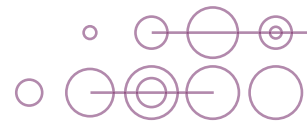




Safe to Learn initiative in Nepal: addressing gaps and assessing achievements

March 2022





Acknowledgement

The report is based on the achievements of three Safe to Learn projects implemented in Nepal by Mercy Corps, Voluntary Services Overseas, and World Education, with the support of the Safe to Learn Secretariat and with the generous contributions from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom (UK FCDO). The research was conducted by Praveen Kumar Yadav, Research Consultant and written by Kristen Hansen, the Safe to Learn Portfolio and Partnership Specialist, under the guidance of Catherine Flagothier, Senior Safe and Inclusive Schools Specialist and Chloë Fèvre, Director of the Safe to Learn Global Initiative at the End Violence Partnership. A special thanks goes to all the informants and respondents, including the grantees, local implementing partners, government officials, head teachers, teachers, parents and caregivers, community members and students who were interviewed and/or participated in the group discussions. We would also like to thank Martin Niblett and Ian Attfield at the UK FCDO for their review of the report.

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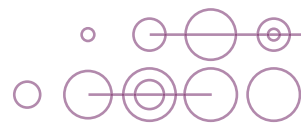




Acronymns and Abbreviations

CEHRD	Centre for Education and Human Resource Development
CHM	Complaint Handling Mechanism
CHRM	Complaint Hearing and Response Mechanism
CPP	Child Protection Policies
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSS	Comprehensive School Safety
CSSMP	Comprehensive School Safety Master Plan
GBV	Gender-based Violence
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
JC	Judicial Committee
KII	Key Informant Interview
GSHS	Global School-based Student Health Survey
MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
SIP	School Improvement Plan
SZOP	Schools as Zones of Peace
UK FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VSO	Voluntary Services Overseas





VIOLENCE IN AND THROUGH SCHOOLS

Introduction

Violence in and around schools affects children across Nepal. Violence against children, whether it be physical or psychological, corporal punishment, sexual exploitation and abuse, gender-based violence, bullying by peers, or online violence, has serious implications on a child's well-being and has long-lasting consequences that can be carried on from generation to generation. Violence in and around schools poses a remarkable obstacle for a child's better future; it affects a student's academic performance, causes extreme distress and depression, undermines educational investments and even causes some students to drop out, altogether.

While Nepal does not have systematic mechanisms for tracking, monitoring and reporting of violence against children in schools, various studies have shown a high prevalence of violence against children in Nepal's school system.¹ A study conducted in four regions in Nepal revealed that corporal punishment was a common practice in most schools, with a higher prevalence in private schools compared to public. And, of those subjected to such punishment, primary school students made up the largest proportion, followed by lower secondary students.^{2,3} In 2015, Nepal underwent a Global School-Based Student Health (GSHS) Survey which found that within the 30 days before the survey, 45.3 per cent of the participating students (grade 7 to 11) had been physically attacked, 39.3 per cent were involved in a physical fight and 11.7 per cent had been victims of sexual violence.⁴ Additionally, following further analysis of the evidence from the GSHS 2015, a 2020 study, identified that 51 per cent of Nepalese school adolescents (55.7 per cent in males and 46.1 per cent in females) had said they were bullied.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021, the Government of Nepal, like many other governments was forced to close schools and universities to slow down the spread of the novelty virus and protect its citizens. As a result, many schools were forced to find remote options for continued learning, including running virtual classes through radios, television or online⁵, or in most cases conducting socially distant learning sessions, when optimal. The increased time spent at home and in the community has exacerbated students' exposure to violence, neglect and abuse. Many parents and caregivers have lost their jobs due to the consequences associated with control measures and restrictions which has put a strain on a family's financial capabilities⁶. As a result, early childhood marriage, child labour, and neglect have increased, and there has been an overall increase in gender-based-violence, psycho-social abuse, physical and emotional maltreatment and sexual exploitation⁷. In addition, in schools that have moved to online study, students are faced with new challenges and forms of violence. With extended exposure to online platforms, there are higher risks for children to be exposed to harmful online content, sexual abuse and exploitation, elongated peer-to-peer bullying, and more. In a survey conducted by ChildSafeNet (2020), more than 41 per cent of the respondents (including children and young people) said they had visited pornographic sites, despite the government's ban.⁸

With the right tools, policies and interventions, violence that occurs in school, on the way to school, in the community, at home and even in COVID-19 related distance learning modalities can be prevented.



¹Bhatta, P. and Upreti, L. (2020) Safe to Learn Nepal Diagnostic Exercise Final Report.

²Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (2008) citing CVICT (2004).

³UNICEF (2016) Violence Against Children in Education Settings in South Asia. A Desk Review.

⁴Panday, A. R., Neupane, T., Chalise, B., Shrestha, N., Chaudhary, S., Dhungana, R. R., and Bista, B. (2021) Factors associated with physical and sexual violence among school-going adolescents in Nepal: Findings from Global School-based Student Health Survey. *PLoS One*. Vol 16. Iss: 3.

⁵While the government promoted online and technology-based education, the majority of schools in the country do not have computer, nor internet access. According to the Economic Survey, of the 29,707 public schools, only 8,366 have computers and only 3,676 of those schools that offered Information Technology-based study have internet connectivity stands. Data available [here](#).

⁶Dawadi, S., Giri, R. A., and Simkhada, P. (2020). Impact of COVID-19 on the Education Sector in Nepal: Challenges and Coping Strategies. Sage Submissions.

⁷UNICEF (2020). COVID-19 in Nepal: Assessing Impact and Opportunities for a Child and Family-friendly Response. A national e-conference on 10 December 2020.

⁸ChildSafeNet (2020). Survey on Changed Online Behaviour During COVID-19 Lockdown in Nepal.





In supporting evidence-based solutions to incorporate violence prevention mechanisms in education systems and modalities, schools can become the safe spaces needed to nurture students to believe in their dreams and become active members of society.

Safe to Learn Initiative in Nepal

The Safe to Learn global initiative was launched in 2019 with the mission to end violence in and through schools. In January 2019, Nepal endorsed the [Call to Action](#), at the Education World Forum in London, demonstrating high political commitment to ensure that all girls and boys have access to safe learning environments throughout their learning experience, independent of their age, gender, socio-economic background, or where they learn.

Following Nepal's endorsement, and with thanks to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom (UK FCDO) for their financial contribution, the End Violence Fund⁹ supported three Civil Society Organizations (CSO's) in the scale up of evidence-informed interventions in Nepal.¹⁰ The investment aimed to accelerate progress towards the Safe to Learn Call to Action and support the country in its commitment to preventing violence in and through schools.

Three selected organisations – [Mercy Corps](#), [World Education](#), and [Voluntary Service Overseas \(VSO\)](#) – implemented interventions geared at enhancing teachers' capacity and students empowerment as well as increasing community engagement in 639 schools¹¹ across Nepal in collaboration and coordination with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, local governments, local CSO's, schools, communities and students/children. The Safe to Learn Secretariat provided technical and operational support throughout the implementation.

