

# Assessing the Impact of Seasonal Factors on School Attendance in the Karnali Zone



Submitted by  
Teachers' Union of Nepal



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# CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	2
Acronyms.....	5
Executive summary.....	6
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	9
Rationale of the study.....	9
Objectives of the assessment.....	10
Research questions.....	10
Steering Committee.....	10
Chapter 2: Methodology.....	11
Study approach.....	11
Selection of study areas, schools and research participants.....	11
Development of the study scheme.....	12
Instrumentation.....	12
Study procedure.....	13
Limitations.....	13
Chapter 3: Literature review.....	14
Student absenteeism.....	14
Teacher absenteeism.....	15
Student/teacher absenteeism and student achievement.....	15
Studies on student and teacher attendance in Nepal.....	16
Chapter 4: Analysis of results.....	18
Introduction.....	18
Links between student and teacher absenteeism and seasonal events.....	18
Current status of student attendance.....	19
Trends in student attendance in recent years.....	21
Trends in student attendance throughout the year.....	23
Student characteristics and reasons for low attendance.....	24
Impact of student absenteeism on education.....	26
Factors influencing low student attendance.....	26
Current status of teacher attendance.....	29
Trends in teacher attendance in recent years.....	30
Trends in teacher attendance throughout the year.....	30
Teacher characteristics and reasons for low attendance.....	31
Factors influencing low teacher attendance.....	34
Existing interventions for increasing attendance of students and teachers.....	35
Shortcomings in addressing low student and teacher attendance.....	37
Chapter 5: Key findings and recommendations.....	40
Key findings.....	40
Recommendations for improving attendance of students and teachers.....	42
Bibliography.....	45
Annex 1: Socio-economic situation.....	48

Annex 2: Study scheme .....	51
Annex 3: Interview or discussion triggers .....	54
Annex 4: Survey questionnaire .....	56
Annex 5: School profile .....	60

## ACRONYMS

DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DDC	District Development Committee
DEO	District Education Office
DOE	Department of Education
ECD	early childhood development
EFA	Education for All
FGD	focus group discussion
INGO	international non-governmental organization
KIRDARC	Karnali Integrated Rural Development and Research Centre
MOE	Ministry of Education
NGO	non-governmental organization
PTA	Parent–Teacher Association
SLC	school-leaving certificate
SMC	School Management Committee
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
VDC	Village Development Committee

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In October 2009, UNICEF Nepal contracted the Teachers' Union of Nepal to undertake an assessment of seasonal factors impacting school attendance in selected schools of the Karnali zone in order to produce recommendations on strategies to reduce student and teacher absenteeism in the region. The study collected qualitative and quantitative data through focus group discussion, interactions, structured questionnaires and school attendance registers from respondents including head-teachers, teachers, students, members of School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), parents, community members, District Education Officers, Resource Persons and School Supervisors associated with 18 primary and secondary schools in the districts of Jumla, Humla and Dolpa.

### KEY FINDINGS

The main finding of the study was that, for schools in the region, approximately 83 school-days are lost each year through absences linked to seasonal events. This is nearly 38 per cent lower than the government standard of 220 school-days per year. This does not include school-days lost for non-seasonal factors.

Students identified as most likely to be absent were children from poor families, followed by Dalit children, children from households engaged in agriculture or livestock-raising, girls, and children living far from school. The main seasonal factors cited for student absences were yarchagumba collection and harvesting/planting in May and June; temporary settlement away from school during the farming season also in May and June; hay-making in August and September; migration away from the Karnali region to avoid cold weather in December, January and February; and local festivals in February, May, August and November. Non-seasonal factors included family poverty meaning that children had to work to supplement family incomes rather than attend school; lack of parental awareness on the importance of education, especially for girls and children from Dalit families; teacher absenteeism; lack of child-friendly classrooms and teaching-learning practices, including lack of adequate weather protection; school located far from home, making it difficult for some children to reach school especially during adverse weather conditions; and untimely textbook distribution.

Teachers identified as most likely to be absent were those originating from outside the district, followed by those attending training and seminars or involved in higher education, local teachers, and female teachers. The main seasonal factors cited for teacher absences were early departure for vacations in September/October and December; late return after vacations in October/November and February; yarchagumba collection in May and June; involvement in farming activities during May/June, August/September and November; and migration away from the Karnali region to avoid cold weather in December, January and February. The main non-seasonal factors cited for teacher absences were poor management of teachers in schools, with no DEO nor SMC mechanism to regulate teacher absences; participation in teacher training, with no system for providing a substitute during these periods; involvement in secondary occupation such as trade or business, causing teachers to miss classes; and engagement in activities for Teachers' Union, political parties, or NGOs.

The main problems highlighted by study respondents in addressing student and teacher absenteeism included the lack of an effective mechanism for supervising, monitoring and controlling student and teacher attendance; the lack of adequate teachers' positions in schools; inaccuracy of school attendance records; inflexibility in the development of individualized school calendars; the inability of SMCs to monitor student and teacher

attendance in their schools; the lack of accountability for head-teachers and teachers; the lack of safe, weather-protected, child-friendly school facilities and teachers trained in child-centred teaching–learning methodologies; and generally low awareness by parents/guardians of the importance of education and the need for regular school attendance.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- **Develop a strong regulatory and monitoring mechanism**

Monitoring and supervision of the education system should be enhanced, with a system of assessment to review performance at each level. The DEO should be empowered to strengthen school monitoring. School Supervisor positions should be filled, and made functional and effective. School Supervisors should be motivated with incentives and rewards, based on their performance.

- **Ensure adequate number of teachers in each school**

There should be an adequate number of teachers in each school. The SMC should consult with relevant government agencies in order to obtain an adequate number of teachers for their school. If teachers are absent for official reasons, there should be substitute teachers. Schools should be encouraged to engage local volunteer teachers as short-term substitute teachers. The volunteer teachers would be appointed and remunerated by SMCs.

- **Ensure that student and teacher attendance records are correct**

For effective management of absenteeism, school records need to be accurate. They should be verifiable and shared with SMCs and the community. They should also be supplied to the DEO. If records are accurate, then they can be used to reward students and teachers with outstanding attendance.

- **Give schools more flexibility in developing their own school calendar**

A mechanism for implementing school standards and directives concerning school-days is needed for the Karnali region, where seasonal events hamper attendance. The DEO should be able to authorize and facilitate schools to develop their own calendar, in consultation with teachers, student representatives, parents and local communities.

- **Build capacity of SMCs/PTAs to monitor attendance at their school**

SMCs should be empowered to take greater charge of managing school affairs, including student and teacher attendance. The DEO should train SMCs/PTAs on their roles and responsibilities and facilitate them to monitor school attendance. SMCs should keep records of student and teacher absences and send reports to the DEO. Schools could include expectations regarding student and teacher attendance in their codes of conduct.

- **Increase the authority and accountability of head-teachers**

Head-teachers should be accountable to their SMC for school affairs, including student and teacher attendance. The DEO should monitor the attendance and performance of head-teachers. Head-teachers should obtain approval for leave from their SMC, and the DEO should also be informed.

- **Increase accountability of teachers**

The salary, benefits and incentives of teachers working in the Karnali region should be reviewed and made attractive enough to recruit and retain competent teachers. Incentives should be based on performance. Teachers' professional organizations, including the Teachers' Union, should be active in making the teaching profession more responsible, by

enhancing teacher regularity and performance. Teachers should obtain approval for leave from their head-teacher, and the SMC should also be informed. Schools should place a signboard outside their front gate, displaying teachers' names and indicating whether they are present or absent, so that teacher attendance can be monitored by the community.

- **Ensure schools are child-friendly, with adequate physical facilities and appropriate teaching-learning methodologies and materials**

The DEO should ensure that the physical and learning environment in schools is child-friendly, with adequate learning materials including textbooks. Teachers should be trained in the use of child-friendly approaches. A strong programme of teacher development should be implemented in the Karnali region, as this is linked to improved teacher attendance.

- **Increase awareness on the importance of education**

Government authorities should work with stakeholders to sensitize parents on the importance of education and the need for regular student attendance. Schools should organize meetings and door-to-door visits within their community to discuss ways to combat seasonal low attendance and encourage parents to send their children to school regularly. Child clubs can also raise awareness on the importance of regular school attendance.

- **Consider developing special packages for the Karnali region**

The government could consider developing a special package for residential schools for the Karnali region. Through a public-private partnership, weather-protected residential schools could be developed for Grade 4 upwards. Initially, one school could be opened as a model in each district.

In addition, the government could consider a special Karnali Teacher Preparation Programme to encourage students from the region to develop a career in teaching.

Finally, the government could coordinate with NGOs and international agencies supporting education in the Karnali region to ensure that their support covers all VDCs in the region and is available to all children equitably.



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Karnali is one of 14 administrative zones in Nepal, with Jumla as its headquarters. It is located in the mountains of the Mid-western Development Region, and is remote and backward. The region has few roads and is so physically remote from Kathmandu that it costs more to fly to Jumla from Kathmandu than to fly to New Delhi. The zone's five districts are Jumla, Humla, Dolpa, Kalikot and Mugu. Karnali covers almost 15 per cent of Nepal's land area but is home to only 1.3 per cent of its population (CBS, 2003). In terms of overall development, its five districts are ranked amongst the lowest nine of the country's 75 districts (Rimal and Rimal, 2006). The region lags the rest of the country in terms of access to basic services, education, transport facilities, and information. It continues to depend on traditional technologies, with little infrastructure for industrial development. It suffers from high poverty and unemployment, and is vulnerable to frequent famine and other natural disasters (see Annex 1 for more on the socio-economic situation of the region and its districts).

While the Government of Nepal is committed to providing quality education for all Nepali children, it has not yet been able to provide effective educational instruction for the national minimum requirement of 220 school-days per year to children in the Karnali zone. There are a variety of reasons for this, and this study aims to examine the extent and causes of student and teacher absenteeism, in order to make recommendations that will lead to improved student and teacher attendance rates in schools in the region.

### RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

A brief examination of the educational situation in the Karnali zone reveals that it is below average for a number of indicators, and has especially poor rates for promotion, repetition and dropout in Grade 1. For 2009/10, the region as a whole had a promotion rate from Grade 1 of 51.0 per cent compared to a national average of 63.5 per cent, a repetition rate for Grade 1 of 35.0 per cent compared to a national average of 26.5 per cent, and a dropout rate in Grade 1 of 14.0 per cent compared to a national average of 9.9 per cent (DOE, 2009) (see Annex 1 for more on the educational situation in Karnali districts). Educational achievements are poor with less 16.4 per cent of students in the region passing their school-leaving certificate (SLC) examinations in 2003 (Mathema and Bista, 2006).

High dropout rates and weak educational achievements are seen together with high absenteeism by teachers and students as well as seasonal school-closing. These conditions suggest that structural, curriculum-related and management-related interventions are needed to radically reform education management in the Karnali zone. Therefore, in order to identify alternative interventions, a needs assessment of the situation was required.

UNICEF Nepal contracted the Teachers' Union of Nepal to undertake a situation analysis of selected schools in the Karnali zone with a particular focus on the effect of seasonal events on student and teacher attendance rates, in order to produce recommendations for educators, policy-makers, government departments and international and national non-governmental organizations (INGOs) on effective and viable alternative ways to enhance education delivery services in the zone.

The study's rationale is as follows.

- To fulfil the Education for All (EFA) goals by 2015.
- To bring children not in school, owing to barriers associated with their geographical locality, into the education system.

- To support the government in fulfilling educational plans and the fundamental rights of children by helping to put in place alternative ways of planning and financing education.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE ASSESSMENT**

This study is intended to increase knowledge on seasonal factors and their impact on education in the Karnali zone. The specific objectives are as follows.

- To assess the current status and trends of student and teacher attendance in the Karnali zone.
- To identify the major seasonal factors influencing regular student and teacher attendance at the primary school level.
- To identify current strategies to cope with seasonal factors influencing student and teacher attendance, and assess their relevance and success.
- To make concrete recommendations on future strategies for tackling issues arising from seasonal factors.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following research questions were used to achieve the objectives.

- What is the current situation of student and teacher attendance at primary schools in the Karnali zone?
- What are the trends in student and teacher attendance over time?
- What are the causes of variation in student attendance?
- What are the causes of variation in teacher attendance?
- What existing interventions to control absenteeism are being implemented by the government, schools, and other agencies such as donors and I/NGOs, community-based organizations, and the community?
- What strategies are recommended to address low attendance by students and teachers?

### **STEERING COMMITTEE**

In order to provide guidance on designing, undertaking and reporting on the study, a Steering Committee was formed under the chairmanship of the Director, Planning and Monitoring Division, Department of Education (DOE). Members of the committee included a representative from the Teachers' Union, a UNICEF representative, a representative from the School of Education at the Kathmandu University, the Section Head of the Planning and Budget Section, DOE, and the Section Head of the School Management Section (Primary), DOE (member secretary). The committee was responsible for general oversight of the study and provision of technical advice.

## CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

### STUDY APPROACH

This study was primarily qualitative in nature, supplemented by quantitative information where available. Qualitative information was collected through focus group discussion (FDGs) and open-ended interviews, discussions, interactions and consultations with respondents such as head-teachers, teachers, students, members of School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), parents, community members, etc. in selected schools. Quantitative information was generated through a structured questionnaire administered to head-teachers, teachers, students and community members. These primary data were supplemented by secondary data obtained from other relevant documents such as school attendance registers for teachers and students. In addition, a literature review of relevant documents was undertaken.

### SELECTION OF STUDY AREAS, SCHOOLS AND RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The study attempted to be representative of the whole Karnali. To use the time available for fieldwork as efficiently as possible, clustering was employed to identify areas with a sufficient number of schools that fulfilled the sampling criteria. This resulted in three clusters of two schools being selected in each of the districts of Jumla, Humla and Dolpa (i.e., six schools in each district) (Table 1). Two types of school were selected: the first was running primary level only; and the second was running primary, lower secondary and secondary levels. Schools were considered to be homogenous and representative of the Karnali, with attendance patterns consistent with the region overall and little variation resulting from local conditions.

**Table 1: Schools selected for the study**

District	Area	Schools' Name	Type
Jumla	Anamnagar, Mahat Wada (Central)	Karnali Secondary School, Anamnagar	Secondary
		Janta Secondary School, Mahatgau	Secondary
	Tatopani (West)	Sabhunath Gyankunj Lower Secondary School, Shree Dhuska	Lower Secondary
		Nawaprabhat Primary School, Lalichaur	Primary
	Urthuchautara, Acharyabada (East)	Bagawati Primary School, Urthuchautara	Primary
		Malika Lower Secondary School, Acharyabada	Lower Secondary
Humla	Simikot (Central)	Kala Silta Primary School	Primary
		Balmandir Secondary School	Secondary
	Dadafaya (West)	Kailash Lower Secondary School	Lower Secondary
		Man Sarowar Higher Secondary School, Simikot	Higher Secondary
	Bargaun (East)	Raling Secondary Sec. School, Bargaun	Secondary
		Ram Dev Lower Secondary School, Thehe	Lower Secondary
Dolpa	Tipla Dangibada (Central)	Lali Gurans Primary School	Primary
		Dangibada Primary School	Primary
	Dunai (East)	Dhruba Tara Primary School	Primary
		Balmandir Primary School	Primary
	TripuraKot, Liku (West)	Hima Jyoti Primary School	Primary
		Gauri Primary School	Primary

Key-informant interviews were performed with the head-teacher of each school, the chairperson of each SMC, and the District Education Officer. Officials from the Ministry of Education (MOE) and District Education Offices (DEO) were also consulted. In addition, two types of FGD participant were selected: (i) school-based, and (ii) representatives from central, regional, and district educational authorities. On average from each school, the head-teacher and two other teachers, four students including Dalits, *janajati* and girls, two parents, and two SMC/PTA members including the SMC chairperson were selected (Table 2). In addition, the District Education Officer and relevant Resource Persons and School Supervisors took part in at least one FGD. Approximately 210 people from the three districts took part in FGDs.

