Children Working in Portering

Child Labour Status Report 2009
The Child Porters of Nepal

Nepal is a small and extremely mountainous country with few roads. Everywhere you look in Nepal you see people carrying loads up and down steep mountain trails -loads of firewood and fodder, food, sacks of rice and potatoes, roofing iron and everything else. Carrying loads is a part of life in Nepal and the majority of children carry loads on family farms and to and from markets with families.

Child porters are those who carry loads for an income. Some work seasonally to earn extra money for the family or work around rural towns carrying loads for customers. Child porters rarely carry loads for tourists but children from the poorest families support the trekking industry and the rural economy by supplying shops and construction sites. Often unnoticed, they are encouraged to miss school and carry loads beyond their capacity in the desperate effort to earn cash to help support their families.

Child porters represent the second largest group of children in child labor after domestics. As more children attend school the numbers of children who are under 14, the legal working age, that porter full time or carry loads beyond their capacity are declining. However in districts across Nepal the children of the poorest of the poor can be seen carrying the heaviest loads, missing school and being exploited for their labor. A general acceptance of the need to porter results in little attention being paid to the fact that it is increasingly girls from the most marginalized Janajati (ethnic minority) and Dalit communities who are being denied the educational opportunities they deserve while endangering their long term health and well-being.

“Our family mainly eats Dhido (a cooked mixture of millet) but on special occasions two or three times a year we get daal bhat (rice and lentils).”  
Sova Nepali (10) Parbat District
Why Child Portering is Considered a Worst Form of Child Labor

While everyone in rural Nepal carries loads, what sets child porters apart is working in hazardous situations or carrying excessive loads for their size. The Nepal Labour Act of 1992 prohibits the employment of children under the age of 14 as porters. The companion Labour Rules from 1993 prescribe the maximum weight of a load carried by a minor male (16-18 years) to not be more than 25 kg and for a minor female at 20 kg. In reality, many child porters fall under the age group of 14, carry loads heavier in weight than their years of age, and toil for over 10 hours each day working in extremely dangerous situations.

Two Distinct Types of Child Porters in Nepal

- ‘long distance’ porters who carry heavy loads for more than one day, and
- ‘short distance’ child porters who carry loads for one day or less at a time.

Typically a long distance child porter’s load includes groceries and goods, construction materials and loads for tourists during long treks. Short distance child porters carry grocery goods, unload goods from buses and trucks, and also work as porters transferring stone, sand, slate and bricks while working in the mining and brick factories sectors. In 2001, ILO estimated that there were 46,000 child porters in Nepal, of whom 42,000 children were long distance porters and 4,000 children short distance. Geographically, most long distance child porters were in rural Nepal, while short distance child porters were found to be concentrated in the Kathmandu Valley and urban areas of Western Nepal.

In 2000, the ILO undertook a rapid assessment baseline study of 349 child porters across Nepal and described the child porters at that time;

"There is a health post an hour walk away, but no one goes to it because the doctor is never there and there is never any medicine".

Kabita Nepali (10) Child Porter Parbat
Profile of a typical long distance child porter in 2000

A boy of 10 years of age who came from the eastern hill areas of Nepal. He is either an ethnic minority or Dalit and came from a poor family. There were 6-7 people in his family. He had been supplementing family income and attended school sporadically depending upon the season. His siblings and father are also seasonal porters.

Profile of a typical short distance porter in 2000

A boy of 15 years of age who came from an urban center. He was a Chhetri boy. He had small piece of land. Due to peer pressure, he joined the portering work. He earned money from the porter work, to pay for food and room rent and sent some money back to the family.

