether or not the school is being run regularly in accordance to law, and whether the school has sufficient physical facilities, resources and teaching. Additionally, also enquire about teaching standards and resource utilization in the school.

c. Forward school supervision report every month to Village Education Committee /Municipality and District Education Officer

There are only five tenured school inspectors for the district of Ilam (Personal communication, Name withheld). (Name, Personal communication, full date). For a district with 426 community schools, this number is alarmingly low. The vice-principal and some of the oldest teachers at Shree Namsaling Higher Secondary School stated that they had not been visited by the school inspector in over 10 years.

Additionally, a major monitoring tool as discussed previously is Social Auditing. Unfortunately, it goes either unused or is poorly implemented because of the limited (or non-existent) knowledge of the parents about the tool. At this point, it would be important to note that a large number of parents who send their children to nearby community schools are engaged in manual labor. This renders them unable to make the time to attend these consultations even if the school makes an attempt to notify them. Innovation is key to encouraging guardians to sit in on these forums; this will be discussed in upcoming sections.

Based on these examinations, it is easy to see that all these problems are interlinked. If we begin with the problem of political infiltration, it branches out to poor management and undemocratic committees. Subsequently, these undemocratic committees appoint a number of teachers based on party affiliations/family links.

In addition to these issues, the problem of ghost schools has also cropped up time and again. A 2015 report released by the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA), Nepal has listed the problem of ghost schools under instances of corruption in education in the country.

There were cases where teachers have been appointed against regulations and "ghost schools" *(jhole bidyalaya)* established to embezzle annual subsidy granted by the government in the form of teachers' salaries and allowances, administrative expenses, student scholarships and physical construction works. District Education Officer, School Supervisor, Resource Person, Head teachers including Chairperson of the School Management Committee have all been found to be involved in the operation of ghost schools.

(CIAA, 2015)

Lack of well-established monitoring has caused such situations to thrive. Absence of a robust education auditing mechanism directed by independently commissioned auditors is one of identified causes (Acharya, 2011).

LOOKING FOR POSSIBILITIES IN EDUCATION INNOVATION: CHARTER SCHOOLS

In light of the fairly dismal performance of community schools, we have tried to identify if these public schools can be restructured using global education innovations. A large number of problems of public schools seem to stem from ineffective management committees that have often been undemocratically elected. There are other associated problems that are leading to continual failure of community school performance, including absence of grassroots level interactions when designing course and curriculum – or at least allowing public schools to benefit from supplementary materials and invest in better teaching practices. The lack of implementation of effective monitoring systems, and teacher unaccountability remain among other challenges.

There has been much research that aims to forward better strategies for education improvement, but one that has been rarely explored in Nepal is the feasibility of management partnerships between private players /educators and public schools. Private schools in Nepal are considered to be better models of management because they are not active breeding grounds for political activity. Private schools are driven by profit motives and their owners are deeply engaged in the day to day management of teachers and other oversight related activities. Accountability is also better practiced in private schools because there is a direct exchange of money for educational services. Teachers are contractual employees so there is little sense of long term job security. While it is understood that private schools are commonly seen as profit-oriented and target audiences who can afford their services, there has been an abundance of low-cost private schools booming in Nepal (Samriddhi Foundation, 2015). Private schools in Nepal are hardly all virtuous and have invited public ire time and again. For instance, private schools have come under fire for being unpredictable when it comes to fees hike from one year to the next (Jha, 2003). In 2012, the Supreme Court issued an order barring private schools from increasing their fees for three years (Budathoki, 2016). While unpredictability in school fees is problematic to parents (who find they have to pay higher fees

rather than change schools which is an even costlier affair), private schools cannot be barred from revising their fee structures completely. It is natural for schooling costs to follow inflation rates. However, predictability in increments would definitely be desirable.

There have been numerous innovations around the world in education to address these problems of inefficiency in public schools and craft affordable education providers. One of these innovations is a collaborative management system where schools are publicly funded but are managed by private players. These models are also popularly referred to as **charter schools.**

CHARTER SCHOOLS

A charter school is a public school that is exempt from most state and local regulations, and is accountable for 'results' to a sponsoring public body, usually a state or local school board. Staff and students are recruited rather than assigned (Finn et. al, 2008). 'Almost anyone' can launch and run a charter school, from parent or teacher groups to community organizations. (Finn et. al, 2008). A typical charter runs for five years (Finn et. al, 2008). It may not be renewed if stipulated academic goals are not met and can be revoked for legal or regulatory violations. They are characterized by a 'charter' – which is a legal document between state/state organs responsible for overseeing public schools and the interested party (Hoxby, 2005).