By integrating effective policies and mechanisms into school programmes and orienting school and government leaders on protection principles, Mercy Corps aimed to improve learning outcomes by focusing on improving the quality of teaching and establishing safe and supportive educational environments. The project aimed to benefit 24,500 children in 70 schools in two districts¹² of Nepal, working together with head teachers, teachers and school staff to enhance and develop school policies and complaint mechanisms, including 'voice boxes' and updated School Improvement Plans (SIPs) to ensure students were safe and felt safe in school. The project also aimed to build capacity of teachers on safeguarding, positive discipline and classroom management, as well as establish student life clubs to promote protection rights and safeguarding. The project also worked with parents and communities to establish Parent-Teacher Associations to promote the welfare of children at home, in schools and in communities; and, organized national- level media dialogues to raise awareness on child safeguarding.

The [Call to Action](#) is a high-level framework, which sets out what needs to happen to end violence in and through schools in five priority areas. Based on international child rights frameworks, UN tools and minimum standards, and best practice from the field of child safeguarding, the Call to Action was subsequently translated into a set of benchmarks.

Each benchmark contains national, state and school-level 'checkpoints' or requirements that governments and the education sector should meet in order to ensure that schools are safe and protective.

These benchmarks have formed the basis for a [Diagnostic Tool](#) which aims to measure the degree to which governments are meeting these standards and checkpoints. A diagnostic exercise, using this tool was conducted in Nepal and four other countries, with thanks to UNICEF, UK FCDO, the World Bank, Cambridge Education and others, to gauge governments' compliance, identify best practices, gaps and priorities, and establish a baseline for tracking countries' progress. A [Synthesis Report](#) of the main findings from the exercises, including recommendations was published in November 2020.

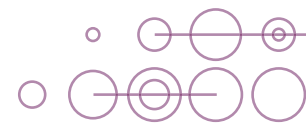
⁹The End Violence Fund Operationalized a Safe to Learn portfolio of the Fund in 2019 to accelerate action towards Safe to Learn in countries that endorsed the Safe to Learn Call to Action.

¹⁰The Safe to Learn portfolio of the End Violence Fund had a targeted open call, where recommended organizations from Nepal, Uganda and South Sudan were eligible to apply. Following an extensive review of project proposals from Safe to Learn Fund staff and external reviewers, five projects were awarded, including three in Nepal (Mercy Corps, World Education and Voluntary Services Overseas) and two in Uganda (Right to Play and Raising Voices).

¹¹69 schools supported by VSO + 70 schools by Mercy Corps + 500 schools by World Education.

¹²Mercy Corps worked in Kailali and Kanchanpur districts.





Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) aimed to strengthen school systems through a school centred approach to reduce vulnerability of gender-based violence (GBV) and increase access to justice and referral mechanisms for adolescent girls and boys within public education institutions. The project aimed to build capacity of adolescent girls and boys to break the culture of silence for amplifying issues of GBV and increase reporting of incidents. The project was implemented in five districts in four provinces¹³ of Nepal, and worked with 69 schools, benefitting 17,000 students. The project built on two VSO-led ongoing girls' education initiatives (supported by UK FCDO) and utilized proven tools and interventions to evolve school management culture and ensure gender and social inclusion, including their Social Exclusion and Gender Analysis Toolkit and its Social Inclusion and Gender Manual, Community Score Cards, Gender and Teen Transformative Norms Training Module and the School- Centre Approach to Reducing Violence Against Children.

The safe learning project implemented by **World Education** aimed to build on its ongoing 'Schools as Zones of Peace' (SZOP) activities, working closely with both federal and local government stakeholders to review and operationalize the Comprehensive School Safety and SZOP policies. In addition, the project aimed to work with 500 high schools in 16 districts in four provinces¹⁴ of Nepal working with educators, youth leaders, and communities to raise awareness on bullying, sexual harassment and discrimination. Through its school-centred activities, the intervention focused on building capacity of teachers on appreciative inquiry, positive discipline and classroom management, establishing student-led groups (peace circles) to build capacity of students on conflict resolution and violence prevention, developing advocacy campaigns to raise awareness among community members on behaviour change, harmful impacts of violence against children, and government, school and safeguarding policies.

Mercy Corps is a global non-governmental, humanitarian aid organisation that works to empower people to survive through crisis, build better lives, and transform their communities with solutions in education, agriculture, disaster preparedness, economic opportunity, conflict management and resilience in more than 40 countries since 1979.

Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) is an independent international development organisation that has been working to create a fair world for everyone, especially for the marginalised and the poor, through its inclusive education, livelihoods and health programming in 120 countries since 1958.

World Education, Inc. is a nonprofit organisation that has been improving quality of life through education, social and economic development programmes for children and adults in 20 countries since 1951.



¹³VSO's project was implemented in Parsa and Sarlahi (Province No. 2), Dhading (Province No. 3), Lamjung (Province No. 4), and Surkhet (Province No. 6).

¹⁴World Education implemented its project in Bara, Parsa, Rautahat, Sarlahi, Mohattari, Dhanusha, Siraha, and Saptari (Province No. 2), Benke (Province No. 5), Salyan and Jajarkot (Province No. 6) and Dadeldhura, Achham, Baitadi, Doti and Kailali (Province No. 7).





Objectives of Research

This research aimed to document the Safe to Learn grants' contribution to advancing the Safe to Learn agenda in Nepal. While the findings of the diagnostic exercise were published after the projects began implementation, the recommendations and gaps identified in the diagnostic exercise report are complimentary to what the projects aimed to address and achieve. As such, given the close connection between the two, this research report also assesses how the three projects in Nepal complemented the recommendations from the Safe to Learn diagnostic exercise undertaken in 2020, including how the projects addressed gaps and challenges that were identified at the country level.

Research questions

The research aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What were the main achievements of the three Safe to Learn projects in Nepal? To what extent and how they contributed to advancing the Safe to Learn agenda in Nepal?
2. To what extent were the projects useful in addressing violence in the participant schools and communities? What needs to be expanded and supported further?
3. What are the existing gaps or remaining needs for creating Safe to Learn environments? To what extent are the gaps and remaining needs for creating safe learning environments as identified in the projects, in line with the gaps identified by the Safe to Learn diagnostics findings?
4. What were the best practices from the projects and the lessons learned? If case study projects were successful, is there any potential to use them/their strategy/approach to scale up results in the country? How?

Methodology

Information gathering

The research included the review of relevant laws, policies, guidelines, Safe to Learn documents, and the final project reports submitted to End Violence by the three organisations, following project completion in March 2021.

Questionnaires were developed to support discussion with Focus Groups and Key Informants, including beneficiaries, project staff, and local government officials. Questionnaires were translated in local languages and were adapted to each group; in the case of children, child-friendly questionnaires were developed.¹⁵ If at any time the interviewee or any participants were unable to write, the questionnaires were read aloud and the respondents answers were documented through recording and note taking.

Before each Focus Group Discussion and Key Informant Interview, the researcher verbally shared the objectives of the research and asked all participants for their consent to participate in the study. In the case of children, the consent from the parents/caregivers were sought through a signed consent form. The researcher maintained and adjusted sensitivity as necessary, taking the relevant contexts and languages into account with regard to the participants during the interviews.

A total of six (6) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held with three (3) different groups, including school teachers, community members and children, and were conducted in two (2) project districts: Dhading and Dhanusha.



¹⁵The child-friendly questionnaire is available in the Annex.