The ILO assessment included the districts of Morang, Sunsary, Udaypur, Dolakha, Kavre, Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Lalitpur,Kaski, Myagdi, Baglung, Palpa, Rupandehi, Banke and Surkhet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of Child Porters - 2000</th>
<th>Long</th>
<th>Short</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of Child Porters from rural areas</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Child Porters between the age of 10-14</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Child Porters from ethnic minorities</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Child Porters from Dalit groups</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Child Porter's families that own land</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>9%</td>
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Hours of Work and Loads

The labor laws prohibit children under 14 working full-time or in dangerous conditions. ILO found large numbers of children working unacceptable hours and carrying excessive loads relative to their age and size in 2000. It also mandated that the average workday for short distance child porters (over 14) should not be more than 8.4 hours. ILO’s rapid assessment highlighted the following general working conditions of child porters:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Porters Working Conditions- 2000</th>
<th>Long Distance</th>
<th>Short Distance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average weight carried</td>
<td>35 kg</td>
<td>69 kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average daily wage</td>
<td>71 Rs</td>
<td>69 Rs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average hours of work</td>
<td>5hrs</td>
<td>&gt;8 hrs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Health of Child Porters

Child portering is considered a worst form of child labor in Nepal mainly because it harms the health and safety of children. Children carry excessive loads for long hours and are often forced to sleep in dangerous environments along the mountain trails.

The health impacts such as malnutrition and stunted growth, shortened life spans, depression, lack of education and social marginalization are the most severe afflictions that affect child porters. The health of child porters is the greatest concern and a health survey undertaken by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (JHU) in 2005 provided more information on health issues for child porters.

The survey of long distance child porters in Solukhumbu District looked at the relationship between portering and consequential health outcomes, particularly nutrition and injury. Of the child porters, 82% were from Eastern Nepal and had come to porter goods—usually vegetables, fruit, and meat—from their villages to the markets in Lukla and Namche. Interviews with 300 child porters found that most were 15-16 year old males with only 6% of porters being females. Most were from minority ethnic groups with Rai (39%), Tamang (18%), and Sherpa (17%). The survey’s findings in relation to the mental and physical health of child porters revealed a number of issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Porters Mental and Physical Health - 2005</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of low height in relation to age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevalence of anemia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low protein levels and restricted food consumption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of injury in the past year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% that sought medical care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% that experienced physical assault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% that witnessed the death of a porter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% that felt alone, without emotional support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Physically, these results indicated malnutrition and stunted growth in child porters. However, the study also highlighted the negative impact of portering on a child's happiness, self-esteem, and positive mental health, with 91% of the participants saying that portering negatively impacted their well-being. These emotional challenges might explain the high levels of alcohol consumption—38%—that were found among child porters. The JHU survey concluded that, "child porters are subject to excessive physical burdens, injury, exposure to elevated levels of sexual assault, physical hazards, and inadequate diets to sustain good health and development. In addition, they have limited access to health care services, primarily due to economic barriers".

![Malnourished Dalit boy of 11 portering a heavy load at night five days walk from home in Khotang district.](image)

The Family Background of Child Porters in 2000

When ILO did its initial research on child porters they found a number of common characteristics and factors pushing children in to child labor as porters. Large family size and insufficient land to support the family were the main reasons families put their children to work to earn cash to help the family. Some of the children put to work as porters attended school during the agriculture year, but were then sent off as child porters in the off-season. Some short distance child porters were also lured by the excitement of urban centers and worked carrying hazardous substances like petrol, kerosene oil and metal piping, etc. According to the data, the majority of children involved as child porters belonged to ethnic minorities and Dalit castes. ILO found 70% boys and 30% girls engaged in long distance portering and 96% boys in short distance portering in 2000.

Changing Characteristics -2001-2008

Over the past 8 years World Education and NGO partners in 22 districts have identified 11,260 child porters and provided educational opportunities for 8,760 children. Detailed information was collected on the 11,260 identified child porters that reflect changes in the composition and characteristics of the child porters as a result of the educational efforts.
Gender and Child Porters

NGO partners identified far larger numbers of girls engaged in full-time portering at younger ages. Of the child porters identified by Brighter Futures most were in rural areas and 67% were girls, a far higher proportion than in ILO’s study. NGO field workers found that girls were ‘more family-based’ for portering while boys leave home to work in the city and other countries. Within this sector, most of the girls were short distance porters carrying stones, soil, agricultural produce such as fruit and vegetables, supplies like fertilizer, and fuel wood. In spite of national and international obligations, the majority of child porters reached by the program were in the 10 to 14 years age group. Six percent were under 10 usually working with parents or older siblings.

