

everyone counts

dalit children and the right to education in nepal

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executive summary

This report describes some Save the Children US programs in Siraha, Nepal, and their effectiveness in improving educational opportunities and success for children in excluded dalit (untouchable) caste groups. It looks at the advantages of supports targeted specifically at dalits, and compares them to more broadly targeted efforts to improve the quality of education. Research findings indicate that special dalit incentives and supports have had little impact outside the context of these broader efforts.

Only 30 percent of Siraha's dalit children are in school, compared to 57 percent for all groups, or 80 percent for the country as a whole. Dalit girls are half as likely as their brothers to attend school. This is a significant expression of dalit exclusion, and also ensures that this exclusion continues. Without the basic skills provided by a primary education, dalit children have no way to break out of dire poverty, and their status as the lowest of the low is perpetuated. Even for those who are enrolled, prospects are not good. More than 75% of children who enroll in Siraha drop out before they complete grade 5, owing in large part to the poor quality of available schooling.

This report looks at three programs, undertaken in close collaboration with the District Education Office and local partner NGOs:

1. the dalit support program, which provides financial and material support for school, motivational support for families and children, and extra tuition each day for the first four months of the school year;
2. the child-friendly school program, which provides extra materials for play and learning, teacher training in active learning methods, a child rights focus, and support for the active involvement of parents and community
3. the ECD program, which supports parenting groups as well as center-based programs for 3-5 year olds, where structured active learning, free play and support for the transition to school are provided.

The study focuses on 27 schools that have received the dalit support program since 2000. Nine of these schools are part of the child-friendly program; they are compared to the other 18 schools (called "non-child-friendly" here), and to 10 control schools in a nearby area. Al-

though these control schools receive no formal supports, they have been the target of informal motivation for dalit families by an organized grassroots network, and through the volunteer work of one of the formal program motivators. Figures from school records, broken down by caste and gender, made it possible to compare enrollment and examination results in these three sample groups. In addition, school outcomes for children who graduated from an ECD program are compared to those of these other three groups. An assessment of the educational indicators was complemented by interviews and groups discussions with parents, teachers, children, local officials and partner NGO staff members.

As of 2003, dalit children were enrolled in school at a much higher rate than their non-dalit peers. Staff estimate that there is 100% dalit enrollment in the child friendly school catchment area. In the non-child-friendly schools, dalit children were enrolling at about the same rate as non-dalits. Within the 10 control schools, dalit children were still under-represented.

Since 2000, all three school groups have experienced significant increases in dalit enrollment, but the gain in child-friendly schools (203%) was more than double that in non-child-friendly schools (100%) or control schools (98%). It is possible to claim with confidence that the combination of dalit supports and the more welcoming child-friendly atmosphere has been extremely effective in promoting the dalit enrollment. By contrast, there was no significant difference between the dalit increase in non-child-friendly and control schools, suggesting that motivational support for excluded groups may be as effective alone as it is in combination with financial subsidies.

Within all 27 target schools, there has been gradual, sustained improvement in the enrollment of girls, both dalit and non-dalit, which hovers now at around 40% of school enrollment. In the control schools, girls also make up almost 40% of non-dalits, but only 26% of the dalits. This suggests that financial incentives play a more critical role for dalit girls than boys.

In addition to demonstrating the greatest success in enrolling dalit children, the child-friendly schools also show the greatest gains in preventing dropout. Dropout rates in the child-friendly schools are significantly lower than those in other schools, especially for dalits, who drop out at half the rate of their non-dalits classmates. There is no significant difference between the non-child-friendly and control schools in this regard. We assume that the greater involvement of parents and the higher awareness and motivation of child-friendly school teachers is responsible for this. This same commitment is generally not present in the non-child-friendly schools, where staff are more likely to marginalize dalit students.

In 2003, students in the child-friendly schools were passing at a higher rate than those in the other schools. Dalit children in the child-friendly schools were outperforming all other

groups, including their own non-dalit classmates. In all the other schools, dalit children were doing less well than their non-dalit peers. When cumulative pass rates for the four years were calculated for each group, differences between child-friendly schools and others were clearly significant, but there was no meaningful difference between non-child-friendly and control schools. The differences among the three school groups were even more pronounced for grade 1 than for grades 1-5, and again, dalit children led everyone in the child-friendly schools, but were the worst performers in non-child-friendly and control schools. Results suggest that the warmer, more encouraging atmosphere in the child-friendly schools allows dalit children to make much better use of the assistance provided by the dalit support program.

A separate data base has tracked all ECD graduates since 1998 (since school records do not indicate which children have or have not attended ECD.) Since 1998, all of the 1856 ECD graduates have enrolled in school; they are present in all of the target schools, where they represent 13% of the total school population. Of this number, 14% are dalit, and of the dalits, 46% are girls. Less than 2 % of these ECD graduates have dropped out over 5 years.

In 2003, 96% of dalit ECD graduates passed their year end exam. In grade one, 91% passed (as compared to about 35% in the control schools, 50% in the non-child-friendly schools and 70% in the child friendly schools.) In grades 3, 4 and 5, 100% of dalit children passed. These results indicate that ECD has been extremely powerful in preparing dalit children for school, promoting a level of success in school that far exceeds the effects of any of Save's other interventions.

This is consistent with findings in other parts of the world. Well targeted investments in children early in their lives have the greatest impact for the poorest children and appear to be more successful and more cost-effective than "second chance" programs. This does not imply that only investments in young children are warranted - continued support as children move into school can be a valuable way to consolidate gains. However, both the experience with dalit children in Siraha, and the research that has been done more widely, points to the particular cost-effectiveness of early interventions, with their accumulation of benefits over time. The reduction in repetition rates alone would go a long way towards repaying the cost of ECD.

In addition to promoting the school enrollment, retention and success of dalit children, the child friendly school program, and even more markedly the ECD program, have had an important influence on dalit parents and communities, heightening their appreciation of their children's capacities, raising aspirations, and contributing to a willingness to make demands on behalf of their children. At the same time, these programs have contributed to tackling caste discrimination by creating a local arena within which people from different castes work productively together towards a shared set of goals for their children.



background

Siraha, one of Nepal's poorest and most heavily populated districts, is home to a large number of people from marginalized castes collectively known as dalits. They are the former "untouchables", and are some of the most deprived people in Nepal's complex society. In spite of protective legislation since 1990, discrimination against dalit castes remains active and deeply ingrained in Nepal.

Save the Children US has been working in Siraha since 1990, supporting a range of integrated programs, many of them targeted at dalits. A primary objective has been to improve educational opportunities for this excluded group. This report describes the findings of research comparing the effectiveness of some of these efforts - for getting children into school, keeping them there, and helping to ensure their success. In particular, it considers the advantages of programs targeted specifically at dalits, and compares them to more broadly targeted attempts to improve educational quality. The findings make it clear that special dalit incentives and supports make comparatively little difference when they happen outside the context of more general efforts to improve school quality. Dalit children in so-called "child-friendly" schools enroll in higher numbers, are more likely to stay in school, and do better academically than their supported dalit peers in regular schools. They even do better than their non-dalit classmates. Dalit children who graduate from an early childhood development program show still more remarkable outcomes, achieving at a level extraordinary for Nepal. These findings have clear implications for policy and investment. But they also call for careful scrutiny, with an eye to the complexities that underpin even the clearest numerical trends.

dalits in siraha

Dalits make up about 17% of the population in Siraha. In the 13 village areas or VDCs¹ where this work took place, they are more heavily concentrated. They range from 16% to 59% in different VDCs, and make up altogether 29% of the local population.² More than 22,000 dalits live in this area, and about 3,500 dalit children of primary school age.³ They include a number of dalit groups, the most numerous (and some of the most disadvantaged) being Musahars and Chamars.⁴

There has been some progress here in the struggle for dalit rights. Among the younger generation and those with education, awareness is reported to have grown and bias has declined. But many dalits continue to be mistreated, repressed and deprived of the right to take part in a range of social, religious and economic activities. They are seen as impure by people in higher castes; what they touch is considered to be contaminated. They are expected to stay out of upper caste homes except for work, to avoid touching upper caste people or their possessions, and to keep their distance at shared facilities like community wells, temples or tea shops.⁵ Housing is usually segregated and intercaste marriage is very rare. Generations of exploitation have undermined health, identity and self respect for these people. Dalit women endure the double oppression of caste and gender discrimination, and are often reported to be victims of harassment and sexual assault.

Different dalit groups have traditionally been associated with specific caste-related activities, and many are skilled artisans. The Bishwakorma, for instance, do blacksmithing work, and Chamars are traditionally tanners and cobblers. But the increasing availability of cheap consumer goods limits demand for their traditional products. Most dalits live in grinding poverty, assigned to the most menial jobs, and are often in a state of deep indebtedness. Since few own land, they

¹ A VDC or Village Development Committee is the smallest administrative unit in Nepal, and generally consists of 9 village-sized wards.

² 2001 census figures, Bureau of Statistics, HMG, Nepal.

³ Although school-aged children are defined as being 6-10 and not 5-9, it is reasonable to assume that these overlapping groups are roughly equivalent in size. Based on available data, it also seems fair to assume that children represent about the same percentage in the dalit population as in the larger population of the area. For instance, in the two VDCs with the highest (over 50%) dalit populations, the number of 5-9 year old children is average for the area – there is no evidence, in other words, that dalit families have more children, as is sometimes claimed.

⁴ Dalit groups targeted in Siraha by Save the Children, include: Sada/Musahar; Sarki/Mochi/Mahara/Chamar; Mandal; Bishwakorma; Paswan/Dusher; Khatwe; Malik/Dum; Safi/Dhobi/Rajaha; Damai/Mijhar/Pariyar; Das/Tatma; Urau; Sardar; Bantar.

