

Education Journalists Group, Nepal

A. Transfer of School Management to the Communities, 2003

Transfer of school management to the community itself is a good beginning. Involvement of the community plays good role in reforming school education. More and more people are increasingly concerned about the management handover of schools to communities. There is a desperate need of providing the access to information on the desired objective of the program to teachers, SMC members, students, parents, etc. and effective media network is inevitable. Education Journalists' Group undertook a study for building positive image of community schools on Transfer of School Management to the Communities.

Objective of this study are:

- To exchange information and share lessons between personalities associated with the education sector, local stakeholders and guardians on the current program.
- To visit schools transferred to the local communities and disseminate the voices of those concerned persons in schools to masses through media.
- To analyze the shortcomings of the government policy and point out the suggestions made by concerned stakeholders for improving those drawbacks.
- To organize discussions at various levels for reforming school education and forward the suggestions arrived in the discussions to policy makers for necessary steps.
- To prepare an effective media campaign strategy so as to help the government to reach out the community to realize its mission of transferring the management of schools.

The major outcomes of the study are as follows:

- Local guardians have become active in their role towards schools wherever the management of schools have been transferred to the communities. SMC members have become pro-active in their roles towards reforming their schools. Teachers have taken the change positively and have become more regular to schools. Teaching learning has gained some momentum.
- Those schools which have not been handed-over to the communities for their management, teachers and the SMC members have been seriously lacking information on the recent government policy of transferring the management of schools to the communities.
- One of the most noted arguments was that of delay in providing funds to schools transferred to the communities.
- The guidelines on management of such schools have still not reached the schools and SMC. In the absence of photocopy machines, the DEO has not been able to make copies of the limited documents so as to circulate them to the communities and schools.
- Teachers have flayed the move of the government and accused it if trying to run away from investing in the community schools.
- Required numbers of teachers are not provided to most schools, which are handed-over to the communities.
- Student organization affiliated to the rebel has banned the communities to collect money from the parents. Thus, the community owned schools are facing problem in income generating from the community itself.
- School custodians at the proximity have begun visiting the transferred schools to understand the pros and cons of management hand-over.

- A separate section has been opened within the office of the DEO to deal with the issue of transferred schools in the district. But other officials have given little attention to this issue.

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Acknowledgements

This report is based on the study conducted in five districts of Ilam, Dadeladhura, Bankey, Kaski and Nuwakot on the transfer of management of government-aided schools to communities.

The report is a result of extensive research and analytical work of the Education Journalists Group (EJG) based on field study, interactions, and discussions at local, district, and national level.

The EJG applied truly journalistic approach in collection of data, facts, and responses in compilation of this report, which, we hope will give the planners and the policy makers a clear insight into the real situation behind the recent government policy on management handover of schools to communities.

It also examines the situation of those schools recently handed over to communities for their management.

Further more, we hope that this report will provide required knowledge on ground realities facing the program and its implementation to the concerned stakeholders.

We are heavily indebted to EJG team members, journalists from various print and electronic media, experts on education, government officials, guardians, political parties, teachers organizations, NGOs and the school headmasters in preparing this report.

We are grateful to journalists, without whose cooperation, we would not have explored the real situation grappling the local communities, which we were hungering to know.

We received valuable response and feedbacks from various personalities and organizations in our endeavors to bring up this report.

- Study Team

Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CDO	Chief District Officer
CPN (UML)	Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist- Leninist)
CSSSP	Community School Support Project
DDC	District Development Committee
DEC	District Education Committee
DEF	District Education Fund
DEO	District Education Office
DoE	Department of Education
EJG	Education Journalists Group
LDO	Local Development Officer
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
NC	Nepali Congress
NEP	National Education Plan 2028
RP	Resource Person
RPP	Rastriys Prajatantra Party
SMC	School Management Committee
VDC	Village Development Committee
VEC	Village Education Committee
WB	The World Bank

Introduction

Education Journalists Group (EJG), since its very inception has been raising the issue of community ownership of education in Nepal and lobbying that the state control on school be scaled down to build a positive image of state schools.

Acknowledging the need for a paradigm shift in education, the government has spearheaded a campaign to transfer the management of government-aided schools to the School Management Committee (SMC), tailored to the context of the Local Self-Governance Act and decentralization policy. The government, through the landmark amendment of the Education Act, has provided grounds for the nomination of the SMC and laid down guidelines through the democratic concept of community ownership of schools.

Civil society has welcomed the move. Unlike the erstwhile SMC, the new one can now use a wide-array of authority to its discretion to manage the day-to-day affairs of schools, which are willing enough to transfer their management and fulfil certain pre-requisites prescribed in the Act. Unlike the previous amendments, the new amendment of the Act has received widespread approval from all quarters. It has been felt more effective and practical piece of legislation that came nearly two years ago.

The Seventh Amendment to the Education Act has redefined the term government-aided schools to Community School . This has interested many who have been lobbying for the transfer of ownership of schools to local people.

The nomenclature of the government-aided schools has changed radically. With the seventh amendment to the Act, the former government-aided schools or public schools have been converted to community schools.

Will the Act bring about any appreciable effect to the management of schools and teaching-learning process? People ask questions like this and show more concerns in the new policy. Some, who have been aware of the growing need to transfer schools to communities are already acting as catalyst to help the government carry forward with the new plan.

The government has gone one step ahead of the recommendations made by educationalists, donor agencies and the civil society, who have been involved in education sector. It has decided to provide as much power as possible to the local people to intervene, plan and manage their schools in the locality. Prior to the landmark amendment to the Education Act, local guardians never bothered to play their role. Teachers did not show much concerns that school education would improve if they moved ahead in the spirit of collaboration and cooperation with the SMC.

The role of the community was weakened by the New Education Policy in 2028 BS (1971), which flagrantly brushed aside the role of local communities. After the thirty-two years of fruitless experiment, the government has realized that the centralized management of schools was a mistake and that the only potent prospective to improve and organize the failing state schools system in a better way was to hand-over the management to local people. It thus, comes as no surprise that the government has begun a step in which it plans to empower the local people community of parents and teachers to manage their own schools.

This report is the outcome of an in-depth study on how the community is responding to the recent government policy on the transfer of management of state-owned schools to the local communities. Various brainstorming discussion and talk program were organized at various level to bring up this report. The study was conducted in 25 Village Development Committee VDCs in five target districts. The study takes into account the performance appraisals from various schools, which have been already handed-over to the SMC for their management and takes into account views and interviews from various experts.

To begin the study, districts were selected on the basis of regional setup. Each district from the development zone was selected. Those districts where schools were run by the SMC were selected for the study. Ilam in eastern development region, Nuwakot in central development region, Kaski in western region, Banke in mid-western region and Dadeldhura in the far-western region were selected for the study.

During the study period, reports appeared in local dailies with the help of the local journalists. Stories were also filed from the spot in different national dailies. National-level journalists were assigned the tasks of reporting the program in their respective newspapers.

The report incorporates thoughts and ideas from the District Education Officer (DEO), Chief District Officer (CDO), Local Development Officer (LDO), School Supervisor, Resource Person (RP), Teachers, Guardians, SMC Members, and officials of various NGOs and INGOs.

This report incorporates and examines the process of transfer of schools to communities' right from the implementation of the program and includes both positive and negative

aspects of the transfer of schools to communities. It examines problems at the policy level and studies changes that came following the transfer.

Similarly, the report incorporates the viewpoints, ideas, and suggestions of the DEO, CDO, LDO, school supervisor, RPs, guardians, members of the SMC.

This report makes brief reference to history of school education in Nepal and examines role played by community in education in the past.

From mid-February to July, news reporting and articles on management transfer of schools to community were published in various newspapers and aired by electronic media. In order to make investigative reporting, various national and local-level reporters were assigned for field visits and in their presence; interaction and discussions were held at the local and the national level. EJJ has also published feature stories after the completion of the study. Those field-based feature stories, which were published by EJJ, were also published in the newspapers.

The reports made headlines in various newspapers at the initial stage of the study and continue to be carried by media. Interaction held in Kathmandu and at the district-level, write-ups and columns that appeared in various media have not only brought great impact at the policy-level but also informed the parents, teachers and the school management, which initially viewed the program with much skepticism in the absence of credible information. This has led to the transformation of their thinking and perception and helped in generating swift response to the government program.

Interactions were held among the government official, implementing bodies and all those concerned stakeholders after the completion of the study.

Overall, the mass media has tried to convey the masses that it was necessary to transfer the management of government-aided schools to communities as a last measure to correct the present ills of public education system in Nepal. Not only this, people in areas where schools are run by the communities, have started speaking themselves openly as to why it was necessary to empower the communities to takeover the management of schools.