Each FGD comprised of five (5) participants representing different project communities and genders. The FGD with teachers was comprised of a head teacher, a gender focal teacher¹⁶ and other teachers who attended the trainings and other activities under the three Safe to Learn projects. Participants of School Management Committees, Parent-Teacher Associations and other caregivers/guardians were part of the Community Member FGD, and students aged 8-15 years old who were enrolled in basic or secondary education were part of the children's FGD. The FGD's were asked questions related to project activities and safe learning environments in their community or schools, focusing on child safeguarding, behavioural change, challenges and lessons learned and overall awareness on violence against children in schools and other learning environments.¹⁷

A total of twelve (12) Key Informant Interviews (KII) were conducted in different districts of three provinces where project activities were implemented (Province 2, Bagmati Province, and Sudurpaschim Province). The key informants included one (1) individual from each of the three (3) organisations, three (3) individuals from different local implementing partners, two (2) community members from different districts, two (2) students, and two (2) representatives from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology at the local and national level. The researcher ensured that the interviewees included both male and female and were inclusive of marginalized communities.

Sampling Approach

The sampling approach included all three organisations' project interventions and ensured accurate representation of all stakeholders who were involved during implementation, including: Representative schools and communities from three different geographical regions/provinces that engaged in project activities, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) representatives from national, sub-national and local levels that were engaged at different levels and areas of project activities, School teachers and students/children from three different levels of schools (primary, basic and secondary levels) from three different project sites, including urban and rural areas.

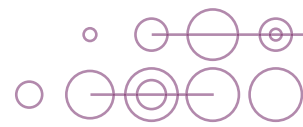


World Education, 2021

¹⁶A gender-focal teacher is a female teacher who was selected and trained on how to respond to gender-sensitive issues and psycho-social support during the implementation of the projects.

¹⁷Further information is available in the Annex.





Major Achievements of Safe to Learn Projects in Nepal

The Safe to Learn projects began in May 2020 with a 10-month project duration and focused on three priority areas of the Safe to Learn Call to Action, including **1) Implementing and enhancing current policies and legislation on ending violence against children in schools**, **2) Strengthening prevention and response at the school level**, and **3) Shifting social norms and promoting behaviour change on the normality of various forms of violence against children**. The project activities aimed to address several contextual challenges and gaps in preventing and responding to violence, many of which were identified and documented in the diagnostic exercise final report that was published in July 2020.

The project activities and goals were complementary to the findings from the diagnostic exercise and supported in the implementation of several identified priority areas and recommendations, including:

- The Constitution of Nepal 2015, the Children's Act 208 and the School Sector Development Plan should include specific provisions to ensure schools are safe spaces to learn and should be strongly integrated at the local level; teachers have skills to identify and address bullying and harassment; and the grievance and complaint referral systems are strengthened.
- Violence prevention strategies should be embedded in curriculum-based activities for children, which should include safe behaviour, promotion of inclusion of marginalized groups and gender equitable relationships. Municipalities should develop their own local curriculum on violence prevention and should have a stronger knowledge and a better understanding of the importance of life skills, equitable relationships and violence prevention strategies to support implementation in schools.
- Safeguarding principles and procedures should be in place in schools, including inclusive codes of conduct, safe and confidential reporting mechanisms and safe recruitment standards.
- There should be wide dissemination and engagement with stakeholders to build knowledge and appreciation of child rights and laws prohibiting violence.

The three organisations partnered with several local-level organisations and agencies, including the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology to ensure local level buy in and ownership for the sustainability of implemented activities.

To coincide with the objectives and aims of the projects and to assess progress towards the Call to Action, the major achievements of the three projects have been categorized and presented under (1) formulation or implementation of policy and legislation, (2) strengthened prevention and response at the school level, and (3) shifting social norms and behaviour.





Formulation or implementation of policy or legislation

In 1997, the Government of Nepal endorsed the Comprehensive School Safety (CSS) Master Plan, which was one of the first policies that raised awareness on the issue of disaster preparedness and child protection in relation to schools. Since then, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology has further expanded on this plan and developed several policies, and guidelines to create a minimum standard for comprehensive school safety, disaster risk management, strengthened infrastructure and more. They include: the School Sector Development Plan (SSDP; 2016–2023),¹⁸ Comprehensive School Safety Minimum Package (2018),¹⁹ Comprehensive School Safety Communication and Dissemination Strategy (2019)²⁰ and Comprehensive School Safety Implementation Guidelines (2019).²¹

While these plans, policies and guidelines aim to provide specific strategies to achieve a minimum level of safety in school, most activities focus on strengthened risk reduction, resiliency and safe infrastructure rather than physical, sexual, or psychological violence against children in schools. While the School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) includes a strategy to equip teachers and school management to identify bullying and harassment among students and teachers, and encourages the strengthening of complaint referral system in school, local level awareness is lacking and, in most cases, there is little to no enforcement of any of these policies at the school or community level.²² Similarly, the Constitution of Nepal 2015 and the Children's Act of 2019, explicitly prohibits violence against children and have punitive measures for such acts, yet violence against children remains high in Nepal. As identified in the [Nepal Diagnostic Exercise Final Report](#), a significant challenge and gap was the lack of awareness of national policies at the local level and a lack of engagement from the municipal level in supporting schools to incorporate measures to prevent and respond to violence against children²³. Without an effective implementation strategy and an adequate monitoring plan, awareness of such important policies will remain low, especially in the most rural areas.

As part of their activities, the Safe to Learn projects aimed to broaden awareness of these policies and plans at the community level, while also advocating for incorporation of prevention and response mechanisms for other forms of school violence, including the physical, sexual, and psychological. These three projects contributed to the orientation and sensitization of the target schools, communities and local governments about the comprehensive school safety framework²⁴ and facilitated the implementation of such policies and guidelines at the school and community level through their activities.²⁵

World Education in coordination with the Centre for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD) and under the Government of Nepal facilitated several workshops which aimed to reinforce knowledge of and practices of the Comprehensive School Safety Master Plan (CSSMP), while also raising awareness of other kinds of violence against children in and around schools, which would not have been covered by the CSSMP.²⁶ Through workshops, these activities sensitized 212 officials and elected local government representatives (including 181 males and 31 females). Subsequently, the intervention activities supported the central government to orient staff including the Provincial Government Education Directorate and Social Development Ministry staff on how to address issues such as gender-based violence (GBV), bullying, social inclusion and more. Local governments have also agreed to disseminate the guidelines and planning tools with 753 additional Palika's (municipalities) over the next planning period.²⁷



¹⁸ Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2016) School Sector Development Plan, Nepal, 2016/17-2022/23. Kathmandu. Ministry of Education, Science and technology, Government of Nepal.

¹⁹ CEHRD (2018). Comprehensive School Safety Minimum Package: Volume 1 – Report (2018). Sano Thimi, Bhaktapur, Nepal: Centre for Education and Human Resource Development.

²⁰ Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2018). Comprehensive School Safety Communication and Dissemination Strategy 2075. Ministry of Education, Government of Nepal.

²¹ Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2019). Comprehensive School Safety Implementation Guidelines 2075 (2019). Ministry of Education, Government of Nepal. Nepal Law Society, 2020. Local Judicial Committees in Nepal: A closer look.

²² Bhatta, P. and Uprety, L. (2020) Safe to Learn Nepal Diagnostic Exercise Final Report.

²³ Bhatta, P. and Uprety, L. (2020) Safe to Learn Nepal Diagnostic Exercise Final Report.

²⁴ FGD with school teachers in Dhanusha.

²⁵ Interview with a representative from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology working in Sarlahi district

²⁶ World Education (2021) Safe to Learn Nepal Project Narrative Report. Unpublished Report.