⁵ Around 30% of surveyed dalits report that they are prohibited from using local water sources; 46% say they have been stopped from entering temples. TEAM Consult Pvt. Ltd, 1999

cannot meet their needs by farming. Most get by through seasonal agricultural labor, but they also find work in brick kilns or tobacco factories or through selling firewood.⁶ Dalit children often work alongside adults in the homes and fields of upper caste families.

Many dalit women say that alcohol is a serious problem for their husbands - and by extension, for the rest of their families. This common response to frustration and hopelessness eats into household resources, and makes it even more likely that dalit children will work from an early age. A recent survey in Siraha found that by far the highest number of child laborers come from dalit castes - they comprise over 60% of all listed child laborers, despite being less than 20% of the population.⁷

dalits and school

According to district figures, only 30% of dalit children are enrolled in school, compared to 57% for all Siraha groups combined, or 80% for the country as a whole.⁸ In some areas, the proportion is considerably lower. A survey in a Musahar community in Siraha found only one child in nine was enrolled; in another community not even one was in school.⁹ The situation is especially bad for girls, who are half as likely as their brothers to attend school. Even in the context of the world's least developed countries, these figures are appallingly low. They are a significant expression of dalit exclusion, but they also ensure that this exclusion continues. Without the basic skills provided by a primary education, dalit children have no way to break out of the cycle of dire poverty, and their status as the lowest of the low is perpetuated.

A number of factors combine to keep dalit children out of school:

- Primary education is theoretically free, but enrollment fees, examination fees, text books, stationery and clothing can add up together to a significant part of household income. When children attend school, they can no longer contribute as much to family survival, whether through wages or household work.

⁶ Sharma, Chhetri and Rana, 1994

⁷ Yadav, 2002. See also Leslie and Rajbhandary, 1997 and Rajbhandary, Karki and Leslie, 1999 for information on children and labor in Siraha.

⁸ District figures from Siraha District Education Office, 2002; national figures from HMG Department of Education 2000.

⁹ Phuyal et al 2002

They say we're dirty, but they don't let us fetch water. Our children bathe with buffalos in the pond - there's not a child without skin problems and infections. They want their own children to be educated, but they want our children to herd their cattle. We're spending our lives in the dark but we don't want to keep our children in dark like us. *One mother in a group of Musahar women*

Discrimination used to be more common here. Older people still discriminate based on caste, but not the younger generation. They'll eat food that we have touched, for instance, although older people will not. Fetching water is still a problem. We still have to wait for upper caste people to use the well first in the morning. And it's true, our children are not allowed inside their homes - but it doesn't matter; they just come to our home and play together. I haven't seen any discrimination from their children, and it's sin to blame others without evidence. But ask my children if you like, rather than believing me.

Hari Ram (Mochi), dalit father of three girls in school

Caste discrimination is definitely diminishing in our communities. It's not just our programs. Dalits are generally more aware. They'll raise their voice now if they're badly treated. But that doesn't mean that discrimination has been eliminated. It takes a long time to eradicate those kinds of habits. Most schoolteachers, for instance, don't discriminate in school, but not many of them would want us inside their homes, touching their kitchen utensils!

Raj Kumari Sada - dalit motivator, Indreni NGO



"We don't want to keep our children in the dark like us."

- Education is not part of the experience or the expectations of most dalit households. The largest terai dalit groups, the Musahars and Chamars, are especially marginalized in this regard, and the dalit literacy rate in Siraha is the lowest in Nepal, (between 5 and 36 percent, depending on the group¹⁰). Schools are unfamiliar, intimidating places for most people in these groups. There are few dalits in the civil service in the Siraha, much less in the teaching profession.
- Most dalit children speak Maithali at home rather than Nepali, the language used in school, and this adds to the sense that school is a foreign world.
- Although there are government incentive schemes to get dalits into school,¹¹ many of these socially isolated people do not know about them.
- Many dalit parents do not see education as an advantage for survival, since good jobs are perceived to depend on good family connections and to be limited by caste identity.
- There is a fear of ridicule or harassment from others in the community when dalits send their children to school.
- Many dalit children were not registered at birth, and so cannot register formally in the schools. (This is true for many non-dalit children too, but is more likely to be the case for dalits.)

For those dalit children who do attend school, the chances of success are low. Like their peers, they are handicapped by extremely poor school quality. Classrooms are often overcrowded, especially in grade 1, where underage children often accompany older siblings. There are sometimes more than 100 children to a class, and little in the way of materials or equipment. Teachers are often poorly trained, frustrated, lacking in commitment and frequently absent for days at a time. Teaching methods focus on rote memorization. Less than a quarter of the children in Siraha who start school make it through grade five, and the worst dropout and repeat rates are in grade 1.¹² The difficulties are especially pronounced for dalit children who often cannot understand or communicate with their teachers when they start school. Because of the high illiteracy rate among dalits, few children can expect help at home with their studies. These difficulties frequently result in children leaving school. Dropout rates in Nepal are high for all children, and in grade one they are routinely over 20%. For dalit children, they are especially high.¹³

¹⁰ A 1997 study found that as many as 36% of Kamis are literate, but only 5% of Musahars, the largest dalit group, and only 9% of Chamars, the second largest group. CERID (1997).

¹¹ Ministry of Education and Sports, 2003

¹² Siraha District Education Office figures for 2001/2002 give the primary school completion rate as 23.85%.

¹³ Although available government education figures are not disaggregated to reflect caste or ethnicity, a CERID study (2001) notes that dalit children are an identified “pocket of low internal efficiency”- or higher dropout.

save the children programs for dalit children

Save the Children US has a number of programs that affect dalit children, but in this report we focus on just three: the dalit support program, the child friendly school program, and the ECD program. The organization works through local partner NGOs, and in these school-related efforts collaborates closely with the local District Education Office (DEO).

the dalit support program

Beginning in 2000, an intensive package of supports was made available to dalit children in 27 schools in the 13 VDCs where the most disadvantaged groups are concentrated. Between 2000 and 2003, the number of dalit children helped in these schools grew from 976 to 2351.¹⁴ The package includes the following:

Financial supports: Funds are available to cover all fees, stationery, text books, school bags and clothing for school, at a total value of Rs 500 per child per year (about US \$8).

Dalit motivators: Six dalit motivators, based within the partner NGOs, visit all dalit families and encourage them to send children to school. They inform families of available supports, provide orientation for mothers, familiarizing them with school routines and objectives, and check on children's progress when they have enrolled in school. Four of these motivators are dalits and two are women.

Extra tutoring: Most of the dalit children who enroll attend daily "tuition classes" for an hour or two before school for the first four months of the school year. These classes, designed to ease the transition to school and to encourage regular attendance, are conducted by facilitators who receive a few days of training from a local teacher.

Dalit teachers: Save the Children US responded to the teacher shortage in some especially crowded schools by hiring eight dalit teachers, all with at least a school leaving certificate. They are paid like other teachers, and carry a regular load. But in addition, they are expected

¹⁴ By 2003, the program had actually grown to include over 4000 dalit children in 38 schools in 24 VDCs; but only the original 27 schools are tracked in this study.

to offer particular support to dalit children: help outside of school for those who need it, follow-up when children fail to come to school, and general support to stay in school and maintain a high level of effort. They organize regular meetings between teachers and dalit parents, and encourage the schools to maintain reliable records and to report to the NGO. In the target school area, they are currently the only dalit teachers in the government system. This innovative step on the part of the program has undoubtedly helped to make schools feel more approachable to dalit families – although the extent of the influence of the dalit teachers has yet to be fully investigated. It is important to note that almost all of these dalit teachers, to date, have been placed in child friendly schools. In addition to these teachers, there are also some dalit “volunteers” who perform many of the same functions, but receive a much smaller wage.

child friendly schools

The child friendly school initiative is a collaboration between Save the Children US, partner NGOs and the DEO within selected government schools. Among the 27 target schools evaluated in this report, nine are part of the child friendly program, which has a number of components.

School self-assessment: this participatory exercise involves teachers, parents, children, school management committee members and District Education Office officials in identifying local indicators for school quality, and it results in a school improvement plan.

Teacher training is provided in child-centered, activity-based teaching practices, and a child rights focus, including a non-punitive relationship with children, is encouraged.

Greater parent and community involvement is promoted in managing and monitoring school affairs, and all child friendly schools have active school management committees (although greater involvement on the part of women and dalits is still being encouraged.)

In addition, extra play and learning materials are provided, and extra-curricular events are planned, with children involved in the planning. The warmer atmosphere of these schools is especially important to dalit children and their families, for many of whom school has been a foreign and intimidating world.



Nathuni Mochi, dalit motivator, talks to a Musahar boy about school.



A typically barren classroom in a regular school, less crowded and in better condition than many.



A more flexible child-friendly classroom with materials readily available for use, and children more actively involved.

changes in a child friendly school

Back in April 2001, we held our school self assessment and came up with a school improvement plan, and after this a lot of things began to happen. In the past, teachers were often late; they never prepared lesson plans, and although they had received whole school training, they didn't draw on the materials. They never concerned themselves with parents. The school management committee was just a token group that came to occasional events.

