



Career Guidance in Schools



CAREER GUIDANCE IN SCHOOLS: A PILOT PROGRAMME

If we ask school children nowadays what they would like to be in the future, many will say that they want to become doctors or nurses, engineers or teachers. If we follow up as to why, very few will be able to give a sound reason. If similar questions are asked to teenagers, they might have a few more ideas, and be a little more realistic in terms of what is financially and academically possible, but they will probably have been heavily influenced by their parents, relatives or teachers. Very few young people in Nepal have a clear understanding of all the possible career options open to them. It is unlikely that any of them would say that they wish to become a contractor, mechanic, plumber or similar practical occupation – one that can be far more rewarding than many of the so-called white-collar jobs. This shows the limited general understanding about the world of work. As a result, students choose their subjects based on the advice of seniors and not by assessing their ability and interest. Specific career guidance within the school educational system, in which every student can learn the process, tools and ways to plan their future career based on an assessment of their own personality, can result in far better career choices. It is also important that people are aware of the extent of the world of work beyond the common professions. However, until recently, such guidance has been almost non-existent in Nepal's schools, with no organisations or teachers specialised in such an approach. The situation is particularly difficult for children from disadvantaged backgrounds whose family members have limited exposure and social capital to know much about future career options. The project Enhanced Skills for Sustainable and Rewarding Employment (ENSSURE), a bilateral initiative of the Governments of Nepal and Switzerland that is implemented by the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) with technical assistance from Helvetas Nepal, has therefore introduced career guidance. This comprehensive, four-stage system covers a four-step process of (i) understanding self; (ii) understanding world of work; (iii) developing career options and (iv) preparing for one's career. The guidance offers conceptual clarity and practical exercises undertaken by Grade 9 and 10 students themselves with support from Career Guidance Teachers of the school.



What is career guidance?

The Collins Dictionary defines career guidance as “advice and information about careers that help individuals, especially young people, decide on a career and also teaches them how to pursue their chosen career”.

Career guidance is a developmental process in which students learn about themselves, define what they want to do in life, and explore the career options most appropriate for them, given their skills and family situation. Good career guidance should not raise expectations beyond any possible reality, but at the same time, it should be motivating, providing information on academic and vocational education which opens different career options to students. In this way, they can be helped to make informed decisions with clear plans to achieve their career aspirations.

Summary of ENSSURE’s career guidance model in schools

- The target group for the programme is Grade 9 students of community schools (although private schools may be included in future);
- Career facilitators are trained in career guidance;
- Two teachers from the selected schools, ideally a woman and a man, are trained to conduct the guidance sessions in the school;
- Two trained career guidance teachers together with one career facilitator conduct the sessions;
- Six, 110-minute long sessions are provided to the students;
- One follow-up 110-minute session is provided to the students when they reach grade 10.

Choosing a career in Nepal

In Nepal, career choices are generally determined through ranking in competitive exams and are heavily dependent on parents' expectations. Little attention is given to the student's aptitude and interest in that occupation. Ideas on suitable careers also tend to be gender-stereotypical (although this is changing, especially amongst more wealthy urbanites). Thus, for example, a boy is more likely to be encouraged to become a doctor or engineer, and a girl, a nurse or teacher. Vocational skills such as electrician or plumbing are generally poorly regarded and are only considered options for

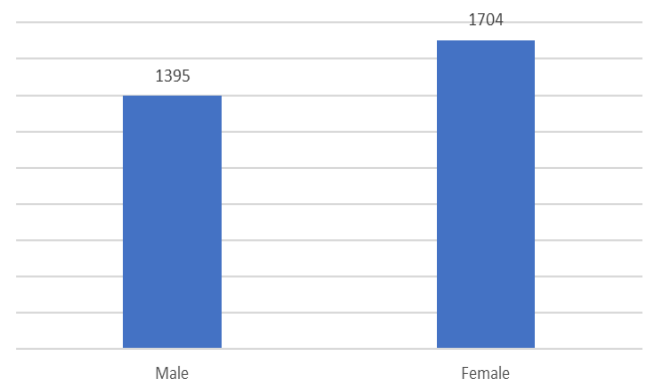
less academically able students. There is a huge potential for employment or self-employment in such occupations. ENSSURE aims to raise the appreciation of students and society more generally about the value of different occupations, their importance in a well-functioning society, and the opportunities for new careers linked to newly emerging job markets.

The ENSSURE career guidance model

ENSSURE sought to identify a strategic partner to develop a school career guidance module, but none with relevant experience could be found. Instead, the organisation AN TARANG was selected, which has a background in psycho-social counselling. As AN TARANG needed capacity building in career counselling, the Promise Foundation, based in Bengaluru, India was contracted, and a group of AN TARANG and ENSSURE staff travelled to Bengaluru to receive training. The Promise Foundation also supported subsequent research, development of assessment tools and training tool kits, and oversaw their field testing.