**Table 2: FGD participants from each school**

Participants	No. in each school	Remark
Head-teacher	1	
Teachers	2	
Students	4	Including Dalits, <i>janajati</i> and girls
Parents	2	Inclusive, as far as possible
SMC Chairperson	1	
SMC/PTA Member	1	Other than above

Respondents for the structured questionnaire included head-teachers, teachers, SMC/PTA members, community members and students. The survey was administered to 225 respondents, of whom seven did not mention their status. Respondents are detailed in Table 3. Of the 225 respondents, 153 were male and 69 were female; three respondents did not mention their gender.

**Table 3: Structured questionnaire respondent by district**

District	Head-teachers	Teachers	Students	SMC/PTA members	Community members	Total
Jumla	1	29	16	1	5	52
Humla	9	63	1	8	3	84
Dolpa	3	23	31	7	18	82
Total	13	115	48	16	26	218

*Note: Missing respondents = 7.*

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE STUDY SCHEME

A study scheme—including research objectives and themes, indicators, evaluation questions, sources of information, and data collection approaches—was finalized after discussions between the Steering Committee and study team (Annex 2), and interview questions were prepared.

## INSTRUMENTATION

Three sets of data-collection instruments were developed. The first was the interview schedule and trigger questions used for FGDs and key-informant interviews (Annex 3). This instrument covered all the study themes generated from each research question. It was designed to elicit information on the rate and trends of absenteeism as well as possible seasonal and non-seasonal causes, based on the opinions, experiences and suggestions of stakeholders. The second instrument was the structured questionnaire (Annex 4). Developed in Nepali, it covered all research questions with free-choice responses. The third instrument was designed to collect information on student and teacher attendance for 2006, 2007 and

2008 from the records of each school (Annex 5). The study team also generated information from observation at schools, documenting their reflections on each thematic area of the study.

## **STUDY PROCEDURE**

The study used the following procedure for collecting information from the field.

- As a first step, the Steering Committee was formed to develop study guidelines and provide input on the study scheme, the sharing of field information, and finalization of the study report.
- A field research team was formed, consisting of representatives from the Teachers' Union, the DOE/MOE and the Kathmandu University's School of Education. For each district, a six-member team was assembled with three researchers from either the Teachers' Union, the DOE/MOE or the Kathmandu University, and three researchers recruited locally who were either officers from the DEO or district-level teaching professionals.
- The study scheme and data-collection instruments were developed.
- Before fieldwork began, researchers were oriented on conceptual and operational aspects of student/teacher absenteeism and its associated causes to clarify the qualitative and quantitative processes of data generation. Each item in the study tools was discussed in detail so that researchers clearly understood its meaning and purpose.
- Six-member teams were deployed to each study district in October and November 2009 to generate data. The field study coordinator supervised and coordinated fieldwork. Each team remained in its assigned district for about 10 days, carrying out data collection. While in the field, team members reviewed their work and carried out editing. When necessary, the team contacted respondents and asked for explanations and clarification on ideas they had expressed. This was important from the perspective of data validation and reliability.
- Each field team collated information generated in the field and prepared a district report, consisting of analysis and interpretation of primary data. The survey questionnaire was analysed using SPSS. Field researchers presented a synopsis of their district report at a reflection meeting of the whole research team. Following this, reflections were incorporated into one draft document.
- The draft report was presented to the Steering Committee. After receiving feedback, the study team finalized the document.

## **LIMITATIONS**

Any survey of absenteeism is subject to suspected respondent bias, as people tend to under-report its extent because they understand that it has a detrimental effect on student learning achievements. In this study, 59 per cent of respondents to the questionnaire were either head-teachers or teachers; this may have resulted in a degree of suspected respondent bias, particularly on questions related to teacher attendance.

Furthermore, in this study cross-verification with attendance registers has had limited success as people freely admit that registers are not accurate. This is probably because schools in Nepal are funded on a per capita basis directly related to enrolment, making it advantageous to over-report the number of children enrolled in school each year. Consequently, discrepancies between enrolment figures and daily attendance figures are obscured by similar over-reporting in attendance records.

## CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review had two objectives: (i) to examine international literature relevant to the study, especially experiences and best practices for regularizing student and teacher attendance in developing countries; and (ii) to collect information on efforts and experiences for enhancing education in the Karnali zone of Nepal. Literature consulted included international research reports on teacher and student absenteeism, periodic reports published by the DOE and national and international research centres, and national documents such as field visit reports, EFA mid-decade assessment reports, Flash I and II Reports, and Consolidated Reports. Although a wide range of the literature was examined, only information relevant to this study has been highlighted here. See the Bibliography for a full list of material reviewed.

### STUDENT ABSENTEEISM

Although considerable evidence has been collected on increasing rates of student enrolment in schools across the world, most education systems in developing countries do not collect or analyse attendance data on a consistent basis. In the absence of reliable data, there is little definitive information. However, periodic studies and anecdotal observations in many countries show that ‘enrolled’ students are frequently not in school.

Although student absenteeism has been consistently identified by educators as a major concern since the 1940s, limited research is available on its extent, causes, and impact on learning. Many factors can lead to student absenteeism. Family health or financial concerns, poor school environment, drug and alcohol use, transportation problems, and differing community attitudes towards education are all conditions that can affect whether a child is attending school (Mervilde, 1981).

A study of eight schools in Bangladesh found that daily student attendance ranged from four per cent to 67 per cent, with about half of children regularly attending classes, 20 per cent with excessive absences, and another 30 per cent with absences frequent enough to cause concern about their achievement (BEPS, 2004).

A study by Wright (1976) explored the relationship between attendance and school factors, and found that as school size increased so did the absence rate. In addition, it concluded that schools with lower teacher–student ratios had lower absence rates. A study of one school in the US concluded that, although student absenteeism was a problem, the organization of school was not designed to help eliminate it (Duke and Mackel, 1980). The responsibility for enforcing the attendance policy was passed back and forth between stakeholders with no one prepared to take direct responsibility. Moreover, the system of rewards and sanctions for teachers for enforcing the attendance policy was not effective, and students did not have an effective system of rewards or sanctions that encouraged regular school attendance (Duke and Mackel, 1980). A study by Washington (1973) of student absenteeism in an American urban high school concluded that most student absences were the result of academic weakness, followed by personal psychological problems and employment outside school.

A study by the Academy for Educational Development concluded that approaches to addressing student attendance must start with using attendance as a management tool, and in understanding the underlying causes of absenteeism. Strategies can include scholarships, food programmes, school–parent activism to assure attendance, and systems of accountability (AED, 2006).

## **TEACHER ABSENTEEISM**

Limited research is available on the extent, causes, and impact of teacher absenteeism on student learning, especially in developing countries where information systems are not sufficiently strong to collect, analyse and report on daily attendance. However, the lack of definitive research is somewhat counterbalanced by widespread recognition that teacher absenteeism is a serious problem, particularly in rural areas.

A study of six developing countries—Bangladesh, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Peru, and Uganda—found that on average 19 per cent of teachers were absent on any given day. Across the countries surveyed, absence rates were higher in poorer regions, and in schools with poor infrastructure and no recent school inspections. Analysis also indicated that absences are not concentrated in a few repeat offenders, but are fairly widespread (Chaudhury *et al.*, 2005).

Normal reasons for absenteeism include family problems, health, pregnancy, or emergency leave. Other causes included teacher training courses that take teachers out of classrooms without providing substitutes, assignments requiring travel, travel to collect salary, and educational leave (Rogers *et al.*, 2004). In South Asia, only four per cent of absences were attributed to official non-education-related duties. Unauthorized absences, including leaving early or arriving late, accounted for 30–50 per cent of all absences (Chaudhury *et al.*, 2005).

Strategies for addressing teacher absenteeism are varied, but must start by identifying the issue as a critical management concern. In Nicaragua, parental involvement and administrative autonomy positively influenced teacher attendance, especially in poor, rural areas (King and Ozler, 2001). Similarly, a national survey of teacher absence in Uganda showed that increased monitoring by district officials and proximity to a district education office positively influenced teacher attendance (Habyarimana, 2004). Chaudhury *et al.* (2006) found that teachers who were required to seek permission directly from the principal for their absence were less likely to be absent than teachers who reported indirectly. The study by Habyarimana (2004) found that teachers with additional training after their pre-service programmes were less likely to be absent, and that lower student–teacher ratios were associated with lower teacher absence rates. Research has also shown that the rate of teacher absenteeism drops when incentive schemes such as buy-backs of unused sick and other personal leave and salary cuts for unauthorized absences are introduced (Boyer, 1994). Boyer also claimed that bonuses or rewards for exceptional attendance can reduce teacher absences.

## **STUDENT/TEACHER ABSENTEEISM AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

Studies show that higher attendance is related to higher achievement for students of all backgrounds (Epstein and Sheldon, 2002). A study by the U.S. Department of Education conducted in 2005 on Asian/Pacific Islander students in Grades 4 and 8 concluded students who attend school regularly score higher on achievement tests than their peers who are frequently absent (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Furthermore, a study in Guatemala of promotion from Grade 1 to Grade 2 found that children who had to repeat Grade 1 were present only about two-thirds of the time, whereas children promoted to Grade 2 had been present for over 80 per cent of the time (Chesterfield, 2005). A study in Honduras found that the strongest factors associated with gains in academic achievement were student–teacher ratios, preschool programmes, and teacher quality (Bedi and Marshall, 1999).

Several mechanisms through which teachers absences may reduce student achievements have been reported (Varlas, 2001). These studies reported that (i) instructional intensity may be radically reduced when a regularly assigned teacher is absent; and (ii) low skill levels of substitute teachers may contribute to a reduction of instructional focus. Another way that

teacher absences affect students is through the creation of discontinuities in instruction and disruption of regular routines and procedures in the classroom.

Monazza (2003) conducted a study in Pakistan focusing on factors that determine students' achievements in reading and maths. Initial results suggested that both home background and school-related factors were important in explaining student achievement. School variables, such as student–teacher ratio, peer group variables and school resources were significant determinants of pupil achievement. However, it is interesting to note that common measures of teacher quality such as teachers' education, training and pay appeared to be poor predictors of student achievement.

Duflo and Hanna's (2006) experimental study, in which financial incentives for good attendance were given to teachers in primary schools in India, provides strong evidence of a causal relationship between teacher absence and student achievement. A year after the intervention began, test scores for students in the treatment schools were substantially higher than those for students in control schools. This finding could be peculiar to the context in which the study was done where student absences were as high as 42 per cent; however, the context of this study and the current Karnali study share several similarities. This study implies that teacher attendance increases when attendance and performance are linked with incentives, and improved teacher attendance results in increased student achievement.

#### **STUDIES ON STUDENT AND TEACHER ATTENDANCE IN NEPAL**

Three relevant studies have been completed in Nepal: one for DANIDA was conducted by Tribhuvan University in 2003 as part of the Secondary Education Support Programme; one for the Education Support Advisory Team (ESAT) at the MOE was conducted by the Foundation for Human Development in 2004; and one for the Karnali Integrated Rural Development and Research Centre (KIRDARC) was conducted by Subba in 2008.

The Tribhuvan University (2003) study looked at teacher absenteeism in the districts of Humla and Doti, and found it was especially high in Humla, where snowfall closed schools for 3–4 months each year. In addition, teachers were absent because of other jobs and because they were required elsewhere by their superiors, usually for political reasons. While local teachers were found to be irregular, teachers from outside the district were considered to take more leave and not to return to school for months at a time.

The Foundation for Human Development (2004) study revealed interesting insights into the culture and incidence of teacher absenteeism in community and private schools, focusing on issues of class size, loss of annual school-days, and the correlation between teachers' involvement in politics and absenteeism. The study pointed out that the problem is compounded by the absence of motivating factors such as proper teacher evaluation and timely promotion, and that in general teachers felt that individual performance did not matter since it did not improve their career prospects. The research suggested that absenteeism has led to poor examination results and incomplete or hastily completed courses, and recommended the provision of substitute teachers and additional classes as possible solutions to this problem. It concluded that the smaller average class size in private schools compared to community schools partially explains the lower degree of absenteeism and the better academic performance of students. Private schools have also dealt firmly with absenteeism and so the problem is less pronounced than in community schools.

The study concluded that large class size, low motivation of teachers, teachers' involvement in politics, teachers' participation in training, the high incidence of *bandha*, disruption caused by SLC examinations, and teachers' engagement in household chores were the main reasons behind teacher absenteeism, especially in community schools.



The study found an acute need for providing financial incentives for teachers who are regular and attend school throughout the year. It also suggests that head-teachers need to be given full authority to stop payments to teachers for days absent and to provide extra classes to make up for missed educational opportunities. To curb misuse of leave provisions, it recommended that head-teachers should allow teachers to take long leave only after obtaining approval from the SMC. In addition, members of the SMC/PTA should be allowed to check the teacher attendance register any time. It also suggested that school-days missed because of *bandha* should be compensated for by having school on public holidays, and that the SLC examinations should not be conducted in ways that disturb regular classes.

The study recommended empowering head-teachers to control absenteeism in cooperation with the SMC/PTA. The study also suggested that schools must be equipped with adequate numbers of teachers. It revealed that since permanent teachers were often the cause of the absenteeism problem, school managements should be empowered to hire teachers either through a local management committee or on an annual contract. It also recommended that teacher training, especially long-duration training courses, should be held during vacations, wherever possible. To limit political intervention in schools that discourages well-qualified and committed teachers, the study recommended adopting advocacy measures for discouraging political interference in schools, including in the hiring or firing of teachers and their transfer, promotion and deputation.

The study for KIRDARC in 2008 examined the organization's impact on improving the quality of education in its programme area since 2006 (Subba, 2009). KIRDARC is supported by Save the Children Norway and manages a project that aims to strengthen and expand early childhood development (ECD) opportunities through the promotion of family and community care systems. It also prioritizes the creation of child-friendly teaching-learning environments in primary education institutions, the provision of alternative learning opportunities for out-of-school or dropped out children, and life skills education. The study looked at 209 schools in 37 Village Development Committees (VDCs), where there were 941 teachers, of whom 21 were women. Table 4 shows progress in quality improvement between 2006 and 2007.

**Table 4: Progress in quality improvement in KIRDARC schools between 2006 and 2007**

Average open school-days increased to 171 days in 2007 from 161 days in 2006
Average teacher attendance increased to 172 days in 2007 from 159 days in 2006
Average student attendance increased to 139 days in 2007 from 89 days in 2006
Student enrolment at primary level increased by 10 per cent in 2007, of which 12 per cent were girls
Dropout rate at primary level decreased to 13 per cent in 2007 from 17 per cent in 2006
Students pass rate increased to 88 per cent in 2007 from 87 per cent in 2006, of which 15 per cent were girls
39 schools were declared Zones of Peace in 2007 from 24 schools in 2006
41 schools practiced 'no corporal punishment' in 2007 compared to 19 schools in 2006

Source: Subba, 2009.

The above summary reveals that, despite improvements in several key indicators, total open school-days, student attendance and teacher attendance were still below the government standard of 220 school-days.

## CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse data collected from schools in Jumla, Humla and Dolpa and generate findings that will identify actions that can be taken to reduce student and teacher absenteeism. The primary source of data was qualitative information generated through FGD with teachers, students, SMC/PTA members and the community along with interviews conducted with head-teachers and DEO staff members. In addition, the field research team made a number of observations. This was corroborated by quantitative data collected in a structured questionnaire administered to 225 teachers, students, and SMC/PTA members. Finally, school records were analysed in an attempt to verify findings from the other sources of data.

