Knowledge hub
-
Collection of best practices

Summary of the best practice

1. Title of the best practice (e.g. name of policy, programme, project, etc.) *

Sisters for Sisters' Education in Nepal

2. Country or countries where the practice is implemented *

Nepal

3. Please select the **most relevant** Action Track(s) the best practice applies to *

☑ Action Track 1. Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools

☐ Action Track 2. Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development

☐ Action Track 3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession

☐ Action Track 4. Digital learning and transformation

☐ Action Track 5. Financing of education

4. Implementation lead/partner organization(s) *

   VSO as a lead partner; Aasaman Nepal and Global Action Nepal as implementing partners; and British Council and Mercy Corps as resource partners.

5. Key words (5-15 words): Please add key descriptive words around aims, modalities, target groups etc. *

   Sister mentoring, marginalized girls, adult champion, community support, gender-sensitive teaching methodologies and policies

6. What makes it a best practice? *

   The project has completed its two phases of implementation in 2021, which started implementation since 2013 in four districts of Nepal, where 320 women aged between 16 and 28 volunteered to be 'Big Sisters (BSs)', and 416 adult-champions mentoring 1,183 'Little Sisters (LSs)' in their communities, which expanded to support 7,380 marginalized girls in 64 schools by 2021. This project creates sustainable social networks within and/or between community groups to facilitate mentorship and knowledge exchange while improving social cohesion and sense of belonging. This model enhanced quality education in Nepal. In the project, BSs supported the LSs to improve learning, confidence and promote self-esteem; BSs are the messengers and role models for girls' education as they are sent to communities with knowledge and skills and their entire get up was changed to show them as a messenger for girls' education; BSs are presented and mobilized for parenting education with support from big brothers, uncles, aunties to value girls education, child safe guarding and challenge stereo on girls education, and bringing whole community to value girls education, child safe guarding; and BSs are mobilized and empowered at system level to improve services for girls education and the evidences are used to influence policies at local and national level. Additionally, mobilization of international volunteers supported to improve gender responsive methodologies in schools and policy changes in the education system of Nepal. With these evidences, the project has been able to develop model as a best practice, which can be replicated elsewhere to improve education for marginalized girls. The project success has led to its expansion into four more rural districts in Nepal, with a focus on supporting girls living in extreme poverty, survivors of gender-based violence, and young people with disabilities. The best practices of this project have been embedded into other projects developed and implemented by VSO Nepal. At the same time, VSO has worked to adapt and scale the model with local partners in Nigeria, where it has a special focus on girls living with disabilities, and in Bangladesh, where it has special focus on improving education of Rohingya children. The project is successfully being replicated in Nigeria and Bangladesh by VSO. Hence, this project is considered as the best practice, which can be replicated in different parts of the world.

Description of the best practice

7. Introduction (350-400 words)
   This section should ideally provide the context of, and justification for, the
   practice and address the following issues:
   i) Which population was affected?
   ii) What was the problem that needed to be addressed?
   iii) Which approach was taken and what objectives were achieved? *

This project leveraged the skills and efforts of community, national, and international volunteers and involves schools, parents, teachers, and Ministry of Education stakeholders in a holistic, multilevel effort to address barriers – such as early marriage, domestic duties, untouchability, violence against girls, stigma and menstrual taboo – that keep many marginalized girls in Nepal from completing their education. The project facilitated volunteer contributions from remote villages to government offices in the capital, addressing factors from the individual to the institutional.

At the program's core is a mentoring program that pairs individual girls in some of Nepal's poorest communities, at risk of leaving school early, with volunteer 'Big Sisters.' These local women, who have themselves completed secondary school, receive training to help them mentor their 'Little Sisters,' giving them encouragement and support to stay in school, promote literacy and numeracy skills and develop life skills and make the most of their opportunities for education and life skills.

Many pressures that lead to girls leaving school early are rooted in discriminatory gender norms and harmful social norms and practices that need to be addressed within families, communities, and society more broadly. 416 adult community volunteers trained as project "champions" encouraged communities to recognize the value of education for girls and inspire parents to prioritize their daughters' schooling over domestic work and marriage.
'Big Sisters' also shared advice on sexual and reproductive health. For example, they helped girls and their families overcome taboos about menstruation and provided practical assistance – like teaching girls how to make reusable sanitary pads – so that girls are no longer forced to stay home during their period. The project also used community theatre to further develop the girls' self-confidence and promoted changes in gender norms and attitudes within their communities. 'Big Sisters' also gain, deriving satisfaction from their roles and acquiring leadership skills and knowledge on gender equality and other topics from training workshops.