The AN ATARANG team trained some of their staff as career facilitators; these facilitators then provided training in career guidance to the teachers of the selected schools. Although the schools were responsible for nominating the teachers to be trained, they were asked to do so from teachers teaching subjects as Occupation, Business and Technology or Social Studies. As far as possible, one woman and one man were nominated to make the process gender-friendly. In addition to the opportunity for training, the selected teachers were paid an allowance of NRs 600 per group per session to conduct the guidance sessions, since this was additional work to their regular duties.

Students completing six career guidance sessions



ENSSURE also holds meetings with the head teachers and management committee members to

explain to them the concept of career guidance and handover the intervention to them for sustainability.

It is important to expose students to ideas of different career options in primary school, and then follow up with more details when they reach their teens. However, given the pilot nature of the programme, ENSSURE chose to focus on students in grade 9, aged 14-15, as this is not too late to influence them, and the results could then be followed through in observing their choice of further studies.

Experience to date

The eight government schools piloted for the career guidance were chosen for their size (adequate number of grade 9 students) and accessibility. They included a range of school types and students in different administrative and geographic locations (Kathmandu, Chitwan, Morang and Banke - covering urban and rural, long-established versus more recently established, good and poor infrastructure, etc). As the given table indicates, rather more girls than boys undertook the course; this may be explained by the fact that boys are more likely than girls to attend fee-paying schools.

ENSSURE piloted the intervention in eight schools in 2017 and upscaled it now in 53 schools reaching more than 6000 students. The students and teachers alike expressed appreciation of the programme. Nevertheless, various lessons have been learned for future improvement. These include the following:

- Despite a “gender-neutral” approach in discussing career options, clear gender biases arose in the preferences expressed by girls and boys. Students and teachers generally reflect societal expectations; to counteract this and open the eyes of both girls and boys to different career options, a pro-active approach is needed. Illustrations in the career guidance materials will deliberately counteract gender stereotypes in the future, and teachers will be asked to challenge expected career “norms” in class.
- Being of a pilot nature, the career guidance modules could not be incorporated into the school curriculum, so these sessions are conducted after or before the regular teaching hours in some schools. ENSSURE is continuously interacting and urging the school management and the teachers to consider it as a part of their academic activities.

- Some teachers expressed the view that more time is needed by students for class interactions. They also suggested that ENSSURE produces a directory listing nearby training institutions and the courses that they offer.

Next steps

ENSSURE is now scaling up career guidance to more than 100 schools in all seven states (provinces) of Nepal, with the aim of reaching 10,000 students in the academic year 2019/20.

Although in other countries, career guidance is a specialist service provided by counsellors who work exclusively in this domain, for the time being this is not viable in Nepal, both because of the distances that such specialists would need to travel, and because the modules can only be conducted during a specific part of the year.

The aim for now is to spread awareness and acceptance of the concept - and support its eventual integration into the national school curriculum.

- Some career guidance teachers did not fully adapt to the intended style of guidance; they require top-up training to implement the modules, avoiding a lecturing style.
- Some teachers and school managers expressed the concern that a focus on technical and vocational education might prompt students to drop out of academic education. This shows that more effort is necessary to educate teachers themselves about the importance of promoting vocational education rather than the general education that has limited scope for job opportunities.
- Obtaining the support of the school management, including the principal, is very important for successful programme implementation.
- Greater emphasis needs to be placed on involving parents, whose attendance at meetings organised to explain the programme was generally low. Other means of awareness-raising could be tried, such as radio announcements and journalistic coverage.
- In the context of federalization, local governments need to understand and support the concept of career guidance to ensure that the system is institutionalized. This is a matter for future focus.



<<This orientation is really important for the lives of our pupils. They understand it well, although it would be better to make it a bit longer. We are supposed to give the session in 110 minutes, but this is not really enough for the students to fully understand..... If I had had this training, I wouldn't have become a teacher! I would have done something else, and my life would have been very different! But teaching seemed the only option for me.>>

Bishnu KC,

Teacher, Saraswati School

About ENSSURE

The Enhanced skills for Sustainable and Rewarding Employment (ENSSURE) project, 2016 to 2020, is a bilateral initiative of the Governments of Nepal and Switzerland addressing the issues of unemployment, under employment and unfair pay

facing the Nepali labour market that result from the mismatch in skills demanded by industries. The project is implemented by the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) with technical assistance from Helvetas Nepal.



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