### LINKS BETWEEN STUDENT AND TEACHER ABSENTEEISM AND SEASONAL EVENTS

The most important message to come out of the FGDs was that a large proportion of absenteeism in the Karnali region is related to seasonal events. All types of FGD participant, including teachers, students and parents, stated that the months of high absenteeism coincided with the beginning of the school year, the farming season, the yarchagumba-collection period, national festivals, and school reopening after the winter vacation. FGD participants summarized seasonal factors that hampered student and teacher attendance and provided estimates of the number of school-days lost, as follows (Table 5).

**Table 5: School-days hampered by different seasonal events**

Seasonal event	Period	Average absent days
Yarchagumba collection or farming season	Mid-May to end of June	35
Before or after national festivals	Mid-October to mid-November	20
Before or after winter vacation	Mid-December to end of December and mid-February to end of February	20
Local festivals	Not defined	8
<b>Total absenteeism</b>		<b>83</b>

Apart from two months of winter vacation and government-approved holidays, FGD participants estimated that a total of 83 school-days were lost each year owing to seasonal factors. This suggests that schools in the Karnali region are functioning for only about 137 days per year or nearly 38 per cent less rather than the government standard of 220 days per year. This is equivalent to losing more than two school-days each week for every week of school each year. Furthermore, non-seasonal factors will also impact attendance of a number of students and teachers to a greater or lesser extent. The annual school calendar reflecting student and teacher attendance can be summarized as in Table 6.

**Table 6: Annual school calendar reflecting present student and teacher attendance**

	Description of major events	Total class days
February/March (Falgun)	Student enrolment, supplying textbook, teachers waiting for air ticket in Nepalgunj	5
March/April (Chaitra)	Classes	25
April/May (Baisakh)	Classes	25
May/June (Jestha)	Yarchagumba collection, farming, livestock to pastures	5
June/July (Ashad)	Yarchagumba collection, farming, livestock to pastures	5
July/August (Shrawan)	Classes, local festivals	20
August/September (Bhadra)	Classes, local festivals, hay-making	20
September/October (Ashwin)	Dashain, teachers going home, hay-making	10
October/November (Kartik)	Tihar, teachers returning from home	12
November/December (Mangsir)	Annual final exam	10
December/January (Poush)	Winter vacation	0
January/February (Magh)	Winter vacation	0
<b>Total school-days</b>		<b>137</b>

This represents the existing school calendar in more or less all districts of the Karnali region. The average number of school-days is lower than 135 days in regions with severe winter weather.

#### CURRENT STATUS OF STUDENT ATTENDANCE

**FGDs:** When discussing student attendance in FGDs, stakeholders indicated that there was a serious problem with low student attendance in schools in the Karnali region. Many participants noted in particular that children in lower grades were frequently absent from school. This was corroborated by the researchers' field observations.

**Questionnaire:** The survey found that 39.9 per cent of respondents felt that there was no problem in their school with student attendance (Table 7). However, 15.0 per cent indicated that student absenteeism in their school was very high.

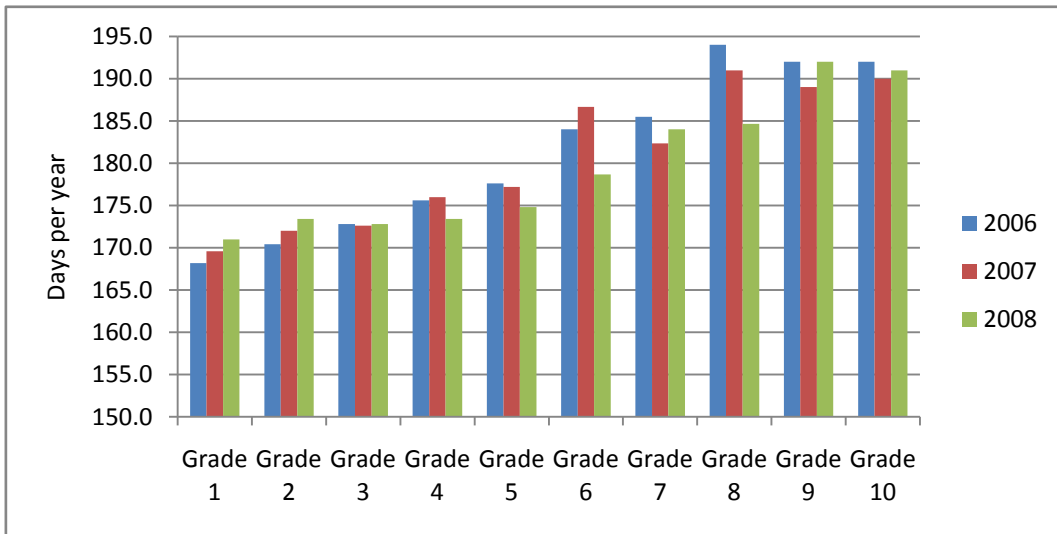
**Table 7: Status of student absenteeism in the Karnali region (percentage)**

	Respondents agreeing
There is no problem with student attendance	39.9
Absenteeism is very high	15.0

Note: Number of valid respondents = 213.

**School records from Jumla:** Analysis of attendance records from schools in Jumla reveals that student attendance by grade for 2006, 2007 and 2008 ranged from 168 days per year to 192 days per year (Figure 1). This is substantially below the government standard of 220 days per year, and corroborates perceptions expressed in the survey and FGDs about student absenteeism.

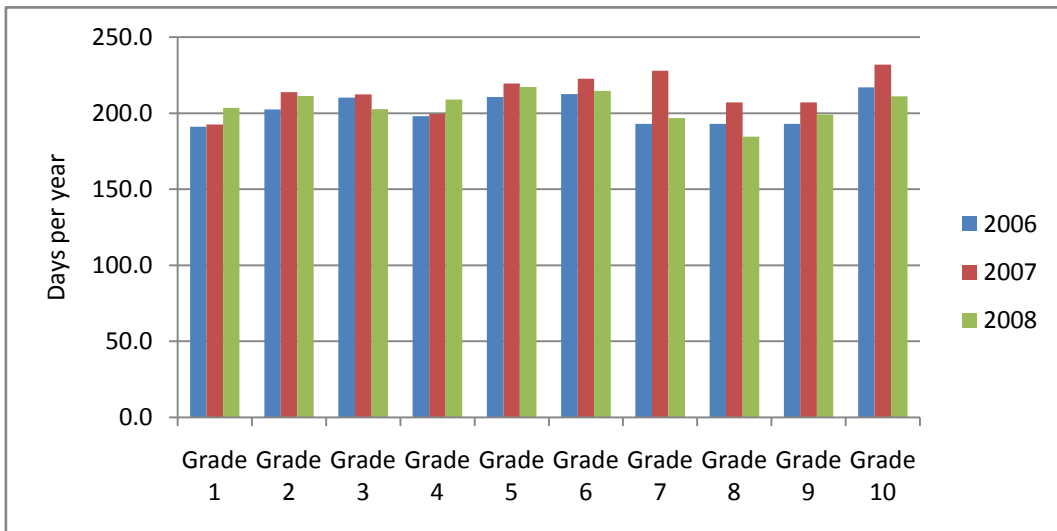
**Figure 1: Status of student attendance based on schools records in Jumla**



It is interesting to note that attendance improves in higher grades: Grade 1 has the lowest average attendance over the three years at 169.6 days per year and Grade 10 has the highest average attendance over the three years at 191 days per year. This pattern of attendance was not found in the school records of Humla or Dolpa.

**School records from Humla:** In Humla, student attendance ranged from 191 days per year to 232 days per year (Figure 2). This is higher than for Jumla, and interestingly on occasion higher than the government standard of 220 days per year, suggesting that records may not be accurate.

**Figure 2: Status of student attendance based on school records in Humla**

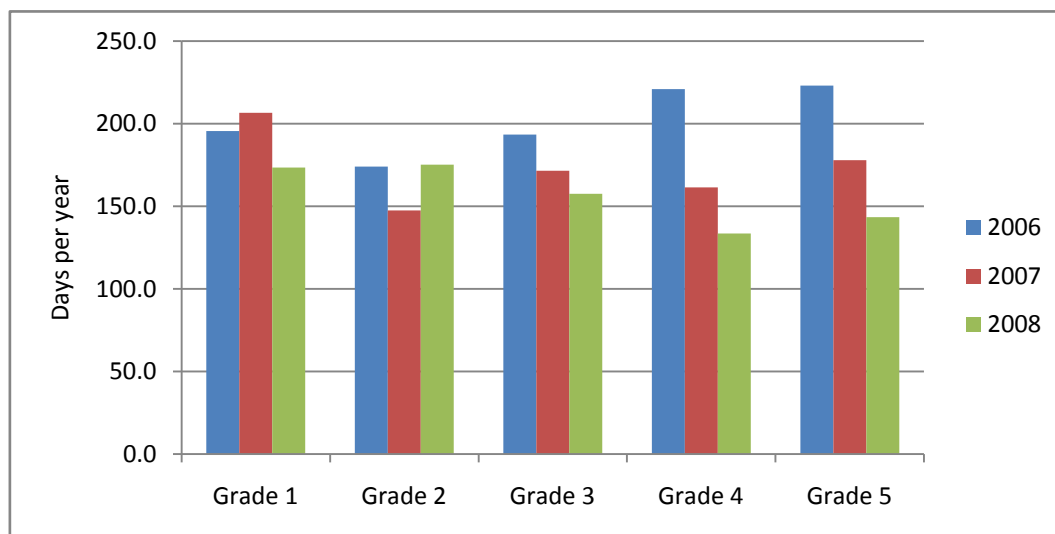


Increases in attendance do not progress smoothly up the grades, with the lowest average attendance over the three years in Grade 8 at 194.8 days per year, followed by Grade 1 at 195.7 days per year, and Grade 9 at 199.7 days per year. Grade 10 has the highest average attendance over the three years at 220.0 days per year

**School records from Dolpa:** The schools examined in Dolpa only had Grades 1–5. Student attendance ranged from 133 days per year to 223 days per year (Figure 3). Again, this last figures exceeds the government standard of 220 days per year, raising concerns about the

reliability of data in school records in Dolpa. The range is also greater than for Jumla or Humla.

**Figure 3: Status of student attendance based on school records in Dolpa**



Increases in attendance do not follow the patterns of either Humla or Jumla. Lowest average attendance over the three years is in Grade 2 at 165.6 days per year, with a more-or-less steady rise to Grade 5; however, unlike the other districts, Grade 1 has the highest average attendance over the three years at 191.8 days per year.

**School records overall:** While there is substantial variation across the three districts, average overall attendance for all grades over the three years was 190.3 days per year, which is almost 30 days or 13.5 per cent less than the government standard. Furthermore, this does not take into account any inaccuracies in school records, which this analysis suggests have a tendency to over-report the number of days of attendance. This tendency of school records towards inaccuracy was also mentioned by participants in FGDs and by other stakeholders, and field researchers also observed that student attendance was actually lower than that recorded in school registers.

### TRENDS IN STUDENT ATTENDANCE IN RECENT YEARS

**FGDs:** FGD participants felt that attendance had improved in recent years, especially when linked to an incentive programme such as the provision of scholarships, school bags, stationery or tiffin. Although it was noted that some students left classes as soon as they had finished eating their tiffin. In addition, campaigns such as Welcome-to-School had increased awareness of the importance of education, resulting in better attendance.

**Questionnaire:** Respondents to the survey were asked about changes in attendance or absenteeism in recent years. Some 65.7 per cent of respondents felt that there had been a gradual improvement in student attendance, although 20.7 per cent noted that student absenteeism had not decreased despite the introduction (in some schools) of interventions to encourage better attendance (Table 8).

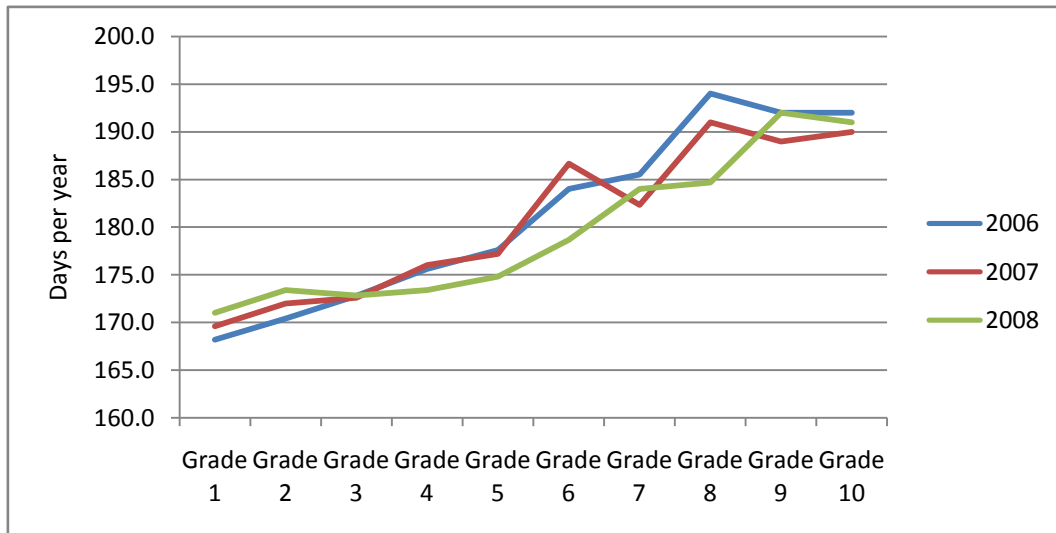
**Table 8: Trends in student absenteeism in the Karnali region (percentage)**

	Respondents agreeing
Gradual improvement in student attendance in recent years	65.7
Absenteeism is not decreasing in spite of several efforts	20.7

Notes: Number of valid respondents = 213.

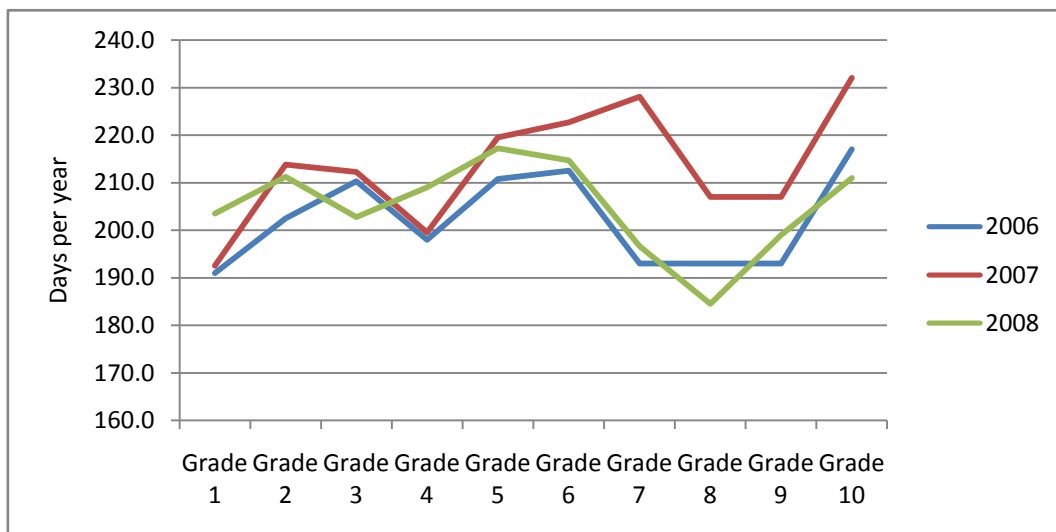
**School records from Jumla:** Trend analysis of school records from Jumla reveals that there has been little change in attendance for 2006, 2007 and 2009 (Figure 4). In lower grades, there has been some year-on-year improvement but this is reversed in higher grades. Bearing in mind that school records are not always accurate, it does not seem that student attendance has improved in recent years.