A charter school thus operates in a manner similar to the one described above. They share common characteristics with private schools on two aspects, one being independence and the other being choice. As explained by Finn et.al (2008), independence is marked by these schools' self-governance. They exercise control over their 'curriculum, instruction, staffing, budget, internal organization, calendar, schedule, and much more'. Secondly, they are schools of choice as they are not characterized by compulsory enrollment.

Unlike American school districts, Nepal does not have compulsory school enrollment stipulated by the area in which the child resides. But

because there are fewer non-government schools compared to government schools in rural Nepal, choice is often limited to government institutions.

Charter schools receive funds on a per child basis (Hoxby, 2005). They do not have admission tests like private schools do, and have to take in any child who comes in for admission. However, they are often not as stringent about teacher certification as public schools (Hoxby, 2005). Charter schools are usually non-profit in nature, and management may either be supported by the charter holders themselves or it may be outsourced to school management organizations (Hoxby, 2005). Charters signed for taking over schools are typically five years long or could be as long as 15 years (Finn et.al, 2008).

The phrase was coined by a certain Albert Shanker, who was the long-time president of the American Federation of Teachers. Shanker visualized a new form of schooling, where teachers would be voluntarily allowed to sign 'charters' and run schools. The idea snowballed, and in 1989, Ray Budde wrote on the concept in an article called "Education by Charter" (Finn et.al, 2008). The charter movement proved important because it made flexible the definition of public schools. Schools that were paid publicly but did not necessarily need to be managed by the state. The important thing was that its administration needed to be transparent and accountable. Additionally, as Finn et. al. (2008) supplements the same idea, 'what matters most is not the resources a school commands or the rules it obeys, but the results it produces.'
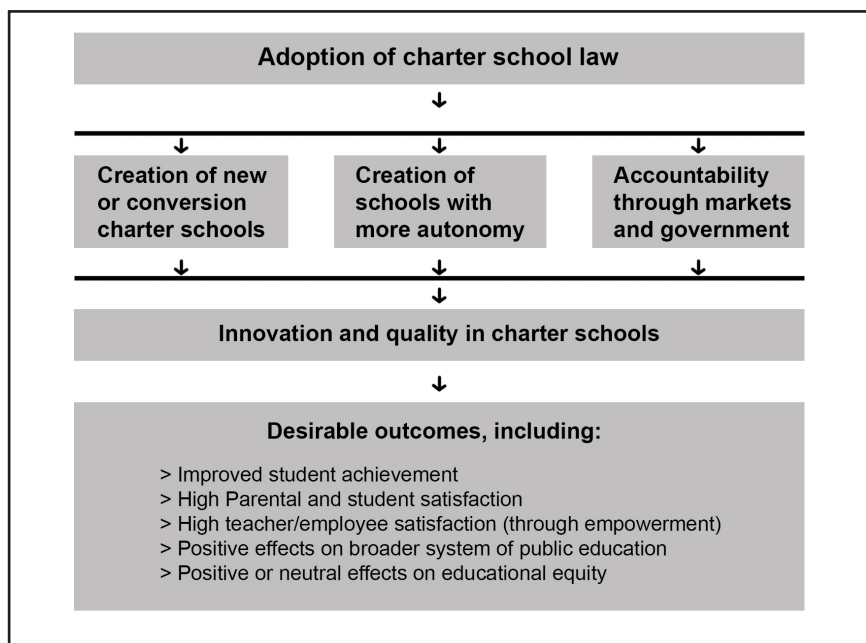
Adoption of charter school law

↓

Creation of new or conversion charter schools	Creation of schools with more autonomy	Accountability through markets and government

↓ ↓ ↓

Innovation and quality in charter schools

↓

Desirable outcomes, including:

> Improved student achievement
> High Parental and student satisfaction
> High teacher/employee satisfaction (through empowerment)
> Positive effects on broader system of public education
> Positive or neutral effects on educational equity

Figure 4: Charter school idea and desirable outcome

Source: A Decade of Charter Schools, Bulkey and Fisher, 2003

Supporters of the charter school movement cite two broad reasons for its adoption (Hoxby, 2005). The first reason is the flexibility that is allowed to them – making them better able to serve student needs (Hoxby, 2005). The second is that because charter schools depend on student enrollment to run, they become automatically student oriented, because funds are tied to number of students (Hoxby, 2005).