²⁷ World Education (2021) Safe to Learn Nepal Project Narrative Report. Unpublished Report.

²⁵ Interview with a representative from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology working in Sarlahi district.





Furthermore, the Safe to Learn interventions supported 139 schools to either develop **new school improvement plans (SIPs)** or update existing SIPs to incorporate child safeguarding measures.²⁸ In addition, a total of 77 local governments have also drafted child protection policies for implementation at the community level. Mercy Corps facilitated workshops and dialogue sessions with local governments to identify and address policy gaps in child protection and safeguarding. Through this activity, **twelve local governments developed child protection policies (CPPs) which contained 'provisions, processes, strategies and commitments to overcome protection risks, strengthen complaint handling mechanism (CSM) at schools, promote referral services and facilitate child centric development programmes.'**²⁹ Once the CPPs are passed, local governments have planned to allocate financial resources for necessary action to protect and promote child's rights. As an example, Bhajani Municipality of Kailali has established a 'municipal level child fund and set up a child helpdesk so that children can access information and government services at the local level.'³⁰

World Education's 'Safe Learning' project supported the central government to orient all the Provincial Government Education Directorate and Social Development Ministry staff on how to support local governments to develop comprehensive school safety plans with schools and how to address issues, such as GBV, bullying, social exclusion, violence and more. The guidelines and planning tools were later disseminated to 753 Palika's (communities).

World Education (2021) Safe to learn Nepal Project Narrative Report Unpublished Report. Unpublished Report.

Strengthen prevention and response at the school level

Complaint Response Mechanisms

To support the prevention and response of violence at the school level, the three organisations worked closely with school management committees, school faculty, including teachers, Head Teachers, and students to prepare, develop and enhance Codes of Conduct in all 639 project schools.³¹ Together, they discussed local issues and shared experiences and concerns and collaboratively developed Codes of Conduct that were specific to the needs of the school. The Codes of Conduct were published and located in a highly visible area of the school and provided guidelines and rules for teachers, school staff and students to adhere to, ensuring that respect, safety, and inclusive learning were made a priority. For example, of the 500 schools that World Education worked with, **456 had developed their Codes of Conducts for the first time, and the remaining 44 schools had updated their Codes of Conduct to include violence prevention and insights about safeguarding children** promoted by the project, including new emerging trends in violence as a result of COVID-19.

To support the operationalization of the Complaint Response Mechanism Guidelines³² issued by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, the organisations supported in the implementation of complaint hearing and response mechanisms (CHRM) in the 639 target schools and communities. For example, Mercy Corps supported 40 schools to establish 80 CHRM (equalling two per school) in the form of 'voice boxes' which was intended as a child-friendly name for CHRM, where children and students could report any incidents of violence, neglect or abuse, anonymously and without fear of negative repercussions. Each 'voice box' had a dedicated complaint handling and management committee who were responsible for addressing the complaints received. The designated committee was typically comprised of five members, led by the Head Teacher of the school, two students, and focal teachers who had received training on appropriate and confidential response, legal provisions, reporting and referral mechanisms and psycho-social and emotional support.³³



²⁸ All three grantees' Final Project Reports (2021).

²⁹ Mercy Corps (2021) Safe to Learn Nepal Project Narrative Report. Unpublished Report.

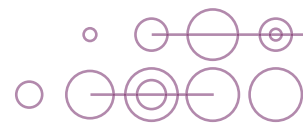
³⁰ Mercy Corps (2021) Safe to Learn Nepal Project Narrative Report. Unpublished Report.

³¹ All three grantees' Final Project Reports (2021).

³² Department of Education (2016). Complaint Response Mechanism Guidelines 2073 (2016). Kathmandu: Department of Education, Government of Nepal.

³³ Mercy Corps (2021) and VSO (2021) Final Project Reports.





Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the project planned to only implement one voice box per school, but given the negative impact that the pandemic has had on children's wellbeing and an increase of violence against children (especially gender-based violence), Mercy Corps quickly adapted the activity and doubled the integration of 'voice boxes' at

each school. As each of the participating schools had relatively high numbers of students, this adaptation aimed to create additional space for children and students to share their concerns. The designated response committees followed the CHM guidelines as per the standards set by the Government of Nepal and reviewed the complaints on a weekly basis. The committees prioritised complaints based on their urgency, following strict ethical guidelines. The committee worked with the school management committees to address the received complaints, and in instances where there were severe violations against student's rights (i.e., sexual abuse, physical violence, fear of death or harm, etc.), the cases would be referred to other agencies and services, including the police, psycho-social support, hospitals and other protection agencies.³⁴ After schools reopened in November, Mercy Corps reported that 635 complaints had been registered in the span of three months,³⁵ of which 524 (82.5 per cent) were reported to be resolved by the school management committees.³⁶ Of the complaints reported, 38.1 per cent were related to teaching and learning, 16.1 per cent were related to gender-based violence, 12.8 per cent were related to the physical infrastructure of the school, and 56 cases were referred to other agencies.³⁷

60.7 per cent of students claimed that the 'voice boxes' were opened every week to ensure incidents, comments and suggestions were being received and addressed.

Mercy Corps (2021) Safe to Learn Nepal Project Narrative Report. Unpublished Report.



World Education, 2021

³⁴ Mercy Corps (2021) and VSO (2021) Final Project Reports.

³⁵ The project ended in March 2021, which restricted the amount of time that the grantee could collect and report on complaints received.

³⁶ Mercy Corps (2021) Safe to Learn Nepal Project Narrative Report. Unpublished Report.

³⁷ Mercy Corps (2021) Safe to Learn Nepal Project Narrative Report. Unpublished Report.





The concerns related to the physical infrastructure of the schools, required a large financial investment, and in most cases were not able to be resolved immediately. As a point of action, schools will incorporate these concerns within their School Improvement Plans (SIPs) and will work towards generating resources and advocating for financial investment.³⁸

A girl student who participated in the FGD, said:

“Earlier, the boys used to tease me. After I posted a complaint, I feel they have changed their behaviour and I find myself safe in the schools. My peers do not have to make many complaints these days.”

Another student in Grade 8 from Parasagadi Municipality, Parsa who studied in one of VSO’s project schools stated:

“A complaint box already existed in our school. However, we were afraid to use it. There was a fear that if we complained against some teachers, they would take some action against us, and even deduct our scores in our practical exams. Now, after the Safe to Learn Project, we are very confident that our complaints will be addressed, without any consequences. Our class has complained or raised issues on several matters, and the school has also taken action.”³⁹

The complaint response mechanisms were well accepted and appreciated by the school management committees, the teachers and especially the students. These mechanisms both helped strengthen the confidence of the students to share their concerns, as well as built trust between school management and students, given that there is now a clear mechanism in place where concerns can be addressed appropriately.

During an FGD, the chairperson of the school management committee in Jan Jyoti School, said:

“I have been encouraging children to report any issues affecting them via the complaint box. We open the box every week and resolve the issues in an effective way.”

Similarly, teachers that participated in the FGD in Dhanusha District said that there were several complaints identified regarding the behaviour of a teacher. Once the complaints were brought to the attention of the committee, the committee worked together with the teacher to shift their behaviour towards the students.