We, therefore, hope that this study and investigative report will help the government in moving forward with its policy and implementation of the program, which is intended at decentralizing the management of schools in Nepal in the long run.

Executive Summary

Education (Seventh amendment) Act has redefined the term government schools into community schools paving a way for transfer of management of these schools to the community. The Act should not only be limited to papers but should actually empower the SMCs to run their school and mobilize the resources.

The initial target of handing-over the management of 600 primary schools in the fiscal year 2003/04 is almost about to be met. Till date, management of ... schools is transferred to the community and ... is on the process.

Education Journalist Group in co-operation of the World Bank had conducted an Investigative Reporting upon the transferring of school management of government-aided

schools to the communities. The exclusive study was done in five different districts Ilam, Kaski, Nuwakot, Banke and Dadeldhura, representing one from each development region.

Various Journalistic means of reporting including various level of community, district, central as well as thematic group-level interactions has recommended the following points, which are summarized below:

- Transfer of school management to the community itself is a good beginning. Involvement of the community pays good role in reforming school education.
- More and more people are increasingly concerned about the management handover of schools to communities. But this has also triggered criticism in some quarters. However, a majority of the people has not objected the fundamentals of this policy and has felt the need to do so. Much of the concern is centered around the sustainability of the program. One of the most noted arguments was that of the delay in providing funds and the guidelines of MOES to the schools transferred to the communities.
- In 16 districts, school management has been transferred to communities. In less than a year following the transfer, schools have readied various policies and programs. Though some schools, which did not receive grants initially, responded negatively, they have already laid down their school improvement plans.
- The government should place before the public what it is really after and should be transparent. Only after participating all actors and identifying the needs, the government should implement the program.
- There is a desperate need to provide access of information on the desired objective of the program to teachers, members of SMC, local actors, guardians, educationalists and various others NGOs and INGOs. Without decisive media campaign, the program is bound to fail since it does not reach the masses. Without a clear knowledge about the program among the masses, the program cannot be implemented and therefore, cannot be successful.
- There is a need for transparency and sincerity in implementing the program. There are instances of how programs in the past have failed to bring about desired results in the absence of honest and upright implementing agency.
- Gap in information and communication may prevent community from grasping right information.
- Effective media network is to be established in order to disseminate right information and trigger popular support to the program.
- In the absence of people's participation, it is futile to think that any program or policy initiated straight from the centre would be implemented.
- Reforms in education are not possible without community's participation. We cannot remove ills grappling the government schools without people's support.
- It is necessary to convey the masses that schools and community are synonymous to each other.
- There exists a wide gulf between the private and government schools. All most all people want to enrol their children in private schools. This is because of the general feeling that education in government school is of very poor quality. But the government school education could still be reformed and upgraded. For this, it is necessary to spread the awareness everywhere about the role parents can play.
- Before transferring rest of the schools, it is imperative that teacher vacancies in all the districts be filled by evaluating the actual number of students studying in schools.
- Training and information should be provided to parents for their encouragement and capacity building.
- Persons contributing significantly in establishing and running the schools are included in the SMC. This has to be guaranteed by law.

- By studying the feasibility, school mapping should be done and accordingly new schools should be allowed to open or merge with the existing ones.
- Rules should be framed in order to provide more grants to schools with paucity of resource and those run by *Dalits* and backward communities.
- Considering the persistently high illiteracy rates in Nepal, it is unlikely that a significant percentage of Nepalese will be able to use the print media or Internet directly. What is perhaps more important for a society unable to access latest marvels of information technology is the alternative sources of information such as pamphlets and newsletters which have the capacity to disseminate knowledge to a broader audience.
- Aside the print media, information about the new policy and program should be aired through radio and television. Various methods to be applied in mobilizing the society to make their role effective and practicable.

Process of transferring the management of schools to community

Since the launch of BPEP I, the government has been increasingly realizing the importance of community participation in education. The BPEP ii had one of the objectives of mobilizing community in school education. The government then realized that it was all the more essential to reform school education.

To attain this objective, BPEP-II has the following program:

- Raising educational awareness in community
- Increasing community s interest in the development and improvement of schools
- Increasing people s participation in schools
- Allowing community to frame school improvement plans, implement them and coordinate them.

The Seventh Amendment to the Education Act is a big leap forward in a sense that it was for the first time that the state acknowledged the significance of community role in education. The Act has authorized democratic election process for the SMC Chairman. As per the Act, the SMC Chairman has to be elected from among those who have their children in that particular school. But this provision has limited some parents who want to exercise their role in the management of schools though they do not enroll their wards in that particular school. EJM study came across quite a significant number of local people share in the management of schools in their neighborhood though they do not have children studying in those schools. The case study is provided in the later pages of this report.

The government has gone a step further when it announced through this Fiscal Year 2003/2004-budget speech that it would hand-over the management of 616 public primary schools to the communities within the current fiscal year. The government has through this measure, hoped to improve the quality of basic and primary education and encourage local communities to take over the management of schools. The government has recently issued a directive on the management of those schools transferred to the local communities. Incidentally, there are now over 350 government-aided schools, which have already been transferred to the community for the management. An additional 218 are already awaiting the decision of the government to be transferred to the local communities. With the announcement that the government is providing a bloc grant of Rs 100,000 to each school willing to transfer their management to local communities, more applications are pouring in.

The government has come up with the policy to transfer the management of 1,500 state-aided schools to communities within 3 years and 8,000 within the Tenth Five-year Plan period. For the same, attractive schemes are already announced. Schools, which show better performance in the initial period of transfer, will be entitled to receive additional grant. Of the 1,500 target schools, 250 schools will be selected based on their initial progress after the transfer for their further support. In this category are 115 primary schools, 50 lower secondary and 25 secondary schools, which will receive extra support from the government.

Scholarships schemes are announced as another attractive package for the *Dalit*, nationalities and other backward and oppressed communities in the schools run by the local communities. Trainings will be provided to teachers and SMC members for building the capacity of such community schools. The monitoring committee will evaluate the progress made by such schools from time to time. Scholarships schemes have been introduced for girls who do not come to school and for the *Dalits*. In the EFA National Plan of Action, the government has clearly stated that the community would be mobilized effectively to fulfil the goal on Education for All by 2015.

BPEP-II and the Tenth five-year plan, similarly state that the role of the community in school education is indispensable.

School management is a strategic step in the government plan to reform and upgrade school system. It is expected that the community, which takes over the management, will be keeping constant vigil over the day-to-day activities of school, ensures that the teachers are regular and are reporting on time, students are not absent and that classes are smoothly conducted.

The SMC is expected to mobilize school's resources fully in an efficient and productive way and that they put their efforts in developing school infrastructure. This measure has been expected to give the local people a real chance to experience democracy especially with regard to administrative decentralization. The government hopes to upgrade quality of education by this measure and increase the role of parents towards schools.

In order to realize this objective, the government and the World Bank have jointly initiated a three-year Community School Support Project (CSSP) from the current fiscal year. The World Bank has agreed to provide US \$ 5 million as loan towards the project with the possibility of further support to extend the project in future.

MEDIA REACTION & ITS IMPACT

Information on such a big thing like decentralization of schools management requires more than a gesture.

Right information on the government program on transferring the management of schools is likely to have the strongest impact on current government policy on devolving the management of schools. The study reveals that the public still lacks reliable information on this matter. Their voices are being muffled.

Media has become pillars of faith in today's society. From computer games and feature films to music and television, the burgeoning information network has the potentials to influence the public opinion. Nepal is no exception to this information rush. Media can profoundly influence the policy and program of the government and stimulate the communities.

Media is the strongest tool for the community to express their grievances. They provide a motivating, challenging, and stimulating environment for learning things as they happen in everyday life.

Media has dynamic implications for democratisation of the schools management in Nepal. Unbounded by geographic and institutional constraints, media can play pivotal role in disseminating and synthesizing public opinion.

Though the government policy on management transfer of schools to communities invoked a widespread debate, lack of right information has kept the public in the dark, hampering the smooth implementation of the program initially. But as the EJG undertook the study and as reports began to make headlines in newspapers, things became all the more different.

Lack of proper information has also led to widespread public scepticism about the government intention.

In the absence of right information about the program, the policy instead evoked criticism from many quarters. Taking stock of this, the EJG initiated the media advocacy program through investigative reporting to inform the masses.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To exchange information and share lessons between personalities associated with the education sector, local stakeholders and guardians on the current program.
- To visit schools transferred to the local communities and disseminate the voices of those concerned persons in schools to masses through media.
- To analyze the shortcomings of the government policy and point out the suggestions made by concerned stakeholders for improving those drawbacks.
- To organize discussions at various levels for reforming school education and forward the suggestions arrived in the discussions to policy makers for necessary steps.
- To prepare an effective media campaign strategy so as to help the government to reach out the community to realize its mission of transferring the management of schools.