There are admittedly mixed results when it comes to student's achievement through adoption of charter schools, particularly because these schools are heterogeneous in nature (Hoxby, 2005). This makes comparison difficult. But growing support for this movement and its ability to be contextualized to different places makes this an engaging alternative for Nepal.

We have examined until now the status of public schools in the country, and also looked at a viable alternative management system. This section will examine how we can address the shortcomings of the public schools in Nepal by utilizing elements of charter and private schools.

Here we look at different aspects of public schools operation (in terms of management and administration) and also visualize how they can be bettered to ensure quality education.

A. MODEL OF OPERATION – FINANCING

In charter or collaborative schools, the schools receive a bulk amount of money from school authorities (local state education offices or those stipulated in their charters). Public schools in Nepal, on the other hand, receive money from the DEO on a quarterly basis[13] . Charter schools are financed in slightly different way than Nepal's current financing model of public schools. Ascher (2004) states that their model of financing depends on a combination of public and private grants. They receive per pupil funding allocations from the state and/or local district. However, they may receive as low as only 75 percent of the per-child funding allocations compared to traditional US public schools. They also thus rely heavily on private grants and donations from philanthropists and charitable institutions (Ascher, 2004).

While charter schools could acquire loans for infrastructural and other developments (such as a mortgage loan) (Ascher, 2004), the loan model may not be the readily applicable in Nepal. In the USA, some of these loan grantees include landlords, commercial banks, and non-profit charter school developers among others (Keeney, 2011). Because of the unfamiliarity of the charter school model in education policy so far, it could be difficult to convince banks and other relevant agents initially to loan such experiments. Thus, for initial exploration, utilizing existing public funds may be the most suitable mechanism.

13 The schools could also receive in-kind donations from interested parties.

Nepalese public schools receive money on particular headings as shown in Table 2. Additionally, public schools in the country are allowed additional allowance from school authorities for infrastructural upgrades. This weakens school autonomy on what they can and cannot spend. Most of the money, as can be seen from Table 2, is spent on recurrent expenditure – mainly salaries. Shree Namsaling Higher Secondary in 2071-72 (2015) alone spent 89% of its total grant on salaries (13% on primary level salaries, 4% on Primary level relief salaries, 59% on Secondary/ Lower Secondary level salaries and 13% on Higher Secondary level salaries). This leaves little else to be spent on educational expenses such as employing technological tools for teaching or even simple ideas like library expansion. However, if accountability policies and their implementation mechanisms are not strong, simply giving flexibility can create space for fiscal mismanagement. Thus, it becomes important to ensure accountability checks and built into more autonomous systems. These checks can be in forms of well-spaced monitoring and evaluation mechanisms carried out either by state actors or independently-hired practitioners.

Additionally, we also need to focus on how education would be structured under a federal governance system, now that Nepal is moving towards its realization. A look at popular federal practices across the world show a marked division of funding power across three actors: the federal government, the state government, and the local government[14] .

Thus, a charter school funding model based on per-pupil calculations could be designed. The prototypical school could identify this cost based on a geographical cost of living index and a formula could be developed to suit that context.

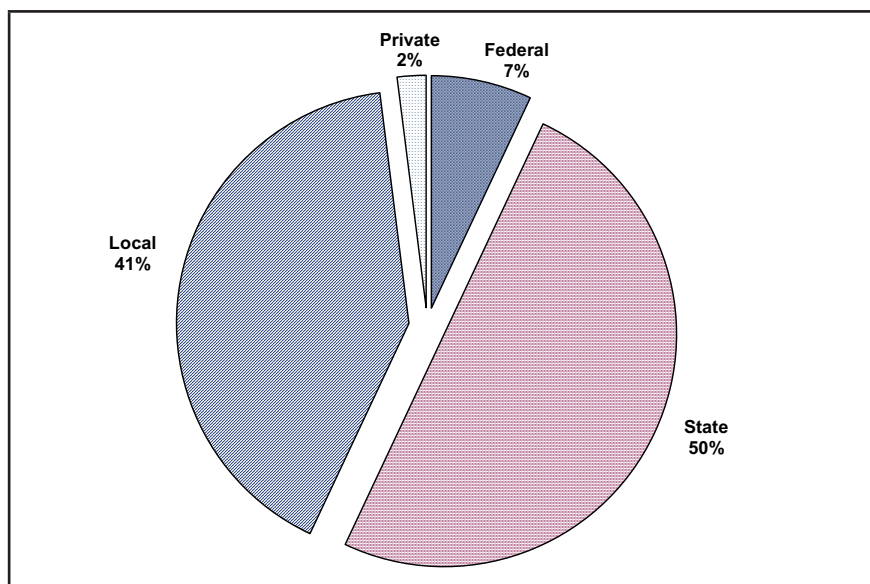14 *In the following sections, the paper looks at the American system as a model charter-school funding system*