**Figure 4: Student attendance trends in Jumla for 2006–2008**



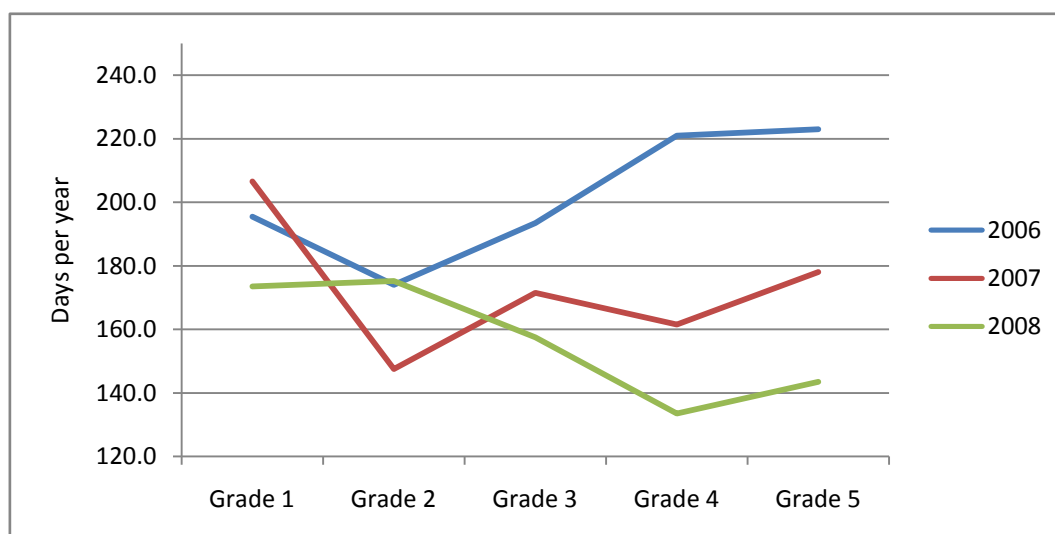
**School records from Humla:** A similar trend can be seen in Humla, with student attendance improving in lower grades but decreasing in higher grades (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Student attendance trends in Humla for 2006–2008**



**School records from Dolpa:** Student attendance trends in Dolpa are disappointing, with no recent improvement in attendance at either lower or higher grades (Figure 6). In fact, attendance in Grade 5 has declined sharply over the three years.

**Figure 6: Student attendance trends in Dolpa for 2006–2008**



**School records overall:** The school records do not corroborate survey results that suggest improvement in student attendance. They tend more to suggest that absenteeism is not declining despite interventions aimed at increasing attendance. However, bearing in mind that interventions to improve school attendance are also aimed at improving the monitoring of school attendance, it is just possible that ‘decreases’ in attendance could indicate that school records are becoming more accurate year by year, particularly in higher grades.

#### **TRENDS IN STUDENT ATTENDANCE THROUGHOUT THE YEAR**

**FGDs:** As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, FGD participants identified several periods throughout the year when student absenteeism was particularly prevalent. These periods include May and June when yarchagumba is collected and farmers are busy with harvesting barley and planting rice; September and October when hay-making and other farming activities occur; October and November for the festivals of Dashain and Tihar; and the winter months of December and January when it is cold (school is closed for the winter vacation during most of these two months; however, children tend to be absent for the few days that school is open).

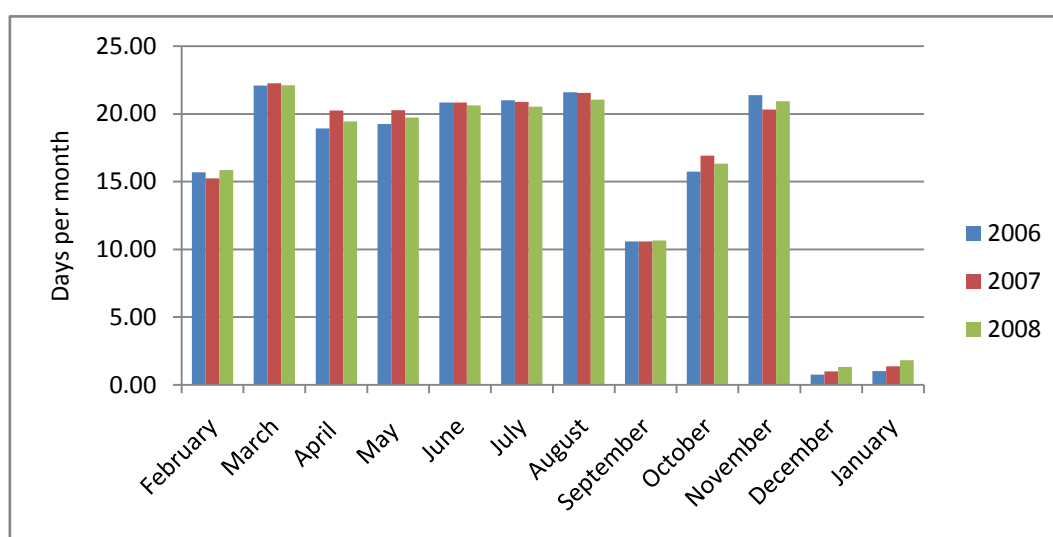
**Questionnaire:** Survey respondents were asked to identify in ‘which months of the year is student absenteeism high’. Some 40.7 per cent felt that student absenteeism was high in the two months from mid-October to mid-December (Table 9). This was followed by 32.9 per cent identifying mid-April to mid-June as high for student absenteeism, 29.2 per cent identifying mid-August to mid-October, and 22.7 per cent identifying mid-June to mid-August. Only 13.4 per cent identified mid-February to mid-April, and 8.8 per cent felt that no particular period had high absenteeism. Mid-December to mid-February are winter vacation in the Karnali region.

**Table 9: Trend in student absenteeism throughout the year in the Karnali region (percentage)**

	Respondents agreeing
Mid-October to mid-December (Kartik/Mangsir)	40.7
Mid-April to mid-June (Baisakh/Jestha)	32.9
Mid-August to mid-October (Bhadra/Ashwin)	29.2
Mid-June to mid-August (Ashad/Shrawan)	22.7
Mid-February to mid-April (Falgun/Chaitra)	13.4
No fixed period	8.8

Note: Number of valid respondents = 216.

**School records for all three districts:** School records of student attendance for all three districts were analysed to identify months with low attendance. Figure 7 shows that February, September, and October have the lowest student attendance (December and January being vacation months), with a consistent pattern for 2006, 2007 and 2008. No particular trend was noticed across the three years.

**Figure 7: Student attendance in each month for the Karnali region for 2006–2008**

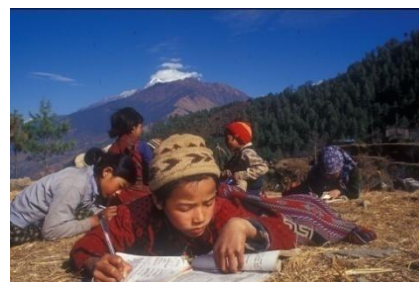
## STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS AND REASONS FOR LOW ATTENDANCE

**FGDs:** FGD participants felt that children from lower economic strata and Dalit students had lower attendance rates than children from economically better-off families and from Brahmin and Chhetri families. They felt that children from poor families often missed school to work for daily wages or to collect fuelwood to sell in the local market to support their families. Some students also missed school to undertake other activities such as fishing or looking after siblings, thus lowering their rate of attendance. It was felt that Brahmin and Chhetri families place high importance on sending their children to school regularly.



### Box 1: Absent schoolchild

While the study team was on its way to Mahatgaon, it came across a 12-year-old boy in school uniform, carrying his younger brother. It was almost 10.30 in the morning, well into the school-day. The study team was interested in this scene and asked the boy why he was not in school. He explained that his parents were landless daily-wage earners, and today they had had an opportunity to work for their landlord. Therefore, he had had to take care of his two-year-old brother while his parents worked. He said that generally he missed about a week of school each month for this reason.



**Questionnaire:** Survey respondents were asked to identify which types of student were likely to be absent. Analysis reveals that 76.4 per cent of respondents felt that children from poorer backgrounds were likely to absent and 71.3 per cent felt that Dalit children were likely to absent (Table 10). Respondents also identified children in households that focused on farming (59.3 per cent) and livestock-raising (55.1 per cent) as likely to be absent. Another important group was girls, with 41.7 per cent of respondents identifying them as likely to be absent. Children from ethnic groups, households engaged in business, and high-caste families were less likely to be absent. As the majority of children in the Karnali region are from households that are poor and engaged in agriculture and livestock-raising, it can be postulated that most children will be vulnerable to the conditions that lead to low attendance.

**Table 10: Common characteristics of students with low attendance (percentage)**

	Respondents agreeing
Children from poorer families	76.4
Dalit children	71.3
Children from households engaged in agriculture	59.3
Children from families engaged in livestock production	55.1
Girl students	41.7
Children living from far from the school	41.2
Children from ethnic groups	19.9
Children from households engaged in business	10.6
Children from Brahmin or Chhetri communities	7.4

Note: Number of valid respondents = 216.

Survey respondents were then asked what they thought were the reasons for students not attending school. Some 72.7 per cent felt that students who had to guard their house during farming periods when other members of the household were away would be absent from school (Table 11). Some 65.5 per cent of respondents felt that children from poor families who had to work as daily-wage labourers to earn income would be absent, 64.5 per cent felt that children who had to remain at home to help out other family members would be absent, 59.5 per cent felt that children who had to look after their siblings while other members of their family were farming would be absent, 56.4 per cent felt children who had to graze cattle would be absent, and 54.5 per cent felt that religious obligations such as *puja* or festivals would prevent children from attending school. Some 29.5 per cent felt that children simply failed to return to school after lengthy vacations. Lack of a child-friendly school environment

(19.1 per cent) and the strict attitudes of teachers (5.9 per cent) were other reasons for student absenteeism as was teacher absenteeism (14.1 per cent).

**Table 11: Reasons for low student attendance (percentage)**

	Respondents agreeing
Guarding house during farming period	72.7
Labouring owing to family poverty	65.5
Helping family members with farming/household chores	64.5
Babysitting during farming season	59.5
Grazing cattle	56.4
Attending <i>puja</i> /festival	54.5
Staying away after vacations	29.5
Living away in temporary settlement at farming area	19.5
Lack of child-friendly environment in school	19.1
Living far away from school	17.3
Teacher absent	14.1
Seasonal migration	13.2
Afraid of strict teachers	5.9

*Note: Number of valid respondents = 220.*

## IMPACT OF STUDENT ABSENTEEISM ON EDUCATION

**FGDs:** FGD participants were not asked specifically about the impact of absenteeism on the quality of education but there was general recognition that children who do not attend school regularly receive a poor education.

**Questionnaire:** The last statement regarding student attendance on the questionnaire was related to the impact of low attendance on the quality of education. It is widely recognized that low attendance has a detrimental impact on learning achievements, and 23.5 per cent of respondents acknowledged that poor attendance by students in the Karnali region adversely affected the quality of their education (Table 12).

**Table 12: Impact of low student attendance on education in the Karnali region (percentage)**

	Respondents agreeing
Quality of education is low because of low attendance	23.5

*Note: Number of valid respondents = 213.*

## FACTORS INFLUENCING LOW STUDENT ATTENDANCE

Discussions with FGD participants and interviews with other stakeholders as well as observations by the field researchers revealed several factors influencing low attendance of students in schools in the Karnali region. These factors can be categorized into two major clusters: seasonal and non-seasonal. Below is an analysis of these factors, using all the various sources of information collected during this study.

### Seasonal factors

Seasonal factors are events (or situations) that cause students to miss school either because they are involved in them or affected by them. According to this study's stakeholders, the main seasonal events affecting student attendance are as follows.

- **Yarchagumba collection:** Teachers and students from upper grades of all schools in Dolpa and nearby VDCs of other districts are engaged in yarchagumba collection during

May and June (Baisakh and Jestha). A teacher from Jumla said, ‘During the yarchagumba season, our school does not function well for 15 days or more, since most of our students are absent. We cannot force them to be present, as some rely on this season to earn their living for the whole year.’ However, yarchagumba collection does not affect all districts of the Karnali region.

- **Planting and harvesting seasons:** May and June (Jestha and Ashad) are also the peak harvesting and planting seasons. All members of the family are engaged in harvesting barley and wheat, and then planting rice. School-aged children either participate in harvesting and planting or stay at home to guard the house and take care of siblings. Female students miss more school-days than boys in this season because they are more likely to be involved in *parma* (a labour system based on exchange of work).
- **Temporary settlement at the farming site:** Those families whose farming land is far from their residence move to their farms temporarily during the planting and harvesting season. Such temporary movements hamper the school attendance of their children.
- **Hay-making (gajo or pula cutting):** Most of the Karnali is affected by cold weather from November to March meaning that livestock is kept in sheds during winter and has to be fed. Therefore, hay is made during August and September (Bhadra and Ashwin) for winter animal feed. Everybody in the family is involved in hay-making. During this season, teachers and students have low attendance.
- **Seasonal migration:** To avoid the cold during the winter, many households move to a warmer place such as Surkhet, Nepalgunj or Dang, with children accompanying their parents. This movement starts in December (Mangsir) and ends in February (Falgun), and results in children missing school before and after the winter vacation.
- **Adverse weather:** When snow falls in the higher parts of the Karnali, student attendance decreases, as children cannot walk to school. This is also true in the monsoon when rivers become flooded.
- **Local festivals:** During each full-moon festival (*purnima*) in Magh, Baisakh, Shrawan and Kartik (February, May, August and November), one or two days of class are missed. In addition, a special festival (*jatra*) is celebrated in Jumla from *Gai Jatra* to *Krishna Astami* in Shrawan (August), causing classes to be disrupted for about one week.

### **Non-seasonal factors**

As well as seasonal factors affecting school attendance, various non-seasonal factors also influence the importance that families in the Karnali region place on school and education. These can be divided into two categories: family-related and school-related.

#### ***Family-related factors***

- **Poverty:** Poor families consider children to be an economic asset and often make use of their labour to generate an income. Children are engaged in collecting and selling fuelwood, or working as porters and in other daily-wage activities, so they frequently miss school. This results in poor learning achievements, and children may eventually drop out of school.
- **Parental awareness:** Parents in the Karnali often have low educational levels and little awareness of the importance of education. Therefore, they place minimal priority on ensuring that their children attend school regularly, preferring their children to undertake household activities. Lack of awareness also encourages discriminatory practices against girls. Many parents in the Karnali region still believe that girls do not need go to school because, as they leave home after marriage, it is not worth investing in their education. This is one reason why girls have low attendance.

- **Learned helplessness:** Some poor and Dalit families in Karnali feel that education is not for them; that it is only for upper-caste or rich people. This misconception means that they either do send their children to school or do not insist on regular attendance.

### Box 2: Dalit mother

While at a school in Jumla, the study team met a 32-year-old Dalit woman, who was the mother of four children. She said that often she did not have the time to take care of her children as she was a daily-wage labourer and had to leave them on their own when she worked. Her husband did not work or take care of them. She explained that she had enrolled the children in school when the teachers had come to her during the Welcome-to-School campaign, but now, as no one in authority cared whether or not her children were in school, she admitted that she was neglectful about sending them. She said that, when it comes to attending school, she felt that Dalit children did not get the same support from their home environment as children from Brahmin and Chhetri families.

- **Parental occupation:** Children whose parents are engaged in daily-wage labour, farming or livestock-raising are more likely to be absent than children whose parents have occupations such as teaching, government service or business.
- **Student awareness:** Children also neglect school and quit classes because they do not understand the importance of education or are unable to see its relevance to their lives.

