

NCEF GYAN

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE NEPALESE CHILDREN'S EDUCATION FUND

What's Inside:

Happy New Year 2007

Interview with Dr. Netra and Nalini Chhetri

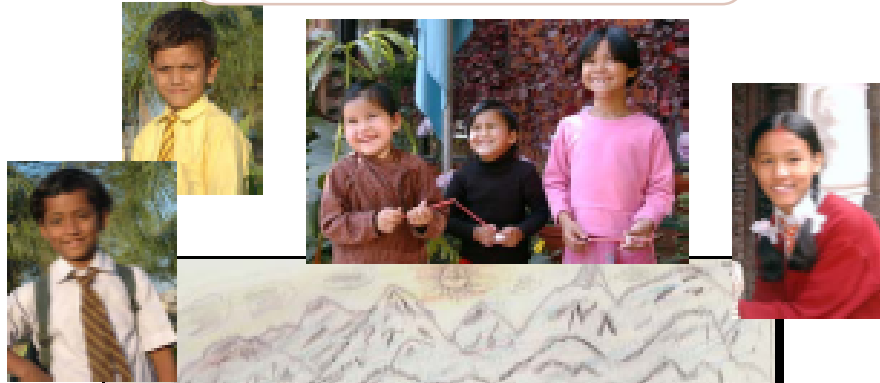


gyan: *n.* knowledge acquired
by direct perception

Happy New Year 2007

We would like to wish everyone a Happy New Year 2007. Thank you for your support in the year 2006. We look forward to your continued help and interest in developing the potentials of disadvantaged children in Nepal through education.

Latest Pictures from our children from Nepalgunj and Patan



Drawing titled "Sunshine" by Laxmi from Pragati Sikshya Sadan Secondary School, Patan

GREETINGS

From

THE CHILDREN
And
Nepalese Children's Education Fund (NCEF)

Interview with Dr. Netra and Nalini Chhetri

In the past issues of Gyan, we have included interviews that have given us insights into mostly how NCEF is doing and how it can improve. In this issue, we seek to give a broader idea of what the education system of Nepal is like, and what major problems, issues and difficulties are associated with its development. Below is an interview with Dr. Netra and Nalini Chhetri, who have kindly shared their expert opinions and perspectives regarding the current situation of education in Nepal.

Dr. Netra and Nalini Chhetri, who are from Bharatpur, Chitwan, currently reside in Tempe, Arizona. Dr. Netra Chhetri is a Post Doctoral Research Associate at Arizona State University in agriculture. He obtained his primary education in Nepal and Masters and Doctorate (Geography and Demography) from Penn State University in

the United States. Dr. Nalini Chhetri is a teaching faculty at ASU. She obtained her bachelors degree in India and obtained Doctorate from Penn State University in Education Theory and Policy. Both enjoy hiking and gardening under the hot sun of Tempe.

Q: What has been the motivating factor for your deep interest in the development of education in Nepal?

Both of us worked in development organizations for over a decade in Nepal promoting literacy programs in disadvantaged sectors of the Nepali society, including children and women. During this period of time we gained firsthand experience of how poverty and education are intertwined and how they affect the lives of Nepali people.

Q: Having lived in both Nepal and the US, what major differences have you observed in the education system in the two countries?

We have children who go to public school here in the U.S. From a personal perspective, we believe that the public schools are not rigorous enough in math and science or even in the culture of learning. Too much emphasis is on FUN. Learning is a discipline and discipline is NOT a dirty word but intelligence and learning seems not be the COOL thing to do or be. The emphasis on

creativity is wonderful but the happy balance between rigor in math and science and creativity is missing. This is with reference to the public schools.

We also teach and we are appalled at the undergraduate level of learning (or unlearning). Preparation for undergraduate studies leaves much to be desired in the U.S at least in the large public university as well as in community colleges. Our understanding is limited here of course. However, the graduate programs are probably the best in the world.



In Nepal, the emphasis on rote learning in elementary and high schools is widely known. But for those lucky few who complete high school and college, there is a certain sense of being an educated person, which we do not see in the US. The technical branches of universities (engineering, forestry, agriculture, and medical) are considered to be

quite good in Nepal though that is debatable.

The biggest drawback is that for Nepal, education is a privilege and not a right. That is the fundamental difference. The Nepalese children are not mandated to be in school as they are in the US. Education in the US is mandatory, at least through high school, but education is not mandatory in Nepal. We are changing that thankfully but funding is the primary issue.

Another thing is that Nepal is a multi-lingual nation and the US is largely homogenous (English and Spanish are largely the spoken languages in the US). Children in Nepal, especially in remote areas have to come to school not just to learn but also to learn in a language that is not their mother tongue. That is the cause of major drop-outs. There are not enough bilingual teachers.

Incentives for poor children to stay in school are almost non-existent. In Nepal, the parents, the community, the child – all have to be extremely committed to go to school. Except for few experiments, there are no lunch programs, and children have to walk great distance just to come to school. There are no free buses. At least primary schools are much more prevalent now but middle and high school are not so. None of that is a problem in the US.

Overall, however, I believe that this is intrinsically not a fair question. You cannot compare the richest nation of the world

with that of one of the poorest, as Nepal is bound to come up short. Here in the US, even in a relatively poor school district, about \$3000 is spent per child per year and this amount can be as high as \$25000. We spend less than \$100 annually per child in Nepal. Private schools in Nepal are good but only an extremely small percentage of students attend private schools.