Figure 5: Division of funding received by public schools in the USA

Source: Education in the United States: A brief overview, US Department of Education, 2005.

It is important to visualize the idea of how this will occur in Nepal. The Constitution of Nepal 2015 is vague on how education will shape up in federal Nepal. It does state that basic education will be compulsory and free and work will be ongoing to ensure free secondary education as well. Under list of powers, the Federal government has no precisely designated powers pertaining to education (Constitution of Nepal, 2015). The State government has under its jurisdiction 'state universities, higher education, libraries, and museums' (Constitution of Nepal, 2015) while local level powers will preside over matters of 'basic and free education' (Constitution of Nepal, 2015). Under concurrent powers of Federation, State and Local Level, their combined jurisdiction lies over 'education, health and newspapers' (Constitution of Nepal, 2015).

The eighth Amendment to Education Act states that a National Education Council will be established in order to aid the Federal government in designing education related policies.

According to the US Department of Education (2005), state Governments in the USA are responsible for the following:

- Developing curriculum guidelines and performance standards;
- Providing technical assistance to school districts and schools;
- Licensing private elementary and secondary schools to operate within their jurisdictions;
- Licensing or certifying school teachers and administrators;
- Administering statewide student achievement tests;
- Developing accountability plans and reporting on student performance to the U.S. Department of Education;
- Defining minimum requirements for high school graduation;
- Distributing state and federal funding to school districts; and
- Establishing the minimum number of school days per year.

While local education bodies, such as the school districts (also known as LEAs – Local Education Authorities)[15], are responsible for the following:

- Determining the budget;
- Allocating money to individual schools and programs;
- Hiring teachers and other staff;
- Preparing and disseminating annual reports on student performance;
- Setting teacher and administrator salaries;
- Implementing the curriculum;
- Planning and administering teacher in-service training;
- Coordinating the transportation of students on school buses;
- Constructing and maintaining school buildings; and
- Purchasing equipment and supplies.

In structuring new governments, we need to look at this division of power as well. The division could largely entail that the center – the Ministry of Education – becomes a coalescing force for all schools. Their focus would have to be on examining whether laws and policies are implement-

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15   *In the USA, State Education Agencies are known as SEAS. Each charter school in DC is considered its own LEA.*

ed well and carry out timely checks to ensure what new laws and policies could help address problem areas.

Experts opine that the current education budget is largely drawn via a top-down approach, with little importance given to understanding how much of the state's resources actually reach an individual student. The District of Columbia Public School (DCPS) employs a Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF) when handing over grants to schools. The idea can be understood as presented in the following paragraph, as described by Focus DC (2010):

> The UPSFF is used to determine annual operating funding for the District's traditional and charter public schools. It also controls facilities funding for the public charter schools.
> …
> Funding under the UPSFF is a straightforward mathematical process. First, each District-resident student enrolled in a DC public school is provided with a "foundation level" of funding, projected at $8,945 for FY 2010 (the foundation level is adjusted each year for inflation and can be increased or decreased by legislation). To the foundation are added various additional amounts, called "weightings," for students at certain grade levels and for students with special needs.
>
> The funding derived under the formula follows the student. That is, DCPS receives formula-funding for every student who enrolls in a DCPS school. Each public charter school receives formula-funding for every student who enrolls in that school.
>
> The base (called the foundation) is determined by using basic needs of the students, such as average cost of hiring a certain pool of teachers, infrastructure payments and other educational materials.
>
> "Foundation" or "foundation level" means the amount of funding per weighted student needed to provide adequate regular education services to students. Regular education services do not include

special education, language minority education, summer school, capital costs, state education agency functions or services funded through federal and other non-appropriated revenue sources.
(DC code §38-2901-12)