### Box 3: Newly-aware student

Nirmaya Bista, aged 18, is studying in Grade 4. She was readmitted to school last year after a gap of several years. She left school earlier because she did not understand the importance of education. However, following mass media campaigns and counselling by teachers, she became aware of what an education could do for her and was admitted to Grade 2. She did well and was promoted to Grade 4 after one year. She said that in the past she did not have enough time for school, as she was busy with household chores such as grazing cattle. Now, she was generally able to attend school unless there was too much work at home. She said, 'Unfortunately, I normally miss about two days of school each month.'



### School-related factors

- **Teacher irregularity:** Teacher irregularity is a major reason causing students to be absent from school. The late return of teachers after the winter vacation results in low student attendance during this period.
- **Weak administration and management of school:** If the head-teacher is absent or unable to ensure regular teacher attendance, then student attendance tends to decline also. In schools with weak administration, teachers have a tendency to return late after Dashain/Tihar and the winter vacation. An inactive SMC also contributes to weak school administration, resulting in low attendance rates for both students and teachers.
- **Lack of child-friendly classroom practices:** Corporal punishment discourages children from attending school, and results in poor attendance. This in turn results in poor performance in school, leading to more punishment. Schools in the Karnali region are often not child-friendly, and children are sometimes reluctant to attend.

- **Poor physical environment:** The Karnali region is a cold place, particularly between October and March. Most school buildings are not weather-protected and are uncomfortable during cold weather. This discourages students from attending during the winter.
- **School far away from home:** For some students, school is far from home and weather conditions make it difficult to attend during the monsoon and winter seasons. During bad weather, they miss school.
- **Untimely textbook distribution:** Textbooks reach schools in the Karnali region later than in other parts of the country (see Table 21 in Annex 1). Therefore, not having textbooks in time means that students lose interest in school and do not attend.

## CURRENT STATUS OF TEACHER ATTENDANCE

As with student attendance, teacher attendance was examined through FGDs, interviews and observations by the field study team, the structured questionnaire, and school records.

**FGDs:** FGD participants acknowledged that there is problem with teachers being absent from school. Some suggested seasonal associations for this, while others mentioned specific characteristics of absent teachers.

### Box 4: Absent teacher

While in the district headquarters of Jumla, the study team came across Ram Kumar Tharu (name changed), a teacher who was visiting the DEO for official work. The team asked him about his attendance at school. He explained that as he is a permanent resident of Janakpur in the south of the country he only gets to go home and see his family for the Dashain vacation. He freely admits that he generally leaves his school to travel home about 10 days before the vacation starts and, as a result of pressure from his family members whom he only meets once a year, he does not leave until after the Tihar festival. However, it is then difficult to obtain air tickets and he often does not return to school for about 15 days after Tihar. He estimated that he spends about two months away from school.

**Questionnaire:** The structured questionnaire found that 75.8 per cent of respondents felt there was no problem with teacher absenteeism in the Karnali region (Table 13). However, some 12.1 per cent of respondents perceived teacher absenteeism to be frequent.

**Table 13: Status of teacher absenteeism in the Karnali region (percentage)**

	Respondents agreeing
There is no problem of teacher absenteeism	75.8
Teachers' absenteeism is frequently experienced	12.1

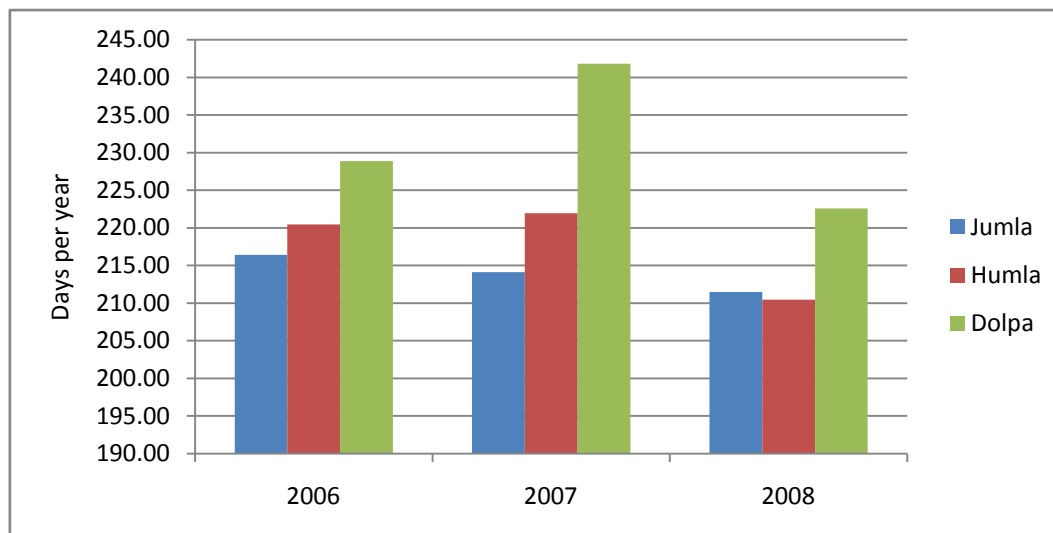
*Note: Number of valid respondents = 215.*

Although the majority of respondents to the survey felt there was no problem with teacher attendance, this finding differs from responses expressed by participants in the FGDs. The reason behind this discrepancy might be related to the fact that 59 per cent of respondents to the structured questionnaire were head-teachers or teachers. These individuals may have wanted to downplay the incidence of low attendance because officials from the MOE/DOE were involved in the field study and they were reluctant to reveal any problems with teacher absenteeism.

**School records:** Analysis of school records for 2006, 2007 and 2008 for the three Karnali districts appear to show that there is no serious problem with teacher absenteeism (Figure 8). In fact, figures seem to be overinflated, especially for Dolpa, where teacher attendance at

between 222 days per year and 241 days per year over the three years is greater than the government standard of 220 days per year. Jumla has the lowest recorded teacher attendance at between 211 days per year and 216 days per year, and Humla is generally higher than Jumla but lower than Dolpa at between 210 days per year and 222 days per year.

**Figure 8: Teacher attendance in the Karnali region for 2006–2008**



#### TRENDS IN TEACHER ATTENDANCE IN RECENT YEARS

**FGDs:** FGD participants did feel that there had been an improvement in teacher attendance in recent years. Some people ascribed this to growing awareness within the community of the importance of education for their children and the impact that teacher absenteeism has on the quality of education. Other people also mentioned that more active monitoring of schools by district authorities and SMCs/PTAs had resulted in better rates of teacher attendance.

**Questionnaire:** Some 49.8 per cent of respondents to the structured questionnaire felt that teacher absenteeism had gradually reduced in recent years, while 9.3 per cent felt that it had gradually increased (Table 14). Furthermore, 9.3 per cent indicated that, despite interventions to encourage full attendance, teacher absenteeism had not been reduced.

**Table 14: Trend in teacher absenteeism in the Karnali region (percentage)**

	Respondents agreeing
Compared to the past, teacher absenteeism is gradually reducing	49.8
Compared to the past, teacher absenteeism is gradually increasing	9.3
Despite efforts, teacher absenteeism is not being reduced	9.3

*Note: Number of valid respondents = 215.*

**School records:** Looking again at Figure 8 above, teacher attendance from school records was quite variable over the three-year period of 2006–2008. Teacher attendance appeared to fall in Jumla but this may be a reflection of records becoming gradually more accurate rather than actual decreases in attendance. Teacher attendance in Humla was also possibly trending lower, although it is difficult to say; while teacher attendance in Dolpa was most variable, with no obvious trend.

#### TRENDS IN TEACHER ATTENDANCE THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

**FGDs:** FGD participants suggested that teacher absenteeism was high in February and March after the long vacation as well as in September, October and November throughout the Dashain and Tihar holidays.

**Questionnaire:** Survey respondents were asked to identify periods throughout the year when teacher absenteeism was high. Some 47.4 per cent felt that teacher absenteeism was high in the two months from mid-February to mid-April (Table 15). This was followed by 26.8 per cent identifying mid-October to mid-December and 26.8 per cent identifying mid-August to mid-October. Some 22.5 identified mid-April to mid-June, and 14.8 per cent felt that no particular period had high absenteeism. Only 8.1 per cent identified mid-June to mid-August as a period with high teacher absenteeism. Mid-December to mid-February is winter vacation.

**Table 15: Trend in teacher absenteeism throughout the year in the Karnali region (percentage)**

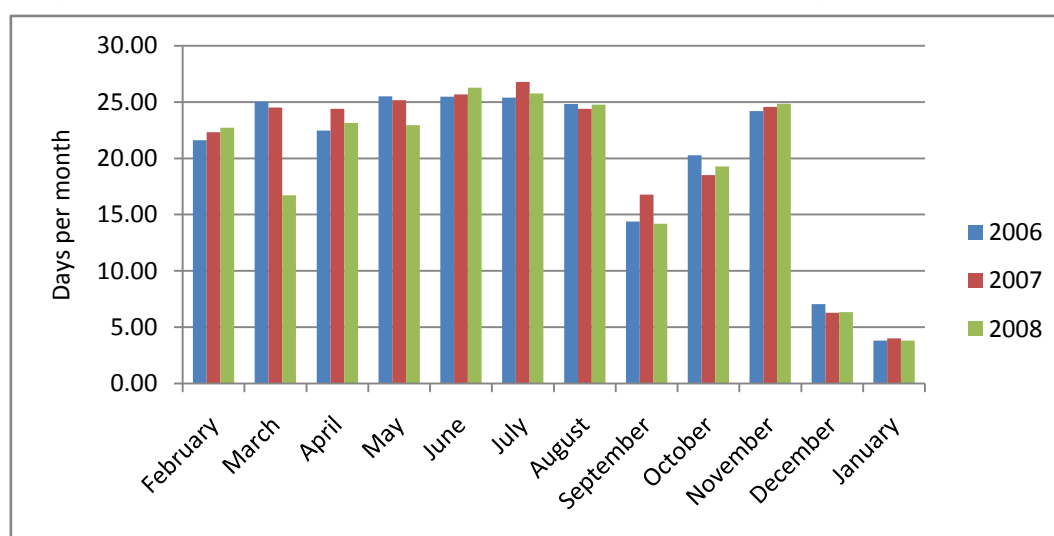
	Respondents agreeing
Mid-February to mid-April (Falgun/Chaitra)	47.4
Mid-October to mid-December (Kartik/Mangsir)	26.8
Mid-August to mid-October (Bhadra/Ashwin)	26.8
Mid-April to mid-June (Baisakh/Jestha)	22.5
No fixed period	14.8
Mid-June to mid-August (Ashad/Shrawan)	8.1

Note: Number of valid respondents = 209.

Survey respondents considered teacher absenteeism to be high in mid-February to mid-April as well as in mid-October to mid-December and mid-August to mid-October. This is slightly different from student absenteeism, where more respondents considered mid-October to mid-December and mid-April to mid-June to be months of high absenteeism.

**School records:** Analysis of school records by month showed that September, October and November have the lowest teacher attendance, followed by February and March (Figure 9). This pattern is similar to student attendance. Although FGD participants and survey respondents also noted that these were months of low teacher attendance, school records do not fully reflect the actual extent of days absent as reported by the other data-collection methods. No particular trend was noticed across the three years.

**Figure 9: Teacher attendance in each month for the Karnali region for 2006–2008**



## TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS AND REASONS FOR LOW ATTENDANCE

**FGDs:** FGD participants felt that teachers from outside the Karnali region were most likely to miss school, particularly after vacations. However, some participants felt that local

teachers also missed classes as they were involved in household and social activities. One teacher participant said, ‘Local teachers have their own household work and are sometimes absent for many days.’ It was also reported that female teachers are more likely to be absent than their male counterparts. Reasons cited for low attendance of female teachers included their multiple roles of mother, wife and daughter-in-law. However, teacher attendance records did not suggest gender-wise variation.

#### **Box 5: Local female teacher**

In Jumla, the study team talked with a female teacher who had worked at her school for three years. She was a local woman and also had a family to take care of. Each morning she woke at four o’clock to start her household chores of cleaning, washing, feeding cattle, gathering fuelwood in forest, and farming. Other members of her family woke around six o’clock, and she then feed her children, prepared lunch, and got ready for school. She said that she nearly always arrived at school late. During the planting and harvesting seasons, she did not attend school as she had to work in the fields. Even if she tried to go to school then, she was so exhausted that she could not concentrate on the students. She admitted that she was often tired, and was always worrying about housework that she needed to complete after school. Her husband never helped her with the chores. She went to bed after nine o’clock, thinking about her duties for the next day. She said, ‘Women and donkeys in Karnali never have any leisure.’

FGD participants were asked whether the age of teachers makes a difference to their rate of attendance. They felt that older teachers were more likely to be absent than the younger ones. Students also felt that older teachers were less interested in doing their job than younger teachers. Although no evidence was collected on whether temporary or permanent teachers were more likely to be absent, FGD participants felt that permanent teachers were less caring about their jobs than teachers with temporary appointments. One participant noted that ‘in comparison to temporary and *rahat* teachers, the absenteeism trend of permanent teachers is high’.

FGD participants also felt that teachers with higher academic qualifications were more regular than teachers with lower qualifications, and that they were more conscientious about their work.

Teachers who did not have other occupations were considered to be more punctual than teachers who were involved in other jobs besides teaching. Participants felt that teachers engaged in business, agriculture, livestock-raising and the priesthood missed more classes than other types of teacher. Furthermore, they mentioned that union-affiliated teachers missed school at least once or twice a month. One participant said, ‘At least a day or two are lost when teachers are involved in union activities. Some teachers place higher priority on their union activities than on their work at school.’

Involvement in politics and low attendance in school was considered to be a cause of teacher absenteeism by some FGD participants. However, no evidence was collected on teachers being absent from school because of involvement in political activities. An SMC member from Jumla said, ‘There is no influence of politics in teacher attendance. We are not aware that the political activities of teachers have hampered classes.’ Some teachers said that teachers have their own political and professional ideologies, but that these do not obstruct teaching and learning activities at school. However, some SMC members felt that training on the roles, responsibilities, duties and rights of teachers should be organized for teachers who are strongly involved in politics.



**Questionnaire:** Survey respondents were asked to identify which characteristics were common in teachers who were likely to be absent. Some 57.9 per cent of respondents felt that teachers who were from outside the district where they were stationed were likely to have the highest rates of absenteeism (Table 16). Respondents also felt that involvement in professional development and further education affected the attendance of teachers, with 42.1 per cent identifying teachers attending training and seminars as having low attendance and 30.2 per cent identifying teachers involved in higher education as having low attendance. Local teachers and female teachers were considered to be absent by around a quarter respondents. Local teachers living far from the school, teachers associated with political parties or affiliated with the Teachers' Union, teachers involved in administrative responsibilities, and the principal were other categories of teacher who were commonly absent from school.

**Table 16: Common characteristics of teachers with low attendance (percentage)**

	<b>Respondents agreeing</b>
Teacher from outside the district	57.9
Teacher attending training and seminars	42.1
Teacher involved in higher education	30.2
Local teacher	29.2
Female teacher	24.8
Teacher living far from school	21.8
Permanent teacher	19.3
Teacher involved in politics	18.3
Teacher associated with Teachers' Union	17.3
Principal	14.4
Temporary teacher	12.9
Teacher involved in administrative work	10.9
Teacher with many social obligations	8.9
Teacher on quota	6.4
Teacher with fears for security	5.9

*Note: Number of valid respondents = 211.*

Survey respondents were asked what they considered were the reasons for teachers being absent from school. Some 75.4 per cent felt that teacher absences were due to teachers failing to return to school on time after vacations (Table 17). Some 46.4 per cent felt that teachers were absent when they were otherwise engaged in farming. Some 27.5 per cent felt that weak monitoring by education authorities was to blame and 21.3 per cent felt that weak administration in schools was to blame. Other reasons included teachers living far from school (21.8 per cent), visits to the DEO (19.4 per cent), involvement with NGOs (12.3 per cent), and involvement with political parties (11.4 per cent) or the Teachers' Union (8.5 per cent).