MODUS OPERANDI

To begin with, five districts were selected from among those districts, where the government had transferred the management of schools to communities. The selection was made in such a way to give equal representation to all the development regions.

Ilam in the eastern development region, Nuwakot in mid-western, Kaski in western region, Banke in mid-west and Dadeldhura in far western region were selected to make the study.

To organize the program, one team leader and three district co-coordinators were selected. Specialised task outline for reporting and interaction has been provided.

ACTIVITIES ORGANIZED AT DISTRICT-LEVEL

- Five journalists from major national dailies were assigned to the tasks of reporting in their respective newspapers in each of the five districts
- District-based local reporters were assigned to each VDC based on the locations of schools

- Local reporters published the case study and findings of the study in their own papers
- Interactions were arranged at the local level and local guardians, members of SMC, local representatives of the political parties, teachers and students representatives, members of DEC, DDC, RPs were the chief participants.
- Information about district education status and reactions from people in the district were circulated

DISTRICT-LEVEL INTERACTION

- Interactions were held in all the district headquarters of five selected districts
- Various stakeholders participated in the interaction
- All the participants pointed out that the interaction was the first of its kind to be held in the district to inform the government policy of transferring the management of schools to community
- Open discussions were held to identify the roles of each actor on the devolution of the management of schools in the longer run. Such discussions were held between the government officials, teacher organizations, political parties, NGOs and civil society organizations and many more
- Appealed the concerned stakeholders to commit on the program

FEATURE WRITING SERVICE

- 15 investigative write-ups and reports were circulated among different newspapers
- Interactions were organized to gather public opinion on the reports

FIELD VISIT ARRANGED FOR JOURNALISTS FROM ENGLISH DAILIES

- In order to disseminate the latest information on schools management hand-over to English readers, various reporters from English national dailies were hired for the field visit to make on-the-spot investigation.
- Almost all print and electronic media have published various reports stating the problems and difficulties facing the communities in taking-over the management of schools. They also published reports on the changes that came along following the transfer. Reporters involved in this program made fair and objective analysis.

CENTRAL-LEVEL INTERACTION

EJG organized various interactions at the central level on the issue of management transfer of government-aided schools to communities. The outcomes of the interaction were circulated to political parties, student organizations, intellectuals and representatives of civil society organizations, who took part in the interaction. Such interactions were also held separately with the concerned stakeholders.

- District-level activities were presented in each of those interaction
- Participants were briefed on the issues and challenges that surfaced after the government announced the policy
- Papers were presented on the need and urgency of handing-over management of schools to communities
- Papers were also presented to evaluate how people have viewed the latest policy and how it benefited them

- Other issues of implementation procedure and the response of community were discussed during the interaction

RADIO PROGRAM

- While print media capability is certainly the most sought after and most common form of connectivity in the Nepal's context, Radio can have still effective role in spreading awareness on education. Radio Program was launched based on the field reports and interaction and interviews of concerned experts.
- Interaction held keeping all actors in same place
- Reactions from masses
- Government decision concerns shown by donor agencies and activities in districts were broadcasted by six different community radio services across the country.

RESPONSIBLE AGENCIES IN DISTRICTS AND THEIR ROLE

District Education Office

The DEO is dispensed with the task of managing the entire educational program in the district it represents and is the place where people-to-people contact is possible. Communities, which want to take-over the management of a government-aided school, have to first apply at the DEO. The DEO will then forward the application to the DoE for final approval.

During the study period, there were no elected people's representatives in local bodies. Officials have been appointed to look after the day-to-day transaction of local units works. LDO has been dispensed with the charge of executing the functions done by the chairman of DDC. Similarly, in place of DDC chairman, who is supposed to be the chairman of the DEC, the LDO has been dispensed with the charge. And there has been little interaction with the LDO with regard to education.

There is no place for the SMC chairman in the management of schools. In the application process that involves in management hand-over, the District Education Committee (DEC) has hardly any role to play. The DEO recommends the application straight and forward it to the DEO, which wields final authority to approve or reject the applications.

The LDO of Nuwakot received a copy of guidelines on the management transfer of schools directly from EJM during an interaction nearly a year after the program was implemented in his district. The LDO expressed outrage at the government guidelines that gave DEO most power and remained silent about the role of DEC.

Guardian

As per the Seventh Amendment to the Education Act 2002, only an elected person from among parents would be the chairman of the SMC. In keeping with the Act, schools in most of the districts have already formed their respective SMC. But in few schools, they have been elected. In majority of schools, SMC chairman was nominated unopposed. The members of SMC have not only begun the improvement of the physical facilities of their

schools but also started the improvement in quality soon after they took over the management.

They have also recruited teachers to fill vacancies and managed their salaries privately. Now there is increasing concern shown by parents for better education of their children and reform in school.

TEACHERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

The Act has however, instilled sentiments of fear among the teaching communities, who criticize the government of shying away from its responsibility to provide funds to schools and plan and intervene in the education sector. But a majority of the actors have welcomed the initiative. Teachers also claim that the community is not capable of taking over the management of schools and are not aware.

Many teachers feel uncomfortable to work under the local communities and remain under their supervision. Teachers are scared that since the SMC chairman comes elected from the village, he might not be sympathetic to them. However, teachers who have stood for the support of the community management of school hoped that it would enable the improvement in physical facilities of schools. Teachers support this because they need not be overburdened with the problems of school since communities run the management. However, not all teachers share the same view. A small number of them are opposing.

VIEWS OF POLITICAL PARTIES

Majority of the political parties welcome the management hand-over of schools as a positive step but they have not been able to take this program as their agenda to the grassroots. This is also due to the absence of elected people's representatives in the local level.

A GLANCE AT SOME INFORMATION OBTAINED DURING THE STUDY

Some print and electronic media carried news in clutter as soon as the government began its drive to hand-over the management of schools to communities. But after the EJM launched its program in five target districts, a number of news reporting has been published in almost all national as well as local media giving a wide coverage on management transfer of schools.

Aside print media, television, Radio Nepal and FM stations also aired the news a number of times.

Most news explained the reasons behind the transfer of management of schools to the communities, challenges following the transfer, readiness shown by communities and so on. *Details of the news coverage are provided in this report with analysis.* Given below is a brief description of the outcomes of field reporting concluded in various districts.

- Local guardians have become active in their role towards schools wherever the management of schools have been transferred to the communities. SMC members have become pro-active in their roles towards reforming their schools. Teachers have taken the change positively and have become more regular to schools. Teaching-learning has gained some momentum.

- Those schools which have not been handed-over to the communities for their management, teachers and the SMC members have been seriously lacking information on the recent government policy of transferring the management of schools to the communities.
- One of the most noted arguments was that of delay in providing funds to schools transferred to the communities.
- The guidelines on management of such schools have still not reached the schools and SMC. In the absence of photocopy machines, the DEO has not been able to make copies of the limited documents so as to circulate them to the communities and schools.
- Teachers have flayed the move of the government and accused it if trying to run away from investing in the community schools.
- Required numbers of teachers are not provided to most schools, which are handed-over to the communities.
- Student organization affiliated to the rebel has banned the communities to collect money from the parents.
- School custodians at the proximity have begun visiting the transferred schools to understand the pros and cons of management hand-over.
- A separate section has been opened within the office of the DEO to deal with the issue of transferred schools in the district. But other officials have given little attention to this issue.

School Education: From Community To Community

Formal school education started in Nepal more than 100 years ago when the then Rana Prime Minister Dev Shumsher established school for educating the common people. Rana Prime Ministers who ruled Nepal after Dev Shumsher had some contribution in education but it was out of compulsion. Some enlightened Ranas, who then held superior position in the Nepalese society had some zeal for education and began opening more schools.

However, awareness on need for education in Nepal rose steadily only with the heralding of democracy in 1950s. State was committed towards educating the masses. This sentiment of the government was reflected in the establishment of the National Education Commission in 1952 (2009 BS). The Commission was constituted to gather information on the state of education and recommended the ways for reforming education sector. Two years later, the Commission submitted its report to the government.

Nepal's Five Year Plan, which began since 1956 (2013 BS), similarly gave priority to education sector. Five years later in 1961 (2018 BS), the government constituted yet another commission on education.

However, the recommendation submitted by the National Education Commission in 1954 was not implemented. The state was not serious in expanding education but the community was still active and capable. The communities themselves established schools, constructed schools and monitored them. They even recruited teachers and provided salary to them. In some schools, the government provided only headmasters and a block grant ranging from Rs 6,000 - Rs 8,000.