For instance, the budget for education – once Nepal moves on to implementation of federalism – will come from local, state, and federal bodies. This will cause one lump sum of budget to be acquired. Currently, this budget is distributed in a top-down manner where, primarily, the number of teachers determines how much funding is allocated to one public school. However, with a bottom-up approach as employed by the DCPS, we could shift the focus on schools being student-centered and not teacher-centered when it comes to fund allocation. DCPS does this by determining the projected number of students that will enroll in the coming year.

For the 2015 Fiscal Year, the foundation level for education services for DC charter schools is $9,492 per student (DC code §38-2901-12).

According to (Moon and Stewart, 2016), this is calculated by looking at the following:

(1) Analysis of four years of historical trends of enrollment
(2) Adjustment of kindergarten numbers based on birthrate trends
(3) Analysis and accounting of school-based trends of decreasing or increasing enrollment
(4) Consideration of aggregate numbers based on the four-year trends

Using similar ideas, a per-pupil expenditure could be determined. A per-pupil expenditure based formula will be an important change for education funds allocation because then funds that the school receives will be tied to the number of students that a given school can capture. This move makes schools competitive in that they will have to compete with other schools to have more children enrolled to receive more funds.

Another interesting aspect of the UPSFF is also that it is a weighted system. Usually, the per-pupil funding formula is developed for one set of grades first; for instance, let us assume for grades 3-5. Then weights are assigned by understanding which grades require more funds that the base fund does not cover. For instance, the lower primary grades are given more funding in the DCPS because of the need for more play-involved methods of learning involving play sets. There is also funding for teacher aides that assist the teacher in helping out with the children. In Nepal, however, the pre-primary funding per child is merely Rs.3600 (UNESCO, 2015). Again, grades higher than 5 have more expenses than lower grades because they now need to be exposed to practical education (such as demonstrations in science/computer laboratories). Thus, the per-pupil spending for higher grades needs to be adjusted accordingly.

Grade Level	Weighting	Per Pupil Allocation in FY 2015
Pre-Kindergarten 3	1.34	$12,719
Pre-Kindergarten 4	1.30	$12,340
Kindergarten	1.30	$12,340
Grades 1-5	1.00	$9,492
Grades 6-8	1.08	$10,251
Grades 9-12	1.22	$11,580
Alternative program	1.44	$13,668
Special education school	1.17	$11,106
Adult	0.89	$8,448

Source: (DC code §38-2901-12)

The money is allocated to schools in four installments throughout the school year. However, schools, particularly public schools, can be seen to have a higher need for more funds at the start of the school year. There are costs associated with getting textbooks and other educational materials for the rest of the school year in particular. Thus, the allocation of funding

in the first quarter could be increased from 25% to 40% or more, depending on a scrutiny of universal expenses of public schools in the first quarter.

B. MODEL OF OPERATION – MANAGEMENT

The current model of management of public schools is divided in the manner shown in figure 3. The headmaster is at the top of the management hierarchy flanked by the SMC head. The teachers all come under the direct supervision of the headmaster.

One of the biggest problems in public schools is the intense infiltration of politics and subsequent nepotistic teacher appointments. While it cannot be denied that a large number of public school teachers are better trained than private school teachers, it is questionable whether expected results will be delivered when the better qualified are supposed to work alongside those who have reached their position via connections alone becomes an organically rising question.

A major reform here could thus involve changing how School Management Committees are formed, which includes understanding why there is such intense political infiltration in it in the first place. As previously mentioned, the elections for SMCs are coveted because local elections are absent and there is little other space available for exercising political power. Thus, one of the most important recommendations this paper makes is stressing the need for local elections. These elections have not happened in Nepal for almost two decades now, causing political actors to infiltrate public spaces like schools. This is why these elections become so coveted. Being part of the SMC means that one is able to exercise considerable influence on a school's resources – especially financial resources – and also make recommendations for teacher appointments. Though there have been promises to hold local elections for the past fifteen years, they have not been held so far. Thus, in order to reduce the pressure on SMC elections, it becomes imperative to hold local elections. This would also reduce nepotistic teacher appointments in public schools, with fewer actors who could influence such placements.

