

Making Dreams Happen for Out-of-School Girls through Community Learning Centers

AARAMBHA: LEAVE NO GIRL BEHIND

Learning Brief | Feb 2024

INTRODUCTION

Since 2018, People in Need (PIN) Nepal has been implementing the Aarambha-Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB)¹ project in Bara and Rautahat districts of Madhesh province, under the FCDO/UK aid's Girls Education Challenge (GEC) programme². The project operates in 21 palikas of Bara and Rautahat, reaching 9,497 girls through collaboration with Aasaman Nepal (ASN) and the Social Organization Development Coordination Committee, Parsa (SODCC). Aarambha specifically targets out-of-school (OOS) adolescent girls aged 10-19 in remote palikas across the Madhesh province, which has the highest illiteracy rate in Nepal.

Aarambha aims to enhance the life chances of targeted marginalized girls by providing basic literacy, numeracy, and life skills sessions in non-formal education (NFE) settings specifically through accessible community learning centers (CLCs). Under the project, 462 CLCs were conducted in 21 palikas of Bara and Rautahat. Upon the successful completion of accelerated learning courses at these centres, graduates were able to either transition into formal schooling into 1st to 9th Grades, or get upskilled through trainings on technical/vocational skills, which were market-needed. They furthermore received the necessary equipment. Both learning and employability interventions have been successful in addressing early marriage and breaking down harmful social norms. The project cycle data shows that 9,497 OOS girls have been educated on literacy and numeracy skills under the project, with 4,986 successfully transitioning to school and 2,347 to technical and vocational education and training (TEVT). The project has also consistently tracked the girls' learning progress through assessments in both formal education and TVET pathways to ensure positive returns.



¹ <https://nepal.peopleinneed.net/en/our-work/civil-society-inclusive-governance>

² Girls Education Challenge (GEC) is the UK FCDO's largest girls' education programme focused on provision of education to marginalized girls across the world. <https://girlseducationchallenge.org/>

Beyond education, the Aarambha project has also actively promoted gender-equitable attitudes and practices among communities, schools, and local authorities. This has enabled the creation of a positive environment for sustained improvements in the life chances of these girls. Over the five years of its operation, the project has directly positively impacted 9,497 OOS girls and over 180,000³ of various beneficiaries indirectly, including in-school students, family members, community leaders, teachers, and governmental authorities.

WHY IN MADHESH?

Although the Madhesh province is relatively ahead of other provinces in terms of transportation, access to communication, education, and the availability of infrastructure, many children are still out-of-school due to poverty, restrictive traditional practices, limited teacher positions in Terai schools with high student numbers, lack of schools-infrastructure, and high prevalence of child/early marriage in a number of palikas. The overall literacy rate of the province is 49.72%⁴ with 191,221⁵ students not attending school. Furthermore, 25,344 of these children are of primary school-going age, and 135,877 are fit to be in secondary school.

Cultural norms and traditions deeply underpin community structures in the Madhesh province. There are perceived roles of boys and girls in society that create additional barriers to accessing education. Young girls are burdened with heavy household responsibilities from a young age and there is a lack of acceptance for them going outside, earning income, and/or engaging in income-generating work. Traditional thinking and societal unwillingness to change have contributed to the perpetuation of these harmful social norms. In the province, child marriage, early marriage, and forced marriage (CEFM) rates range from 58% to 83% for girls and 12% to 40% for boys (2022)⁶. According to The Equity Index 2018⁷, Rautahat and Bara districts are consistently ranked at the bottom as two of the least-performing districts within the Madhesh province in terms of development indicators, especially the ones relating to girls' education and life outcomes.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTER (CLC)?

The Community Learning Center (CLC) is a vital learning center established for out-of-school adolescent girls. It offers a transformative opportunity for marginalized girls to engage in comprehensive literacy, numeracy, and life skill courses over a period of 9-10 months. The girls learn to read and write and receive life skills training.

The project has established 462 CLCs in Bara and Rautahat over the last five years. All of the enrolled girls are taught levels 1 and 2 of the CLC curriculum (242 hours) of Nepali, English and Math as per the Nepalese government's Continuous Education, with additional life skills curriculum of 142 hours. The girls are given a safe place and the following skills are taught – sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), social skills, basic financial management and business planning, and safety and leadership skills. The CLCs further extended support to girls in preparing their life plans or developing literacy and numeracy skills.

³ Estimated Calculation

⁴ National Census 2021

⁵ Ministry of Education (2021)

⁶ Local census by Breakthrough ACTION and Breakthrough RESEARCH (2022)

⁷ Foundation for Development Management. (2022). Girls Education Challenge. Project Evaluation Report. <https://girlseducationchallenge.org/media/m5jb3cu3/aarambha-IngB-endline-evaluation-cohort1.pdf>



Photo 1: Group activity at a Community Learning Center.

WHERE ARE THE CLCS LOCATED?

CLCs are established in secure and environment-friendly surroundings with access to safe drinking water and toilets. These CLCs are selflessly positioned for effortless accessibility, ensuring that girls can participate in the educational journey without obstacles. To ensure the utmost safety and suitability, PIN Nepal has developed a checklist that serves as a standard for the identification and preparation of these secure CLC locations, guaranteeing an enriched environment for the continuous delivery of educational sessions to empower and uplift the girl's cognitive and non-cognitive skills.