Teachers were accountable towards school. Quality education was possible then with the accountability of the teachers and the concerns shown by parents towards their schools. However, education was still not accessible to all the sections of society. It was the few rich in the upper segments of society, which had access to education and had opened most schools. School custodians then had very little sympathy towards the need to

educate poor and the marginalized, which made an overwhelmingly large number of functionally illiterate populations in Nepal.

In an effort to bring about uniform education system in Nepal, the government endorsed the National Education Plan (NEP) in 1971 (2028 BS). This radical measure nationalized education in Nepal. The central government then planned, managed, and ran all the schools under its centralized policy. It framed same curriculum for all schools, provided financial, technical, and logistic supports to schools. From this period, teachers were assured their job guarantee and were entitled to receive fixed salaries from the central level.

It is imperative that in order to reform education, only qualified and competent teachers are recruited and that they should be willing to stick to teaching profession only. With this policy, the government spearheaded to provide a number of amenities to teachers and those staffs working in education sector. Job security to teachers, establishment of the District Teachers Service Commission (DTSC), District Education Fund (DEF), fixation of teachers salary, recruitment, maintaining teacher-student ratio in classes, grading, retirement facilities to teachers and a number of measures were adopted after the adoption of the NEP.

This has heralded an era of state intervention in school system. The state began to intervene in every aspect of schools leading towards an undemocratic management of schools. Teachers who were accountable towards the community then had to be accountable towards the government also. This led to the weakening of community's role in education.

With the gradual loss of community's hold in schools and the subsequent failure of the state-controlled education system, the government invited private persons to establish and run schools. Permissions were granted to private individuals to start schools. As the management of privately operated schools was stronger and efficient, they gained considerable success in maintaining school standards and quality of learning within a short span of time. Number of private schools rose suddenly as they gained massive publicity.

Most government officials and middle-class people were attracted towards private schools. However, this had serious repercussions on state-owned schools, which could not maintain the standards. The state has given very little heed to increasing and upgrading the physical facilities in community schools, which turned out to be school of last resort for those who are unable to pay fees and are poor. Community schools remained at a critical stage with dismal pass rate, large dropouts and high repetition rate.

The government came up with a policy to invest huge money on education and formed nearly a dozen education commissions to study the state of education in the country and recommend the appropriate measures and strategies for reforming education sector.

Finally, with the realization that the nationalization of community schools was a mistake and that community's role in schools was a must, the government has initiated the transfer of management of willing schools to the community of parents and teachers.

Some print and electronic media carried news in clutter as soon as the government began its drive to hand-over the management of schools to communities. But after the EJC launched its program in five target districts, a number of news reporting has been published in almost all national as well as local media giving a wide coverage on management transfer of schools.

Aside print media, television, Radio Nepal and FM stations also aired the news a number of times.

Most news explained the reasons behind the transfer of management of schools to the communities, challenges following the transfer, readiness shown by communities and so on. *Details of the news coverage are provided in this report with analysis.* Given below is a brief description of the outcomes of field reporting concluded in various districts.

- Local guardians have become active in their role towards schools wherever the management of schools have been transferred to the communities. SMC members have become pro-active in their roles towards reforming their schools. Teachers have taken the change positively and have become more regular to schools. Teaching learning has gained some momentum.
- Those schools which have not been handed-over to the communities for their management, teachers and the SMC members have been seriously lacking information on the recent government policy of transferring the management of schools to the communities.
- One of the most noted arguments was that of delay in providing funds to schools transferred to the communities.
- The guidelines on management of such schools have still not reached the schools and SMC. In the absence of photocopy machines, the DEO has not been able to make copies of the limited documents so as to circulate them to the communities and schools.
- Teachers have flayed the move of the government and accused it if trying to run away from investing in the community schools.
- Required numbers of teachers are not provided to most schools, which are handed-over to the communities.
- Student organization affiliated to the rebel has banned the communities to collect money from the parents. Thus, the community owned schools are facing problem in income generating from the community itself.
- School custodians at the proximity have begun visiting the transferred schools to understand the pros and cons of management hand-over.
- A separate section has been opened within the office of the DEO to deal with the issue of transferred schools in the district. But other officials have given little attention to this issue.

What the media said

- Increased concerns shown by parents towards the schools their children attend, parents have begun raising funds for their schools and teachers have become regular to classes.
- Temporary teachers scared of losing job security and delay in providing bloc grant discouraging the community.
- People are in confusion since the program was taken without discussion and debate at the grassroot level.
- Education Act and Education Regulation is unclear about the responsibility of SMC and that the local stakeholders are not active in implementing the program.
- Information not disseminated to general public adequately and in the absence of people's representatives in the local units, the program has not been able to bring the desired result.
- The delay of grant, lack of recruitment of teachers in schools, unavailability of funds
- Government shying away from its responsibility to provide education and lack of awareness program.

- Information not reliable and the community economically not self-reliant to manage the schools by themselves.

Activities of the communities in five districts: A brief overview

NUWAKOT

Communities in 2042 BS established the Sundara Primary School of Tupche VDC in Nuwakot. Japanese Rotary Club supported this school two years after its establishment. Since the Club supported it, physical facilities of this school improved. For about 4 years, the Club provided salaries to the teachers.

The communities requested the DEO to support their school's management since they could not carry along with the assistance to maintain its physical facilities. The DEO then provided one teacher every year. At present this school has five permanent and two temporary teachers. Local people recruited the latter category.

But education in this school is not totally free of cost. Each student as they enrol in this school pay fees ranging from Rs 400 to Rs 600. This fee from students goes to the salary of two teachers managed by the local themselves. Parents are investing some money because this school offers a hope for quality education to their children.

The school has opened its savings accounts. This school currently has a bank balance of more than Rs 100,000. Parents share concerns that their school must be improved at any cost.

CURRENT STATE OF EDUCATION IN NUWAKOT DISTRICT

- Of the 150 state-aided schools in the district, only 10 have obtained the management transfer.
- Communities in Bhrikuti Secondary School in Madanpur VDC recruited teachers but they receive Rs 900 as salary. This is common in other schools as well but still they are doing their jobs without any problem.
- There are 31 community schools in Nuwakot, which have obtained the permission to run by local communities but have not been granted the final authority to do so.
- 42 primary schools in Nuwakot district have no teachers provided by the government. They have not been granted the permission to run. Most of the 39 lower secondary schools have the permission to run.
- Though there is school feeding program in the district, 42 schools have not been touched by the program. This is because they have not obtained the permission to run.
- Chandi Secondary School, Janagyan Niketan, Rana Bhuvaneshwori Higher Secondary and Tribhuvan Trishuli Schools have the average of 150 students in each class but there are no teachers as per the standard teacher/student ratio.

KASKI DISTRICT

- A religious rite was organized at Sitaladevi Primary School in Kaski, shortly following its management transfer. This was done to generate fund for the transformation of the school, which was about to collapse. The idea was well conceived: The school generated Rs 4.2 million. According to Tika Bahadur Kakri, chairman of SMC of the school, Rs 7,00,000 out of Rs 42,00,000 has been spent on organising the program and Rs 35,00,000 has been deposited in bank as school's fund.

- With the amount balance in bank, the SMC has formulated a master plan to convert his school into a model schools in Nepal. Plans are underway to provide English-medium education to pupils in this school beginning next academic year. Plans are also underway to extend the school to secondary level.
- Tika Bahadur Karki is not a guardian of Sitaladevi School but he is already the SMC chairman of this school. Most well to do parents in Matepani, including Karki himself send their wards to private boarding schools. Children of poor and migrant workers only send their pupils to this school and have hardly anytime for meeting and other activities in their school. Upon request and interest shown by Karki and others, they have formed the SMC.
- In Parshu Primary Schools, even before the transfer, teachers have begun teaching in English language. Currently, except one compulsory Nepali subject, all other subjects are taught in English. This school runs classes up to fourth grade. Even a back-bencher speaks and writes in English.
- Teachers themselves have come forward to transform this school and have urged for community management of their school. Headmaster Tulsi Prasad Adhikari says it was the overwhelming concern shown by parents, teachers and concerned stakeholders that without community participation, they were heading nowhere. So they came forward to manage their own school.
- When asked about the objections raised by teachers elsewhere on the government policy, headmaster Adhikari explains: We don't want to lie and earn our livelihood. For those teachers who are not affiliated to any political and teachers organizations, this policy will not harm, he further explains.
- Maula Islamic is a community-owned school in Pokhara. It was established in 1991 with the initiative of the local people. It currently runs two types of schools one community and other public within the same school complex. One bloc is for community and the other is public. English is the medium of instruction in community-owned bloc while Nepali remains the medium of learning in the government bloc. There are seven teachers teaching in the community bloc while there are only three in government-owned bloc.
- There are 69 students in the government school bloc and 81 in community bloc. Chairman of the Teachers Association of this school and a guardian Hanif Miya says from the next academic year, Nepali will be phased out from his school to give way to full-fledged English-medium school just like a private and boarding school does.
- But one well-to-do and well-situated Rastriya Higher Secondary School in Pokhara's Bagar does not want to transfer its management to the local people. This school lends its building and compounds for rent and earns more than Rs 80,000 monthly. Hari Khanal, headmaster in this school says, I don't like the management handover to communities. What's the benefit we get by doing this?