Nowadays, teachers arrive on time and often stay after school to catch up on their work. There are lesson plans hanging in every class, and teachers make good use of whatever materials there are now. Dalit students used to have to sit in the back of the classroom, but now teachers are much less biased. They also have a better relationship with parents -they visit their homes and report on what their children are doing. Parents are much happier with the school; they come to meetings and school functions and they help out with school repairs. They visit the school regularly and there are frequent parents' meetings. At this point, they are really in touch with what is happening for their children. SMC members are also much more aware of their role and responsibility. They meet regularly, and they also visit classrooms and school activities to stay in touch with what is going on. School accounts are transparent now, and everyone knows about the budget. *Guddhar Chaudhari, chairperson of SMC at a child friendly school*

Before things changed here, we didn't really care what children were learning. We just tried to finish the course. If they didn't do their homework, teachers beat them, and students would just stop coming - it was a vicious cycle. We didn't really care about student attendance, and we only paid attention to the really clever students. We never

had any extra-curricular activities - teachers just went home as soon as they could. It's all really different now. Teachers are committed to following the school improvement plan. Students are a lot more confident - willing to ask questions and not scared of speaking up. And every Friday we have extra curricular activities organized by a student committee. In the past, if a parent ever came to school, it was just to put pressure on a teacher to pass their child. Now they come to really discuss how their children are doing. *Fekan Jha, head teacher at a child friendly school*



A dalit boy drinks freely from the well at his child-friendly school, something he could not do at the village well.

early child development programs

Save the Children US early child development (ECD) programs include parenting support and center-based programs for 3 to 5-year-old children.

Group parenting sessions meet for three months on a series of child development topics, followed by monthly discussion meetings. Programs build on families' existing practices and increase their knowledge, skills and confidence in supporting their children's overall development and accessing needed services and supports.

ECD centers provide an expanded range of experience for young children for 2 hours a day, encouraging active learning and developing skills that will help children make good use of whatever learning opportunities are offered in school and elsewhere. They offer a structured program of facilitated, directed and free play activities. These include stories, singing and dance, and the exploration and manipulation of learning materials. The centers also support a successful transition to primary school through a three month program near the end of the year, which introduces children to some of the skills, themes and activities they will encounter in school.



ECD centers provide an expanded range of experience for young children

Only a small proportion of the population in the target area has been reached by ECD to date. Because of enthusiasm for the program, however, and its increasing financial self sufficiency,¹⁵ the number of centers is expanding rapidly, and grew from 38 to over 100 just in 2003. As centers become more self sufficient, they are turned over by Save the Children to become the responsibility of the District Education Office – although the organization maintains involvement in the affairs of each center, providing encouragement and on-going technical support.

Only 14% of the children served by ECD in 2003 were dalits, but their numbers are increasing as centers become more financially secure, as greater efforts are made to involve dalit families, and as more dalit parents realize that their children's fees can be waived. (The decision to waive or lower fees is made by the management committee of each center, and is based on need.) By early 2004, 22% of the ECD children were dalits, the ratio in any given center depending on the make-up of the local community. There are very few dalit ECD facilitators (only one in twenty) however, since a minimum requirement for the training is a school leaving certificate – rare for dalit women in Siraha. Active efforts are now being made to recruit qualified dalit applicants.



The centers encourage active learning and exploration.

¹⁵ These centers, which were initially dependent on Save the Children US, are managing over four or five years to become self-sustaining within their communities, drawing on fees and on support from both their VDCs and the district education office.

research methods and data sources

This research made use of both qualitative and quantitative methods.

The quantitative component focuses on the 27 target schools that have received dalit supports since 2000; nine of these are child friendly schools. These two groups, the child friendly schools (CF) and the other target schools (non-child friendly, or nCF), are compared to a group of control schools in nearby VDCs that received no formal interventions. However, late in the research it was discovered that, although lacking in formal supports, the control school area was in fact receiving informal motivation for dalit families through the efforts of a committed dalit motivator from the program. This will be discussed below in more detail.

table 1: the sample schools

	Child friendly schools (CF)	Other target schools (nCF)	Control schools
Number of schools	9	18	10
Interventions	Dalit support package and child-friendly supports	Dalit support package	No formal interventions

Finally, some outcomes for children who attended an ECD program are compared to those of these other three groups. Data for these various comparisons were drawn from the following sources:

- A database was compiled of the enrollment, examination attendance and examination pass rates of children in all the schools in the 13 VDCs between 2000 and 2003, based on figures from school records broken down by caste and gender. This database makes it possible to compare the child friendly schools to the 18 target schools without this program. School records in Nepal are often incomplete and unreliable and these figures cannot be considered fully accurate. There is no evidence, however, that they discriminate between groups, and they can be considered to provide a reliable overview of the comparative situation of different groups of children.
- The same figures were collected from the 10 control schools.
- A separate database was maintained by Save the Children US staff on the progress of ECD graduates through the school system since 1998. This made it possible to compare the school success of ECD graduates with those in the larger school population. Data on ECD gradu-

ates are organized according to slightly different categories from those in the school records, and comparisons cannot be considered as dependable as those made within a single database.

All quantitative data was analysed for its statistical significance.¹⁶

The qualitative component provided a means for exploring the pathways through which the programs made an impact. By investigating people's responses to their situation and to various interventions, it contributed to a fuller understanding, revealing complexities beneath the quantitative findings. It also pushed us back to the numbers to look more carefully for support or refutation of hypotheses that were stimulated through discussion and observation.

Interviews or group discussions were conducted with 112 men and women, boys and girls from 6 communities, representing a number of dalit groups. Some non-dalit parents were also interviewed. In addition, the perspectives of teachers (dalit and non-dalit), school management committee members, ECD facilitators, dalit motivators and Save the Children US district staff were included. The recent resumption of hostilities in Nepal made it difficult to collect all the qualitative data that we hoped for. Several topics would ideally have been more extensively investigated, among them:

- the level of parent involvement in the child friendly schools and how it is experienced among different groups;
- the full impact of having dalit teachers, both for dalit children and families and for the larger school community;
- the reasons for the poor performance of dalit children in the nCF schools;
- the social implications of the dalit scholarships;
- the story behind the grassroots dalit support network in the control area.

¹⁶ Statistical analysis was done using Microsoft Excel's built-in Data Analysis Tool Pack. Wherever possible, a paired T-Test was used. When the paired test could not be used (either because records for one year were incomplete or the testing was across two different groups) a T-Test assuming unequal variance was used. For significance tests on data using absolute numbers (enrollment for instance) only schools reporting data for all years were used. For tests of percentages (pass and examination appearance rates) all available data was used. Significance for all tests was achieved when P-values for a two-tailed test were below .05 (i.e. more than two standard deviations away from the sample mean.) In a few noted instances, significance was achieved on a 1-tailed test (the line again being drawn at P-values below .05) when it could not be reached on a 2-tailed test.

using qualitative research to get below the surface

Our qualitative researcher sometimes uses the tactic of playing "devil's advocate" to ensure that people aren't just feeding him the answers they think he wants to hear. One day, he spent time with the head teacher of a child friendly school and the chair of the school management committee. The conversation turned to their success in enrolling dalits. "Do you think education is really necessary for dalits?" our interviewer asked innocently, wondering how deep their commitment really went. The SMC chair looked uncomfortable and was quiet for a minute. He murmured something in the local language to the head teacher, and then said, "Education is necessary for everyone." Our researcher persisted, "But why for dalits?" The man was clearly irritated this time. "Schooling isn't only for the upper castes. Dalits and non-dalits have contributed to this school, and have made it what it is. Dalit parents are as active in the management committee as the rest of us. The government and the NGOs provide a lot of support to educate dalits. We go door to door to encourage parents to send their children. If education wasn't important, why would we all be working like this? Do you think it's just a foolish notion?"



getting dalit children into school

A primary objective of these all these programs has been simply getting these excluded children into school. Since the 2000 school year, there has been a marked increase in the enrollment of dalits in the 13 VDCs. Area-wide they were enrolled as of 2003 at the same overall rate as non-dalits (76% and 77% gross enrollment for the respective groups). This increase is concentrated most heavily in the CF schools, where dalit enrollment is now higher than that of non-dalits, relative to their presence in the population at large. Dalits make up 38% of the school population, but only 25% of the larger population in the CF VDCs. In the nCF schools, dalit children are enrolling at about the same rate as non-dalits. Within the 10 control schools, dalit children are still under-represented.

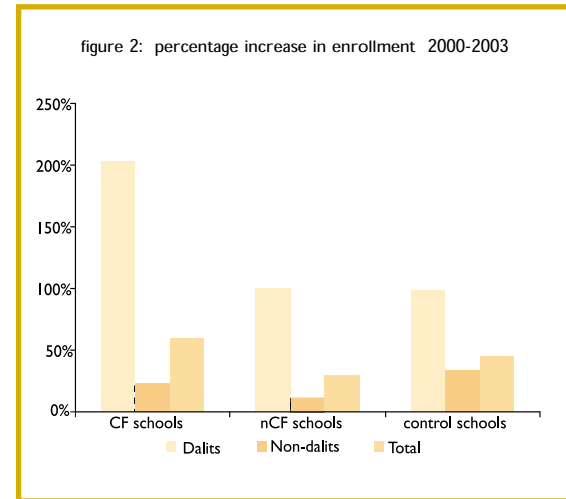
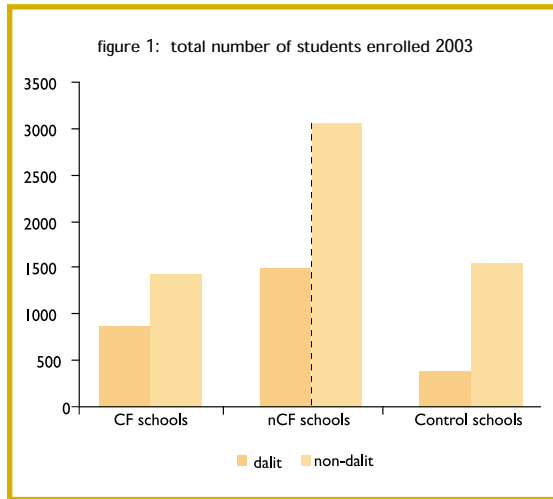
table 2: dalit presence in the sample schools in 2003

	CF schools	nCF schools	Control schools
Dalits as % of total in school	38%	31%	19%
Dalits as % of total population	25%	32%	24%

A look at changes in enrollment over the last four years adds another dimension.¹⁷ All three groups of schools experienced significant increases in dalit enrollment over this period, but the gain in the CF schools (203%) was more than double that of either the nCF schools (100%) or the control schools (98%).

