



Case study – Nepal

Supporting Nepali teachers to improve the quality of education

Background



Nepal is a landlocked country in South Asia, bordered by China to the north and by India to the south. The Himalayas run across the north of the country, and eight of the world's ten highest mountains, including Mount Everest, are within its territory. It has a population of around 30 million and is currently ranked 142 out of 177 countries in the Human Development Index. From 1996 until 2006, Nepal suffered from a civil war between government forces and Maoist guerrillas.

Challenge

VSO has worked in Nepal since 1962 and much of the work has been supporting the basic education system. Since 1999 there has been a successful expansion of educational facilities in Nepal. The number of children out of school was reduced from over one million in 1999 to 700,000 in 2006. However, the increase in numbers in schools led to many problems and challenges in the education system, particularly the quality of educational management.

Through 'Valuing Teachers' research, carried out by Purna Shrestha and VSO volunteers, it was found that teacher representation in planning and implementation of education was very minimal. There was a lack of meaningful participation even when teacher representatives sat in on education meetings. In addition, teachers' terms and conditions were poor and there was a great imbalance of male to female teachers. The teachers' lack of participation at the decision-making and reviewing level meant that these issues were never discussed. This issue – the lack of a real 'voice' for teachers in education policymaking - became the basis of the VSO advocacy strategy in Nepal.

One specific issue for teachers in Nepal was the lack of health insurance. When VSO carried out focus group discussions they found that the low salary wasn't the most important aspect of their conditions. Teachers wanted some sort of social security, especially in the context of the ten years of civil war. Since teachers, especially in rural areas, could be killed or forcibly recruited, they wanted health insurance or protection for their families. However, since there were few opportunities for teachers to talk to policy makers this issue never got on to the government agenda.

Catalyst

Over a number of years VSO provided several volunteers, who helped to

develop a close partnership between the VSO campaign and the teachers' union in Nepal, and provided assistance in developing a strategic plan, as well as training them in lobbying and advocacy techniques. Volunteers placed with the teacher's union were instrumental in linking the teachers' union with national and international organisations such as Save The Children.

Working from what was observed in the research, advocacy work with the Department of Education was undertaken to increase teachers' participation in meetings and workshops organised by the ministry. The government department recognised VSO's work in the education domain, and responded positively to their advocacy.

The support from VSO motivated the teachers' union to devise a clear plan to raise the issue of health insurance with the government. The Valuing Teachers research provided solid evidence for the need for a scheme. Strengthened links between the union, local and international NGOs and the added involvement of the Global Campaign for Education gave greater force to their demands.

Results

The Nepali government responded by introducing life insurance for all permanent teachers in Nepal, and the teachers' union now participates in round-table sessions, and so they are able to voice their concerns to stakeholders.

A code of conduct has been developed for all education stakeholders, which serves as a basis for lobbying by the union to attain these official standards of education. The union has decided to tackle the gender imbalance in the teaching profession by drafting an advocacy strategy to increase women's participation in union affairs. They hope that this will encourage young girls to stay in education.

Not all of their objectives have been obtained, but buoyed on by their initial successes, the teachers' union now benefits from a greater voice in education affairs, and both the union and VSO have garnered closer ties with national and international education organisations.

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