SITUATION OF SCHOOLS TRANSFERRED TO COMMUNITIES

Schools, which have handed-over the management to communities in Kaski are not having abundant resources and are not financially self-reliant. Most of the schools have very poor and underdeveloped infrastructure. Many have their own school building and have desks and benches in classes. Following is a brief description of the situation of schools transferred to communities for their management:

- Most school buildings are not built on modern style. Except two concrete school buildings in Pokhara Metropolitan City, rest of the buildings are poorly built.
- Student rush is more in some schools and less in others.
- Teacher/student ratio is not uniform.
- In some schools, there is a serious shortage of teachers
- Not all schools have enough of teaching materials

- Teachers themselves reveal that in the absence of adequate teaching aid and time, their training is going waste
- In some schools there are child learning centres in others, they have not heard about it
- Parents are not fully aware of their rights, duties and responsibilities towards their schools
- Schools have no lands and other assets that could be lent to others as rent in order to earn some income. So they have no other earning source

POSITIVE CHANGES THAT SPRUNG UP AFTER THE TRANSFER

- That the school is ours and that our children learning would improve only if we come forward to manage the school, is a feeling generated among the parents. Thus, parents have begun planning to improve their schools.
- Schools have not been affected much by party politics. Guardians have realized that politics in school is a bane and must be banned.
- Teachers have become more regular to schools and have stopped squandering away their time by indulging in their own household chores and party meetings. As compared to past, they are teaching better. They have also realized that they can no more act like in the past since they lose out their jobs.

BANKE DISTRICT

Management of six schools has been transferred to the communities in this district. Many others have shown their willingness to opt out of state-management but have not been able to come openly due to following reasons:

- Lack of awareness among communities
- Unaware of policy and rules for governing school management
- Lack of support from teachers
- Unavailability of required number of teachers
- Doubts regarding financial sustainability of schools after the transfer of management
- Lack of information on the roles and responsibilities of teachers, students and parents in the changed context
- Inability of the government to disseminate right information to mass, are among the problems hindering the smooth transfer of schools.

Nepal Rastriya Primary School runs classes up to fifth grade. Out of the total students, there are about 49 percent girls here. Headmaster Bhup Bahadur Khatri says after the management of his school was transferred to communities, more people are interested to support the school.

Last year, this school had 499 students in all. Out of which 48.5 percent of the total students were girls and 28 percent were *Dalits*. It was surprising that 59 percent of them were girls. This year, student number has increased by 5 percent.

The local people have hired one female teacher and two male teachers. They provide salary to them out of their purse. There are now three female teachers, one including a volunteer.

Parents and local communities are capable of managing the school since the SMC members are selected from among the parents who send their kids to this school. The SMC members regularly monitor this school. In the past, it was the government that monitored the school. People felt that all works were to be performed by the state. Now all

those rights regarding the management of schools once exercised by the state are given to the communities.

There are 45 *Dalits* scholarships and 6 donated by Community Forestry Program in this school. This fiscal year, the school received Rs 83,000 from the Program. The Community Forestry has assured assistance to this school annually based on its income generation.

Communities are increasingly showing concerns to invest in schools. Teachers have become regular to school after the new management threatened to cut down their salaries. Bhim Bahadur Khatri, chairman of the SMC says those teachers who have become irregular knowingly or unknowingly will lose their salaries. This is what the SMC meeting decided.

It has been seen that the community has become active in its support to school and that teachers have started becoming accountable and upright in their duties.

The SMC chairman of Singha Bhawani Primary School in Bankatawa says the community has taken over the management of this school only after the discussion with the headmaster.

In most schools of Banke district, Plan Nepal, JICA and the DEO have assisted in the construction of school building and toilets.

DADELDHURA DISTRICT

- Schools have poor infrastructure. They do not have adequate desks and benches in classrooms. While senior students enjoy the limited facilities, the junior ones have to spread their mat on the cold earthen floor as they sit in the class.
- Despite being illiterate and poor, parents keep concerns on their children and schools. This shows that the community is well aware of their rights and responsibilities. Parents are ready to put any efforts that involve muscles to improve schools since they are financially poor.
- Teachers have been irregular since they are kept engaged in training by NGOs from time to time.

Process Of Transferring Management Of Schools

Two schools have applied for handing over the management to the community but the government permitted only one. One school stepped back during the process.

Following factors have been noted for the lack of interest shown by the community:

- Very short time was given in providing information to the schools on transfer of management
- Unclear directives on teachers recruitment
- Lack of coordination between school, SMC and DEO and the communication gap between them, misinformation to the public about the transfer of school management
- Obstacles encountered in the implementation of the program due to the absence of local units
- Negative comments from the political parties about the program
- Inability of the DEO to make the program successful and its lack of interest as accused by some people

According to the SMC chairman of Kailapal Primary School Padam Bahadur Saud, he did not receive the directives on school transfer timely from the DEO. An agreement was concluded between the DEO and the SMC last year. The agreement related to the transfer of management of this school to the SMC. There are three teachers given by the government for this school, which got opened way back in 1991. Locals have managed resource for one female teacher.

Out of 110 students in this school, 60 are girls. The scholarships schemes for girls run by the Women Education Section, MoE, which runs scholarship for girls, has been held responsible for raising the enrolment of girls in this school. Each girl receives Rs 300 as monthly scholarship to study in this school.

In the absence of adequate teaching staff, this school has adopted a multiple-classroom approach to learning. Most people here have misunderstood the term community management of school. They say that the government is transferring all schools in their hands. As a result, they are unwilling to take over the management of schools since they fear that they have to provide everything to schools.

ILAM

Ilam Municipality had already begun the management of schools within the municipality even before the handover to the communities. Ilam wanted to follow what Dhulikhel Municipality had done. But since the local governance was collapsed, the original plans could not be translated into action.

According to Pashupati Khatiwada, municipal secretary in Ilam, Since communities could handle the management and supervise the schools better than the municipalities, we decided to give the communities a chance. But if the communities failed to manage the schools as desired, the municipalities could still takeover the management and supervision.

He said that though the management has been transferred to parents, municipalities would continue to provide financial support and monitor the school.

A total of 37 schools have been transferred to communities in Ilam. Durga Lal Shrestha, SMC chairman of Adarsha Primary School says, We have not applied for managing the schools after being influenced by the government policy. We decided so after the municipality asked us to do so. Otherwise, the municipality was ready to take over the management.

We held a number of parents meeting after that and it was the willingness shown by all of us that reached us to this decision, Shrestha adds. Other schools in Ilam similarly, decided on their own to handover their management to communities.

Schools Physical Infrastructure

Situation of primary schools in Ilam Municipality area is not depressing in all aspects. School building in the municipality area is better than those in the villages. More teachers are recruited in the municipality area than in the villages. But the rush of students every year in the municipality area has led to poor environment for learning. This has upset the teacher/student ratio. In the absence of classrooms, each class has to handle between 70 to 80 students at a time.

Like other districts, schools in this district also receive Rs 11,000 as administrative fund from the DEO annually. But this amount goes on purchasing chalk, duster, attendance register, maintenance of furniture and so on. Most schools have no teaching materials for kindergarten and nursery classes. Even the upper classes do not have the abundance of these facilities. Most schools do not have income and other resources to manage those materials.

Most community schools in Ilam have been opened and run with the sole initiative of the local people. Those schools have been brought up at the cost of sweat and toil of the parents.

Inadequate resources and facilities form one of the severe handicaps common to all state-owned schools in Nepal. But there is yet bigger problem: Not all schools have been able to utilize whatever limited resources they already have at their disposal. One excellent example is Karpok Bidhya Mandir. This school has 400 *Ropannis* of land with it and has 46 *Bighas* of land in various places of Jhapa. But all those lands are under utilized. Similar is the story of Adarsha and Namsaling, two oldest secondary schools in Ilam.

Awareness rising among parents

Parents in Ilam are now increasingly aware of their need to educate their children. Parents have started showing concerns and are aware only after the process of transferring the management of schools started. Now, one of the common gossips among the parents is how to make the future of their children bright.