CF schools have clearly been a much stronger draw for dalit children, and staff estimate that currently there is 100% dalit enrollment in the catchment area of these schools. It is impossible to know whether these gains would have been evident without the financial supports. It is possible, however, to claim with confidence that the combination of dalit supports and the more welcoming "child friendly" atmosphere has been extremely effective in speeding the entry of dalit children into school.

¹⁷ Not all schools kept complete records between 2000 and 2003, but it was possible to look at changes in enrollment for most of these schools. Three of the CF schools, five of the nCF schools and two of the control schools had incomplete records, and were left out of calculations on change in enrollment.



Some dalit children have apparently chosen to move to one of the CF schools rather than attend their local school. But census and school records combined indicate that this has not been a strong trend - it is simply not feasible for children to go any distance to school. The considerably higher increase in dalit enrollment in the CF schools can reasonably be taken at face value.

By contrast, there was no significant difference between the increase in nCF and control schools. Despite the lack of formal supports for dalits in the control schools, their numbers almost doubled in four years, and kept pace with the increases in the nCF schools. It is important to recall, however, that the control schools appear not to have been a true control in this regard. Although lacking in formal supports, they were in fact receiving informal supports, they were in fact receiving informal motivation for dalit families. Raj Kumari Sada, a committed dalit motivator in the support program, lives in the control area, and in her free time has contributed to establishing a groundswell of support for enrolling dalit children in the control schools - a testimony to the ripple-effects of the program.

In addition, this area has a strong Musahar network and a far more organized dalit population than is true in the target area. As of November 2003, this network has established itself as a formal organization, Rishikul, and Raj Kumari serves on the board. This level of local organization has undoubtedly contributed to the enrollment increase in the control area. This suggests that self-organized grass roots motivation for excluded groups may be as effective alone as it is in combination with formal financial subsidies. This is an important finding, but could use further investigation. As we will see below, this hypothesis breaks down to some degree when girls are considered separately from boys.

For non-dalit children, rates of increase were dramatically lower than those of the dalit children over this same period. Only the control schools saw a significant increase (34%). In the CF schools, non-dalit enrollment grew by 23%; in the nCF schools it increased by only 11%, about one tenth of the dalit increase. A third of the nCF schools actually saw an overall decline in the number of non-dalit children. There is a very significant difference ($P=.01$) between the nCF schools and the control schools with regard to non-dalit boys in particular.



Raj Kumari Sada, a committed dalit motivator even in her free time.

Their numbers grew by 33% in the control schools over these four years, but only by 3% in the nCF schools. This is virtual stagnation at a time when growing enrollment is the rule all over Nepal. What could be happening with these non-dalit children, and boys especially? One possible explanation is related to the private schools in the area.

There has been spectacular growth in the number of private schools in the target area in recent years. Enrollment in these schools, known in Nepal as "boarding schools" (despite the fact that few of them are residential) has soared since 2000, when there were four private schools in the 13 VDC area with a total attendance of 134 students - or 2% of the total primary enrollment. By 2003, there were 10 boarding schools with 784 students - over 8% of total primary enrollment. Almost all of these students are non-dalits, and the great majority (70 %) are boys.

Private school enrollment nationwide is 6.6%. This makes 8% in the very poor district of Siraha seem unexpectedly high - but on the other hand, Siraha's location on the East-West highway, an important conduit for emerging social trends, could be a contributing factor



The more welcoming child friendly atmosphere has been extremely effective in speeding the entry of dalit children into school.

Nonetheless, this phenomenon raises a question: could Save the Children US's efforts on behalf of dalits be contributing to the movement of upper caste students into private schools - as was the case, for instance, when schools in the USA were desegregated? None of the interviews with parents or teachers suggest that the presence of dalit children was a factor in decisions to send children to private school - the expressed concern was school quality. But parents might have been reluctant to admit they were motivated by bias. Without further investigation, we cannot conclude that there is any relationship between Save the Children's dalit supports and the burgeoning private school industry. Recent discussions with head teachers, in fact, indicate that there may now be a reverse flow of private school students into the child friendly schools, drawn by their high quality, but we have no figures to confirm this.

enrolling girls as well as boys

In Siraha, as in most of Nepal, fewer girls than boys attend school. Parents rely more on girls to contribute to the workload at home, and since girls leave home when they marry, investment in schooling is considered less practical for them. Among poorer dalit groups especially, the number of girls attending can be extremely low.

The program schools, however, have a good record in improving girls' enrollment. The increase in the number of girls attending school has not been as high as the increase in the number of dalits, but there has been continual progress, most markedly for dalit girls in CF schools. Although gender balance has improved for both dalits and non-dalits in the program schools, it is changing much faster for dalits. Within all of the program schools, the presence of girls, both dalit and non-dalit, hovers now at around 40%.

If grade 1 alone is considered, the percentage of girls is still better - 49% for all girls in the CF schools and close to 45% in nCF schools (although slightly lower for dalits than non-dalits.) Grade 1 figures provide a sense of the direction in which things are moving, so this bodes well for girls. (Within Siraha, where females are only 48% of the larger population, these figures represent full parity, or close to it.)

The control schools are a different story, however. Although girls make up 40% of non-dalits enrolled, only 26% of enrolled dalits are girls, and this balance does not improve in grade 1. The difference in the dalit girl presence in program and control schools suggests that financial incentives may be playing a more critical role here. Informal motivation in the control area appears to have contributed to significantly increased enrollment for dalits - but primarily for dalit boys. The added financial incentive seems more critical to making the same difference for girls. Discussion with staff and parents confirms this. When asked what would happen if

"Parents hate to invest in their daughters. They're considered the property of their future husband's household and parents think that it's pointless to spend money on their education. Their logic is that if you won't get the fruits in the future, why would you bother to pour water on the seedling."

Shiv Shankar Mahato, head teacher of a private school

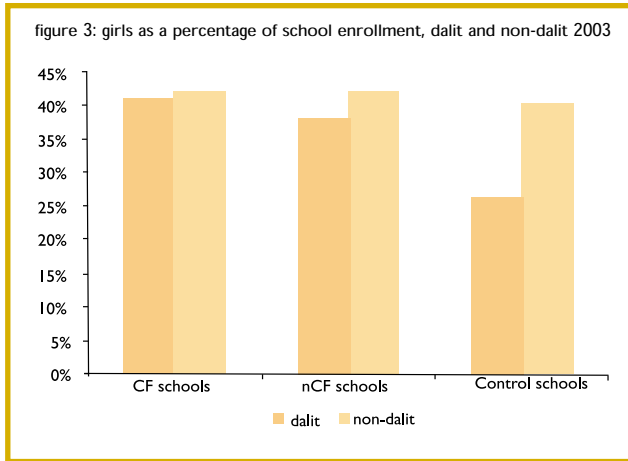
"Girls in the Terai are in a difficult position, and it's worse if they are dalits. In the lower grades, there are more girls. But when they reach adolescence, parents hurry to get them married. The family's whole prestige is tied up in the sexual purity of their daughters, and they don't want to take any chances. Boys can continue their studies after marriage, but not girls. Even before they are adolescents, girls have to spend more time on household chores. Regular attendance is the exception for girls. First they have to do their housework, and only then can they go to school."

Raj Kumari Sada, dalit motivator

Dev Kumari's mother says that she always treats her son and daughter equally. But there are real differences in her long term expectations are for them. She hopes her 12-year-old son will go through school and become a teacher. But when she is asked about 14-year-old Dev Kumari, she just looks at her and laughs. Dev Kumari says angrily that her mother makes it very hard for her to stay in school. "Last year she tried to pull me out, and said there wasn't enough money. But I know my father sends enough from the Gulf. She wouldn't give me money to register, and I had to go to Indreni (the partner NGO) three or four times to ask for help. They gave me money for books and stationery, and finally my mother paid the registration. Now she says I can stay in school, but I don't know whether to believe her."



Dev Kumari and her mother



financial supports to dalits were withdrawn, a number of people said that girls were most likely to be pulled out.

In spite of steady growth in the relative numbers of girls in all the target schools, there are still considerable differences among dalit groups. Among Musahar children in the target schools, for example, the percentage of girls is still only 32% (31% in the nCF schools and 36% in the CF schools). Girls from these families are still twice as likely to be kept at home as their brothers. This is an improvement over their 20% presence four years ago, but it is still a far cry from the gender balance for upper caste children, and even for most other dalit groups.

keeping dalit children in school

Enrolling dalit children is critical. But keeping them in school is just as important. Enrollment does not necessarily mean regular attendance. Nor does it guarantee that children will stay in school after the first year or two.