**Table 17: Reasons for low teacher attendance (percentage)**

	Respondents agreeing
Not returning on time after vacations	75.4
Involvement in farming during the season	46.4
Weak monitoring	27.5
Teacher living far from school	21.8
Weak school administration	21.3
Frequent visits to the DEO	19.4
Involved in NGO	12.3
Affiliated with political party	11.4
Active in Teachers' Union or professional association	8.5

Note: Number of valid respondents = 211.

## FACTORS INFLUENCING LOW TEACHER ATTENDANCE

Based on information collected from schools in Humla, Jumla and Dolpa, the following factors were identified as influencing teacher attendance. They have been classified into two clusters: seasonal and non-seasonal.

### Seasonal factors

- **Early departure for vacations:** Owing to the scarcity of air tickets, teachers from outside the Karnali region often leave school before vacations begin, particularly in December and September/October (before Dashain).
- **Late return after vacations:** Teachers from outside the Karnali region often return late after the winter vacation in February and the Dashain/Tihar holidays in October/November.
- **Yarchagumba collection:** Teachers also participate in yarchagumba collection, thereby missing school during the season, especially in Dolpa and adjoining VDCs of Jumla.
- **Involvement in farming:** As with students, some local teachers miss classes during the planting season in May/June, the hay-making season in August/September, and the harvesting season in October/November.
- **Seasonal migration:** Some local teachers migrate to a warmer place during the cold Karnali winter from December to March.

### Non-seasonal factors

- **Poor teacher management:** Poor management of teachers is cited as a major cause of low teacher attendance in schools in the Karnali region. Head-teachers, who often also have low attendance, are not empowered to enforce attendance regulations on other teachers. The unreliability of teacher attendance registers attests to generally poor management. There is no DEO or SMC mechanism to regulate teacher absences from school. Head-teachers, who are primarily responsible for regulating teacher attendance, fail to do so. Some teachers claim that unfair treatment by management also causes low teacher attendance.
- **Participation in teacher training:** Teachers sometimes leave school with official permission for training. However, schools are not provided with substitutes to cover classes while teachers are at training, and such training programmes are not held during vacations. Even when class coverage is arranged by other teachers, students think that classes will not be effective and so do not go to school.

- ***Involvement in secondary occupation:*** Teachers in the Karnali region often have an alternate occupation, usually in trade or business, and from time to time they miss classes to attend to their business affairs.
- ***Engagement in unions or NGOs:*** When teachers are involved in unions or community-based organizations and NGOs, they tend to prioritize these other activities over teaching classes. When teachers are not responsible about attending school, then students also do not attend regularly.

## **EXISTING INTERVENTIONS FOR INCREASING ATTENDANCE OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS**

The Government of Nepal has applied several initiatives to increase enrolment, retention and attendance in school. Similarly, local NGOs are work to improve education in Karnali. Communities are also expected to help schools to reduce teacher and student absenteeism and improve the quality of education. Some of the initiatives to increase enrolment and attendance implemented by the government, schools, communities and I/NGOs are given below, as described by FGD participants and key informants.

### **Government initiatives to improve attendance**

- ***Scholarships:*** The government gives scholarships to girls, Dalit children and students from deprived communities to encourage their enrolment and retention in school. However, many of these students feel that the scholarships are not adequate for them to continue their education.
- ***School tiffin programme:*** Schools in the Karnali region receive government support for a school tiffin programme (*khaja karyakram*) to increase student attendance. This programme has contributed to better attendance but students have a tendency to leave school after the day's tiffin. Another problem is that although schools receive NRs 15 per student per day for the programme, this is not sufficient to purchase tiffin for all students because food prices in the Karnali region are high.
- ***School infrastructure development programme:*** In order to make schools weather-protected, comfortable and child-friendly, the government has initiated a school infrastructure development programme. This programme has helped to upgrade the physical facilities of some schools, making classrooms more comfortable and child-friendly. However, such improvements are yet to be implemented in all schools in the region.
- ***Directive to promote student and teacher attendance:*** Based on the Education Regulations, the DOE has issued a school operations directive. If this directive were implemented effectively, student and teacher attendance could be improved. However, field information revealed that DEOs are not successfully enforcing this directive.
- ***Provision for Resource Centres and Resource Persons:*** The government has developed Resource Centres and assigned Resource Persons to monitor schools as well as provide support to teachers. However, respondents reported that they have not been effective in reducing student and teacher absenteeism yet. Nevertheless, respondents confirmed that DEOs have carried out unannounced visits on schools to check the attendance of teachers and students.

The DOE through the DEOs has been implementing these government programmes in the Karnali region for several years. It also ensures the distribution of free textbooks, provision of teaching materials, 100 per cent coverage of teachers' salaries, training for teachers, provision of block grants for school improvement, support for running extracurricular activities, rewards for outstanding teachers and students, and school inspection, monitoring

and supervision. Several school improvement projects are being carried out in partnerships with national and international organizations and community groups. Workshops and seminars are organized to improve the quality of education in schools. However, despite these important interventions and continued support from DEOs, attendance of students and teachers in many schools is still low, suggesting that, while such schemes help to increase enrolment, additional interventions focusing on seasonal and non-seasonal factors associated with low attendance are required.

### **Other initiatives to improve attendance**

Initiatives by other organizations and the community to improve attendance usually include capacity-building of SMCs/PTAs aimed at improving the management and monitoring of schools; awareness-raising and community mobilization; development of child-friendly physical environments; teacher training in child-centred teaching–learning methodologies; provision of teaching–learning materials; activation of child clubs; income-generation programmes; and other innovative interventions.

However, it should be noted that these interventions are often project-based and inevitably applied to only a relatively small number of schools. Furthermore, activities aimed at improving attendance are usually introduced as a part of a wider package of school improvement, making it difficult to analyse the effectiveness of specific interventions in reducing absenteeism apart from acknowledging that in schools with such interventions attendance of both students and teachers is now better than it was before such school improvement packages were introduced.

***Capacity-building of SMCs/PTAs:*** Various organizations have supported capacity-building of SMCs/PTAs with the aim of empowering these bodies to develop school improvement plans and monitor their progress. These plans often include activities to encourage better attendance by students and teachers. For example, to reduce teacher absenteeism, SMC/PTA members visit schools to monitor teacher attendance. Teachers who are absent are given a warning and asked to improve their attendance. In some schools, the names of absent teachers are publicized to control absenteeism. Teachers who are regular and have good performance records are rewarded. KIRDARC (2008) reported that, following training on the role and responsibilities of SMCs, one SMC in Humla was empowered to demand the dismissal of persistently absent teachers from its school, and is now able to persuade all its teachers to be regular. Takdbol Lama, the SMC chairperson, said, ‘Now teachers stay and teach for the whole summer and our children can calculate and read and write their letters easily.’ Nevertheless, community members felt that monitoring and supervision of schools by SMCs/PTAs is still not adequate for effectively decreasing student and teacher absenteeism.

***Awareness-raising and community mobilization:*** Head-teachers, teachers, students and community members identified public awareness programmes, door-to-door campaigns, street dramas, and monthly interactions with parents on the importance of regular attendance as important community mobilization interventions that have increased student attendance. These types of campaigns are usually carried out with support from SMCs/PTAs, child clubs, community-based social organizations, and local NGOs.

***Development of child-friendly physical environments:*** Support has also been mobilized for constructing child-friendly classrooms, with educational messages painted on classroom walls and comfortable seating arrangements. The physical infrastructure has been rehabilitated and weather-protected, and drinking water and toilet facilities for students and teachers have been installed. In addition, playgrounds have been constructed and recreational

equipment has been supplied. This type of support usually comes from projects but social organizations have also raised funds for such interventions.

**Teacher training in child-centred teaching–learning methodologies:** As well as improving physical facilities, projects have organized training/seminars for teachers on child-centred teaching–learning methodologies. On occasion, this type of intervention has also been initiated by social organizations and communities.

**Provision of teaching–learning materials:** Schools in some project areas have received child-centred teaching–learning materials. Some social organizations have arranged extracurricular activities for students.

**Activation of child clubs:** In some schools, child clubs have been involved in initiatives to reduce student and teacher absenteeism such as tracking attendance and meeting with absent students and their parents to discuss the issue. The child club at Sita Lower Secondary School in Raralihi VDC, Jumla, has helped to regulate student and teacher attendance in its school (KIRDARC, 2008). A teacher at the school, Devi Ram Gautam, says, ‘Teachers are regular nowadays, as the child club comes to ask them why they have been absent for a long time. When teachers are absent, senior child clubs members are mobilized to facilitate classes for junior children.’ Child clubs have also assisted SMCs to devise rules to control absenteeism and reward regular attendance. Although respondents acknowledge that these types of intervention contribute to reducing absenteeism, most schools in the Karnali region do not apply any such programmes.

**Income-generation programmes:** Some I/NGOs have provided support for income-generation programmes to parents in selected VDCs. These programmes particularly target the families of children that are absent from school for reasons of poverty.

**Other innovative interventions:** Faced with low student numbers, some communities have merged their schools and are offering residential facilities. For example, communities in upper Dolpa have merged eight schools and are now running a residential school with financial support from external donors. This school is running well in terms of quality and regularity of students and teachers.

It was also reported that in some schools teachers provide guidance and counselling services and hostel facilities are available to encourage regular attendance.

One community in Humla recognized the good work being done by the facilitator of its ECD centre and parents decided to reward her by each giving her 2 kg of grain in May and 6 kg of grain in November (KIRDARC, 2008). This has motivated to the facilitator to continue her work and the make the ECD centre a model for the area.

## **SHORTCOMINGS IN ADDRESSING LOW STUDENT AND TEACHER ATTENDANCE**

FGD participants and other key informants mentioned the following shortcomings in the roles of various bodies and actors in addressing low student and teacher attendance in the Karnali region.

**Role of DEO:** Respondents felt that the DEO, the body responsible for supervising, monitoring and controlling attendance by teachers, does not carry out its responsibilities effectively. Weak enforcement of attendance-related regulations by the DEO was cited as a major cause of low attendance among teachers and head-teachers. It was also reported that teachers are drawing salary for the days they are unofficially absent from schools. In most cases, school attendance records do not reflect actual absences, and are not reliable. Head-teachers and teachers signed the attendance record even for days when they were not present.

In addition, as student enrolment is linked to funding for schools, with higher numbers ensuring greater funding, there is a temptation for schools to inflate enrolment. This leads to inaccurate school records for both enrolment and attendance.

The allocation of teachers' positions is based on the number of students enrolled in school. According to the government norm, the student–teacher ratio in the mountain region is 45:1. Since most primary schools in the Karnali region have between 20 and 40 students in a class, the reality is that inadequate numbers of teachers are assigned to each school. Most communities are composed of poor families who cannot afford to hire additional teachers from their internal resources. Inadequate numbers of teachers results in irregular classes, which promotes student absenteeism and hinders learning.

Another serious shortcoming is the constraint on development of contextual and functional school calendars. At present, the DEO is unable to provide schools with enough flexibility to develop their own school calendars that can take into consideration seasonal factors that impact on student and teacher attendance.

Other areas of weakness in DEO management cited by study respondents included regularity in school supervision, the performance-based teacher appraisal system, the rewarding of teachers and students for good attendance and performance, the provision of adequate tiffin for students, and the equitable provision of scholarships.

**Role of VDC/DDC:** Local bodies such as VDCs and DDCs do not oversee the operation of schools in their jurisdiction adequately. Their support, including visits and interactions, would provide encouragement to schools for maintaining proper attendance of both students and teachers. In addition, through their planning and funding mechanisms, they could ensure that schools are child-friendly with adequate physical facilities and properly trained teachers.

**Role of SMC:** Teachers, students and community members stated that SMCs are not performing their role in monitoring student and teacher attendance. SMCs are not sufficiently empowered to enforce attendance rules and control student and teacher absenteeism.

**Role of head-teacher/teachers:** Almost all respondents including teachers felt that teachers were not as professional as they could be. Some people said that head-teacher and teachers were more concerned with personal benefits than with professional practices. They felt that teachers should be role models for students by being punctual, committed and conscientious.

**Role of Teachers' Union and professional organizations:** Although it was acknowledged that the Teachers' Union can play a vital role in reducing student and teacher absenteeism, no specific examples were identified. Some respondents felt that the Teachers' Union is sometimes the cause of absenteeism by head-teachers and teachers. Respondents stated that the Teachers' Union could play an important role in conducting periodic monitoring, providing guidance to teachers, and arranging for teacher training.

**Role of parents/guardians:** The role of parents and guardians was considered by respondents to be vital for improving student and teacher attendance. Teachers, SMC members and students stated that while some parents/guardians in the Karnali region are conscientious and concerned about the education of their children, others are less aware of the importance of education and the need for regular school attendance. The guidance, encouragement and support of parents/guardians are vital for reducing student absenteeism. Most parents/guardians do not visit their schools routinely to check whether children and teachers are attending, and do not ask about the achievements of their children.

**Role of community organization:** Although community organizations and civil society were acknowledged to be crucial in raising parental awareness about the importance of sending

children to school regularly, respondents felt that these efforts to improve student and teacher attendance require intensification and more effective targeting.

***Role of politicians:*** Respondents believed that political organizations in the Karnali region do not regard educational development with high priority. The improvement of schools including student and teacher attendance is rarely on the political agenda. However, most people believed that politicians could play a vital role in gaining the support of parents/guardians and the community in controlling student and teacher absenteeism in school.

## CHAPTER 5: KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### KEY FINDINGS

- Although analysis of data collected in FGDs, interactions with various stakeholders, observations by field researchers and the structured questionnaire shows that there is a wide range of perceptions regarding the extent of both student and teacher absenteeism in the Karnali region, it can be concluded that low attendance by both students and teachers is considered to be a serious problem by many stakeholders.
- Unfortunately, research and observation for this study found that school records, which should reflect daily attendance accurately for each student and teacher, are generally unreliable.
- Despite the difficulty of obtaining an accurate average attendance figure for students and teachers, FGD participants estimated that approximately 83 school-days are lost each year through absences linked to seasonal events. This is nearly 38 per cent lower than the government standard of 220 school-days per year, and is equivalent to losing more than two school-days each week for every week of school each year. This figure does not include school-days lost for non-seasonal factors that will impact attendance of a number of students and teachers to a greater or lesser extent.
- Although student and teacher attendance were assessed separately, they each follow a similar pattern, with students being absent when there is no teacher and teachers being absent when students do not attend school. Both student and teacher absences can be clustered by seasonal and non-seasonal factors.
- It was acknowledged by survey respondents that low student attendance hampers the learning process and adversely affects the quality of education received by students.
- The periods of highest student absenteeism were identified as mid-October to mid-December (Kartik/Mangsir) and mid-April to mid-June (Baisakh/Jestha).
- Students identified as most likely to be absent were children from poor families, followed by Dalit children, children from households engaged in agriculture or livestock-raising, girls, and children living far from school.
- It was perceived that students were most likely to be absent because they had to guard the house while other family members were away planting or harvesting; they belonged to poor households and had to work to earn income for their family; they had to help other family members with farming or household chores or were responsible for babysitting their siblings; they had to graze cattle for their family; or they had to attend a *puja* or religious festival.
- The main seasonal factors cited for student absences were yarchagumba collection and harvesting/planting in May and June; temporary settlement away from school during the farming season also in May and June; hay-making in August and September; migration away from the Karnali region to avoid cold weather in December, January and February; and local festivals in February, May, August and November.
- The main non-seasonal factors cited for student absences were family poverty meaning that children had to work to supplement family incomes rather than attend school; lack of parental awareness on the importance of education, especially for girls and children from Dalit families; teacher absenteeism; lack of child-friendly classrooms and teaching-learning practices, including lack of adequate weather protection; school located far from home, making it difficult for some children to reach school especially during adverse weather conditions; and untimely textbook distribution.