Job at government school, children in private schools

Teachers in Ilam want to educate their children in private and boarding schools though they teach in community schools or the public schools. Teachers of Adarsha Primary School in Chiya Bari, Ilam, prove this. Out of six teachers interviewed, none of them said

they had their children in the school they taught. Instead, they enrolled their children in private and boarding schools elsewhere while they continue to teach in this public school.

Our children are studying in private schools, said headmaster of this school Jhuma Kafley.

If the Education Minister, Secretary, DEO and many high-level government officials could send their children in boarding, why not we? Kafley asks. If those officials enrol their children in government school, we are also ready to do so.

Kafley and five other teachers in this school are not alone in this. In most districts, teachers teaching in government schools send their own children to private and boarding schools. This kind of discussions is now taking centre-stage in schools handed-over to SMC.

Situation After The Management Transfer Of Schools

Parents, who have long been dissatisfied and grumbling with the state of government-aided schools and the degrading quality of education, hope that the government policy to handover the management of schools would bring about reforms and improvement of the standards of school education.

But a wrong message that spread in the beginning had left the parents uncertain about their decision. Along with this is a feeling of discouragement created by the government's dilly-dallies in providing bloc grant to the schools transferred to communities.

The DEO and the Municipalities have never called a meeting or any gathering of the parents, teachers and the SMC members after the handover of the management of schools in their respective areas.

Many parents here want to run the management of schools. They are not opposed to policy but are dissatisfied with the process that involves in the transfer. In the absence of right information and support from the concerned authority, frantic parents have been confused and dispirited.

But overall, parents' concerns on education and awareness level have undergone a dramatic change. Durga Lal Shrestha, SMC Chairman of Adarsha Primary School says: As compared to past, parents have become more vigilant and pro-active towards schools activities and their children. But this change came only after the management transfer of schools. Shrestha further adds that parents be provided with the required information, it would not take long before we could have an enlightened community capable of managing the schools all by themselves.

PARENTS STILL CUT-OFF FROM RIGHT TO INFORMATION

Lalan Thakur has two daughters Pooja and Namrata studying in grades 5 and 2 respectively in Bal Mandir Primary School. The management of this school has long been transferred to communities but Thakur does not know about this. I once went to school's meeting but have not been to school ever again. That's why I do not know about it.

Police personnel Karna Bahadur Karki stays next to the school building and works at the District Police Office. He has his eight year old daughter in this school but he does not know this school s management was taken over by the local people.

Though we send notices to parents to attend parents meeting much in advance, they fail to turn up, says head teacher Keshab Prasad Khatri. But still some parents are watchful of the developments.

It is the also the head teacher who should provide right information to parents. But many head teachers and teachers blame the parents of not becoming aware and sensitised.

A majority of parents, who keep themselves busy at works have missed the information. How do they obtain information when their only means of information Radio Nepal has not aired anything in-depth about the policy. Neither the DEO nor the municipalities have tried anything to spread the awareness.

Sita Baral, a teacher at Pokhari Primary School in Ilam s Golbasti says she and her colleagues have not understood anything about the management handover of their schools even six months after the handover. How can the innocent people in the villages know about it? She asks. It is therefore, noted that many parents who have come forward to takeover the management of the schools do not know about the government policy. In Maipokhari, Bhabu, Namsaling and Panchakanya, no single parents were found who could understand the basic concepts on transferring the management of schools to communities.

PARENTS ACTIVE ROLE

Parents of Suryodaya Primary School in Namsaling gathered for a meeting last month. They decided to attend classes turn-wise from the next day. And they did it.

They did it in the absence of teachers in their schools. There are two teachers in this school and three classes. One class often remains without teacher. Students in this section often disturbed while other classes are run. So the parents decided to engage the students of this class. Shiva Prasad Dhakal, SMC chairman in this school said 22 parents have volunteered to teach the class in rotation.

One of the privately hired teachers often worked for Rs 500 as his monthly salary here. Now he draws out Rs 1000. For the sake of the children s future, I did not demand a hefty salary, he told.

The DEO in 2001 send a teacher to this school from other schools but did not promote this teacher. Now there are 14 students each in grade one and two and 19 in grade three.

Declining standard of education trigger free education

Parshu Sapkota, chairman of the SMC of Pokhari Primary School in Golbasti says educational standard in Nepal is declining since education has become free in community schools.

Since education is free, parents need not invest in such schools. If they do not invest, why should they feel responsible? asks Sapkota.

If the parents were charged fees, they would have obviously asked for the return, Sapkota further argues. Parents would have inquired about their child's progress in school and taken great care of their schools if they had sacrificed some money in them.

It is generally argued that where parents pay fees, they become more curious to know whether their investment on the child is going a waste and whether teachers are on duty. They would also pressure their headmaster to make learning more effective and result-oriented.

Sapkota is of the view that most well-to-do citizens in the country enrol their kids in private schools and colleges. Poor on the other hand is forced to enrol their kids in government schools and colleges, which require little or no fees.

When asked how could the poor afford private education, Sapkota says, Parents in government schools need not pay very high fees in order to educate their children as in private schools but they can still part with some fees ranging from Rs 20 to Rs 100 to get good education in government school.

Those who can afford can pay fees and those who cannot should get scholarships. If this happens there would be no problem at all, he adds.

In villages, according to Sapkota, many people smoke and drink lavishly. If they control this attitude and divert some amount as fees to educate their children, many people can afford to pay fees to schools.

If the scholarships were provided to those who cannot genuinely pay fees, poverty cannot be a barrier to education, Sapkota argues. Like many others, Sapkota suggests that politicisation of schools must end for the general good of all. He says so referring to the political intervention in schools made by parties. This must be stopped.

However, Sapkota is not able to implement his plans into action even in his own school, as he is scared of those advocating for free education. Had I been allowed to go as I wished, I would have long converted my school into a model school.

Management transfer of schools to communities: Strong aspects and lessons to be learnt

Rapporteur of Central Interaction

EJG organized an interaction entitled: Management transfer of schools to communities: Strong aspects and lessons to be learnt. The interaction was organized with a view to give final shape to the draft report on Management Transfer of Schools to Community prepared by the EJG.

During the day-long interaction, participants representing various organizations such as teachers unions, political parties, student bodies, associations of private and boarding schools, donor agencies, government ministries and Department of Education discussed on the findings of the report prepared by the EJG through its painstaking efforts.

EJG chairperson Hari Thapa opened the interaction by introducing the report and its objective. He briefed on the report and outlined some of the remarkable field experiences during the course of the study while Rajan Sharma, EJG ex-chairperson presented the summary of the findings. Sharma said citing an instance in the report that the dropout has

dramatically declined in schools following the management transfer of schools to communities. He said that in spite of the busy agricultural season, children have been found regularly going to schools and teachers have become accountable and regular to classes.

We hope this report to be a good case study, said Sharma presenting the brief summary of the report that was released during the programme and disseminated among the participants.

Commenting on the EJM report, Dr. Bidyanath Koirala, educationalist said: I found both positive and negative aspect of this report. What I have learnt from the report is that some teachers just draw Rs 900 to 1000 as monthly salary. How can we expect them to perform better?

He said that despite being very comprehensive and thoroughly researched report; it is not clear what kind of people came forward to take over the management of schools. What kind of people was interested to manage the schools, what was their social status and primary motive in applying for the management of schools? Were they really interested in managing the schools and not for deriving personal benefit?. It would have been better if the report had focussed on these aspects.

Dr Koirala suggested cross verification before jumping to the conclusion those teachers have become regular to school. However, overall, he hailed the report as a comprehensive document.

We are feeling quite upbeat. Our efforts to transfer the management of schools to communities are paying off, said Janardan Nepal, director at the Department of Education, who was present during the dissemination of the EJM report. He acknowledged the fact that the community is prepared to manage the schools as pointed out in the report.

He said the management transfer was aimed at making the community more accountable. He said that in the first year after the programme was implemented; the response from the community was very little with the result that the government had difficulty in meeting the target of handing over even 100 schools. But we obtained 150 applications this year alone and have already transferred the management of an estimated 300 schools to communities thus far. The response from the community is swift now.

Director Nepal, however, admitted that the delay in providing bloc grant has put the communities in dilemma to come forward to manage the schools. This has lulled the process of transfer of schools to communities. He said that since the programme was on experimental phase, one of the biggest hurdles was inspection of such schools and lack of advocacy programme. However, he hailed the efforts taken by EJM in disseminating the information to the masses.

Teachers unions, have however, objected that the report did not outline the objective of the programme and why it came. They say that the management transfer of schools to communities has put them in great disadvantage position.

Keshab Bhattarai, chairman of the Nepal Teachers Association (NTA) said the state could not provide funds and resources to schools so it wanted to wash its hands off and leave the schools at the mercy of helpless communities.

This programme has not come under a good democratic objective and vision, he said adding, This programme has come merely to punish teachers and put them under rigorous rule.