CLCs are run by a trained female facilitator, whose role is essential in implementing the centre's functions such as teaching, tracking of attendance, and performance. She is further supported by the essential project staff and a comprehensive system of oversight by the ward chairperson and their dedicated representatives.

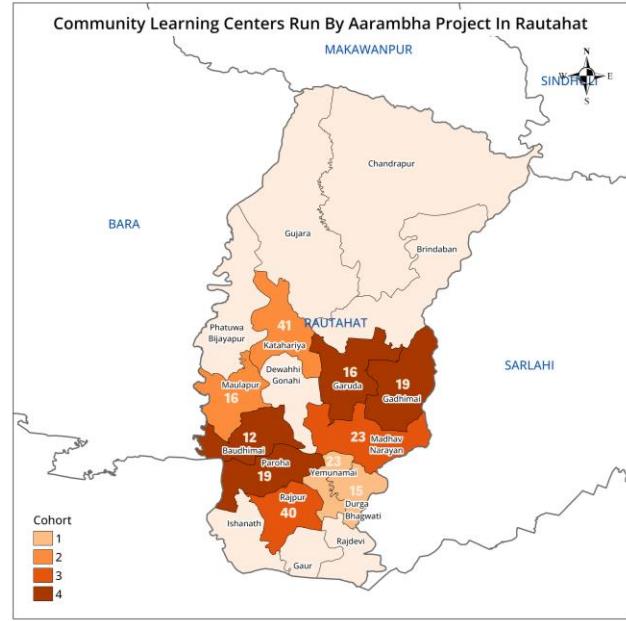
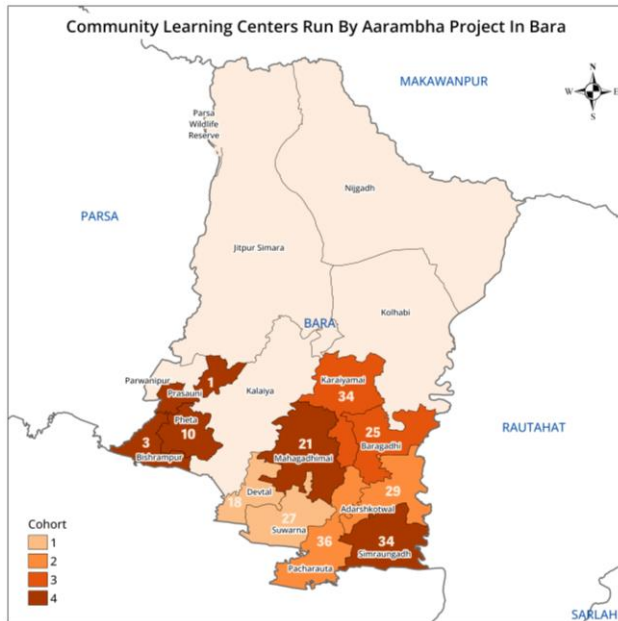
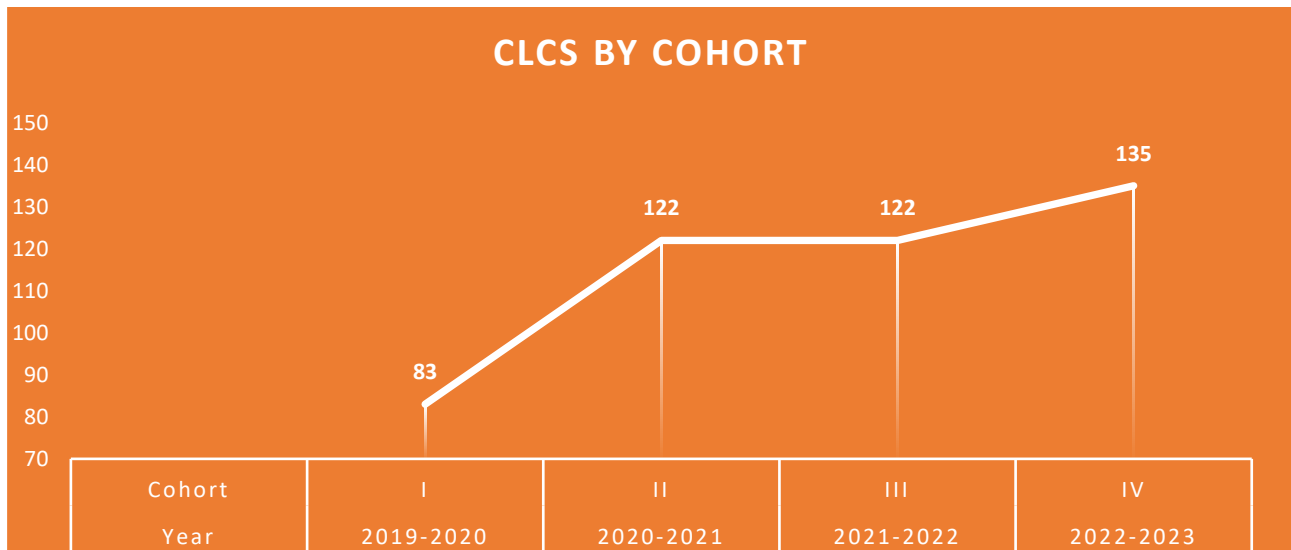


Photo 2 & 3: Map of CLCs in Bara and Rautahat districts.

