



SUPPORTING THE EDUCATION OF MARGINALISED GIRLS IN KAILALI PHASE II (STEM II)

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Now in its second phase, *Supporting the Education of Marginalised Girls in Kailali (STEM II)* is a 2.6 million GBP project, funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office under the Girls Education Challenge (GEC).

The project, led by Mercy Corps along with its implementing partner Backward Society Education (BASE), aims to improve the opportunities and outcomes of more than 6,000 marginalised girls in the Kailali district in the Far-West region of Nepal. To do this, the project cultivates an enabling environment, so girls are likely to stay in school, obtain higher levels of math and literacy and successfully transition through key milestones.

Background

Adolescent girls in the Far-West region of Nepal face marginalisation in multiple ways. They come from a region with the highest poverty levels in Nepal, which compounded by social factors which creates barriers to girls' access to education. This includes the low value placed on girls' education and the prevalence of early marriage – almost half of girls in Kailali district are married by 18.

Many of the girls with which Mercy Corps works in Kailali district come from the Tharu ethnic group, who have their own language, and this puts them at a distinct disadvantage as the language of instruction in government is Nepali, discouraging them from continuing school. All of this results in a third of girls not transitioning to secondary school, and only half of all eligible girls go to school at all in the district.

Target areas and communities

The project works in **30 schools across Kailali District** in one sub-metropolitan city (Dhangadhi), three municipalities (Ghodhaghodhi, Gauriganga, Tikapur), and two rural municipalities (Bardagoriya, Kailari).

The largest ethnic/caste group is Tharu, followed by Brahmin/Chhetris, Dalits and Janajati. The environment in and around STEM schools varies from one catchment area to another – some are mixed communities while others are not; some are cut off from main thoroughfares due to jungles or rivers with less access to resources and some are in the provincial capital. Class sizes depend on how populated the communities and schools are, varying from 20 to 80 students. Therefore, project activities reflect the range of backgrounds, and are tailored to the needs of each group.



Activities & Approach

STEM II combines a range of interventions for in-school girls and out-of-school girls to improve learning outcomes by targeting the following groups:

Target at Baseline	Target at Midline	Key Activities
In school Girls 4,460	In school Girls 4768	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to additional classes in Maths, English and Nepali languages, Science, life skills, and adolescent sexual health through Girl's Clubs Additional educational resources (study clubs, and learning materials)
Out-of-School Girls 1,804	Out-of-School Girls 2112	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in work readiness skills (vocational training, financial literacy and business skill development) School Education Examination (SEE) intensive classes Access to low-interest and collateral-free loan opportunities
Teachers 513	Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training to teachers on gender-friendly resources and improved teaching methodologies Equip teachers and schools by establishing learning centers (library, computer labs and science labs)
School System 30 schools	School System 30 schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training on girl-sensitive education and materials Training in forming and operating School Management Committees (SMC) Formation of an active SMCs and Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) Infrastructure support (particularly girl-friendly infrastructure) Create linkages with the local government authorities
Parents	Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement in girl's education through SMC and PTA Targeted campaigns and household level interventions aimed at shifting attitude toward girls' education

Learning

STEM II supports marginalised girls to stay in school and access a better quality of education, yielding improved literacy and numeracy outcomes on the country's standardised tests. In-school girls have the opportunity to improve their grades through girls' clubs on core subjects such as Nepali, Maths, Science and English. Girls' clubs run throughout the academic year to supplement their regular classes.

During the girls' clubs, sessions on life skills and adolescent sexual and reproductive health are provided. STEM II also supports out-of-school girls who wish to re-sit their Grade 10 Secondary Education Examinations with extensive examination preparation classes.

After attending girls' club classes regularly, I have become more confident about my own learning. I have realized that any sorts of confusion can be cleared out if we ask questions to teachers.

