

# A shift in perspective: from being unaware to sharing a vision for a safe learning environment

***“We were hopeless back then. We had no attention from the municipal officials or any agencies about the safety of our school, nor did we have enough teachers to act upon it. An inaction of the school disaster management...”***

Kaman Sing Rai, former Chairperson of School Management Committee, called to mind what it was like, two years ago.



*School before the retrofits*

It was a reality facing the Suryakunda Basic School that nobody had given a full attention to improving its safety. Established in 1977 and situated in a hilly area of Sunsari in east Nepal on a high slope, the school is vulnerable to earthquake. Students and teachers were not aware of how to make school a safe place. Neither was the local government. No girls and female adults were much engaged in school construction work in the past. Rough road and no public transportation made it difficult for all to reach there. Sadly, at all seasons.

With the initiation of the Strengthening Community Resilience to Disaster through

School Safety Initiative Project, the school has found its turning point for improving the infrastructure, putting some attempt to make school safe from disasters. Slowly, through exercises in hazard, vulnerability and capacity assessment, risk mitigation activities and frequent interactions between parents and teachers, school started to realise a child-friendly teaching and learning environment. With a closer engagement with the local government, school drew attention of the local officials and parliament. School could mobilise 1,500 euros for teaching and learning material provision from the local education unit and secure 10,000 euros of parliament development funds. It was such a rare opportunity to access the funds, thanks to the school advocacy, Kaman Sing Rai reflected:

***“the safe school project brought about everyone’s attention for the school improvement that significantly changed the environment. All stakeholders concerned stood together for the safe environment and education”***

Such efforts came into fruition after the project supported the school, facilitating its school improvement plan, integrating emergency funds committee, revitalising school disaster management committee and gaining parents’ support – all made a progress in better teaching and learning. The headmaster attested to the progress that the project not only improved the infrastructure but also the school capacity.

***“We replaced the blackboard with whiteboard for classes, encouraged child-friendly DRR games (snake and ladder), and installed GI sheets for two classrooms. The funds from the parliament were utilised for slab casting, allowing the school to have sufficient safe rooms to our children”,***

### **Construction work making school feel safe**

Behind the school is a vertical slope and to protect the school, a fence has been built with a cemented pillar and iron nets. School also repaired the water tank to have a child-friendly taps, placed at the height of the average lower grade students. They now have a better access to drinking water. Through the student capacity building, a garden with flower plants and small trees have been made for greeneries.

Emergency funds of 300 euros has been collected through individual donations, allocated for sudden accidents and transportation need when a disaster occurs. A guideline for fund utilisation is under the drafting phase. A series of DRR activities was also made possible such as: first aid training to teachers for treatment service, orientation and training on construction monitoring and earthquake drills, and the designation of the assembly point.



*School facilities after two-year intervention from the SCRSSI Project*

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Diliram Adhikari, the Education Coordinator from Barahachhetra Municipality Office shared that he was cognizant of the progress achieved by the school. One major change he witnessed is the inbuilt school improvement plans incorporating actions and plans – different from most schools in Nepal, this school has made its action. A good change has its own ripple effects: parents are now more confident in admitting their boys and girls in the school. 36 girls from the most marginalised families have had a chance to study in a safer environment and six full-time teachers teach in the school. More women and girls are seen participating more actively. Out of 9 members in school disaster risk management committee, four female students form part of the committee, exceeding the government mandatory 33 percent policy for female participation in the committee.

Similarly, the active child clubs have 66 percent female representation in the membership while 66 percent of the taskforce committee are female, participating in various school-based activities and some even leading them. Four girls also attended the child-led monitoring training on quality of construction work and materials. With the two-year intervention in safe school, not only did the school make an infrastructural improvement but also develop the capacity of students and teachers in disaster preparedness and the engagement with other stakeholders.