Attendance

Our data unfortunately does not include the attendance rates of children in most of the schools – and even where attendance rates are kept, they are suspect. Attendance is a serious problem, however, and receives far less attention than it should. Save the Children Norway, for instance, has found that many parents and teachers consider children to be attending “regularly” even when they come to school for less than half the time.¹⁸ The problem is often more severe for dalit children, whose work loads are greater. A recent study found in one Siraha community that the attendance of Musahar girls during harvest time dropped as low as 7 percent.¹⁹

Even when children come to school, they may not remain all day. Children and teachers go home to eat at midday and often do not return. This practice is tacitly accepted by all; parents are just as happy to have children home to help out; children see little point in returning to school when no teachers are present; and teachers feel little responsibility to be present when children are largely absent. Teachers’ attendance is widely seen to be a serious problem. In one school that staff visited recently, one of the three teachers arrived at 10 a.m. but left shortly afterwards. The head teacher arrived at 11 a.m., and the third teacher never came at all. This is apparently all too common.

The attendance problem has been exacerbated by the resumption of hostilities in Nepal, and Siraha is seriously affected. Schools are often forced to close for a day, but it can take five or six days before everyone starts to come again. Students are reportedly afraid of attending, knowing that children are sometimes taken from schools to serve in the rebel forces. A recent one-month survey in one of the control schools showed an overall attendance rate of only 28%; a nCF school in the same month had only 18% attendance. We do not know how typical this is, but given the current situation, it is probably not unusual.

¹⁸ Baseline information collected from Kavre schools, Save the Children Norway, Nepal.

¹⁹ Phuyal et al, 2002.

There appears to have been some improvement in this regard in the CF schools, where attendance rates were monitored between 2000 and 2002. Over this period, attendance climbed from 45% to 62% – an impressive change, but even so, a discouragingly low rate. Qualitative data suggests that it is still much better than at other schools. “Now that we’re child-friendly,” says one teacher, “none of the children try to escape from school after lunch anymore. We have story books and poetry books, and when the children have free time, they love to read. They forget what time it is when they’re reading. In the past, we had to tell them to come to school. Now we have to remind them to go home!” It is at least possible that the more supportive atmosphere of the CF schools serves to allay children’s fears.

school retention

Dropping out of school is a serious problem in Siraha, especially in grade 1. Less than 25% of those that enroll ever complete grade 5. Measuring annual dropout, however, is a challenge, since there is no formal system for tracking children from year to year. In many local school districts in Nepal, the annual dropout rate is estimated based on the number of children who fail to appear for the year-end examination. Failure to appear does in many cases mean that a child



"They forget what time it is when they're reading. In the past, we had to tell them to come to school. Now we have to remind them to go home."

has dropped out, or plans to. But some of these children may repeat the year, or may have transferred to another school. Many of the "dropouts" are underage children in grade 1 who are not permitted to sit for the exam and most of them repeat the year. This figure, then, is almost surely an overestimate of true dropout, but it is a useful proxy in the absence of anything better. We will use the term "dropout" in quotation marks whenever it refers to the failure to appear for the examination.

Table 3: "Drop out" rates, 2003²⁰

	CF schools			nCF schools			Control schools		
	dalit	n-dalit	total	dalit	n-dalit	Total	dalit	n-dalit	Total
Grades 1-5	8%	14%	12%	19%	16%	17%	18%	18%	18%
Grade 1	13%	24%	20%	28%	21%	24%	21%	25%	24%

"Dropout" rates in the CF schools are significantly lower than those in the other schools ($P < .044$). This is especially true for dalits, whose "dropout" rate is around half that of their non-dalits classmates, and is significantly lower than the rates in the other schools ($P < .015$). There is no significant difference between the nCF and control schools with regard to "dropout", although dalit children in the nCF schools show the highest "dropout" rates.

Why would "dropout" be so much lower for dalit students in the CF schools than for everyone else - and so much higher for dalits in nCF schools? It is likely that the support provided for dalits is much more effective in the context of CF schools, where parents are more aware and actively involved, and where school staff are more highly motivated to retain these students. According to a dalit motivator, this same commitment is generally not present in the nCF schools; staff are more likely to marginalize dalit students, and in some cases, it has been difficult to get them enrolled in the first place. This issue calls for further research.

²⁰ The formal drop out rate for Siraha in 2000 was 13 percent for grade 1, and lower than that for other grades; the failure-to-appear rate was 25 percent for grade 1, and 21 percent for grades 1-5. It has not been possible to clarify this difference, since, when district staff are interviewed, they describe their calculations for annual dropout as being based on the recorded failure of children to appear for the exam.

gender and "dropout"

There is a general belief that girls are at greater risk of dropping out of school, given parents' lower commitment to their education, and greater reliance on having them at home. Yet almost no difference was found between the "dropout" rates of girls and boys in any of these three school groups. Girls across the board "drop out" at slightly lower rates than boys (1% less than boys in target schools, 3% in control schools), but this does not reach significance. In grade 1, the differences are slightly greater, with girls dropping out 3-4% less than boys; but these also are not significant differences.

finding ways to stay in school

For those dalit children who manage to stay in school, sheer determination is often a critical factor. The accounts of those who sent their children to school in the years before Save the Children's supports are very telling. Perhaps most noticeable is the gritty persistence of many mothers. Dalit women have a great deal working against them - but when it comes to their children's chances in life, many have proven that, with even minimal support, they can stand up to their husbands' resistance and to the ridicule of the larger community.

Guru Saran's mother is a good example. Guru, a 19 year-old Musahar youth, is the first person in his village to complete secondary school. His mother, he says, was the reason he made it through. She was illiterate when he started school, but was determined that her son would learn to read. While he went to school, she attended literacy classes so that she could help him with his studies. There were no ECD centers or other supports at that time, but he did really well in school, placing first in his class year after year. The teachers praised and encouraged him, and that was an inspiration. He also won prizes in competitions, which spurred him on, and finally he got a scholarship from a local organization. His parents quarreled repeatedly about keeping him in school. His father wanted him to get a paying job, but his mother always refused. "My mother helped me get through," says Guru Saran, "and now I'm helping my brother and sister. I want to be sure they also graduate." This young man has now become the secretary of the new dalit organization, Rishikul.

problems for dalit children in the nCF schools

Don't ask me about problems! There are a lot of problems around dalit students and some of these schools. And as more dalit children enter school, new problems emerge. The first problem is just finding the space to accommodate them all. There are no extra teachers, so one teacher may have to teach more than a hundred children at a time. They spend more than half the period just taking attendance. In this situation it is very difficult to talk about quality. Recently, we tried to enroll a group of dalit students in Janta Secondary School in Chandralalpur (nCF school). The school head teacher refused and said they didn't have the classrooms, furniture, teachers or other anything else to accommodate all the dalit students. It was so difficult to convince him! Finally, we asked him how many primary level teachers there were in his school. He said six, but that a lot of them were actually spending their time teaching the higher classes. We started to put pressure on him. We told him he was creating an artificial problem by diverting the primary school teachers from their real responsibility, and we threatened to tell the District Education Office that he was undermining the educational rights of these children. At last he agreed to enroll dalit students in grade I, but I am not sure how teachers are going to treat those children!

Raj Kumari Sada, dalit motivator

Three of my children were going to school, but now I've pulled them all out. The school that was close to us wouldn't take them - the head teacher said they were full. So they had to cross the highway and go to the Chainpur school. This meant that they had to pass through a village where they were often harassed and beaten up. At the school there was also a lot of fighting and the teachers did nothing! So finally I decided they should stop going.

Gulebiya Mochi, dalit mother of four children

working for change in the CF schools

You can't make a model school without everyone's efforts. We've involved parents, teachers and students in developing this school. It was a challenge at first bringing dalit children in - but now a lot have enrolled. Now we pay attention to keeping them there. It wasn't only the responsibility of the SMC and teachers. Children and parents also help out. We have a student attendance committee with representatives from each class. When a child doesn't come to school for three days straight, they go to his house and find out why. If he's sick, they suggest that he see the doctor. But if he or she is not coming because of chores or something else they start questioning the parents. If they really love their children, why don't they send them to school? This really embarrasses the parents and it's very effective. Children are supposed to tell the attendance committee in advance if they are going to be absent more than three days. The committee members take attendance in their own classrooms, and this frees the teachers up to concentrate on teaching.

Guddhar Choudhari, parent and SMC chair at a child friendly school.

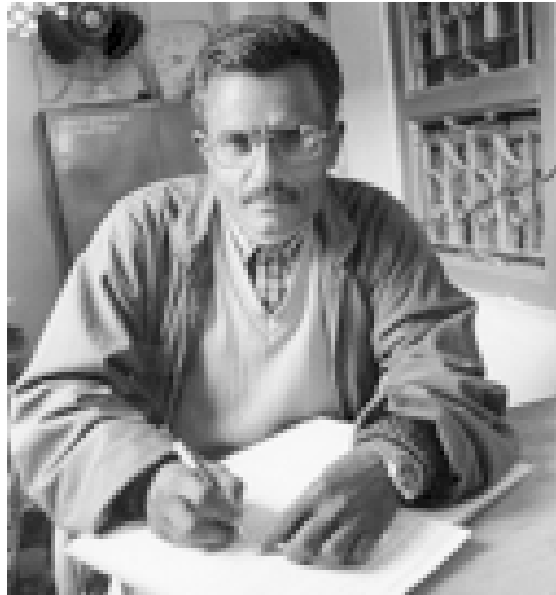


Guddhar Choudhari, chair person, makes a point at a school management committee meeting.

the quality issue: supporting the children that enroll

I'm really not satisfied with the service we're providing. We've been able to increase the number of dalit students, but we've been unable to provide them with the level of support they need. We have some very large classes - close to 100 - and it's very difficult to support and care for children individually. Parents feel that we're doing well in comparison to some of the other schools, but it's really hard to maintain a high level of performance. The most important thing is certainly to get all dalit children into school and find ways to keep them in school. It's a challenge. Even a small event may threaten the parents' commitment. If they see their children sitting on the floor, while others are on a bench, they may stop sending them. If they get negative reports from their children, for instance about bullying from other children, or physical punishment from the teachers, they may pull them out. And when one parent does this, others follow. In my experience, it is very hard to make all parents happy at the same time. So we try to involve them in school activities as much as we can. Every month we share our achievements, limitations and weaknesses with them, and we ask them to support us. I feel that if we're open with them, they'll excuse our mistakes. Our door-to-door visits to dalit families have also helped.