- The periods of highest teacher absenteeism were identified as mid-February to mid-April (Falgun/Chaitra), mid-August to mid-October (Bhadra/Ashwin) and mid-October to mid-December (Kartik/Mangsir).
- Teachers identified as most likely to be absent were those originating from outside the district, followed by those attending training and seminars or involved in higher education, local teachers, and female teachers.
- It was perceived that teachers were most likely to be absent because they did not (or could not) return to the school on time after Dashain/Tihar and winter vacations; they were involved in seasonal farming activities; monitoring of schools by district educational authorities was weak and there were no consequences for non-attendance; they lived far from the school; and the school's administration was weak, leading to poor attendance.
- The main seasonal factors cited for teacher absences were early departure for vacations in September/October and December; late return after vacations in October/November and February; yachagumba collection in May and June; involvement in farming activities during May/June, August/September and November; and migration away from the Karnali region to avoid cold weather in December, January and February.
- The main non-seasonal factors cited for teacher absences were poor management of teachers in schools, with no DEO nor SMC mechanism to regulate teacher absences; participation in teacher training, with no system for providing a substitute during these periods; involvement in secondary occupation such as trade or business, causing teachers to miss classes; and engagement in activities for Teachers' Union, political parties, or NGOs.
- The government supports education in the Karnali region (as elsewhere across the country) with special packages such as scholarships for needy children; a daily school tiffin programme; a school infrastructure development programme to upgrade physical facilities and make classrooms more comfortable and child-friendly; remote area allowance for teachers; and free textbooks. However, despite these important interventions and continued support from DEOs, attendance of students and teachers in many schools is still low, suggesting that, while such schemes help to increase enrolment, additional interventions focusing on seasonal and non-seasonal factors are also required.
- Various organizations have supported education improvement projects in the Karnali region. Interventions to reduce student and teacher absenteeism have focused on capacity-building of SMCs/PTAs aimed at improving the management and monitoring of schools; awareness-raising and community mobilization; development of child-friendly physical environments; teacher training in child-centred teaching-learning methodologies; provision of teaching-learning materials; activation of child clubs; income-generation programmes; and other innovative interventions. However, these interventions are often project-based and inevitably applied to only a relatively small number of schools. Furthermore, as activities are usually introduced as a part of a wider package of school improvement, it is difficult to analyse the effectiveness of specific interventions in reducing absenteeism apart from acknowledging that in schools with such interventions attendance of both students and teachers is now better than it was before such school improvement packages were introduced.
- The main shortcomings mentioned by study respondents in addressing student and teacher absenteeism include the lack of an effective mechanism for supervising, monitoring and controlling student and teacher attendance; the lack of adequate teachers' positions in schools; inaccuracy of school attendance records; inflexibility in the development of individualized school calendars; the inability of SMCs to monitor student and teacher attendance in their schools; the lack of accountability for head-teachers and teachers; the lack of safe, weather-protected, child-friendly school facilities and teachers

trained in child-centred teaching–learning methodologies; and generally low awareness by parents/guardians on the importance of education and the need for regular school attendance.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING ATTENDANCE OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS**

- **Develop a strong regulatory and monitoring mechanism**

Monitoring and supervision of the education system should be enhanced from the ministry down to schools and teachers. A system of assessment should be implemented to review performance at each level of the education system. The DEO should be empowered to strengthen school monitoring to ensure that students received the minimum required educational inputs. School Supervisor positions should be filled, and made functional and effective. School Supervisors should be motivated with incentives and rewards, based on their performance in maintaining required school-days, instructional hours, student and teacher attendance, and students' academic performance.

- **Ensure adequate number of teachers in each school**

The existing practice of providing *darbandi* (teachers' positions) should be re-visited for the Karnali region to ensure there are sufficient teachers. There should be an adequate number of teachers in each school to run all classes smoothly. The SMC should consult with relevant government agencies in order to obtain an adequate number of teachers' positions for their school. If teachers have to be absent for an official reason, there should be an arrangement for substitute teachers because, when there is no teacher, students usually do not attend school. Schools should be encouraged to engage local volunteer teachers as short-term substitute teachers. The volunteer teachers would be appointed and remunerated by SMCs.

- **Ensure that student and teacher attendance records are correct**

The accuracy of student and teacher attendance records in schools was found to be questionable. For effective management of absenteeism by schools, these records need to be correct. They should be verifiable and shared with SMCs and the community. They could also be supplied to the DEO. Furthermore, if records accurately reflect the actual attendance of students and teachers, then they can be used to reward those students and teachers with outstanding attendance. They also need to be accurate because they are sometimes used to assess eligibility for receiving certain incentives such as cooking oil from the World Food Programme.

- **Give schools more flexibility in developing their own school calendar**

Although school standards and directives concerning school-days and attendance requirements are endorsed by the Department of Education, a mechanism for implementing them is required in regions like the Karnali where seasonal events hamper attendance. The DEO should be given flexibility in authorizing schools to develop their own school calendar, school hours and timetable, maintaining minimum requirements for school-days and instructional hours. Schools should be facilitated to develop their own school calendar, ensuring that, while minimum requirements are met, unavoidable seasonal events are also taken into consideration. The school calendar can be prepared in consultation with teachers, student representatives, parents and the community.

- **Build capacity of SMCs/PTAs to monitor attendance at their school**

SMCs should be strengthened and empowered to take greater charge of managing school affairs, including attendance of students and teachers. They should be able to reward students

and teachers with outstanding attendance records to inspire others to be regular. The DEO should train SMCs/PTAs on their roles and responsibilities as well as national educational rules and regulations. DEOs should mobilize SMCs/PTAs to have regular interactions with parents and the community, and help them to monitor schools to ensure that government regulations and guidelines concerning minimum attendance and school-days are maintained. Some schools have developed and implemented codes of conduct; expectations regarding student and teacher attendance can be included in these. SMCs should keep records of student and teacher absences and send reports to the DEO. In order to control unauthorized absences by teachers, strict action should be taken against absent teachers by SMCs. To encourage better student attendance, SMCs should be empowered and facilitated to obtain support for improving their school's physical environment and for ensuring that teaching-learning is child-friendly and enjoyable.

- **Increase the authority and accountability of head-teachers**

The head-teacher is the main person responsible for management in individual schools and should have the authority to deal with management issues, including student and teacher absenteeism. Head-teachers should be accountable to their SMC for school affairs, with consequences for non-performance. Head-teacher should be a model for students and teachers; their own good attendance is critical for improving attendance of students and teachers. The DEO should monitor the attendance and performance of head-teachers. Head-teachers should obtain approval for leave, including *kaaj* (secondment), from their SMC, and the DEO should also be informed.

- **Increase accountability of teachers**

The salary, benefits and incentives of teachers working in the Karnali region should be reviewed and made attractive enough to recruit and retain competent teachers. However, such incentives should be based on performance, assessed using transparent criteria/standards. The MOE should explore ways to motivate teachers such as honouring and rewarding well-performing teachers. Teachers' professional organizations should be active in making the teaching profession more responsible, by enhancing teacher regularity and performance. The Teachers' Union should play a role in this by supporting the MOE/DEO to control unauthorized absences. Teachers should obtain approval for leave, including *kaaj* (secondment), from their head-teacher, and the SMC should also be informed. Schools should place a signboard outside their front gate, displaying teachers' names and indicating whether they are present or absent, so that teacher attendance can be monitored by the community and others.

- **Ensure schools are child-friendly, with adequate physical facilities and appropriate teaching-learning methodologies and materials**

The DEO should ensure that the physical and learning environment in schools is child-friendly, with adequate learning materials including textbooks. The curriculum should be flexible, interesting and relevant to children's lives. Teachers should be trained in the use of child-friendly approaches and the development of joyful learning materials as well as in ways to use the curriculum flexibly so that children can engage in activity-based learning. There should be adequate provision of instructional materials to run activity-based classes. If student numbers are sufficient, all classes in Grades 1–3 should adopt grade teaching. If student numbers in these grades are small, then a multi-grade teaching approach should be applied. Schools should be encouraged to employ female teachers. Teachers with higher academic qualifications were considered to be more conscientious and regular than teachers

with lower qualifications; this suggests that a strong programme of teacher development could improve attendance of teachers in the Karnali region.

- **Increase awareness on the importance of education**

Government authorities should work with all stakeholders (teachers, students, SMCs, parents, and communities) to sensitize parents on the importance of education and the need for regular student attendance. Schools should organize meetings and door-to-door visits within their community to discuss ways to combat seasonal low attendance and encourage parents to send their children to school regularly. Child clubs can also raise awareness on the importance of regular school attendance, and child club members can counsel and advise students with frequent absences. Local NGOs can conduct community mobilization on education and the prevention of gender- and caste-based discrimination that can keep girls and Dalits out of school.

- **Consider developing special packages for the Karnali region**

In addition to strengthening current support for scholarships, the school tiffin programme, and the school infrastructure development programme, the government could consider developing the following special package for the Karnali region. From Grade 4 onwards, weather-protected residential schools could be developed, through gradually merging existing schools, if necessary. Initially, one school could be opened as a model in each district. Schools could be developed as follows.

- Schools would be managed through a public–private partnership, with full authority for teacher management, management of residential facilities, and overall operation of the school given to the participating partner under clear guidelines for operational modality, school standards and expected outcomes.
- Representatives from the DEO and the local governance body would be members of the Board. The board would enjoy operational autonomy.
- The intake capacity would be 45 students per year in Grade 4. A few students could enter in Grade 8 through an entrance test. Students would be selected from needy communities, through fair competition. Only students who meet predefined standards would be admitted. Girls and Dalit children would compete within set quotas.
- All students would live in a weather-protected hostel, and be provided with free board and accommodation.
- Well-performing, qualified teachers would be engaged and offered adequate compensation and benefits to attract and retain them. Teachers would live in residential quarters with students, so that students are well taken care of and teachers could run remedial classes in the mornings and evenings.
- Schools would operate for five years as a pilot scheme. If attendance and quality are successfully addressed through this scheme, such schools would be gradually replicated at the cluster level with full government financial support.

In addition to this package, the government could consider a special Karnali Teacher Preparation Programme. Students from the Karnali region with a strong academic background, who want a career in teaching, could be provided with a scholarship to study on teacher preparation programmes. This would facilitate the supply of qualified teachers for the Karnali region who would not need to leave the region frequently thereby missing classes.

The government could also coordinate with NGOs and international agencies supporting education in the Karnali region to ensure that such support covers all VDCs in the region and is available to all children equitably.

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## ANNEX 1: SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION

The Karnali has a low socio-economic status associated with poverty, malnutrition, disease and exploitation. It has long been considered a deprived region, with food deficiency and epidemics taking their toll on the population. Basic services such as health and education are often adequate. Table 18 shows socio-economic indicators for Nepal and the Karnali zone.

**Table 18: Comparison of key socio-economic indicators for Nepal and the Karnali zone**

Indicators	Nepal	Karnali
Population	23,151,423	309,084 (1.3 %)
Area (km <sup>2</sup> )	147,181	21,351 (14.5 %)
Sloping area (>30 degrees) (% of total land area)	59.9	85.7
Area covered by grass (% of total land area)	11.9	27.30
Average family size (persons)	5.44	5.58
Population density (persons per km <sup>2</sup> )	157	14
Dalit population (as % of total population)	8.7	17.9
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	97	150
Workforce above 10 years (%)	57.0	80.7
Women	35.1	82.0
Men	82.9	79.4
Workforce in agriculture (%)	81.1	93.5
Women	95.5	97.9
Men	74.8	89.2
Average life expectancy (years)	55.0	52.7
Women	52.4	50.4
Men	55.0	52.7
Adult literacy (%)	36.7	19.6
Women	21.3	3.0
Men	54.3	35.7
Illiteracy of children aged 10–14 year (%)	36.6	63.0
Girls	23.9	42.1
Boys	50.4	85.9
Children in labour force (%)	22.9	54.5
Girls	28.0	95.5
Boys	18.1	74.8

Source: CBS, 2003.

In addition, development indicators for the region are poor, with its districts being ranked between 67 and 75 on the Human Development Index (HDI) and between 68 and 75 on the Human Poverty Index (HPI) (Table 19).

**Table 19: Indicators and status of districts, 2001**

National/District	National	Jumla	Humla	Dolpa	Kalikot	Mugu
HDI	0.471	0.348	0.367	0.371	0.322	0.304
HDI rank		70	68	67	73	75
HPI	39.6	56.8	63.8	61.9	58.9	61.1
HPI rank		68	75	74	70	73

Source: Rimal and Rimal, 2006.



## EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT OF KARNALI DISTRICTS

The Karnali zone lags the country in terms of literacy and educational status. Table 20 shows literacy and mean years of schooling for districts with the Karnali zone. Adult literacy is below the national average, with Humla and Mugu having the lowest literacy rates in Nepal. Indeed, Humla has the country's lowest literacy rate for women at 4.8 per cent. Mean years of schooling are also extremely low, with girls spending an average of less than one year in school.

**Table 20: Literacy and mean years of schooling for districts of Karnali zone, 2001 (percentage)**

	National	Jumla	Humla	Dolpa	Kalikot	Mugu
Adult literacy (15+)	48.6	26.6	19.6	29.0	33.2	24.1
Male	62.7	42.5	33.5	45.4	50.3	41.6
Female	34.9	9.3	4.8	11.7	10.7	5.2
Mean years of schooling	2.75	1.55	1.25	1.59	1.81	1.40
Male	3.56	2.49	2.1	2.46	2.73	2.45
Female	1.95	0.61	0.40	0.71	0.88	0.34

Source: Rimal and Rimal, 2006.

Recent educational statistics for districts in the region show that while net enrolment is generally good, other indicators are much more variable, with high repetition and dropout rates in Grade 1 (Table 21).

**Table 21: Key education indicators at primary level for districts of Karnali zone (percentage)**

Indicator	National	Jumla	Humla	Dolpa	Kalikot	Mugu
Gross intake rate (GIR)	141.4	192.8	199.7	162.7	229.6	173.1
Net enrolment rate (NER)	93.7	96.8	95.5	97.9	96.6	95.9
Promotion rate from Grade 1	63.5	50.9	46.6	56.6	47.9	79.1
Repetition rate for Grade 1	26.5	23.8	46.2	30.2	42.1	12.4
Dropout rate in Grade 1	9.9	25.3	7.2	13.2	10.0	8.4
No textbooks within two weeks of start of school year	37.6	82.6	40.8	11.8	21.8	67.8

Source: DOE, 2009.

Table 22 shows the number of schools in the Karnali zone.

**Table 22: Schools in the Karnali zone**

District	Primary	Lower secondary	Secondary	Higher secondary
Jumla	97	21	28	8
Humla	94	17	7	5
Dolpa	100	10	9	3
Kalikot	190	42	26	10
Mugu	100	15	10	5
Total	581	105	78	31

Source: DOE, 2009.

The nationwide SLC examination is conducted at the end of Grade 10. The Karnali has low appearance and pass rates (Table 23). In 2002, of 886 students who appeared for the examination, only 78 (or nine per cent) passed. This suggests a lack of educational quality for students in the Karnali region.

**Table 23: SLC exam results of Karnali in 2002**

District	Appeared			Passed		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Jumla	213	46	259	18	6	24
Humla	94	15	109	2	2	4
Dolpa	70	14	84	13	2	15
Kalikot	203	46	265	6	1	7
Mugu	155	14	169	23	5	28
Total	745	135	886	62	16	78

*Source: Yogi, 2003.*

## ANNEX 2: STUDY SCHEME

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To assess the current status and trends of student and teacher attendance in the Karnali zone.
- To identify the major seasonal factors influencing regular student and teacher attendance at the primary school level.
- To identify current strategies to cope with seasonal factors influencing student and teacher attendance, and assess their relevance and success.
- To make concrete recommendations on future strategies for tackling issues arising from seasonal factors.