Additionally, another prospective management change is allowing interested private players to take over management functions of the schools. This is definitive of charter schools and would be a plausible idea in the Nepali context. It has been well established in this paper that one of the primary causes for the continuing dismal performance of public schools is poor management. If an institution is being publicly funded, it does not have to mean that it has to be publicly managed. Allowing the concept of leasing schools management by forming 'charters' (documents signed between state organs and the interested party setting up ground rules in leasing the school) could be one of the most promising ways to actualize new management possibilities. Typically, other countries have separate charter school focused oversight authorities. This authority is a central body responsible for monitoring all charter schools in the country. A form of this chartering authority could be established under the DoE as a small separate department. A number of nations have chartering authorities overlooking each state, an idea we can replicate if people/institutions show increasing interest in opening new charter schools as we move to becoming a federal nation.

The chartering authority will be responsible for developing certain charter-schools related provisions. These could include:

a. Duration of leasing the school to the interested party (typically seen as between 5-10 years in practice)
b. The funding formula according to which the institution will be given grants (such as the one practiced by the UPSFF)
c. Achievement indicators divided into yearly and 5-year goals to aid effective monitoring

Typically, charter schools are not found to be subjected to rigid regulations, and thus are seen as more independent. The interested party thus should be allowed to exercise hire and fire policy when it comes to teacher appointments and adopt pedagogical approaches as they see fit. They will of course be subjected to monitoring, which is an important concept, because unsuccessful charters can be forced to close if they are seen to be failing by stakeholders. In case of an eminent closing of the

school, there are steps whereby existing students of the school in question are transferred to another charter school/or public school (in case of absence of charter schools).

C. MODEL OF OPERATION − CHECKS AND BALANCES

There are usually two forms of evaluation present in any schooling system: internal and external. The internal evaluation system has to do with core evaluation by those in authoritative positions in the school itself. The headmaster (principal) monitoring the teachers and classes is one example of this. External evaluations usually have to do with an external body examining the school, such as the DEO using school inspectors.

The most commonly used basic form of evaluation of schools is the administering of examinations. Examinations are administered at two levels: the lower secondary examination and the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examination (administered at the end of grade 12, after a change in the Education Act[16]). Though there is still an examination requirement at the end of grade 10, the SLC has been shifted to the end of grade 12. Because these results are readily available, they make for easy comparisons between schools. Schools are usually compared by the usage of these scores by parents; even official documents as released by the state use SLC results to rank schools. However, the SLC has been continually seen as an atomistic indicator rather than a holistic one because of the obsession it has garnered with scoring at least or over distinction. Because the SLC is seen to measure more the ability to rote-learn rather than analyze contexts well, it has continually come under fire in the country (The Rising Nepal, n.d.).

The second form of evaluation – the external evaluation – is mainly carried out in the forms of school audits and inspections. Two actors are involved in this: the local resource center and the DEO. The resource center has both an 'evaluation' and a 'support' role, as UNESCO notes in a 2002 study:

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16 *The SLC examination used to be administered at the end of grade 10 until 2016.*

They may serve an indirect 'evaluation function' through school visits, classroom observation, sharing experiences and bringing uniformity across the schools. However, resource centers are involved in supervision and professional support by providing such services as holding Friday head teacher meetings, dissemination of curriculum policy and programmes, preparation of annual work plans, and conducting cluster examinations, and training in the use of instructional materials, teaching methodologies and examination results.

(UNESCO, 2002)

Monitoring and evaluation examine effects of school practices and their absence can mean repeating unsuccessful practices. While the law outlines monitoring and evaluation implementation techniques, field visits showed that external school inspections are a rarity.

The DEO – the smaller, more administration-oriented version of the MoE for all districts – has been over-burdened by a number of responsibilities that could be delegated to local governance bodies. One prime example is that of appointment and deployment of school inspectors. Field work has shown that school inspectors are vastly outnumbered by the number of schools in any given district. When there are only five inspectors in a geographically varied district like that of Ilam, which has 426 community schools, it becomes logical to question this number. This task can be handed over to local bodies such as the VDCs. Allowing this move will mean that local bodies will have a lower number of schools to monitor and can employ staff as needed.