-A girl from Sukhad

Transition

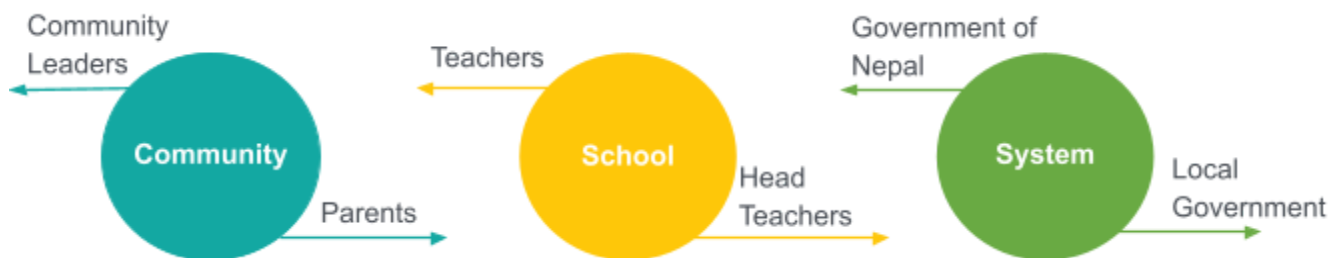
STEM II ensures that marginalised girls are supported through key stages of education, training or employment, leading to a safe, healthy and independent adulthood.

STEM II works with vocational training institutes to provide marketable skills for out-of-school girls seeking employment. Young women, who are often excluded by commercial banks as unreliable borrowers, can access the **Girls' Transition Fund**, offering them collateral-free, affordable loans through local cooperatives to help them start or expand their own businesses.

To date, STEM II has disbursed **300,000 GBP** worth of loans to over **340 young women**. In addition to affordable capital, STEM II provides out-of-school girls with business development and management training, and works with female entrepreneurs to act as mentors for targeted girls.

Sustainability

STEM II works across three levels to ensure the school system is sustainable and can support girls' education beyond the life of the project; **community, school and system**.



At the **community level**, the project works with parents and community leaders to raise awareness of the importance of girls' education to ensure that they allow girls to have home study time, become members in school management committees and parent-teacher associations, and become champions for girls' education within their own communities.

At the **school level**, STEM II improves teaching methodologies within all 30 targeted schools with the support of faculties from Kathmandu University and Education Training Centre so that all students, not only the girls under STEM II, benefit from child-friendly, participatory and interactive lessons.

At the **system level**, STEM II is supporting all targeted schools with the installation of fully equipped libraries, science labs and computer labs to enhance the student's learning experience. To improve schools further, STEM II incentivises schools through the *Educate Girls, Alleviate Poverty (EGAP) Awards* to improve enrolment, retention and exam performance. STEM II rewards high-performing schools with grants to build or repair school infrastructure, such as girl- and child-friendly toilets.

STEM II has been heavily involved in impactful government engagement, resulting in the maximum sustainability score of 12 out of 12 at midline

Following the federal restructure, Support STEM II works with **district and local level government** to improve education policy in Kailali and beyond, and supports local government agencies in strengthening child protection mechanisms to ensure each student is able to learn in a safe, child-friendly environment.

Monitoring & Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation is woven into the fabric of STEM II and the project is designed to provide rigorous data on the learning outcomes on targeted girls across all 30 schools. STEM II adopts a **quasi-experimental approach** to evaluation, working with 13 control schools and 30 treatment schools to ensure that any changes at every evaluation point are directly comparable and quantifiable, and triangulated with qualitative data.

PURPOSE OF INDIVIDUAL TRACKING

- To have accurate data on overall reach
- To ensure interventions are well-targeted and appropriate
- To help track transition and impact of interventions
- To ensure our interventions take GES into account
- To incorporate adaptive management in MEL

To measure learning outcomes, STEM II employs a plethora of tools, such as Secondary Grade Reading Assessments (SeGRA) and Secondary Grade Mathematics Assessments (SeGMA). Over the course of the project, Mercy Corps tracks the progress of individual in-school and out-of-school girls, providing a longitudinal study of their progress.

A rigorous approach monitoring and evaluation in STEM II is integral to the project, offering peer NGOs, donors, governments and education practitioners with research findings and recommendations which can inform learning and the strengthening of education interventions, policies and governance to ensure that increasing numbers of marginalised girls in Kailali district are enrolled and graduate from secondary school.

ABOUT MERCY CORPS

Mercy Corps is a leading global organisation powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.

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