Brighter Futures Beneficiaries By Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Below</th>
<th>Above</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 Yrs</td>
<td>10 - 14 yrs</td>
<td>14 Yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>4397</td>
<td>1206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>2093</td>
<td>552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>6490</td>
<td>1758</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Child porters by Age and Ethnicity

The caste and ethnic makeup of a district influences the children likely to end up in child labor locally. In districts dominated by Janajatis such as Khotang it is not surprising that they are heavily involved in child portering. However the proportion of children from Janajati and Dalit communities is far higher than their presence across the districts. In contrast to the earlier research by ILO in 2000 there were relatively fewer higher caste Brahmin and Chhetri children from lower-income households.

![Pie chart showing caste and ethnicity distribution of child porters]

The age of a child porter is most important as the younger the child and heavier the load the greater the health problems. The Brighter Futures beneficiaries had 6% under 10, with 74% in the 10-14 age group. As children get older they are more engaged in other agricultural activities and do less portering.

Regional variations

The numbers of child porters reached also varied across the four regional clusters with the Dhaulagiri cluster (Kaski, Parbat, Baglung and Myagdi Districts) with the largest percentage of child porters. The eastern districts of Udayapur, Okaldunga and Khotang were less well served by the project in the early years due to the intensity of the conflict in these districts.
In west Nepal, fewer child porters were identified as loads are more often carried by mule or sheep used as pack stock. In the central cluster the most child porters were found in Dhading and Makawanpur carrying supplies to remote villages.

Child Porters by regional cluster

The districts of Baglung, Parbat, Dhading, Khotang and Udayapur had the greatest concentrations of child porters and their families. Significant numbers of child porters were also present in other districts, for example in Jhapa there were 485 child porters identified working in the tea plantations carrying tea leaves and in Dhanusha girl porters were found carrying fuel wood from forests to sell in the markets. These work situations were considered relatively less hazardous with girls working close to their homes to generate additional income for their families.

Major Child Porter Districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISTRICT</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UDAYAPUR</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>616</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DHADING</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>1009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MYAGDI</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARBAT</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAGLUNG</td>
<td>1190</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KHOTANG</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>507</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Modest numbers of child porters were identified in other districts and small numbers of older children of legal working age in urban areas. Children found portering loads of rocks and bricks at mining sites and at brick factories were considered to be workers within these sectors.
Carrying Loads For Better Off Families

Pipal Tari village is on the side of a steep, terraced hill - a three-hour walk from the district center of Kusma. Between the small clay and broken brick houses are rice paddies, cornfields, and other agricultural land. There are 310 households in the village, 200 of which are of the Dalit families from the Kami and Sarki groups; historically cobbler and blacksmiths.

The day-to-day struggle for subsistence forced parents of Pipal Tari to send their children to porter. Children—often as young as 8 years of age—spent the morning helping out at home and then were sent to Kusma to porter goods back to the village. The 7-hour round trip required walking down a steep path slippery with mud to the river and back up the incline on the other side. This difficult trail is the only access to the village, and child porters transported the essentials needed for the village—vegetables, house construction materials, shop goods, etc. Often, they would make the trip together or sometimes with their fathers. Most children were portering for 18 days a month in 2003. Most of the children have portered at some stage.

Sita Nepali, nine years old, said that she typically carried about 15 kg and was paid 1.5 Rs./Kg or about Rs.22 a day. The children would give most of the money to their families and keep a small amount to buy books and pens for school. They would also get reimbursed in other ways for their work. Anil BK Kami, nine years old, explained “If you carry a load less than 10 KG, then you are given a meal of daal bhat (rice and lentils) by the family that hires you.” Children who carried loads for a store get credit and can "purchase" items at the store instead of a cash payment. Typically, it is Dalit children that carry goods to the village for the upper caste families or for shopkeepers.
Long and Difficult Trails in East Nepal’s Hills

Udayapur and Khotang District lie to the east of Kathmandu in the hills. Road-heads are often 4 or 5 days walk from these remote villages and travel between neighboring villages can take up to 3 or 4 hours one way. Agriculture is the main source of income and most families own small pieces of land or lease other people’s land for farming. Ethnic minorities are the majority of population, with Rai, Tamang, and Magar being the most predominant ethnic groups. Extremely large family size, generally 8 or 9 people in a family, is common. Because of the remoteness and the hilly terrain, the only way to bring materials and goods to these villages is either by humans or animals. Typically, families porter goods from their villages to sell at roadhead markets or district centers; generally being away from home for 5 to 6 days at a time. Because farming is seasonal, portering is also cyclical in nature; therefore, depending on the season, villagers either porter or are at home farming.