SELECTION OF GIRLS AND LEARNING



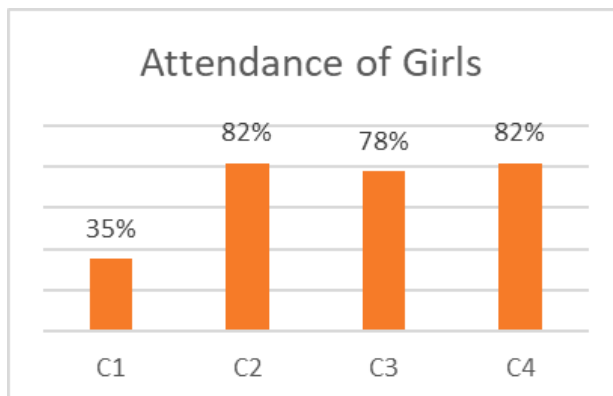
With the approval of the local government, pre-baseline assessments are conducted using the project’s marginalization framework, following inclusion criteria⁸ to select the primary beneficiaries/OOS girls. Once identified, parents/guardians and other family members are consulted for enrollment in CLCs. After obtaining approval, girls are enrolled, and pre-tests assess their baseline learning. Post-tests evaluate learning outcomes upon CLC completion. A total of 462 CLCs were established from 2019 to 2023 to enroll OOS girls.

⁸ Age: 10-19 years, Marital Status: married or in a union or is waiting for “Gauna” ceremony, School Status: out-of-school girls who have never attended school, out-of-school girls who have attended schools but have dropped out, Residence: living in the project target area

MAJOR IMPACTS OF THE CLC

Increased attendance in literacy and numeracy sessions:

The regular attendance-tracking of girls in CLCs shows that 35% of girls from Cohort 1 girls have attended more than 70% of CLCs literacy, numeracy, and life skill classes. This indicated number is low when compared to other cohorts due to distance learning interventions during COVID-19. In contrast, in Cohort 2 and Cohort 4, 82% of girls attended the CLCs and more than 70% attended the classes. Likewise, in Cohort 3, 78% of girls attended more than 70% of the CLC classes. The high attendance levels are attributed to parental engagement activities and the mobilization of change champions⁹.



Supported smooth transition of girls to school and TVET: The project supports the development of life plans for all 9,497 girls, who are enrolled in the CLCs during life skill sessions. 7,759 of the girls successfully developed their life plans¹⁰. 4,986 girls enrolled in a school, and 2,347 pursued an education in TVET following their graduation from CLC.

Learning Outcomes: The data on literacy and numeracy from the baseline and end line show that non-learner girls have decreased after attending CLCs, while the number of proficient girls has increased after graduating from CLCs by 10% in Nepali, 3% in English, and 1% in Mathematics.

Enhancement of the girls' confidence: According to the perception survey, an encouraging 83% of the girls from Cohort 3 and Cohort 4 reported noticeable improvements in the girls' self-esteem, self-efficacy, confidence, and a heightened sense of agency. This empowered them to make informed and positive choices for themselves.

I did not know how to read and write before, but now I do. I even teach my brother at home, and my parents are pleased to see this.
(OOS girl in Mixed interview, Karaiyamai)

Parents encouraged to support their girl's education: The thematic assessment of parental engagement intervention for girls' education conducted under the project shows that nearly four-fifths (77.9 %) of parents developed a positive attitude towards continuing the OOS girls' learning after the intervention. They provided emotional support, encouragement, and a favourable homely environment, such as helping girls to complete their household chores, providing them pocket money to buy educational materials, and providing school snacks to support their learning outcomes. Mothers-in-law and husbands also supported married OOS girls to improve their learning outcomes by helping them with domestic chores.

⁹ Change Champions are actors within their community who conduct awareness activities and engage in door-to-door visits to persuade parents to send their daughters to CLC and school regularly.

¹⁰ Life plans include different ways and procedures to help girls identify how and where they will transition – either to school through re-enrolment or vocational training.

In our society, we did not send girls to school; instead, we got them married at early age. But when we involved in this project, we learn that we must send daughters to school.

(Parents in KII, Devtal; Rajpur; Pachrauta; Suwarna)

A positive shift in community attitudes: The results of the perception survey conducted among parents of girls enrolled in the CLCs reveal a significant 78% positive shift in attitudes and perceptions towards girls' education, impacting male and female family and community members, educators, boys, and government officials alike.

My parents have changed their behaviour lately. Previously, they favoured my brother and gave him more money. However, now they treat us equally. Earlier, I had to do all the household chores, but now my parents help me with them. These changes happened after they attended parental interventions.

(OOS girl in Mixed interview, Karaiyama)



Photo 3: Group photo at a Community Learning Center.