Building Capacity of Teachers

In order to prevent corporal punishment and end violent discipline in the schools, the three organisations conducted several trainings and sensitization workshops to build the capacity of teachers and school staff within each of the project-related schools. The trainings aimed to build teachers capacity to create fear-free and respectful learning environments. In addition, activities were designed to empower teachers on using conflict-free classroom strategies, such as child friendly non-violent techniques in the classrooms, appreciative inquiry, gender-responsive pedagogy, child safeguarding, alternatives to corporal punishment and positive classroom management. World Education, together with school management committees of the project schools, identified and designated 500 Safe Schools Focal Teachers (382 males and 118 females),⁴⁰ one in each of the schools, who would take the responsibility of overseeing all school safety issues, including interpersonal violence, child protection and infrastructural safety. The focal teachers were selected based on specific criteria, including the teacher’s rapport and reputation, and were based off recommendations from school faculty and students. They were trained on conflict-free classrooms which raised awareness on gender-based violence, bullying, harassment, exploitation and abuse and were capacitated to prevent any form of violence against children.

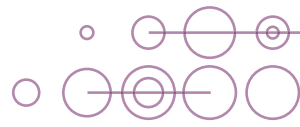


³⁸Mercy Corps (2021) and VSO (2021) Final Project Reports.

³⁹VSO (2021) Safe to Learn Nepal Project Narrative Report. Unpublished Report.

⁴⁰There were men teachers than women teachers in the schools that were able and willing to be a focal teacher, hence the majority of focal teachers were male.





Following their training, the focal teachers then provided the conflict-free classroom training to all teaching and non-teaching staff in their respective school. Together with municipality education officials, the focal teachers also supported Peace Circle groups, which were student-led/youth-led groups that aimed to address gender-based violence and develop response strategies for violence against children within the school and community.⁴¹

In VSO-supported project schools, 330 school teachers have received trainings on gender-responsive pedagogy, appreciative inquiry and child safeguarding practices. Evidence from post-assessment and follow-up visits, shows that seventy-two percent of teachers displayed learner-centred classroom practices, including promoting equal and fair treatment, remedial teaching and providing attention to students' unique needs, using positive affirmations and having open discussions. After being asked about her experience following the training, one of the beneficiaries said:

“The trainings enhanced my personal skills and teaching methods, including alternative ways of teaching which don't involve using any form of punishment”.

Through the training conducted by Mercy Corps and its local partners, a total of 1,500 school teachers (1,044 male and 456 female, including 18 persons with disabilities: 15 male and 3 female) were trained in 74 schools (70 programme schools and 4 resource schools)⁴² on safe classroom environments, classroom management, and alternatives to corporal punishment, through workshops on child-safeguarding, conflict-management and positive discipline. As part of this training and to measure progress, Mercy Corps developed a self-assessment tool which was shared with the teachers to assess their personal and professional behaviours and skills and analyse their performance based on set of minimum standards. Following dissemination, Mercy Corps reported that 79.07 per cent of teachers use the self-assessment tool regularly. Moreover, teachers have built a better rapport with their students and have demonstrated positive changes in creating safe classroom environments and using alternatives to corporal punishment.⁴³ For example, a girl with disabilities studying in one of the targeted schools in Kailali said:

“One of my teachers used to often shout at me; I was very scared and I did not like him. Now, I feel that he has changed. Perhaps, it is because of the trainings and the different activities he participated in. He now treats me well and motivates me too.”⁴⁴



श्री आदर्श माध्यमिक विद्यालय (सजुरा गा.पा.-३, बाक)

अभिभावक आचार संहिता:

१. आफ्ना बालबालिकालाई विद्यालयमा तोकिएको पोशाकमा पठाउनु पर्ने ।
२. बालबालिकाको नियमित सरसफाई गर्ने गराउने ।
३. बालबालिकाको पढाइको बरिमा बेला बेलामा विद्यालयमा सम्पर्क गर्नुपर्ने ।
४. विद्यालयले दिएको गृहकार्य र अन्य कार्य नियमित रूपमा गराउने ।
५. विद्यालयले बोलाएको बेलामा अनिवार्य उपस्थित हुने र सल्लाह सुझाव दिने र लिने ।
६. विद्यालयको गतिविधि सम्बन्धमा प्र.अ. तथा अन्य सरकारी वालासंग सम्पर्क गर्ने ।
७. बालबालिकामा भयमुक्त वातावरण सृजना गर्ने ।
८. बालबालिका माथी लैंगिक विभेद नगर्ने ।
९. विद्यालय समय भन्दा अघि / पछि आफ्ना बाल बालिकाका गतिविधि प्रति चासो राख्ने ।

विद्यार्थी आचार संहिता:

१. शिक्षकको आज्ञापालन र आदर गर्नुपर्ने ।
२. विद्यालय वा बाहिर सधैं अनुशासनमा रहनुपर्ने ।
३. शिक्षक नभएको अवस्थामा पनि विद्यार्थीहरू कक्षा कोठामा शान्तिपूर्वक बस्नुपर्ने ।
४. भौतिक संरचना र बोट बिरुवाहरूको संरक्षण गर्नुपर्ने ।
५. विद्यालय हाता भित्र र बाहिर सुर्तीजन्य पदार्थहरू प्रयोग नगर्ने ।
६. कक्षा कोठामा भित्ताहरूमा लेख्ने, कोर्ने र फोहोर जस्ता कामहरू नगर्ने ।
७. सबैसँग शिष्ट व्यवहार गर्नुपर्ने ।
८. विद्यालयले आयोजना गरेका कार्यक्रममा सक्रिय रूपमा सहभागी हुनुपर्ने ।
९. राष्ट्रिय भाषा, संस्कृति उत्थानका लागि सधैं प्रयत्न-शिल रहनुपर्ने ।
१०. विद्यालयमा विद्यार्थी आउंदा तोकिएको ड्रेस र समयमा आउनुपर्ने ।

World Education, 2021

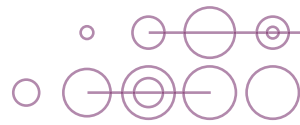
⁴¹World Education (2021) Safe to Learn Nepal Project Narrative Report. Unpublished Report.

⁴²Resource schools are non-traditional schools/learning spaces.

⁴³Mercy Corps (2021) Safe to Learn Nepal Project Narrative Report. Unpublished Report.

⁴⁴Mercy Corps (2021) Safe to Learn Nepal Project Narrative Report. Unpublished Report.





Child-centered activities

Trainings and programmes that shift social norms, empower children and promote child rights, and focus on child participation are essential in preventing and responding to violence in and through schools. Aligned with this commitment, the three organisations worked together with students and young people on multiple activities which aimed to promote gender equality, raise awareness on violence prevention and response, and enhance life skills.

Saksham Chhori (Empowered Daughters) training implemented through Mercy Corps, aimed to enhance the physical, mental and social resilience of girls against the risk of gender-based violence. The training built capacity of 13,254 youth (13,224 girls and 30 boys, including children with disabilities: 30 boys and 53 girls) on violence prevention. It aimed to increase their confidence and knowledge on inclusion, girls' rights, and child safeguarding. An inclusive training package was also developed to train children with disabilities and was extended to five resource schools, and out-of-school girls. The children and youth who were trained were able to identify issues such as gender-based discrimination, protection risks, early marriage and heavy domestic workloads. They also organized activities in their communities and schools to raise awareness, including conducting street dramas, demonstrations on self-defence skills and shared information on protection service providers.⁴⁵

Peace Circles are clubs of school children which were formed under World Education's project. Through these clubs, children were empowered to address various forms of violence in their schools and communities. One of the initiatives led by a Peace Circle from Adarasha Higher Secondary School, situated at Khajura Rural Municipality in Banke district made an impact on ending child marriage incidents in the community.