Strategies to Provide Education for Child Porters

The Brighter Futures provided education to 8,760 child porters- 2,889 boys and 5,871 girls. The youngest children in the worst conditions were prioritized. It was not possible to support many older children in need of vocational education or school scholarships.

The Brighter Futures Program’s goal was to "combat child labor through education". Direct educational services for children working as child porters under the program included several nonformal education options, scholarships to attend formal school and practical vocational skills. In addition the project helped set up and train Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) so that they could work to support school improvements and reduce the barriers to attend formal schools.

As many child porters state that they go portering to pay for schooling or to help support their families, the project also provided help to improve the livelihoods of the most needy families through microfinance, agro-forestry and income generating activities.
Nonformal Education

The great majority of child porters identified had either never been in school or were school dropouts with 6,071 were in need of nonformal education (NFE).

In the first years of the project 156 child porters used the government’s Naulo Bihana curriculum. This curriculum was designed for children 8-12 years old who had never attended school and was initially used in classes where there were both boys and girls. This was less suited to older school dropouts. Many communities had large numbers of girl porters and they used the Girl’s Access to Education-GATE curriculum to give 2,568 girls the opportunity to gain literacy, numeracy and life skills. Over time it was found that an increasing number of the children were school dropouts at different grade levels. World Education developed a modular curriculum ‘Jeevan Shiksha’ that gave communities the flexibility to accommodate a range of ages and grade levels in learning centers with flexible timings to meet the learners needs. This greater flexibility enabled these centers to work with 3,347 children from scattered communities and children on the road with loads.

Flexible Timing Makes NFE Accessible

The child porters of Pipal Tari in Parbat District, started NFE classes early morning while still portering. The mainly Dalit children attended the NFE class that was run for two hours each week from 7-9am, six days a week run by NESDO the local NGO. They used the Jeevan Shiksha curriculum which included a choice of topics of interest to them. After 9 months all the children were able to read and write and had also gained self-confidence and self-respect, and most wanted to continue learning and join formal school.

In Udayapur District, the local partner, Community Legal Research Center (CLRC) chose to establish a learning center to reach long distance porters. These child porters are constantly in and out of the town market with loads. The Learning Center’ catered to 60 enrolled children, who used the Jeevan Shiksha curriculum, and attended classes for two hours daily. Two sessions were held (7am to 9 am and 10am to 12). Participants attended the session that best fitted their work schedule.

In other locations such as Beni the NGOs kept learning centers open all day and child porters would attend in small groups at their convenience.
Most Successful Approaches

- **Conducting a Baseline survey** – Working with the community and school to identify the children not in school that were child portering and those not attending regularly to go portering helped build awareness and commitment to support child porters to attend NFE or school.

- **Skill Testing** – Too often children not in school are put into basic literacy classes when they have dropped out of school and need more advanced levels. Skill testing helped ensure children were in appropriate program levels.

- **Multi-level or Multi-grade approaches** - Learning Centers were able to offer multi-grade approach which is essential when child porters have varied learning needs and are at different levels. In remote areas there are insufficient numbers of children to run classes at all levels that are needed.

- **Relevant Curriculum** – Child porters liked the content of the Jeevan Shiksha curriculum and this helped increase regularity in the sessions.

- **Class Management Committees** – The local committees were proactive in getting children to attend NFE regularly, supported facilitators and helped with school enrollment after NFE.

Major Challenges

- **Location and Timing of NFE** - Child porters are constantly on the move and therefore finding a common time and appropriate location for classes where sufficient numbers of children can attend a center can be challenging.

- **Equivalency** - The government has agreed to provide equivalency for NFE. Currently though only the government’s Flexible Schooling curriculum has formal recognition.

- **Testing** – Facilitators use regular tests and continuous assessment. Many children and parents are seeking recognized external testing.