Additionally, the project introduced gender-sensitive teaching methodologies, management systems and school environments to facilitate girls' active participation in education. It developed the skills and capacities of stakeholders throughout the education system and in the community to effectively implement, monitor and expand improvements in girls' education.

8. Implementation (350-450 words)
   Please describe the implementation modalities or processes, where possible in relation to:
   i) What are the main activities carried out?
   ii) When and where the activities were carried out (including the start date and whether it is ongoing)?
   iii) Who were the key implementation actors and collaborators? (civil society organizations, private sector, foundations, coalitions, networks etc.)?
   iv) What were the resources needed (budget and sources) for the implementation?
   *

The major activities include the following and the project is funded by FCDO for 8 years (started in 2013 and completed in 2021) into two phases:

• Big Sisters' mentoring scheme to support girls in schools
• Bridge courses for out-of-school girls and remedial classes for in-school girls
• Established a national Girls' Education Network with partners to share best practices and influence policy
• Non-formal Girls' Clubs including English and 'Digital for Girls' Education' training, life skills, career guidance, business skills and financial literacy
• Provided teacher training on gender-sensitive and child-friendly methodologies
• Trained school management and governance bodies to improve planning and child protection
• Community awareness-raising on the value of education through street dramas, household meetings and school and community visits by education champions
• Coached and mentored staff in the Department and Ministry of Education with a focus on gender equality

The above activities were implemented with the following modalities:

Conditions for Learning: The project leveraged confidence in girls, which they gain through the mentoring interventions. It works closely with schools to capacitate them on providing a safe learning environment and inclusive education practices. English for Digital and Girls' Education Clubs set up to provide girls an opportunity towards digital literacy. Girls gain skills, market knowledge and access to low-interest loans to start viable businesses.

Environment for Learning: Through community outreach activities, systems established and strengthened to support girls' protection, such as establishing reporting mechanisms for harassment, abuse or bullying within schools. Worked with families and communities to mobilise them to recognize that educating girls, boosts their socio-economic status and removes any negative connotations to address attitudinal change. Community awareness through street dramas, household meetings and visits to promote awareness on girls' rights to education. ASHR awareness incorporated in the community and school campaigns including menstrual hygiene management.

Teaching and Learning: Improved teacher capacity working closely with teachers and teacher support mechanism to enable them to transcend their learning through their teaching in classrooms. VSO teacher trainer volunteers were placed at school clusters to deliver group-based teacher training followed by on-going one-to-one mentoring support. Teacher's skills were developed in areas of subject specific knowledge (Math, English, and Science), use of technology, bridge-class teaching material and life skills.

Leadership and Management: Supported to develop sector plan and worked closely with the government in national priorities especially gender inclusion and child protection. As an active member of National Campaign for Education and Association of International NGOs, these partnerships were mobilized to maximize the influence of the project. Provides opportunities to the schools and DEOs to reflect on the existing leadership and management provisions and practices and worked together for strengthening them, including development of SIP, which has impact on learning, school management and governance.

9. Results – outputs and outcomes (250-350 words)
To the extent possible, please reply to the questions below:
i) How was the practice identified as transformative? (e.g., impact on policies, impact on management processes, impact on delivery arrangements or education monitoring, impact on teachers, learners and beneficiary communities etc.);
ii) What were the concrete results achieved with regard to outputs and outcomes?
iii) Has an assessment of the practice been carried out? If yes, what were the results? *

The flexible and innovative approach taken by the project has been considered as transformative approach to change education system in Nepal for marginalized girls.

• It applies the Big Sister approach focusing on girls who have proved hardest to reach through other interventions.
• Girls themselves are central to the project's design, implementation, development and evaluation. Through the Big Sister Scheme they identify their challenges and work together to try to solve them through building skills, ambitions and confidence. Through their outreach work, and with adult champions, they bring about positive attitudinal and behavioural change amongst parents, spouses, elders and the wider community. By presenting their experiences to the DEOs and the MoE they have the opportunity to influence policy makers.
• Gender and teaching quality assessments provide new information on the level of gender sensitivity in rural schools and the education management system.
• Multi-stakeholder partnership, bringing in different actors including successful Nepali business women from the private sector, to exert positive influence, as well as technical capacity, and to support a cultural and attitudinal shift.