During the project period, the Peace Circle stopped three cases of early marriage. Their massive campaign led the local government in Khajura rural municipality to declare the ward, a child marriage free ward on 8 March 2021. Even following the completion of the project, the Peace Circles continue to initiate campaigns to end violence against children in schools and community.

World Education (2021) Safe to Learn Nepal Project Narrative Report. Unpublished Report.

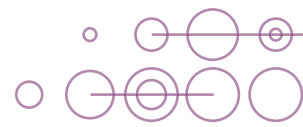
In addition, Mercy Corps implemented additional child-centred activities, such as a Student Life Club, which supported students to continue their learning during COVID-19 and gain additional knowledge on issues related to child safeguarding. This activity provided safe spaces for girls and boys to express their concerns about their community and school. In total Mercy Corps project reached 36,778 children (21,671 girls and 15,107 boys) including children from marginalized groups: living in remote areas, out-of-school, living with disabilities and ethnic minorities. As per pre-and post-test analyses conducted by Mercy Corps, 96 per cent of the 36,778 students had reported an increase in their self-efficacy levels as a result of the project activities.⁴⁶

As part of World Education's project to empower students, 183 Peace Circles were developed, engaging 2,895 students. Student members were trained on a curriculum which covered a diverse set of topics, including importance of listening to others, effective communication, self-awareness, the difference between conflict and violence, and conflict resolution. Students were mobilized to create action plans to support efforts towards violence prevention and collected information on GBV and were engaged in mapping forms of violence occurring at the school level. The Peace Circles led awareness campaigns at the community level which focused on prevention of social issues that exist in their home environments and communities. These student-led clubs enhanced students' empowerment and leadership and provided them with an opportunity to engage in more team-building efforts to promote greater inclusion and support in raising awareness on harmful social practices, including child marriage, early-age consumption of tobacco, bullying and harassment.

⁴⁵Mercy Corps (2021) Safe to Learn Nepal Project Narrative Report. Unpublished Report.

⁴⁶Mercy Corps (2021) Safe to Learn Nepal Project Narrative Report. Unpublished Report.





Given the positive feedback received from the participating students and focal teachers and positive encouragement from the local community governments, World Education expanded their project reach and worked together with schools originally outside of the project’s scope to develop 23 additional Peace Circles.⁴⁷

VSO implemented several child-centred activities, including 69 self-defence trainings which aimed to empower students (particularly girls). The self-defence trainings aimed to provide students with practical skills needed to protect themselves, and increase knowledge on identifying and avoiding risks. Based off the Child Empowerment Score Index, 90 per cent of 15,695 students who had participated in the self-defence trainings [and other child-centred activities like sensitization sessions and trainings on child marriage and social norm transformation] felt they had gained the knowledge to protect themselves and act against abuse, violence and early child marriage. Following participation in VSO-led trainings focused on prevention of early child marriage, bullying and harassment, students felt they had gained more knowledge on child rights issues, and gained the confidence and skills needed to prevent and respond to violence and discuss the issues with their classmates.⁴⁸

“Around five minutes away from school, there used to be some boys who would sit by the tea shop and call us name and tease us while we were returning to our homes from school. We used to feel very unsafe, and we would only walk back in groups and didn’t have the courage to walk alone. Now, after the training, I feel confident to walk alone, and I am not afraid to ask them to stop, if needed”

- A female student from Surkhet



VSO, 2021



⁴⁷World Education (2021) Safe to Learn Nepal Project Narrative Report. Unpublished Report.

⁴⁸VSO (2021) Safe to Learn Nepal Project Narrative Report. Unpublished Report.





Shift social norms and behaviour change

While many activities were shifted due to restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, the three organisations quickly adapted their projects to scale-up advocacy and use of mass media to raise awareness on safeguarding and protection issues. Various trainings, street dramas and sensitization sessions, social media, radio drama skits, jingles, TV programmes and dissemination of materials and flyers played an important role in the increased reach and awareness of community members. For example, World Education supported the production of a total of 8,000 sets of campaign materials which focused on raising awareness on child labour, sexual harassment and abuse, bullying, and cyber bullying/online violence. The campaign materials were widely disseminated through various distant learning modalities, through schools (when they re-opened) and around communities. A total of 20 audio jingles on inclusion, prevention of child violence and bullying, child helplines, and more were also produced and broadcasted nationwide through 32 local FM radio stations, reaching a total of 193 million beneficiaries over 60 days.^{49,50} Similarly, Mercy Corps also raised awareness on child safeguarding and protection, school re-opening, psychosocial support, and information on social service providers through media campaigns, home visits, advertisements and other Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials. As part of the student life skills programme, Mercy Corps also distributed life skills textbooks to 36,778 children. An interview was conducted with a parent of one of the students who participated in the life skills programme, who said:

“I have seen the life skills textbook provided to my child. I found it very informative for children. This has covered the topics that were not included much in the school curriculum, specifically, the content provided knowledge and skills for solving problems they may face with their peers, and how to stay on track and reach their goals.”⁵¹

To raise awareness holistically and on multiple levels within the community, VSO, also worked together with parents, community members, local government leaders and even influential/religious leaders on the harmful impacts of violence against children. In total, VSO, worked with 1,678 parents and 611 religious, social and political leaders through sensitisation sessions and trainings which focused on gender-based violence, early child marriage, violence in the home and on the way to school and bullying and harassment. Given that religious leaders and political leaders are often seen as important and influential members of the community, their participation and buy-in was needed to help push the agenda forward and establish meaningful behaviour change within the communities. As a result of the sensitisation meetings and discussions, religious leaders and elected leaders who are typically involved in administering or registering marriages, have pledged to not officiate or register any marriage unless both parties present birth certificates to ensure that they are of legal age and are legally eligible to wed.⁵²

Children’s groups, supported by the three organisations, played a crucial role in advocating to end violence against children in schools, the home and the community. Through the child-centred and child-led clubs, (including Saksham Chhori,⁵³ the life-skills programme, Peace Circles⁵⁴ and other student clubs) children have developed and demonstrated new skills and enhanced knowledge on how to protect themselves and their peers and how to respond and report to acts of violence. Through the encouragement of child participation, students were able to lead peer-to-peer sensitisation sessions on violent-free schools and communities, organize street dramas and demonstrations of self-defence skills, which raised awareness on the rights of children, child protection, gender empowerment, and social inclusion within their communities.



⁴⁹World Education (2021) Safe to Learn Nepal Project Narrative Report. Unpublished Report.

⁵⁰The audio jingles were played on two of the most popular radio stations in Nepal (Radio Krishnasar and Sanskar FM), and were also posted on social media through Hamro Patro (the most popular Nepali app). The radio stations were able to collect information on how many had tuned in to their channel, and had also conducted station surveys to measure listeners. Similarly, the app was able to track how many people had visited the site and played the jingles.

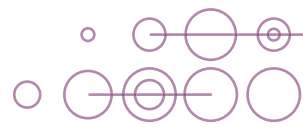
⁵¹Quote taken from a Key Informant Interview

⁵²VSO (2021) Safe to Learn Nepal Project Narrative Report. Unpublished Report

⁵³Saksham Chhori is the Nepali term for empowered daughters/girls.