- **Qualified Facilitators** – Teaching multi-level and multi-age NFE participants requires stronger facilitators than basic level literacy classes. In the remote areas where child porters live it is difficult to find qualified facilitators.

- **Adjust Diverse Learners In Classes** – Child porters in NFE are different in ages, both boys and girls and at different education levels. Facilitators need space and skills to adjust learners into groups.
Life Skills For Better Living

Bhim Raj Achhami had never attended formal school—was labeled as a "badmass" or punk by the community. He had long hair, earrings, and unkept appearance. He spent whatever money he earned portering on cigarettes and drank alcohol almost every night. Bhim Raj joined the Learning Center in Udayapur.

After joining the center, he cut his hair, removed his earrings, donned clean clothes and grew a respectful demeanor. He learned to read and write, but also learned the importance of personal hygiene, maintaining a healthy lifestyle and self-respect. Even though his village is a 2 hour walk away, Bhim says, "It (the OLC) is the best part of my day and I try to come everyday if I am not portering". Bhim says that he wants to be an Engineer in the future, but is also interested in carpentry and has gone so far as to get information about carpentry schools in Kathmandu. Bhim says that financial education and concepts of saving and bargaining that he learned at the OLC have also helped his situation as a porter and he now feels more confident to bargain with shopkeepers to earn a better wage. His physical appearance, the excitement in his voice and his enthusiasm to learn are all indicators of the impact that the OLC has had on Bhim. He has learned, through his time at the OLC, that cigarettes and drinking are going to get him nowhere; but, if he is self-motivated and works hard he can achieve his personal goals.
Lessons Learned

- **Choices** - Child porters respond best to flexible learning options where there are choices of curriculum and timing. For children on the move options to take books for self-study between center visits are needed.

- **Contact Centers** - Contact centers where child porters can get information, access education and get referred for other services need to be located in busy market junctions.

- **Intensive Off-season Options** – Many child porters return home over the monsoon and are interested in short-term intensive programs in this season.

- **Well Placed Learning Centers** - Learning Centers located in strategic locations along portering routes were most utilized and have potential to evolve into long term community literacy centers for young adults.

- **Priority For School Enrollment** – As most child porters are school dropouts who would like to return to school when possible this should be the preferred option over encouraging children in to NFE.
Transition to Formal School

The majority of the child porters graduating from nonformal education classes enrolled in formal school. Child porters were more likely to enroll and stay in school compared to child laborers from other work sectors.

Swapping Dhokos For Books

**Krisna Kumari Gurung** dropped out of school from Grade 3 to work as a porter to help support her family of nine. After several years carrying loads she was identified by REEC to participate in a GATE class near Beni. After the NFE she re-enrolled in school with a Brighter Futures scholarship. Krisna is studying now in Grade 9 at Prakash Higher Secondary School and is looking to sit the SLC examinations next year. Krisna takes occasional work on building sites when they do the “dalan” – cement roof. The Rs.220 she earns for each work day she puts towards her education and school fees. The Coordinator from REEC Sumitra Thakali goes to check her study and meets her teachers. Krisna is now 16 and is getting help from the District Child Welfare Board and hopes to be able to continue her studies and would like to be a social worker.

**Kamal Pariyar** is the eldest of five children in his family. When his father remarried and abandoned the family, Kamal was eight and in Grade 2. He dropped out of school and by the time he was 12 was carrying loads of up to 40 kgs. Kamal’s mother supports the family by working on building sites in Beni Bazaar. Kamal was a top student in his NFE classes and then re-enrolled in school. He is now in Grade 7. At 16 he wants to stay in school until college but needs to work at least part-time to help support the family. Kamal spends 2 to 4 hours a day doing local portering. In his free time he helps his younger sisters and brother with their studies. Kamal thinks he would like to be a driver.
Support to Attend Formal School

Large numbers of child porters supported for nonformal education requested assistance to help meet school costs. With so many requests for scholarships the youngest child porters and those from the poorest of the poor families were prioritized for support. Brighter Futures provided in-kind support for 3,209 children (1,706 girls and 1,503 boys) to enroll or re-enroll and continue their formal schooling. Based on the grade level and individual child’s needs the project provided school uniforms; paid school fees; or provided stationary and other school supplies.