Based on these objectives, a series of discussions was held in consultation with the Steering Committee to design and finalized a detailed study framework, as given in Table 24.

**Table 24: Study scheme devised in consultation with the Steering Committee**

Main components	Theme to be captured	Possible question	Source of information and approach
RQ 1: What is the current situation of student and teacher attendance at primary schools in the Karnali zone?			
Status of student attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attendance</li> <li>• Absenteeism</li> <li>• Attendance by personal characteristics of students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is average student attendance?</li> <li>• How is incidence of student absenteeism?</li> <li>• How is attendance by gender, caste and ethnicity?</li> <li>• How is attendance by age?</li> <li>• How is attendance by proximity (distance from school)?</li> </ul>	Data source: school records, grade-wise attendance record, head-teachers, teachers, community members, students, parents, SMC/PTA members, district-level stakeholders Approach: school profile format, questionnaire, FGDs, interactions
Status of teacher attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attendance</li> <li>• Absenteeism</li> <li>• Attendance by personal characteristics</li> <li>• Attendance by affiliation with professional organization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is teacher attendance according their residence (how far they live from school)? Is the teacher local or from outside the district?</li> <li>• How is teacher attendance by gender, caste, and ethnicity?</li> <li>• How is teacher attendance by employment status (permanent or temporary or <i>rahat</i>)?</li> <li>• How is teacher attendance from local community, outside the district, hill or <i>terai</i>?</li> <li>• How is attendance by age, experience, qualification?</li> <li>• How is attendance of teachers affiliated with unions or political organization?</li> </ul>	Data source: school records, teachers' attendance record, head-teachers, teachers, community members, students, parents, SMC/PTA members, district-level stakeholders Approach: school profile format, questionnaire, FGDs, interactions

Main components	Theme to be captured	Possible question	Source of information and approach
RQ 2. What are the trends in student and teacher attendance over time?			
Student and teacher attendance trends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student attendance trends</li> <li>• Teacher attendance trends</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is the trend of student attendance over last three years?</li> <li>• How is the trend of teacher attendance over last three years?</li> <li>• How is the attendance trend of students from disadvantaged (marginalized) communities over last three years?</li> </ul>	<p>Data source: school attendance records for three years, head-teachers, teachers, community members, students, parents, SMC/PTA members, district-level stakeholders</p> <p>Approach: school profile format, FGDs, questionnaire, interaction</p>
RQ 3. What are the causes of variation in student attendance?			
Causes of low student attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seasonal factors</li> <li>• Non-seasonal factors</li> <li>• School factors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the seasonal factors influencing student attendance?</li> <li>• What are the non-seasonal factors influencing student attendance (e.g., poverty and household work, distance, textbooks, babysitting, language problem, etc.)?</li> <li>• What are the school-related factors affecting the student attendance (e.g., teacher absence, classroom environment and teachers' behaviour, treatment from teacher and head-teacher, etc.)?</li> </ul>	<p>Data source: head-teachers, teachers, community members, students, parents, SMC/PTA members, district-level stakeholders</p> <p>Approach: FGDs, questionnaire, interaction, observation</p>
RQ 4. What are the causes of variation in teacher attendance?			
Causes of low teacher attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seasonal factors</li> <li>• Non-seasonal factors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the seasonal factors influencing teacher attendance (e.g., yarchagumba, seasonal migration, local festivals, etc.)?</li> <li>• What are the non-seasonal factors influencing teacher attendance (e.g., threats to teachers, alternative occupations /positions, teachers' positions available in the school, administrative, etc.)?</li> </ul>	<p>Data source: head-teachers, teachers, community members, students, parents, SMC/PTA members, local bodies, district-level stakeholders</p> <p>Approach: FGDs, questionnaire, interaction, observation</p>

Main components	Theme to be captured	Possible question	Source of information and approach
RQ 5. What existing interventions to control absenteeism are being implemented by the government, schools, and other agencies such as donors and I/NGOs, community-based organizations and the community?			
Existing interventions and strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intervention for low attendance of students</li> <li>• Intervention for low attendance of teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the government interventions to address seasonal and non-seasonal low attendance of students?</li> <li>• What are the interventions of schools to address seasonal and non-seasonal low attendance of students?</li> <li>• What are the interventions of others (NGOs, local bodies, community-based organizations) to address seasonal and non-seasonal low attendance of students?</li> <li>• What are the government interventions to address seasonal and non-seasonal low attendance of teachers?</li> <li>• What are the interventions of schools to address seasonal and non-seasonal low attendance of teachers?</li> <li>• What are the interventions of others (NGOs, local bodies, community-based organizations) to address seasonal and non-seasonal low attendance of teachers?</li> </ul>	<p>Data source: head-teachers, teachers, community members, students, parents, SMC/PTA members, local bodies, district-level stakeholders, women's groups, Dalit community</p> <p>Approach: FGDs, questionnaire, interaction, observation</p>
RQ 6. What strategies are recommended to address low attendance by students and teachers?			
Recommended strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategies to address low attendance of students</li> <li>• Strategies to address low attendance of teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are possible strategies to address seasonal low attendance of students?</li> <li>• What are possible strategies to address non-seasonal low attendance of students?</li> <li>• What are possible strategies to address seasonal low attendance of teachers?</li> <li>• What are possible strategies to address non-seasonal low attendance of teachers?</li> </ul>	<p>Data source: head-teachers, teachers, community members, students, parents, SMC/PTA members, local bodies, district-level stakeholders, women's groups, Dalit community</p> <p>Approach: FGDs, questionnaire, interaction, observation</p>

## ANNEX 3: INTERVIEW OR DISCUSSION TRIGGERS

The following questions were be used to generate information to answer to each research question. Themes given in the left-hand column are to be captured while generating information under each research question. Questions in the right-hand column are triggers detail information are expected to be generated while conducting interview or focus group discussion and through researchers' own observation and reflection.

Themes	Questions
1. Current status of student attendance	
Attendance	How is average student attendance by grade? How is attendance by year?
Absenteeism	How is incidence of student absenteeism? Which time of the year are students mostly absent?
Attendance by personal characteristics	How is student absenteeism by gender, caste and ethnicity? How is absenteeism by age? How is absenteeism of students by proximity (distance from school)?
2. Current status of teachers attendance	
Attendance	What is your overall observation of teacher attendance in primary school? Which time of the year is teacher attendance in school high? What types of teachers are mostly regular (local vs. out-of-district, permanent vs. temporary, <i>rahat</i> vs. <i>darbandi</i> , male vs. female, caste and ethnicity)?
Absenteeism	What is your overall observation of teacher absenteeism in primary school? Which time of the year is teacher absenteeism in school high?
Absenteeism by personal characteristics	What type of teachers is mostly irregular (local vs. out-of-district, permanent vs. temporary, <i>rahat</i> vs. <i>darbandi</i> , male vs. female, caste and ethnicity)? How is absenteeism of teachers from local community, outside the district, hill or <i>terai</i> ? How is absenteeism by age, experience, qualification?
Absenteeism by affiliation with professional organization	How is activity in union or similar organizations affecting attendance of teachers in school? Do teachers affiliated with union have low attendance?
3. Attendance trends of students and teachers	
Student attendance trends	How are student attendance trends in recent years (increasing or decreasing)? What could be the reasons for attendance increase or decrease?
Teacher attendance trends	How are teacher attendance trends in recent years (increasing or decreasing)? What could be the reasons for attendance increase or decrease?
4. Causes of low student attendance	
Seasonal factors	What are the seasonal factors influencing student attendance (yarchagumba season, farming season, local festivals, seasonal migration, etc)? How many days are students usually absent because of each of these?
Other factors	What are the non-seasonal factors influencing student attendance (poverty and household work, distance, textbooks, babysitting, language problem, etc.)?
School-related factors	What are the school-related factors affecting the student attendance (e.g., teacher absence, classroom environment and teachers' behaviour, treatment from teacher and head-teacher, child-friendly physical environment, child-friendly learning environment, health and safety, etc.)?

Themes	Questions
5. Causes of low teacher attendance	
Seasonal factors	What are the seasonal factors influencing teacher attendance (yarchagumba season, farming season, local festivals, seasonal migration, Dashain/Tihar vacation, winter vacation, etc.)?
Non-seasonal factors	What are the non-seasonal factors influencing teacher attendance (e.g., threats to teachers, alternative occupations /positions, teachers' positions available in the school, administrative, participation in training, political affiliation/ affiliation to social organization, union activities, etc.)?
6. Existing interventions for increasing attendance of students and teachers	
Interventions for low attendance of student	What are the government interventions to address seasonal and non-seasonal low attendance of students? What are the interventions of schools to address seasonal and non-seasonal low attendance of students? What are the interventions of others (NGOs, local bodies, community-based organizations) to address seasonal and non-seasonal low attendance of students?
Interventions for low attendance of teachers	What are the government interventions to address seasonal and non-seasonal low attendance of teachers? What are the interventions of schools to address seasonal and non-seasonal low attendance of teachers? What are the interventions of others (NGOs, local bodies, community-based organizations) to address seasonal and non-seasonal low attendance of teachers?
7. Recommended strategies to address low student and teacher attendance	
Strategies to address low attendance of students	What are possible strategies to address seasonal low attendance of students? What are possible strategies to address non-seasonal low attendance of students?
Strategies to address the low attendance of teachers	What are possible strategies to address seasonal low attendance of teachers? What are possible strategies to address non-seasonal low attendance of teachers?

## ANNEX 4: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

This study is related to attendance of students and teachers in the Karnali zone. Please, tick, (✓) sign or write answers.

1. In which category do you belong?

- (a) Head teacher
- (b) Teacher
- (c) Student
- (d) SMC/PTA member
- (e) Community member
- (f) Other (please specify)

2. Tick (✓) as appropriate.

- (a) Sex: male  female
- (b) Caste: Brahman  Chhetri  Dalit  Janajati  If others, write the caste
- (c) Educational qualification:  Illiterate  Literate  Primary  Lower secondary  Secondary  SLC  Graduate  Post-graduate
- (d) Date of birth (in B.S.)

3. What is the condition of student absenteeism in your school? Tick (✓) all appropriate answers.

- (a) There is no problem with student attendance
- (b) Absenteeism is very high
- (c) Gradual improvement in student attendance in recent years
- (d) Absenteeism is not decreasing in spite of several efforts
- (e) Quality of education is low because of low attendance
- (f) Others, please specify

4. In which months are students absent? Tick (✓) all appropriate answers.

- (a) Falgun/ Chaitra
- (b) Baisakh/ Jestha
- (c) Ashad/ Shrawan
- (d) Bhadra/ Ashwin
- (e) Kartik/ Mangsir
- (f) No fixed period

5. Which group of children have low attendance? Tick (✓) all appropriate answers.

- (a) Girl students
- (b) Dalit children
- (c) Children from ethnic groups
- (d) Children from poorer families
- (e) Children living from far from the school
- (f) Children from Brahmin or Chhetri communities
- (g) Children from households engaged in agriculture
- (h) Children from households engaged in business
- (i) Children from families engaged in livestock production
- (j) Others, please specify



6. What are the major reasons for student absenteeism? Tick (✓) all appropriate answers.

- (a) Guarding house during farming period
- (b) Helping family members with farming/household chores
- (c) Living away in temporary settlement at farming area
- (d) Seasonal migration
- (e) Grazing cattle
- (f) Labouring owing to family poverty
- (g) Attending *puja*/festival
- (h) Staying away after vacations
- (i) Afraid of strict teachers
- (j) Lack of child-friendly environment in school
- (k) Teacher absent
- (l) Others, please specify

7. What are the causes of absenteeism? Please state the reason and average days of absenteeism in the table given.

S.N	Causes	Average days of absenteeism
1		
2		
3		

8. What is the condition of teacher absenteeism in your school? Tick (✓) all appropriate answers.

- (a) There is no problem of teacher absenteeism
- (b) Teachers' absenteeism is frequently experienced
- (c) Compared to the past, teacher absenteeism is gradually reducing
- (d) Compared to the past, teacher absenteeism is gradually increasing
- (e) Despite efforts, teacher absenteeism is not being reduced
- (f) Others, please specify

9. In which months are teacher absent?

- (a) Falgun/ Chaitra
- (b) Baisakh/ Jestha
- (c) Ashad/ Shrawan
- (d) Bhadra/ Ashwin
- (e) Kartik/ Mangsir
- (f) No fixed period

10. Which groups of teacher are mostly absent?

- (a) Female teacher
- (b) Local teacher
- (c) Teacher from outside the district
- (d) Temporary teacher
- (e) Teacher on quota
- (f) Permanent teacher
- (g) Teacher involved in politics
- (h) Teacher associated with Teachers' Union
- (i) Teacher involved in higher education
- (j) Teacher with fears for security

- (k) Teachers involved in administrative work
- (l) Principal
- (m) Teachers with many social obligations
- (n) Teacher living far from school
- (o) Teacher attending training and seminars

11. What are the major causes of teacher absenteeism? Tick (✓) all appropriate answer.

- (a) Involvement in farming during the season
- (b) Not returning on time after vacations
- (c) Involved in NGO
- (d) Affiliated with political party
- (e) Active in Teachers' Union or professional association
- (f) Weak monitoring
- (g) Weak school administration
- (h) Frequent visits to the DEO
- (i) Teacher living far from school
- (j) Others, please specify

12. What should be done by the following institutions/organizations to reduce teacher absenteeism?

A. School Management Committee

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_

B. Social institution/ organization

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_

C. Professional organizations

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_

D. District Education Office

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_

13. What interventions are necessary to reduce teacher absenteeism? Who should be responsible?

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_

14. What interventions are necessary to reduce student absenteeism? Who should be made responsible?

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

15. Which organizations/ agencies should be activated and what sorts of activities should they carry out?

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

## ANNEX 5: SCHOOL PROFILE

Name of the school .....

Full address .....

Level: Higher Secondary/ Secondary/ Lower Secondary/ Primary

Name of head-teacher .....

School established in .....

Date of visit .....

### 1. Teacher attendance

Teacher name	2063		2064		2065	
	Total class days	Average absent days	Total class days	Average absent days	Total class days	Average absent days

### 2. Monthly average attendance of students

Class		ECD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
2063	Baisakh									
	Jestha									
	Ashad									
	Shrawan									
	Bhadra									
	Ashwin									
	Kartik									
	Mangsir									
	Poush									
	Magh									
	Falgun									
	Chaitra									
2064	Baisakh									
	Jestha									
	Ashad									
	Shrawan									
	Bhadra									
	Ashwin									
	Kartik									
	Mangsir									
	Poush									
	Magh									
	Falgun									
	Chaitra									

2065	Baisakh									
	Jestha									
	Ashad									
	Shrawan									
	Bhadra									
	Ashwin									
	Kartik									
	Mangsir									
	Poush									
	Magh									
	Falgun									
	Chaitra									

### 3. Monthly average attendance of teachers

Class		ECD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
2063	Baisakh									
	Jestha									
	Ashad									
	Shrawan									
	Bhadra									
	Ashwin									
	Kartik									
	Mangsir									
	Poush									
	Magh									
	Falgun									
	Chaitra									
	2064	Baisakh								
Jestha										
Ashad										
Shrawan										
Bhadra										
Ashwin										
Kartik										
Mangsir										
Poush										
Magh										
Falgun										
Chaitra										
2065		Baisakh								
	Jestha									
	Ashad									
	Shrawan									
	Bhadra									
	Ashwin									
	Kartik									
	Mangsir									
	Poush									
	Magh									
	Falgun									
	Chaitra									