⁵⁴Peace Circles are child-led clubs, an activity part of World Education’s project.





From interviews and focus group discussions, it is evident that there is some change at societal level, particularly in the confidence of girls. A member of the School Management Committee in Dhangadhi said:

“The Safe to Learn project has made a change in the school and community. Earlier there was hardly any participation of girls in community-level events. Now I feel happy to see the increasing number of girls participating in campaign activities and decision-making processes. This is encouraging...thanks to the trainings that empowered them.”

Lessons Learned

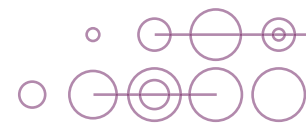
A series of good practices emerged from the achievements and lessons learned of the three organisations projects'. They include: (i) in-country collaboration; (ii) engagement of children; (iii) dissemination of national policies into local level action; and (iv) cross-sectoral collaboration.

(i) **In-country collaboration:** the three organisations, together with local implementing partners, representatives of the MoEST, and UK FCDO Country Office, collaborated several times throughout the duration of the projects to ensure that the projects' activities remained on track and that each project was using similar language to advocate for change and discussed challenges and best practice examples to support project implementation. This provided a platform for grantees to work through challenges and build on synergies, including enhanced messaging and advocacy and ramping up of project activities to ensure that violence prevention and response mechanisms were incorporated successfully in schools throughout 19 districts in Nepal.



Mercy Corps, 2021





(ii) The **engagement of children** in safe learning activities, including prevention and response to all forms of violence, is an example of a good practice that should be replicated and built on for further scale-up. Children can be active members and advocates in their school and community once they are given the opportunity to do so. Through the project activities, children were encouraged and empowered to be change-makers within their communities, advocating for violence prevention, child safeguarding and safe schools. Students gained knowledge and skills to play a proactive role in creating safe learning spaces within and around their schools and communities. Students gained the skills to make informed decisions about their lives and also gained the skills and confidence to raise awareness among their peers.

Among the child-friendly activities that were implemented with students, the life-skills activities were seen as the preferred ones, given the high-level of student engagement and analysis of activity assessments. From discussion and interviews with students, teachers, parents and community members, the life-skills activities provided children and youth the knowledge and skills to solve problems, avoid conflict, and gain general life skills that were not part of regular school curriculum. A girl who participated in a child friendly focus group discussion, said:

“The self-defence training has built up my confidence. I feel that I can defend myself if someone tries to harm me or perpetrate physical violence against me. I think this training should be provided for every girl”.

(iii) The activities implemented through the Safe to Learn projects also significantly helped bridge the gap between national policy and local-level action and response. By supporting the dissemination of the national policies and frameworks at the local level, and by facilitating the participant schools and communities to translate those policies and structures to each specific context, the projects provided a **gateway for stronger linkage and communication between the national, community and schools levels**. These activities also helped raise awareness on the importance of preventing and responding to violence against children and supported the better implementation of safe learning policies. This has assisted both the schools and local governments to incorporate policies and mechanisms to prevent and respond to violence both in local legislation and also within their education policies. It has also strengthened municipalities database management systems to ensure response mechanisms are effectively monitored.⁵⁵

Through sensitizing local governments on Safe to Learn and the objectives of the three projects, including the importance of violence prevention and response, local governments of several project activity sites began drafting Child Protection Policies (CPPs) and several have already been approved and applied in their municipalities. The CPPs contain provisions, processes, strategies, and commitments to overcome protection risks, strengthening CHM at school, promoting referral services and facilitating child centric development programmes. Following the development and approval of the CPPs, local governments are planning to allocate resources and budget for necessary action.⁵⁶ However, according to several school teachers and community members who were interviewed, more sensitization for local governments is needed to ensure the sustainability of prevention and response mechanisms within local policies.

While the child protection policies may be passed, raising awareness of the harmful effects violence has on children, and building capacity of local government authorities, teachers, parents and students themselves remains a priority to ensure effective implementation and sustainability of the Safe to Learn activities. Amid unprecedented challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, many activities were shifted to mass media campaigns and messages, and online trainings for children and teachers. While mass media messaging was an effective way to increase awareness and reach a broader audience with violence prevention messaging, not all activities were able to be conducted online.

⁵⁵All three grantees' Final Project Reports (2021).

⁵⁶Mercy Corps (2021). Safe to Learn Nepal Project Narrative Report. Unpublished Report.





Depending on the district and region, online trainings were not always effective adaptations due to lack of electricity and internet availability and technical knowledge to use computers/internet, especially among younger students. In addition, the short duration period of the projects and the constraints associated with social distancing requirements led to an even shorter timeframe to implement other activities that were only meant to be in- person, such as extensive use of the Complaint Response Mechanisms/boxes, self-defence trainings, in- school activities with students, and others. A chairperson of the School Management Committee in Dhangadhi said:

“By the time the school, the local government, the children and the community were well informed of the Safe to Learn Initiative, the project had nearly come to an end. To end violence in and through schools, a longer intervention duration is required. For instance, some violence is linked with social norms and traditional behaviour, and shifting them may take time.”

(iv): Lastly, involvement and sensitization of all levels of education’s eco-system, ranging from schools to communities, teachers to students, and national government to local government, **builds accountability of each party on their role in ending violence against children in and through schools**. Cross-sectoral collaboration across all levels (including national government and local communities) has encouraged knowledge sharing and cooperation, to build on skills that were gained through project activities and work together to further implement violence prevention mechanisms and ensure a whole-school approach. Based on the experience of the three organisations, findings show that this is an effective approach that should be scaled up and further encouraged throughout the country to achieve safer learning environments for students.



Remaining Needs

Long-term support is needed to ensure sustainable behavioural change and increased implementation of Safe to Learn activities. While the project duration was relatively short due to specified donor timelines, the organisations effectively developed synergies among various actors and beneficiaries, including government officials and other stakeholders. However, more action and buy-in is needed to ensure efforts are continued towards creating safe learning environment.

Further follow-up by the three organisations and local partners is needed to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and functionality of the safe learning mechanisms that were implemented during the project, i.e.: the Codes of Conduct, the School Safety Plan, School Improvement Plan, and the Complaint Response Mechanisms. Increased engagement with the school leadership committees and government officials is also needed to maintain commitment and accountability. Local ownership from both the school committees and local governments will play a crucial role to resolve and mitigate any challenges that are raised during the monitoring period.





Second, further consultations and technical review are needed for the draft of child protection policies made by the local government, particularly focusing on child safeguarding.

A community member in the interview said:

“We lobbied the local government to develop a child protection policy with a view to end violence against children in the community. Although the policy has been drafted, it requires a series of consultations with the relevant stakeholders. We also need a review from experts in child protection and education for the finalization of the policy before it is passed.”

Continued collaboration between the three grantee organisations, plus additional support from other local level CSO’s and country-level actors will be needed to ensure that all policies make interlinkages between violence prevention and education. In addition, child protection and violence response agencies (local government authorities, police and other protection agencies) must be briefed on all new policies, and trained on how to respond efficiently and effectively to all acts of violence against children.

While the MoEST has shown positive commitment to update the Comprehensive School Safety Master Plan, an actual update still needs to be done. Given the rapid political shifts and political paralysis due to changes in parties, there has been a delay in substantive progress in revising the plan.