Working with Parent Teacher Associations in schools where the NFE graduates were enrolling helped to ensure that eligible children accessed government scholarships and wherever possible were provided fee waivers. By helping PTAs set up sustainable income generating schemes, many schools were able to reduce the direct costs to students.

“Before the Jeevan Shiksha classes, I thought that I would never go to school and I would always be a porter. But, now, I have realized that I can succeed in school and, if I work hard, I can have a good job in the future” Robin Pandel (10)
Most Successful Approaches

- **Baseline Survey of Child Porters** – Working with the community and school to identify child porters not in school and those not attending regularly helped build awareness and commitment to support child porters to attend school.

- **Need Assessment** – PTAs and teachers worked together to determine why specific child porters were not in school. When these were as a result of financial barriers such as school fees, the cost of a uniform, stationary, or exam fees, schools were more conscious of the need to address these costs and provide relief for the most needy students.

- **Declining Scholarship Support** – The project reduced scholarships to 50% support in the second year, 25% in the third year and then PTAs and schools linked the most needy students to other agencies if help was needed to continue. This reduced dependency has increased the sustainability and commitment of communities towards supporting these students.

- **Regular Monitoring** – The project tracked academic performance twice a year. Students were motivated to work hard at their studies knowing support would be discontinued if they failed or were not attending school regularly.

- **In Kind Scholarship** – Providing materials, uniforms and fees instead of cash ensured that all investments went to education and dysfunctional families could not misuse cash payments.

- **Transparency** – a formal function to distribute the scholarship materials ensured transparency, greater commitment of students and community consciousness as to which were getting scholarships to help them exit child labor.
Major Challenges

- **Duration and Level of Scholarship Support** – The most needy children need long-term support to stay out of child labor and in school. Even with multiple year support many of the most needy children attend the same schools challenging these schools ability to raise the ongoing support needed after the project.

- **Irregular School Attendance** – Many child porters have been out of school or irregular students for years. Getting them to attend regularly and not to take random work opportunities requires the commitment of teachers, parents, students and others in the community looking for workers.

Lessons Learned

- **Mobilization of PTA and SMC** - School support programs at the community level such as mobilization of PTAs and quality education activities were most effective at reducing child portering.

- **Seasonal tuition classes** – Child porters re-enrolling in school need extra tuition at exam times or during school breaks to help them catch up on missed grades or work.
Vocational Education

Vocational education presents special challenges when working with child porters. Most child porters live in the most remote communities, sometimes many days walk in mountainous country, from the nearest roadhead. These communities usually have few economic activities and low agricultural productivity. Another challenge is that for the 67% that are girl porters families are reluctant to allow them to attend trainings in distant locations or to migrate for work.

To meet the needs of older children of legal working age four different vocational education approaches were used:

A. Farmer Field Schools

A Farmer Field School (FFS) provides youth with practical skills for agriculture over a growing season for a specific crop. Through discovery learning the students learn about crop management, pest and diseases, how to choose crop varieties and to experiment to solve problems as they arise. FFS can also be held in schools as Student Field Schools. Participants are supported to replicate learning at home.
Most Successful Approaches

- **Child Porter Situation Analysis** – A detailed situation analysis of each child, the families access to land, water, forest resources and markets improves success. This helped determine which children would benefit from agricultural training and whether this was best delivered linked to the community or school.

- **Student Field Schools** – By linking SFS to schools many young people in rural communities were able to see the potential of commercial agriculture in their community. It also resulted in a greater appreciation of the need for more scientific farming for greater returns raising its status as a potential occupation.

Major Challenges

- **Provide Ongoing Technical Support from Program** – After training young farmers need help to first grow a better crop and then to market the produce. In scattered mountain communities, providing support is difficult and expensive but is needed for the first crop cycles.

- **Lack of Technical Support from Agricultural Service Centers** - Most child porters live in remote rural communities or have marginal land holdings and as a result are seldom the priority for the government’s agricultural programs. Few agricultural technicians live and work in these remote areas and those that do, are required to support huge numbers of households.
Lessons Learned

- **Commercial Vegetable crops Bring Greatest Returns** - Increased cereal production reduces household expenses and increases food security reducing the need to send children portering. Intensive production of vegetables even on small plots can bring a sizeable economic return to young farmers. Even landless youth were able to benefit working in leased land.