Ram Dev Yadav, head teacher, Sri Sarbojanik child friendly school



Ram DevYadav, head teacher at a child friendly school. "I feel if we're open with them, they'll excuse our mistakes."



Dropout is much lower in the child friendly schools, where staff are more highly committed and involved

helping dalit children to succeed in school

Siraha's child friendly schools have shown significant success in enrolling dalit children and keeping them in school when compared to nCF and control schools. We still need to look at the impacts for the success of dalit children in school, and their capacity to keep pace with their upper caste peers.

In this study, success in school is measured by the rate at which enrolled children pass their year-end examinations.²¹ It has been argued that examination results are an inadequate way to measure school achievement, since they overlook many facets of learning and success. Nor are they always even-handed – many teachers in Siraha are considered to be arbitrary and inconsistent in their marking practices, and pass rates vary widely from school to school. According to local Save the Children US staff, there is no evidence that this variation among schools reflects an objective difference in the quality of teaching or in the real level of students' achievement. These problems could be seen as an argument for a more standardized approach to measuring achievement. But the fact is that pass results, however irregular, determine whether or not these children move ahead in school; they are the pragmatic measure that defines school success. Despite the fact that standards for passing appear to vary from school to school, there is no evidence that teachers discriminate between girls and boys, or between dalits and non-dalits. This being the case, pass rates remain a reasonable, simple way to assess and compare the school success of different groups.

In 2003, students in the CF schools were passing at a higher rate than those in the other schools, and students in the nCF schools were doing somewhat better than those in the control schools. Dalit children in the CF schools were outperforming *all* other groups, including the non-dalits in their own schools; in all the other schools, dalit children were doing less well than their non-dalit peers. These differences were not found to be significant, because of the extent of the variance from school to school. However, when cumulative pass rates for the four years were calculated for each group, the patterns remained constant, and the differences between CF schools and others reached clear significance.²²

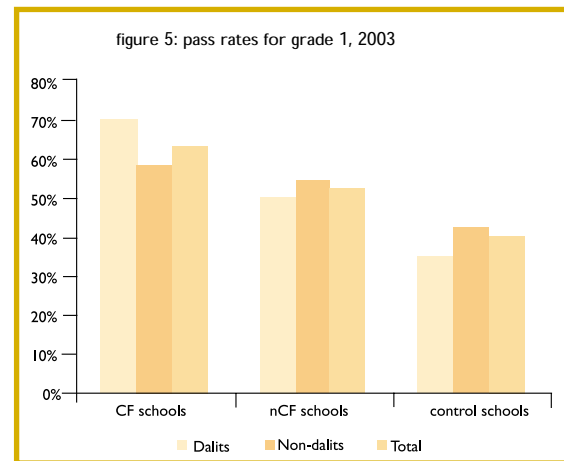
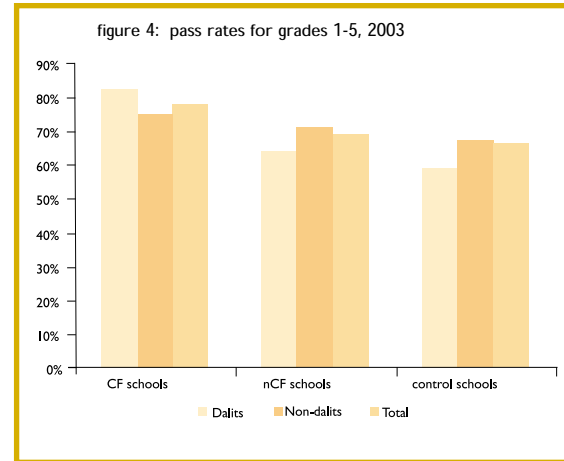
²¹ In Siraha, the percentage of enrolled children who pass their examinations at the end of the year is called the "promotion rate", although it does not necessarily mean that children actually enroll the following year. In this report we will refer to it as the pass rate. The term "pass rate" in Nepal more commonly refers to the percentage of children who pass the exam relative to the number who actually appear for it.

²² The significance of the difference between CF and control schools: for dalits, $P = .00068$, for non-dalits, $P = .0137$; the significance of differences between nCF and control schools: for dalits, $P = .010$, for non-dalits, $P = .0664$ (this last significant only on a 1 tailed test).

Throughout Nepal, pass rates tend to be worst in grade 1, and that is the case here too.²³ Differences among the three school groups are even more pronounced for grade 1 than they are for grades 1-5 (see figure). The differences, again, are largest for the dalit children, who lead everyone in the CF schools, but who are the worst performers in nCF and control schools. Once again, the significance of these differences is more clearly demonstrated by looking at the cumulative results for 4 years, and again, the relationship among the different groups stays the same. The difference between the CF schools and both the other groups is again significant.²⁴ But there are also significant differences between nCF and control schools, both for the overall population and for dalits alone.

These results suggest that dalit students in the CF schools, who are generally outperforming the non-dalits, have benefited from the extra tuition supports provided by Save the Children US and its partners. Dalit students in the nCF schools, who have received the same extra tuition, have not benefited to anything like the same degree, and there is no meaningful difference between their pass rates and those of dalits in the control schools. It seems that the encouraging atmosphere in the child friendly schools allows children to make better use of the supports they are offered. As is the case with enrollment and retention, the child friendly schools appear to provide the context that is necessary to activate the other benefits being made available.

The fact that there is also a difference between nCF and control schools for grade 1 suggests that in the nCF context the extra tuition may be of greatest value for children just starting school, providing needed support during an especially challenging time.



²³ To some extent, these lower pass rates reflect the number of underage children who come to school along with their siblings. These children increase the challenge for teachers and other students, and although they are formally enrolled, they do

²⁴ Between CF and nCF schools, difference is significant only for the whole school population, $P = .03$. Between CF and control schools, there are again significant differences: for dalits $P = .0017$; for non-dalits $P = .0072$. Significance of the difference between nCF and control schools: for dalits $P = .0132$, for non-dalits $P = .06362$ (significant only on a one-tailed test).

As is the case with dropout rates, the difference in pass rates between boys and girls is not large. Girls do better across the board, but the difference is small and insignificant.

repetition

It would be useful to compare repetition rates within the program area with those in other schools. The figures available to us, however, do not actually track children from one year to another, which makes it impossible to do this in any systematic and meaningful way, since not all children who fail a year actually return to school to repeat the year.



Children in the child friendly schools, supported and encouraged, pass at much higher rates than children in the other schools.

comparing ECD to school-based programs

As of 2003, there had been 1856 ECD graduates since the program began in 1998.²⁵ These children attend all the local schools, and they made up about 13% of the 13 VDC primary school population. Since school records are not disaggregated to reflect children's ECD experience, it was not possible to do a systematic comparison of the ECD group with the other groups discussed in this study. However, a separate database tracking ECD graduates between 1998 and 2003 has recorded dropout, migration and repetition over those years. Children not included those categories can be assumed to have passed and moved on.²⁶

Enrollment: Every ECD graduate has started school. The fact that these children entered school at the age of six, rather than as underage children, without a doubt increases their chances of success.

Gender balance: In 2003, 49% of ECD graduates were girls (in other words, full gender balance for Siraha). For dalit children it was 46% - less good, but still a better gender balance than that in the larger school population.

Attendance: Qualitative information has pointed repeatedly to the impressive attendance of ECD graduates. The argument is that these children enjoy ECD to such an extent that they are eager to leave every morning, and push parents to get them there in time. This creates what Save the Children US staff call the "school-going habit", and when these children start school they are far more likely to show up every day. ECD graduates, who are accustomed to taking a snack with them each day, stay on reliably after lunch, unlike most students.

School retention: Of the 1856 ECD children who have enrolled in school over the last five years, 1822, or 98 %, remain in local schools. Some children (10) have migrated out, so this means a cumulative dropout rate of less than 2 % over 5 years. Dalit children have dropped

²⁵ This includes children from centers currently supported by Save the Children US, as well as those in centers that were established by Save the Children, but that are now the official responsibility of the DEO.

²⁶ The figures derived from this database differ from those reported in the recent Nepal ECD impacts study (CERG, Save, UNICEF, 2003), which looked at some of the same children over an earlier and shorter time period. For instance, pass rates are higher now and drop out rates are lower. In part this reflects an additional 2 years of data; in part it results from our rejection in the earlier study of any individual child records that were incomplete or filled out incorrectly. Subsequent tracking by Save the Children US staff has indicated that we were probably over-cautious.

Most dalit parents in our area have enrolled their children in school now, but there are still about 15 percent who hold back - they're fearful of change, and especially for their daughters, concerned about sexual purity. I know the psychology of these dalit parents, because I'm from the same community myself. We're having the best luck with the children who went to ECD. They developed the habit in the center of being regular and serious about learning, and they're doing better than the other children in school. It also helps that the parents of these children now have a real interest in their children's learning. We're still not really satisfied with the performance of children who went right into school without the ECD experience. Their parents tend to pull them out for work at times, or they just send them towards the end of the year for the exam.