An officer at the Center for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD) under the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST) said:

“The government’s Comprehensive School Safety Master Plan mainly focuses on building and ensuring safety measures during disasters or emergency situations. We realize that this document does not cover various forms of violence which may occur outside crises. Hence, we are willing to update and upgrade the comprehensive school safety plan to ensure it reflects all forms of violence.”

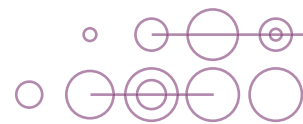
Once the master plan is updated, it will need further dissemination at the school and community levels, which will help support in increased awareness and action towards Safe to Learn. Further engagement with CEHRD, education focal persons and already trained community members and teachers will be needed to continue to build capacity and expand knowledge and ownership of protecting students.

The lockdown and social distancing orders issued by the government as a mitigation measure to reduce the risk of COVID-19 exposure, caused a shift in the way that students learn; moving from in person, at school learning to online or distant learning. This created a huge gap between the schools who were capable enough to conduct online classes and those who were not. As a result, students of the schools who did not have the capacity to conduct online, virtual classes, had a lower chance of continuing their education, causing a higher risk of falling behind in their studies. In addition, students who have moved to online classes have an added exposure to violence that occurs online, including sexual exploitation and more. As there is quite a high digital divide in Nepal, especially in many of the rural communities and in most of the activity sites, the Safe to Learn projects focused most of their activities on violence that occurs in school and distant learning environments and within the communities, rather than on online spaces. As the technology gap begins to lower and more and more children have access to online platforms, a more comprehensive plan will be imperative to address the added stressors and exposure to violence that children may experience online. This need is also highlighted by the recent adoption of the General Comment 25 on digital safety of children developed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁵⁷ It not only identifies the vulnerability of children from various forms of violence in digital environments but also places responsibility on States and relevant stakeholders to take action to address those risks.

Various new laws and policies are in the drafting phase at federal, provincial and local levels, which provides an opportunity for further engagement on violence prevention mechanisms at several levels. For instance,

⁵⁷ Convention on the Rights of the Child (2021) General comment No. 25 (2021) on children’s rights in relation to the digital environment.





the Province 2 Government has recently drafted the Girls Protection Act, which incorporates provisions related to violence against girls and young women. This would be an opportune moment for the three organisations, Safe to Learn partners and their relevant country offices to further engage with the government and support in developing relevant programmatic frameworks, policies and interventions. This could support in the further implementation and effectiveness of ending violence in and around schools. In addition, under federalism, local governments have authority to devise their local education acts, policies and guidelines, which would require further engagement from partners, stakeholders and others to ensure the incorporation of Safe to Learn related frameworks and indicators within local policies, plans and mechanisms to promote access, governance and quality of education in their catchment areas.

Lastly, local Judicial Committees (JCs) are established at the municipal and rural municipal level as per the mandate of the Constitution. Judicial Committees are considered to be the first line of justice that can link individuals to various justice providers like mediation centres at the ward level, the lowest level court at the district level, the police, government legal departments, and other relevant justice/social service providers.⁵⁸

In this context, JCs are potential governing bodies to respond and resolve incidents of violence against children in schools and communities. They could also be potential allies to refer others to either the district court for formal adjudication or to community mediation centres, as per Clause 47 (1) and (2) of Local Government Operation Act.⁵⁹ The linkage with JC's, the local governments and school management systems and others is another area of remaining need which should be prioritized for addressing violence in and through schools.



World Education, 2021



⁵⁸Shrestha, T. P., and Wagley, S. (2019) Local Judicial Committees in Nepal: A closer look

⁵⁹Local Government Operation Act (2017). Government of Nepal.





Conclusion

This exercise aimed to provide a transparent, honest and rigorous account of the projects and their experience in a truly extraordinary time. While Mercy Corps, VSO and World Education began implementation at the height of COVID-19, they effectively adapted to the various contextual challenges and integrated mitigatory measures and actions to ensure activity targets and objectives were met – and in most cases, all three organisations exceeded expectations. Through various activities, the projects also addressed several gaps and challenges that were evaluated in the diagnostic exercise and supported in the integration of the suggested recommendations. For example, the projects contributed to the integration and dissemination of the objectives of the School Sector Development Plan (2016-2023), National Education Policy 2020, and the National Education Act, in-line with the constitutions of Nepal. The projects filled several gaps identified in country, including awareness and integration of national policies, sensitization on violence prevention and response, knowledge transfer and capacity building of primary actors like SMC/PTA members, students, teachers, parents and others.

In the 10 months of the project life, the organisations surpassed their initial targets despite the immense challenges associated with COVID-19. The projects together reached over 639 schools, 6,116 teachers, school management staff and PTA members, 55,368 students and 1,161 communities through their activities and interventions to accelerate progress towards the Safe to Learn Call to Action and prevent and respond to violence against children in and through schools.⁶⁰ While there are several remaining needs, the projects took significant steps in addressing the gaps and challenges that were identified in Nepal's diagnostic exercise final report. Through collaboration with local level partners, school management committees, local level leaders and governments, teachers, parents and students themselves, the three organisations were able to generate positive change and create safe and inclusive learning environments for many children and youth.

These projects are just a first step that compliment other projects implemented by the grantee organisations and other initiatives implemented by the Government of Nepal and other partners at the country level. The findings of the projects, including innovative solutions and achievements, were presented during a panel discussion hosted by the [Safe to Learn Secretariat at the Comparative and International Education Society \(CIES\) Conference on April 26, 2021](#). The CIES Conference is a well renowned global education conference, which showcases innovative educational programmes and research, and supports in the sharing of evidence-based solutions and interventions for the improvement of education around the world.

The three organisations also participated in a 'Together to #ENDviolence' Solution Summit series affiliate event in May 2021, showcasing project achievements and outcomes, including best practices for implementing safe learning projects during COVID-19.

As part of [Safe to Learn's new Strategy \(2021-2024\)](#), and to build on these interventions (including the diagnostic exercise), the Government of Nepal and relevant stakeholders will be invited to share experiences at a regional roundtable in 2022, hosted by Safe to Learn and others. The roundtable will focus on evidence, measurement and tools to inform and strengthen action-oriented strategies and plans to prevent violence in and through schools in Nepal.

Click on the links for more information on [Safe to Learn](#) and its projects or the [End Violence Partnership](#).

⁶⁰The three Safe to Learn Final Project Reports, 2021.





Appendix

Methods	Number	Informants	Geographic Location (District)
FGD	2	School teachers	Dhading and Dhanusha
	2	community members	Dhading district
	2	children	Dhading and Dhanusha
KII	3	Members of the grantees	Mercy Corps, World Education and Voluntary Services Overseas
	3	Local partners	BASE, CIWIN, AASMAN
	2	Government authorities	Kathmandu and Sarlahi
	2	Community	Kailali
	2	Children	Dhanusha, Dhading
TOTAL	18		

The informants selected for Safe to Learn project in Nepal were representatives from the three grantees, local civil society organizations, school teachers, members of both the school management committees, parent-teachers association (PTAs), children, and representatives of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST) who were involved in the implementation of the project. The schools, communities and children selected for the study represented different districts in the provinces. The interviews and focus group discussions with the informants were conducted both through physical and online/phone meetings to comply with the government's regulations and social-distancing requirements.

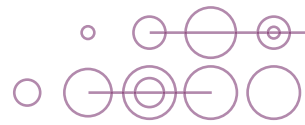




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