The local community also needs to be encouraged to carry out informal monitoring responsibilities. All parents/guardians will have explicit interest in the well-being of their children in schools. While it is common for parents to complain about public school performance, they have not been found to be communicating with the authorities often. Parents do not have an easy access to the DEO. Allowing locally elected representatives of VDCs to take over monitoring mechanism of the school will also make parents more comfortable in presenting personal observations to them. This allows for a streamlined monitoring process.

D. MODEL OF OPERATION – CURRICULUM

Another important adoption that can be made from the charter school movement is of locally developed curriculums. The DEO and CDC work together to prescribe a broad curriculum which stipulates 'reference books' (popularly understood as textbooks) which public schools use. Private schools have more freedom in choosing reference books developed by foreign presses because of greater independence in financial resource use. Community/public schools, on the other hand, are limited to choices from domestic book suppliers. Notably, the publisher for books from grades 6-10, Janak Shiksha Samagri Kendra (JSSK) has routinely delayed book publishing, affecting millions of children all over the country time and again (The Kathmandu Post, 2015). While private publishers are allowed to publish and distribute books from grades 1-5 and thus engage in better distribution, the grades above 5 are almost always hit by lack of sufficient books. This is particularly true in geographically challenging areas of Nepal.

The Local Curriculum Act, 2067 (2010) calls for prioritizing local elements and at least one subject to be completely locally developed and implemented. Despite over 5 years of this law having been passed, the Act remains to be well implemented. This was completely absent in local schools visited in Ilam. Local elements need to be added to overall course and curriculum, and local communities may also favor teaching their mother tongues in schools. Nepal is home to 123 languages (Census, 2011). The country also has a newly formed Language Commission that aims to preserve ethnic languages, among its other duties (The Himalayan Times, 2016).

As the US Department of Education explains in its 2005 document – Education in the United States - explains, schools in the USA do not have fixed reference books or even rigid curriculum structures prescribed:

States set broad curriculum guidelines for what students should know and be able to do. School districts or schools generally select textbooks, adhering to state guidelines. Within these guidelines, schools,

and even individual teachers, are generally expected to determine content details and the pace of instruction so that it is suited to the characteristics of students. Elementary schools do not generally assign students to specific teachers or classes based on their ability. However, within classes, teachers often set up reading or mathematics groups based on student achievement levels. Students in different achievement groups may receive differentiated assignments so that they can progress at an appropriate pace in mastering the class curriculum.

At the secondary school level, each student's coursework is generally composed of courses required for graduation—with requirements varying by district and state—and elective courses. As a statistical average, public high school students complete the following one-year-long courses between 9th and 12th grades: four years of English; four years of history or social studies; three years of mathematics; three years of science; two years of foreign language; two years of the arts; four years of vocational, technical or business education; one year of computer science; and two to three years of other subjects.

If the state feels not prescribing any form of curriculum would invite chaos, they could try and pilot this idea with charter schools. These schools are usually allowed more independence in adopting and creating pedagogical tools and course-curriculum. It will be a good exercise to see if allowing schools to prescribe books on their own, some of which may be in local languages has an effect on the quality of education.

Implementation of this exercise would require a policy reform that revokes the monopoly of JSKK to publish public school textbooks. The state could allow more private publishers into publishing for schools in Nepal for effective competition and lowered prices.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

HOW DO WE START?

National news agencies report time and again of community schools being merged because of low enrollment in schools. As previously stated, by July 15, 2016, a total of 1339 public schools in Nepal had been merged (Aryal, 2016). If so many schools are being closed, causing large resources to go unused, this can instead be used in ways that ensure better management and quality education. Creating a policy that allows for willing parties to engage in professional management of one of the failing public schools would be an effective starting point. Charter schools would still give a certain degree of control to the government regarding the performance of the management team; and the charter could be revoked if the management fails to deliver as per the charter terms. Charters thus preserve the fundamental idea of delivering quality education. For the pilot period, the state could enter into a 5-year agreement that would only be extended once the school is extensively examined in terms of management and student performance. There needs to be in place more frequent monitoring which can be taken over by local bodies. This allows the DoE to monitor the school's progress only at the end of the pilot period unless informed of malpractices by locals or elected officials.