Raj Kumari Sada, dalit motivator

My seven year old son Kari has already dropped out of school. I hoped he would be a teacher. But my dream of seeing him educated has come to nothing. Nothing I did would convince him to go to school regularly, and as a result he dropped out. Other children in the community who went to ECD are enjoying school and getting good results. They want to go to school even if their parents need them at home. The ECD center encouraged them to attend regularly, and it became a habit. But I didn't enroll my son in the center, not realizing what a difference it would make. I felt I wouldn't be able to pay the fees. But my son could have had a scholarship if I had asked the facilitator. I definitely plan to send my other children next year.

Ram Pukar Sada, dalit father

We enrolled my older son in ECD because my wife said it would give us more time for work. But then I found how important the center was. The children learn so much just by dancing, singing and watching, and they always want to go. It's such a lovely environment, and they learn such good habits there. I'm sure these children will always be honest and friendly and talented - it's so easy to see the difference between them and other children. I'm ready to go to any lengths now to make sure my sons are educated. I'll become a bonded laborer if I have to until they pass their final examination. I'll give them all the support they need, but they have to study and pass honestly. I don't want to see them behind the ox like me, slaving on other people's land.

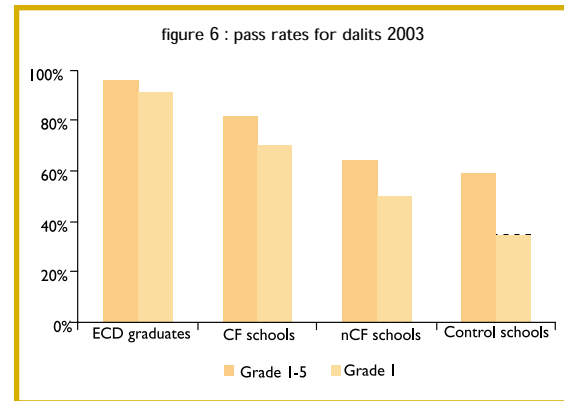
Brahmadev Mochi - dalit parent



ECD children start school ready and eager to learn

out at slightly higher rates than the others (3% cumulative dropout over 5 years, or less than 1% per year).

Pass rates: In 2003, 97% of all ECD graduates passed their year end exam. The pass rate for dalit children (96%) was marginally lower. In grade one, 93% passed overall, and 91% of all dalits - again, an insignificant difference. In grades 3, 4 and 5, 100% of dalit children passed. Figure 6 compares pass rates for dalit ECD graduates, and dalit children from the three school groups. It is fair to assume that the real difference between ECD graduates and the other children is actually greater than these figures suggest, since the ECD children's results have been raising overall averages within the target schools.

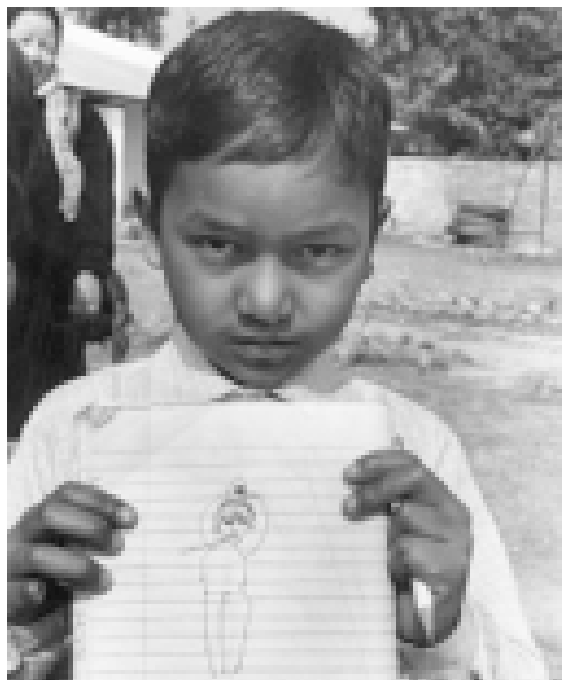


These are important results for two reasons. They indicate that ECD is extremely powerful in preparing children for school, producing a level of success in school that exceeds the effects of any of Save the Children US's other interventions. They also show that the effects of ECD attendance continue through primary schools, in line with what studies from around the world are confirming.²⁷

Grade 1 is a serious stumbling block for many Nepali children - by far the most failures and dropouts occur during this critical year. The ECD graduates, both dalits and others, are moving on to grade 2 at more than double the rate of children country-wide and better still in comparison to those in the Siraha control schools. They are also doing better than dalit children in the program schools, and even those in the very successful child friendly schools. Dalit ECD graduates pass grade 1 at a 20% higher rate than their peers in the child friendly schools, and 40% higher than those in the nCF schools.²⁸

²⁷ Barnett, W.S. 1998.

²⁸ Since almost all of these children pass, and since pass rates are our only current measure of school success, we cannot compare the relative impact for ECD children of CF and nCF schools. This would require either looking at examination marks or making use of some more standardized testing instrument.



A dalit boy, a recent ECD graduate, displays his drawing of Krishna.

This is consistent with findings in other parts of the world. There is a large and growing body of evidence on the disproportionate success of early intervention for children in poverty. Well targeted investments in children early in their lives appear to be more successful and more cost-effective than "second chance" programs. Although some programs for school age children in high income countries have been cost-effective, those geared towards preschool children have been found to have greater returns. According to a recent analysis of cost-effectiveness, "Investments that prepare children to enter school ready and motivated to learn have greater effects than additional investments in school resources, such as higher teacher salaries or reductions in class size."²⁹ This does not imply that only investments in young children are warranted - continued support as children move into school can be a valuable way to consolidate gains. However, both the experience with dalit children in Siraha, and the research that has been done more widely points to the particular cost-effectiveness of early interventions, with their accumulation of benefits over time. The reduction in repetition rates alone would go a long way towards repaying the cost of ECD.

²⁹ Danziger and Waldfogel, 2000, page 6

the impact for dalit families and communities

Save the Children's interventions have had measurable, if varied, impacts for dalit children's school involvement and achievement. Qualitative investigation makes it clear that they also affect families and communities. When school is a realistic option, it can change the perspective of dalit families in a number of ways, encouraging them to think differently about their children's future, about their own role as parents, and about the implications of choice. Most decisions in their lives revolve around survival in very immediate terms. Decisions about school extend the time frame, calling for longer term strategies.

impact for dalit values and expectations

For many dalit parents, there is considerable uncertainty about the value of their investment in education, but also considerable pride when their children do well in school, and especially when they pass the all-important SLC (school leaving certificate). One young man describes his father's quiet tears after the whole community had come around to congratulate him when he graduated. Although this father had never supported his son's school attendance before, he now became determined to make the sacrifices necessary for his other children to succeed in the same way.

We do not have sufficient data to compare the impacts for the families of children who have attended a child friendly school rather than one of the other schools. But the markedly lower "dropout" rate for dalit children in the CF schools speaks for itself. These parents appear to have made a more serious commitment to their children's education.

The most significant and immediate changes appear to have been for the parents of children who have attended ECD (as well as for the children themselves.) ECD programs, with their emphasis on parenting groups and on parental involvement within the centers, have encouraged a degree of confidence and empowerment that is especially important and valuable for dalit parents – not only for supporting their children's school careers, but in their own lives as marginalized people. In some cases, these ECD dalit parents are even challenging the schools. In one case, for example, a dalit child who had successfully passed her Grade 1 examination was not promoted to Grade 2 the next year – a result of the kind of mix-up that is common in situations where classes are large and record keeping is poor. The ECD facilitator, who remains close to all her "graduates", heard about this and talked with the family. The child's parents

then went to the school and insisted that she be promoted. This may appear to be the obvious parental response to this kind of mistake. But for dalit parents, whose own rights are so routinely denied, it is a big step to do something this assertive on behalf of their child.

The enthusiasm that these ECD parents come to feel for education is based on more than a simplistic connection between school-based knowledge and life-success. There appears to be a growing recognition that it is intellectual curiosity and the disposition for learning that is important for their children, not just the content of what they learn. This can make a critical difference to the quality of their involvement when their children enter school. The significance of this kind of parent involvement for children's school achievement should not be underestimated. Research from Europe and the USA has consistently shown that when parents are involved in their children's education, children do better and schools improve. Henderson and Berla, who summarized a large number of studies on parents' involvement, conclude that, "When parents are involved in their children's education at home, their children do better in school. When parents are involved at school, their children go further in school, and the schools they go to are better."³⁰

It is not simply a matter of developing the confidence to tackle authority. The aspirations of these parents have changed. Before, it was not clear to them that their children would be capable of succeeding in school. After their ECD experience, their confidence in their children's abilities had increased, and their hopes and plans for the future had changed. Arjun Appadurai discusses the "capacity to aspire" as a skill that is acquired and sharpened with practice and experience.³¹ The poor and marginalized, he says, have little opportunity to explore the complex pathways between long term aspirations and short term realities; their resources are too heavily invested in the thorny calculations of daily survival. ECD provides the opportunity to reassess the short term realities, and to experience at first hand the latent capabilities in their children, as indeed in themselves. A number of development experiences have been described as sparks in igniting this capacity to aspire. ECD clearly has the potential to be one of them. Further investigation could tell us whether the level of parent involvement at the child friendly schools is having the same effect. It is possible that the smaller and more intimate community of an ECD center provides a safer platform for those with the least confidence.

³⁰ Henderson and Berla, 1994.

³¹ Appadurai, forthcoming.