The concrete changes achieved through the project include the following:

• 94% of the girls transitioned successfully.
• Improved learning outcomes of 7,380 marginalised girls, examples, 'improved examination score,' 'increased interest to learn,' 'more active classroom participation,' and 'better comprehension of the lesson.'
• Attendance of marginalized girls reached to 85%.
• 74% applied trainings in the classroom, when during baseline only 27% teachers used to apply trainings in the classroom.
• Changed parental attitude, examples, reduced engagement in household chores and creating a conducive learning environment at home for the girls.
• Education sector plan increased focus on girls' education, local governments formulated Child Protection Policy and replicated project initiatives, examples, allocated budget, established gender education networks, education policy at municipality level, etc.
• Schools promoted gender-friendly environment, including separate toilets for girls, free sanitary pads, appointment of a gender focal and female trained teacher to listen to girls' issues and appointed girls to leadership positions in school activities.

The project conducted midline and endline evaluations by external parties and those reports can be accessed through the following link.

10. Lessons learnt (300 words)
    To the extent possible, please reply to the following questions:
    i) What were the key triggers for transformation?
    ii) What worked really well – what facilitated this?
    iii) What did not work – why did it not work? *

Branding community structure for inclusion and equity in education is a key trigger for transformation, like Big Siters, Brothers, Aunties and Uncles roles are promoted through the project, meaning bringing whole community to value girls' education. Big Sister and Adult champions schemes bridge the gaps between schools and communities, and BSs, adult champions and international volunteers' mobilization at system and policy level to change systems and practices and linking the evidences to inform policies are good examples of transformative practice.

What worked well:

• Volunteers embedded in communities, and integration of international volunteers into local structures and policy level, helping leverage the power of volunteering and community voices.
• Creating sustainable social networks within and/or between community groups to facilitate mentorship and knowledge exchange while improving education of girls, social cohesion and sense of belonging.
• Using mentoring model to enhance quality education of girls.
• Branding community structures like Big Sisters and Adult Champions (uncles, aunties, big brothers) as community brand ambassadors to promote girl's education and challenging harmful social norms.
• Whole community approach to girls' education – engaging whole community in the project with the role they can play promoting girl's education and challenging harmful social norms.

Although Big Sisters were initially seen as more of a 'delivery mechanism' they also ended up as key beneficiaries. The role of Big Sisters is commendable in reducing social barriers – in this context, particularly child marriage. The evidences were also used to influence the inclusive education guidelines, inclusive education master plan, and establish and maintain the database of out of school children in project districts.

11. Conclusions (250 words)

Please describe why may this intervention be considered a "best practice". What recommendations can be made for those intending to adopt the documented "best practice" or how can it help people working on the same issue(s)? *

The model has proven to be effective in terms of increasing the access, participation, and transition of the Little Sisters. The formation of Big Sisters as a social capital is an achievement in itself. The community and local government are also receptive to the model, and have supported and cooperated to such mentoring models. The fact that the agency of both Big and Little Sisters increased as a result of the mentoring demonstrates that this model could be rolled-out and scaled up. Selection of the mentors is a crucial aspect to consider: given the training and resources expended to build the capacity of the mentors, it is important to select those, who are likely to stay within their communities. There needs to be careful consideration of the context in each intervention area, especially to ensure safeguarding of Big Sisters. The alumni of Little Sisters can be chosen as Big Sisters to mentor a new cohort of Little Sisters. Senior Big Sisters who have built a strong network in the community and have a good relationship with the school authorities and local government can be selected as an Adult Champion. The newly formed Big Sisters would be accompanied by the Senior Big Sisters in offering any guidance necessary during the mentorship. Additionally, working with teachers, local level education managers and local and national policy makers is very crucial to make a systemic change in education system for the transformation.

12. Further reading

Please provide a list and URLs of key reference documents for additional information on the "best practice" for those who may be interested in knowing how the results benefited the beneficiary group/s. *

https://girlseducationchallenge.org/projects/project/sisters-for-sisters-education/
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nepal-child-marriage/big-sisters-ride-to-rescue-of-nepali-child-brides-idUSKBN1YF1LT

https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/big-sisters-work-to-rescue-nepali-child-brides/

https://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/reuters/article-7780885/Big-Sisters-ride-rescue-Nepali-child-brides.html
https://www.facebook.com/Thomson.Reuters.Foundation.News/videos/2475321869391620/?v=2475321869391620

http://epaper.thehimalayantimes.com/infinity/article_popover_share.aspx?guid=a2f4b6b9-4808-4be5-914f-4b2fb660cfe2

http://epaper.thehimalayantimes.com/infinity/article_popover_share.aspx?guid=642f5eb6-653d-4630-aae0-0f628ffe5e1f

https://girlseducationchallenge.org/#/article/breaking-barriers-to-tackle-chhaupadi-in-nepal-2

http://epaper.thehimalayantimes.com/infinity/article_popover_share.aspx?guid=374468db-997f-444d-a6b6-354bbad4a7ff