The recommended funding mechanism (similar to the UPSFF) of Weighted Student Funding (WSF) could also be employed in these schools. Management committees could be given the authority to hire teachers by themselves as per the requirement of the curriculum; a mechanism whereby the DoE reviews the curriculum could be put in place. Being able to hire and fire teachers when necessary will be an important change in charter schools compared to traditional Nepali public schools. It may be easy for SMCs to hire teachers in public schools but political affiliations make it extremely difficult to remove them should they underperform. Thus, the flexibility to fire – which could be included in the charter itself (upon malpractice or non-performance by the teacher) – will be an important addition.

Some charter schools could also open as specialized schools that focus on enhancing skills for one sector in particular. Examples may include agriculture charter schools or industrial management charter schools. Such practice would also create a space for creating a human resource according to the demands of the Nepalese market. This also opens up avenues for alternative investments in these schools from investors and employers across different economic sectors.

This paper primarily intends to spark an increased interest in local communities in taking care of their public education system. One of the biggest reasons for persons to entertain this idea would be a willingness to change the Nepali education system. But this needs to be incentivized in a manner where staff salaries are tied to the school performance.

As has been highlighted a number of times in the paper, one of the biggest factors leading to political infiltration within public schools is the lack of local elections in the country. Regular, free and fair local elections would mean that political actors would be shifted from schools to local government bodies.

It is possible to reshape the education system in Nepal – as long as we are open to experimenting alternatives to determine what works in the country's specific circumstances, and implement the most effective solutions.

More specifically,

a) Charter school is an innovative form of public school and therefore it requires robust public oversight. In order for charter concept to be effective, there needs to be a provision for independent audit of the student enrollment and management practices of each charter school. Similarly, the same concept of audit and management practices need to be applied to traditional public schools. While the school operation modality, finance mobilization, admissions processes, administration and so on are audited in charter schools, there needs to be a provision for auditing the composition of the school management committee to see if it is a manifestation of political compromise or a true composition of people who are genuinely invested in enhancing the quality of education.

b) In Nepal's case, charter schools could also be established as specialized schools (focusing on specific subject areas). Charter schools can provide a unique feature where a career and technical education is a major part of students' academic schedules. They can also run as magnet schools (usually offering a single focused course) where students with similar interest and talents can be drawn from many areas of a region. The curriculum is usually localized and thus would include ideas that could examine and improve local communities. Additionally depending on community needs, when private management comes into play, certain absences of government schools such as lack of provision of bus services can also be reassessed for easier access to schools.

c) Charter schools can fill in a gap where there are no programs in Nepal for learning-disabled children that suffer from dysgraphia, dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia among other disabilities. In Nepal, this conversation is just beginning to take place. Charter schools can serve as laboratories for providing needed knowledge and strategies for such programs.

d) Charter schools run on the principle of choice and recognize that one size does not fit all. In contrast, traditional public schools are designed in a way that promotes the use of a one-size-fits-all approach. When we talk about massive increases in school attendance, enrollment and basic literacy, then a simple, basic, one-size-fits-all model could suffice. However, when there is significant discussion of improving the quality of education, the traditional mass approach is far less effective, and there is a need to explore many innovative approaches to meet the needs of children with diverse interest and learning typologies.

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Public schools in Nepal have had a history of producing dismal student performance in national examinations. They have also been plagued by intense political infiltration, becoming active breeding grounds for political activity. This results in management of these schools becoming subject to nepotistic appointments once politics makes way into School Management Committees. A domino effect then is generated – with teacher appointments coming about as a result of favoritism rather than qualification. An absence of a bridge between local communities and the district state organs responsible for education is also mounting. The fiscal year of 2016/17 saw the Nepalese government allocate NRs. 116.36 billion to the education sector out of the total budget of NRs. 1.048 trillion rupees. Does this mean we need to keep pouring money into a sector that is yielding little?

The world is rapidly innovating to yield new and better practices in education. A relatively new practice, gaining steady wide prominence, is that of charter schools. Simply put, charter schools are publicly funded but privately managed schools. A 'charter' is a legal document where an interested party signs a lease to take over the management of a public school. The 'interested party' here could be a group of teachers, parents, a mixture of both or even business persons looking to open specialized schools to create skilled human resource. Charter schools are characterized by lower regulatory burden than public schools but with effective internal and external monitoring mechanisms.

This book thus has two major aims: the first to outline the working of the community (public schools) in Nepal and second, to understand certain workings of the charter system that could be adopted in order to improve its state. Private schools have flourished in Nepal precisely because their management is perceived to be more efficient. There is a way of allowing the same to prosper in public education through charter schools.