Bhattarai, however, suggested that teachers would be more than happy if the management of all the schools were transferred instead of few selected schools.

He also criticized the report that termed the Seventh Amendment to the Education Act a landmark development in Nepal's education sector. He said that the current government programme and policy was no less austere than that of Rana's during the feudal age. I doubt very much the implementation of such programme.

Dismissing teachers' claim, Dr Purna Kanta Adhikari, a research fellow studying the current government policy on management transfer of schools to the communities at the Tribhuvan University (TU), said it was necessary to look back into history how community participation in schools had brought about praiseworthy performance of schools.

He said that prior to 1971, schools were effectively managed and run by communities, but when the government nationalized them and snatched away the right of the people, public schools were ruined and were converted into schools of last resort for the poor.

The government has looted the people's right to ownership during that time, he said criticizing the political parties of using teachers in the party activities and hampering the classes. He praised the policy but said that the government has brought it into implementation without much homework and thorough discussions.

Bharat Bhandary, school head teacher of Sundara Devi Primary School in Nuwakot said his school's management was transferred to the communities since they desired to bridge the gap between the public and private school education.

According to head teacher Bhandary, one significant change that came after the transfer was regularity of teachers and students to the school. He hailed the EJC report as bringing out those changes to the public. The next significant change, according to Bhandary was that the enrolment rate has increased compared to previous years.

Shankar Pokhrel, central committee member of the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist), CPN-UML said the management transfer policy was good but it lacked clarity in financial resources management. He also said that the programme did not address the teachers' problems.

Krishna Ram Pandey of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) said that the donors are never opposed to community participation. ADB is hopeful that the programme would be fruitful. He reiterated that the ADB's support to education sector would not decline.

Director General Satya Bahadur Shrestha at the Department of Education said the management transfer of school to community was at an initial stage. We cannot jump to the conclusion now itself regarding its progress and failures.

Suprabhat Bhandary, chairman of the Nepal Guardians Association said instead of taking the management transfer programme on an experiment-basis, it was even more essential to make it a full-fledged and long-term programme. However, commenting on the report he suggested that the word 'community' must be cleared and who should represent the community. He also stressed the need to empower the community and provide parental education.

Bhandary also accused the Department of Education of not inviting the guardians in the discussions.

Krishna Prasad Sapkota, chairman, Federation of the District Development Committee dismissed Director General's statement that it was a government-community partnership effort. It is not a partnership programme but the state want to wield all power and delegate accountability to local people.

He suggested that devolution and decentralization must go hand in hand.

He said in reality there has not been decentralization at the local level. He said that the government has not clearly defined the role and responsibilities of each actor and how much work they do in the community school.

He suggested indicator-based monitoring system to make the programme effective and decisive. He stressed on capacity building and right to mobilise

Speaking his viewpoints about the programme and commenting on the EJG report, Hari Acharya of People's Front Nepal said the management transfer of school to community was brought with out much discussions and debate. He also said that had there been elected representatives at the local units, the programme would have been effective.

Unless the elected local government comes to power, no programme would be successful, he said.

Babu Ram Adhikari, general secretary of Nepal National Teachers Association (NNTA) said the programme on management transfer of schools to communities was implemented in haste without much homework.

Nepali Shah, a researcher at the Save the Children, Japan said commenting on the report that it was not clear for whom was the transfer. He said that since there were a lot of geographic variations in hills, mountains and Terai, no study was carried out whether the same modal would be applicable in all the regions.

Speaking during the occasion, Karna Bahadur Shahi, representative of the National Private and Boarding Schools Association of Nepal (N-PABSAN) said it was the efficiency of management that private school education provides quality. But it is expensive too since it does not come without payment.

The private schools have maintained quality in education and their management is very efficient since no body interferes our decision, he said supporting the community management of schools. He opposed politics in school and said private schools fared well because their teachers and students do not involve in politics.

Hom Nath Dahal, spokesperson for the Nepali Congress (Democratic) said the management transfer of schools to communities was passed in the Parliament with a majority of vote in favour of the programme.

Pabitra Subedi, a student of Sanothimi Campus said parents are so ignorant that they do not have the knowledge about the government plan to hand-over the management of schools to local community even after two years. She pointed out that the SMC chairman in some instances did not change. They are not elected.

Rabindra Khanal, ex-assistant minister of Education and Sports said since Nepal has already joined the WTO, it has to be open and democratic in all aspects. He said that there

was a need for common minimum understanding among all actors in the country to reform the education sector.

Janardan Nepal, director at the Department of Education said there was an urgent need to bring a new modal of education. This is now the only modal.

He said that so far 275 schools have been granted the permission to run under the community management and an agreement has also been signed. Nepal said that 16 other secondary-level schools have also applied for the transfer recently and there are 500 more schools in pipeline.

Questions generally asked

Question generally asked

- Had DEO, LDO, CDO, School Supervisor and RPs ever provided the information and the guidelines?
- Have those teachers and officials of SMC obtained relevant information on transfer of schools to communities?
- Had those schools which opted out for the community management, obtained the bloc grant, which was supposed to be provided once a school is approved for management hand-over?
- 0· Many schools handed-over to communities fear: Will the government cut down grants in future?
- Is this government trying to shying away from its obligation to providing education to masses while leaving the schools at the mercy of parents?
- How safe will be the jobs of teachers?
- As the state failed to provide a clear policy guideline, will there be any uncertainty of continuing the bloc grant?
- How aware and capable is the community in the community schools?
- Will they be allowed to collect fees from willing parents?
- What kind of relation could be built between the DEO, teachers and the officials of the SMC in relation to the management of schools?

Positive aspect of the program

- A majority of people are in the view that there is no alternative to transferring the management of state-funded schools to communities for the reform in education in longer run.
- A feeling has been generated among the parents who have begun to feel that schools were theirs and that they bore the responsibility for their management.
- Parents have begun to monitor whether their wards are going to school and whether teachers are regular to their duty or not.

- Efforts have been taken to improve the physical facilities of schools and teaching learning process following the transfer of management to communities.
- Teachers have begun to shoulder more responsibility and have to be more accountable and creative.
- Parents and teachers of some community schools have already initiated plans to make their school a model school in the society.
- Teachers have played vital role in the process of management transfer. In a majority of schools handed-over to communities, teachers have put considerable efforts to do so
- Political parties too have welcomed this step positively.

Critical Actions for Promotion of Community Management of Schools

- Training school teachers who currently serve in community schools.
- Such training should be organized during the vacation period or other school hours so as to minimize the wastage of working hours.
- Training for SMC members on management and resource mobilization.
- Mechanism for providing grants to be laid down depending on the financial situation of school, infrastructure, strength of teachers and geographic location.
- Legal procedure to be laid down in the Education Act and the Education Regulation as regards transfer of management of schools to communities.

SUGGESTED MEDIA ACTIVITIES

In the absence of media, the government will have the increasingly difficult task of popularising the concept of management transfer of schools to communities. Media's apathy can thwart the popular will and any plans and programs of the government will get out of hand.

The print and electronic media can play a decisive role in making the devolution plan understandable to large segments of society. Community's access to information is necessary for general awareness on the issue.

We, therefore, decided to provide everyone with credible information on the subject through our investigative reports and mobilization of media persons in reporting the issue in the national dailies and other electronic media.

Media has been making rapid strides with the restoration of multi-party democracy in Nepal. Today media in Nepal is steadily developing along the lines of professionalism. Not only that number of newspapers and electronic media has increased and fostered in the last decade and have penetrated every nook and corner leaving nothing uncovered.

In recent days, there has been steep competition among many tabloids even at the local level. From a humble down-to-earth workingman to a high level government official, all are today heavily dependent on media for information on any issue.

Taking this opportunity from press and publicity, we can create a forum for dialogue and raise people's participation and awareness on issues and debates that surround education today.

There is no alternative to media in disseminating the information on issues of public interest to people in rural villages.

What we have noticed that in the absence of credible information, there is a wrong perception among the communities on present issue, which provided suitable ground for criticism of the government policy however noble and meaningful it was.

In the absence of effective and reliable strategy in disseminating the information to people in the grassroots level, the government policy on management transfer of schools has evoked much criticism and confusion in masses.

Improving access to information and expanding their services would lead to the making of an informed society. To re-engineer and improve their delivery would create an enlightened citizenry capable of easily grasping the pros and cons of government policy and program. This kind of media sensitisation is missing in many rural parts of Nepal.

Why is the government transferring the management of schools to communities? How has this process been moving forward? What are its advantages? What kinds of policy guidelines are formulated? What will be the role of the government? What will be role of communities? These are the some of the questions unanswered to the communities.