Q: What major problems and obstacles contribute to these differences?

In short, funding. The Ministry of Education has little money to develop curriculum and provide textbooks, infrastructure investment is minimal, teachers are poorly paid, and teachers are not qualified (the World Bank presently has given soft loans for the primary education). Other problems include: cultural discrimination against girls and marginalized and ethnic communities, historical attitude of ruling bodies to keep the greater half of the country illiterate, terrain, and lack of political will.

Q: What possible steps can different sectors (government and non-government) take to tackle such obstacles?

Scale, commitment and investment on the part of the executive, legislative and judicial bodies as well as the citizens at large. Formal and non-formal schooling must go hand in hand. Formal schools alone will not address illiteracy of a country where over 55% adult are yet uneducated (more for women). Education program has to work for ALL districts, all children, in all Village Development Committees (smallest administrative units). It cannot be piecemeal, with few VDCs or districts at a time. The time for experiments is over. Education is a long-term investment; the country cannot have a mere 5 year or even 10 year commitment (project based approach). It has to be at least a generation long commitment. A person has to have at least 16 to 18 years of education to become a productive citizen. So investment in education has to be that long. Admittedly, however, that is a pretty tough call for a nation as poor as Nepal where the entire national budget is half that that of Penn State University's.

Steps have to be comprehensive. Duplication has to be avoided. Commitment made by NGOs/ bilateral agencies and all other development agencies, as well as the government and private bodies for education and literacy programs have to be made for at least 10 years and there must be a strong coordinating body. But the programs must be flexible. For example, the urban areas are more educated so their emphasis should be on secondary and tertiary education. In the rural areas, emphasis should be on more elementary and illiteracy.

Q: What role should organizations like NCEF play from the US to contribute to the education of Nepal?

Programs have to be complementary. We cannot afford to reinvent the education wheel. Coordination with the National Planning Commission or Ministry of Education and other agencies to have a multiplier effect in the sense that the efforts of each individual party enhance the efforts made by others. Turf battles must be avoided.

MAKING DONATIONS

□ **Online:**

www.nepalchildren.org/donation.html

□ **Checks:**

Make checks payable to:

Nepalese Children Education Fund or NCEF

Mailing address:

Nepalese Children's Education Fund

P.O. Box 380061

Cambridge, MA 02238-0061

Questions?

Website: www.nepalchildren.org

Email: contact@nepalchildren.org

THANK YOU!

WHAT ARE CHILDREN DOING?

Bina in Palpa enjoyed an educational tour with teachers to a local place of Palpa district.

Kavita in Palpa had fun at a school picnic.

Subin in Kavre says, "My happiest moment is the day I won the race on school's sports day program."

ABOUT NCEF

NCEF is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to develop the potential of disadvantaged Nepalese children through education. Need-based scholarships are provided to deserving students who would otherwise be unable to attend school. Our social workers in Nepal meet regularly with the selected children and their parents to assist in each child's development. We dedicate our resources to each NCEF child until they complete high school (twelfth grade).

Q: Where should NCEF focus its efforts to maintain an efficient and effective operation according to its mission of helping disadvantaged children in Nepal?

We do not know enough of NCEF's program to advise them at this point in time. But enough work needs to be done. The important thing is not to focus on the child alone. That causes resentment and alienation for the child and the family who gets selected and has only short term benefits. Either the whole village has to benefit or not at all – communal harmony is most important in educating a child.

Q: It is safe to say that a lot of Nepali people in the US are interested in development and betterment of Nepal because they have observed and/or experienced the situations back in their home country. What role should organizations and individuals in the US, who are keen about the betterment of Nepal play?

First we must educate ourselves. We have been here for many years and to our grief our Nepali community (to put it mildly) are not well versed in the actual situation about education back at home. Most who are here come from privileged backgrounds and have rarely had the chance to work or be aware of the situation in the country, other than politics and knowing we are poor. Everything starts with being aware ourselves. Then we need to find out what already exists and discuss among ourselves to see how we can maximize our support. Regular information is important - so is regular feedback and transparency in funding, reporting (both good and bad) and above all consolidation and coordination with the government bodies would have a greater impact.

Q: All our students are awarded scholarships until they complete grade 12. What should NCEF students do once they graduate to ensure that they have desirable career and academic opportunities? Should there be some form of support system so that the students can continue their education? What other options do the students and organizations like NCEF have in this regard?

By all means they should have support. Support system are important as the students of NCEF enter into the professional field. They will need advice, need to learn how to network and transfer their learning – a kind of career support and network group is necessary. They are also an important alumni group – keeping them happy is a great investment for NCEF!! They can spread the word about NCEF and become ambassadors of NCEF themselves. The options are endless.



GETTING INVOLVED

Why?

- To make a lasting difference in the lives of children.
- To be a part of an exciting team of interesting and dedicated volunteers.
- To put your spare time, no matter how little, to good use.

How?

- [Join](#) our announcements list!
- Help fundraise money for NCEF scholarships.
- Help with the administrative aspects of NCEF.
- Take part in discussions to ensure NCEF is increasingly effective.
- Help expand NCEF to new areas in Nepal
- Become a field volunteer in Nepal.
- Help lead NCEF by running for a position on the Board or Executive Committee.

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NCEF PAMPHLET

Share information about NCEF with your friends with [this printable pamphlet](#)

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