The father of this grade 2 ECD graduate is involved in his daughter's education, helping her with homework and serving on the school management committee.

impact for caste discrimination

The intent of Save the Children's programs is not only to promote dalit education, but in so doing, to tackle the discrimination that remains inherent in Nepal's caste system. Education is widely perceived as the most effective avenue to reducing exclusion – and from this perspective, these programs can take credit for laying some essential foundations for change. Children in these VDCs are enrolling at rates that far surpass those in other parts of the district, and in the CF schools, there is evidence of even greater change.

There is also some evidence, though, that some of the dalit supports may be having unintended consequences. The argument presented by a number of staff members and local people is this: while caste differences are a reality, they are gradually lessening for educated people, for the younger generation, and especially for children, who often ignore caste distinctions in their own friendships. The specific identification of dalit children through these programs, and the benefits made available to them, emphasize the differences and in some cases cause ill-will. Non-dalit families say their children resent the fact that their neighbors are getting school materials that they don't get. Some dalit children say they are made to feel like beggars. A number of people point out that the special school uniforms available to dalit children have marked them as a different group. In some schools, a move has now been made to require these uniforms for all.

It is difficult to know how serious these concerns are - or whether they may in some cases be a reactionary response to this affirmative action program. We also do not know for sure whether these feelings are more or less prevalent in communities served by the child friendly schools. If dalit supports were clearly effective in terms of promoting children's enrollment and success in school, it would be easier to disregard these charges. But dalit supports, by themselves, have demonstrated relatively limited success. Dalit children, even with their supports, appear to be more readily included at the CF schools, but we know very little about the experience of their parents and the general effects for community relations. The complex issue of targeted incentives and their effects for excluded people needs to be more fully discussed within these communities in a careful and participatory attempt to evaluate the overall worth of these programs.

Because of more extensive previous research, we have a clearer sense of the effect of ECD programs on caste discrimination.³² A point that was repeatedly raised is the changing awareness about caste that ECD promotes. Discrimination is not permitted within the centers. Facilitators know they could lose their jobs, and dalit families all say that they have encoun-

³² CERG, Save, UNICEF, 2003.

Recently, we got new school dresses from Bhawani (partner NGO). This made the other kids really jealous. One Sah girl told me that we got the dresses by begging, and that dalits are all beggars. I was really upset and wanted to complain to the teacher, but then she shut up.

Ram Kumari Mochi, grade 4, nCF school

I was never really conscious of being a dalit. My best friend was Imal Lama. While I was in the child club, I used to go to his house, and we would eat and play and work together. Our families also spent time together. Now my younger brother and Imal's younger brother are also friends.

They're still small and there's a lot they don't know. Recently, our school provided extra tuition classes for dalit students. They wanted to go together, but Imal's brother couldn't go because it was only for dalit children. Before this, they had no idea about dalit or non-dalit. Now they know about caste differences. It's not good. My brother gets extra tuition classes in school without paying and Imal's brother is doing the same thing, but in a different place and he has to pay for it. I had no idea of caste when I was a child, but my brother knows all about it through the program. It's not good."

Amit BK, child club advisor and dalit volunteer teacher



Amit BK with his students

tered no such discrimination. Many higher caste families seem to welcome the chance to ignore traditional boundaries within the center and to see their children experiencing a more inclusive social world. One facilitator noted that the fee schedule at their center, which charged less for the poorer Musahar group in their village, resulted in a much greater sense of community. "It has created 'we' feelings among us," she said. "The gap between people has been decreasing and, at least while they are at the center, they tend to be able to rise above caste and economic differences."

Outside the centers, practices do not change as fast and most people still adhere to traditional patterns of exclusion. ECD facilitators who treat all children equally within their centers, for instance, may still not allow dalit children to enter their homes, aware as they are of potential disapproval from family and neighbors if they ignore these community norms (see below.)

However slow change may be on the outside, the fact is that ECD centers create a space within the community, protected from social disapproval, where new ways of relating can be practiced, and where the will to move beyond exclusion can be given a chance to develop. The daily proximity of these children and the time their parents spend working together on matters of joint concern provide valuable opportunities for reconsidering old assumptions and biases. It is important to bear in mind, however, that dalit children have been a minority to date in most ECD centers. It is possible that this may make it easier for the rest of the ECD community to accept and support them. We know too little about the dynamics within the supported schools, where increasingly large numbers of children are dalits. In CF schools, they are almost 40% of the school population. It would be helpful to explore in depth the experience of dalit parents and children, and especially to find out whether the child friendly schools, with their emphasis on inclusion and participation, have managed to break down barriers in the same way that the ECD centers have.

Once, when I was still in ECD, I went to the facilitator's house to pay my monthly fees. She and her mother-in-law were eating lunch, and I called to her from the corner of the yard, and said I had come to pay her. When she called me to come over, I went and tried to hand her the money, but she told me just to throw it down near her. So I did, and then I left. She didn't invite me in, and she didn't want me to touch her while she was eating, because her mother-in-law was there. But the next day, she touched me and washed my face at the center.

Hari Sharan Sada , ECD graduate

conclusions and recommendations

There seems to be little question about the relative effectiveness of Save the Children US programs in supporting educational opportunity for dalit children. ECD is the single most effective support to date. When children have had two years of this program, they rarely fail to enroll in school, and five years of experience indicates that they almost never drop out. They are highly successful at coping with the demands of whatever school they end up in, and few have failed a year-end examination. Even in grade 1, notorious in Nepal for its high failure rate, over 90% of dalit children pass and move on to grade 2. (Compare this to 35% for control schools, and to a little over 40% for the country as a whole.) The fact that the ECD program includes a parenting component, and that parents are very involved in center management, undoubtedly plays a role. The ECD children enter school with their parents prepared to offer the kind of interest and support that has been found critical world wide in improving both the success of children and the quality of schools.

Also very powerful as an intervention for dalits is attendance at a child friendly school. This is a relatively new initiative, stronger in some schools than others. But it is clear that the warmer, more child-focused environment, and the genuine welcome extended to parents as partners, makes a big difference. Dalits enroll in much higher numbers at these schools and are less likely to drop out. Their pass rates are significantly higher than those of dalits in other schools. We do not know, at this point, how these children might be making out without the package of dalit supports. What we *do* know is that within child friendly schools, children seem to make excellent use of these supports – as demonstrated by the fact that they are achieving consistently better than their non-dalit classmates.

This is *not* the case within the non-child friendly schools. Dalit children here receive the same motivational, financial and extra-tuition supports – but the supports appear to have little impact. These children are not performing as well as their non-dalit classmates, and on the whole are not doing much better than dalits at the control schools, who have received only informal motivational support. In grade 1, the extra tuition appears to contribute to higher pass rates – presumably by easing the very challenging transition to school for these children. But at the same time, these children are “dropping out” (or failing to appear for their exams) at higher rates even than dalits in the control schools, pointing, we believe, not only to problems of quality in these schools, but to failures in genuine inclusion.

We need to look more closely at the benefits of the dalit support program, and some of the concerns that it raises. This package appears to have been highly successful in the context of the child friendly schools. The more inclusive, encouraging atmosphere seems to activate the potential value of these supports. We cannot entirely dismiss their value in other school settings: there is some evidence that the financial support makes a difference to dalit girls, and also that the extra tutoring may be helpful for grade 1 children. But overall, the effects of the package have not been impressive. At the same time, there are some indications that, in places where it is not backed by more general attention to rights, this affirmative action program may be doing harm as well as good, stimulating resentment and possibly even reinforcing caste differences in immediate, if not long term, ways. These reactions may be the kind of backlash that can be expected when the status quo is challenged. But the concerns of dalits themselves should be taken seriously in this regard. By contrast, the testimony of both dalits and non-dalits points to the building of genuinely constructive relationships through the ECD programs.

The hostilities in Nepal are bound to color any situation at this point. The fear and uncertainty generated by the conflict appears to have very real implications for education. Attendance appears to be at an all time low, and this affects children's learning in obvious ways. The level of community solidarity and support experienced in many of the child friendly schools seems to provide some reassurance, and although we lack full attendance figures to confirm this, these children appear to be attending more regularly. Large scale progress in Nepal for the education of excluded groups is unlikely to happen in the context of conflict. But the establishment of child friendly schools may be one interim step – providing a greater sense of security for children while the foundations are built for a better system of education.

recommendations:

- Increase the number of ECD programs and child friendly schools as much as possible, ensuring, of course, that quality is not compromised by going beyond the capacity to support the programs properly.
- To this end, focus on building capacity, increasing the number of people who can reliably provide the level of support needed to establish and assist new programs.
- Since national ECD coverage will take a while to establish, support and ensure dalit enrollment in any existing or new centers.
- Promote the kinds of horizontal networks and connections that can encourage both ECD programs and child friendly schools to learn from one another.
- Investigate the mechanisms whereby existing financial subsidies are accessible, and provide assistance to dalits in accessing them – not only in order to conserve resources for programs that have been proven effective, but also to build the capacity of local people to pursue the supports to which they are entitled.

- At the same time, work to strengthen the links between program efforts on behalf of dalit children and the DEC/MOE work on disadvantaged communities. Conduct discussions with MOECS/DOE/DEO and donors to share findings and encourage incorporation of these proven approaches into EFA 2004-2009.
- Continue to research the positive and negative aspects of affirmative action subsidies by consulting with parents, teachers and students.
- Investigate the high level of grass roots dalit organization and mutual support that exists in some areas, with a view to learning how to support and build on it.
- Continue to press for and support accurate record keeping within the schools, so that tracking success can become a more routine matter.
- Make the findings of this (and any other) research available to stakeholders at the local level. Parents and teachers need to know about the relative benefits for children of the programs they have been involved in. Their perceptions and responses could be valuable in rethinking and strengthening programs.
- Continue research into the effectiveness of programs, following children and communities over time, in order to build on the base that has been established.



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