This study presents an analysis of the role of media in promoting the democratic transition of schools management to communities in Nepal.

This study argues that access to information can have a positive impact in promoting decentralization efforts of the government, by providing civil society with greater leverage vis-à-vis stimulating them to support the current government policy on transfer of management of schools. The study makes the theoretical case for the role of increased information access and communication in the promotion of community schools management.

Following strategies can be adopted in order to give them the right information and to increase their participation:

- Wall magazine
- News bulletin
- Feature service
- Radio program
- Television
- Mobilization of reporters at the local level
- Regular interaction program
- Use of various cultural festivals

This issue can also be raised as advocacy in the community forestry program, drinking water consumers groups, savings groups and many more. Through regular coverage and advertisements in media, this issue can help draw the attention of communities. It can also be raised in the form of advocacy program in collaboration with NGOs and INGOs.

During the process of handover, the EJJ searched for various media strategies to reach out the information to target communities in order to draw out massive people's support to the program. Discussions were made with various actors. Some of the activities are discussed below:

One year has passed since the government came up with a decision to handover the management of state-aided schools to communities. The government side has done nothing more than calling upon the interested communities to file their application at the DEO. The government has only recently issued guidelines on management transfer of schools. But in the villages, many people continue to be deprived of the information that the government is handing over the management of schools to communities.

In the absence of information, many rural people still have the wrong notion that community schools are state-run institutions. But however, some educated people constantly hooked to the information and hungering to know the latest policy and program of the government, are increasingly aware of the new government policy. But they have no answers why and how the government has decided to transfer the management of schools to communities. They also do not know what will happen after the transfer and the new roles communities are set to play.

Without information, no development can be possible in any sector. Media is necessary to disseminate information on latest policy of the central government to the villages to which media persons have a vital role to play.

With the support from correspondents of mainstream national dailies, news were reported from Ilam, Nuwakot, Kaski, Banke and Dadeldhura, where the program has been implemented. Discussions were also held on number of occasions in the presence of those journalists. The reports filed by them found headlines in various newspapers and electronic media.

Similarly, feature services, radio program and interaction were organized in Kathmandu. The news report that appeared in newspapers helped spread the message. Local reporters who learnt from news published in Kathmandu are increasingly concentrating on similar stories in their locality.

While moving in this direction to reach out the information to general public and to encourage people's participation in the program, various strategies and options were to be identified. Following are some of the strategies we adopted in our approach:

PUBLICATION OF PAMPHLET AND NEWSLETTER:

Pamphlet can be used as an information kit that can explain the communities in simple language about the transfer of management of schools. Such pamphlets can contain specific information. They can be used in the form of appeal or expression of interest. Some significant decisions made by the government can be published in such pamphlets along with reasons and interpretation.

Why has the government decided to handover the management of schools to communities? What kind of policy has been formulated? What would be the aftermath of the handover? And what are the processes that involve in the transfer? All these questions and their answers could be expressed in the pamphlet lucidly. We can also incorporate some cases studies in the pamphlet. Those cases studies can help teachers and communities to grasp the idea behind the transfer of management of schools easily and can help inculcate positive response.

PUBLICATION OF WALL MAGAZINE

Some districts in Nepal still do not have access to newspapers. Receiving some newspapers published in other districts is equally challenging. Wall magazines can fill this information vacuum in such districts. Wall magazine is one of the reliable and easier options to reach out to the remote districts.

Such wall magazines can be published monthly and circulated from the VDC offices and schools. Such magazines could help bring out social issues from local level for publicity.

PUBLICATION OF NEWS BULLETIN

A news bulletin will be prepared giving the news on the issue of management handover of schools. The bulletin will carry news that include published reports and articles in newspapers.

Such bulletin will feature thoughts of various experts and officials as well as civil society. The bulletin will carry investigative reporting. It will also serve as a platform for all and include opinions of all actors.

RADIO PROGRAM

Radio still represents the mode through which the majority of Nepalese people receive information about national and international events. Radio is by and far the most prominent source of information for Nepalese in general, even when compared to television or newspapers.

Radio and television can have significant impact on community participation in schools management and stimulating the community to increasingly help government in its endeavours to transfer schools.

Electronic media such as radio has the ability to easily and quickly transmit the opinions on public policy issues to the communities.

Radio access could potentially erase disparities of distance and geography, minimizing the rural-urban distinction that has had significant communication gap in Nepal in the past.

Various decisions taken by the government, developments in various districts and the voices of the people can be aired through the Radio Program.

Recently many FM stations have come up in the district. As FM services provide impressive and faster delivery of information, it is necessary to utilize the services for spreading information on educational activities.

Beside the commercial FM radios, there are several community radios, which can air multiple programs at a time. Therefore, community radio can be of immense help in spreading the awareness. Many people can be benefited from this program.

TELEVISION PROGRAM

Access to television in Nepal is fast increasing. With moving pictures and sounds, television is considered as the most powerful form of mass media. Its popularity is spreading wider. It can act as a powerful tool in spreading awareness on education and broadcasting program on the management handover of schools to masses. By doing this, it will act as a catalyst to stimulate interest and will among the communities to take over the management of schools. Tele-serial film, play and dramas in television would motivate the communities faster.

MOBILISATION OF LOCAL AND NATIONAL DAILIES AND THEIR CORRESPONDENTS

Various newspapers have been published in Nepal at the local level. There are dailies, weeklies, and monthly. Newspapers published locally have their own significance. FM and cable television have also made their advent into Nepal in recent times heralding the dawn of media revolution.

In the recent years, national dailies, weeklies, quarterlies, monthly newspapers and journals, radio and television have begun broadcasting the news and views on education. But the press has been more biased on news that are of violent nature. Due to inadequate knowledge on education sector and program, press persons have not been able to concentrate much in investigative reporting on educational stuff.

Where dissemination of information to communities is concerned, the government appeared to have done very little and made little widespread use of the media as a tool of communication and persuasion.

The EJC has, therefore, been trying its best to provide a platform for education reporters through press meet, interaction, and seminars to develop the stories to write enterprising stories of public interest. They have been encouraged in writing investigative report but it has not been able to bring much impact on the kind of reporting required to bring about a swift flow of information.

However, reporters have now been encouraged to write on the current topics management transfer of schools.

Training can also be of some help to them. Engaging reporters in a talk program constantly focusing on the issue can also help to generate ideas and themes on writing stories on the intended topics.

MOBILIZATION OF VARIOUS UNITS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

There are various persons working at the local level in supporting various schemes such as drinking water, community health, environment, forest, education and so on. Since quality education is a concern for them too, they can be encouraged to conduct program on education at their operating areas.

Information can be spread through the community organizations such as the Community Forestry program, drinking water projects, savings groups and irrigation projects. A network can be established between all these units to make regular flow of information.

ORGANISING SKILLED DEVELOPMENT TRAINING

Simply making a hyperbolic decision of handing over the management of schools to communities would lead to nowhere. Communities should know the process how it is to take place. For this, capacity building training could be essential in the district. Educationalists, government officials and reporters long working in education will be given an opportunity to participate in such training. School supervisor and resource persons should be involved in such training.

INTERACTION PROGRAM

Interactions remain a critical part of the management handover process. There is greater influence both as an individual who can more easily communicate his or her views on a topic directly to the gathering, and indirectly through easier access to issue thoughts and opinions through advocacy organizations. Experiences and lessons related to the transfer of school management to communities will be circulated after conducting discussions and interaction program. This information will be disseminated to all at the district-level and interaction will be organized between all the stakeholders of VDCs. In this regard, members of the SMC who have already taken over the management of community schools will be encouraged to pass on a positive message to other about the new program being implemented in their own schools.

In the above-mentioned interaction, both positive and negative impacts of the program as reflected in the education sector will be thrown up for discussions. This kind of interaction will be organized both at the centre and the district-level in which government officials, education experts, officials of the local units, teachers, guardians and journalists will be invited for discussion. Experiences will be shared on the status of schools before the handover and after their handover. Problems that have been surfacing while implementing the policy and their possible remedies will be discussed and recommended.

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING

Investigative reporting on various aspects of school education, role of the communities and the readiness shown by the government could be carried out.

VARIOUS SLOGANS TO BE PREPARED TO PRESSURE THE COMMUNITIES

Sloganeering is one way to bring impact on people. Attractive slogans and banners can be prepared and pasted on the walls of educational institutions, other institutions, public and private transport vehicles, cinema hall and public rendezvous. This campaign can be taken from schools to schools and guardians will be made conscious and responsive to the program. The message can be something like this: Participation of communities in school

management is a must. Without the community participation, educational development is impossible.

ESTABLISHING WATCH GROUP AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL

This program could be largely successful if a watch group is constituted at the district level to oversee that the program is carried out smoothly.