- **Building Local Capacity** - Young farmers venturing in to growing new more profitable crops or intensifying farming for home consumption need access to ongoing technical expertise. Training local NGO staff and Farmer Trainers was most effective. Valuable government staff were often lost to a district when transferred and replaced by untrained personnel. In Myagdi district, REEC has been able to access support from CARITAS Nepal to sustain agricultural training activities.

B. Self-employment and Economic Education

Through a combination of an economic education course and discovery learning, youth learn the basic principles of running a business. Hands on experience running a small business helps them develop an understanding of how to assess local markets, conduct a feasibility study, prepare business and marketing plans and keep accounts.

Most Successful Approaches

- **Engagement of Self-employed Youth in Microfinance Groups** – Being in microfinance groups provides self-employed youth with a support network and access to savings and credit to scale up their enterprises. These groups are growing rapidly and one group of former child porters in Myagdi now has Rs.500,000 – US $6578. Other groups are linking up with other microfinance agencies or working to become registered co-operatives.

- **Grants for Materials for Start-up** – Providing youth with in-kind materials to start a business helps speed up the process of becoming self-employed. Youth though identify the training as most important factor in getting started, then the grant to help get firmly established and then microfinance for scale up and continuation of the business.
Major Challenges

- **Migrant Members Savings** – most working youth are able to save regularly but some migrate temporarily for work options creating irregular participation in savings and meetings. This challenges groups management capacity and they usually require returning migrants to make up the savings for the missed months.

- **Insufficient Volume of Savings to Meet Credit Demand** – Children in the most remote communities where economic activity is low accumulate savings slowly and can not loan the sums needed to start or scale up businesses as per the demand. They also lack access to other microfinance or do not meet eligibility requirements.

- **Difficulty Managing Account Keeping** - Many participants have dropped from the basic grades in school or are NFE graduates and as group funds grow find it difficult to manage the increasingly complex bookkeeping and experience difficulty calculating interest and repayment schedules.

Lessons Learned

- **Self-employment Generated Through Small Businesses** – Youth aged 14-18 were able to generate incomes from small shops, small trading to local markets, small scale vegetable farming, livestock especially poultry and goats as an alternative to portering.

- **Technical Support** – More intensive support over a long period from NGO staff increases the success and incomes from self-employment for youth.

- **Linking Youth to Microfinance Programs** – It is a challenge linking youth in remote areas to established microfinance programs due to poor coverage in hill districts and eligibility requirements that limit programs to married women or other specific groups. Where linkages were made they increased young entrepreneurs access to credit and technical support.

“I am now interested to read and write and work hard and go to school every day so that I can achieve my goal in the future.”

*Hemanta Nepali (9)*
C. Apprenticeships

NGOs identified potential business options and employers willing to host apprenticeships. While costs, training duration, potential employability are explored and negotiated the prime motivation for most employers is being able to contribute and being recognized as contributing to the community. Youth gained valuable skills through the apprenticeships and the majority were able to access better employment on completion of their training.

Most Successful Approaches

- **Local NGOs recognize employers** – Providing social recognition in the local community was a major motivating factor for employers to take apprentices.
- **Mentoring Apprentices** – Long term tracking and follow up by NGOs helps improve the job placement and helps ensure youth leave exploitative child labor.

Major Challenges

- **Budget Does Not Support Living Expenses** – the apprenticeships are part-time and unpaid. For impoverished child porters participation in an unpaid apprenticeship that requires daily attendance and continue to work part-time to support themselves is difficult.
- **Skill Testing** – The skill testing of apprentices is done by CTEVT which requested Rs2000 per child at each level for testing. This was not budgeted for and was seen as excessively high by both apprentices and employers. A more affordable testing option involving employer certification is needed.
- **Lack of Resource Materials** – Employers and apprentices were interested to use World Education, ILO and CTEVT materials but there were insufficient materials available at the workplace.
- **High Turnover Impacts Linkages** – The political instability in the country resulted in a constant turnover of staff and officials in Trade Unions, FNCCI, industries and government agencies. Linkages would be built which would help apprentices but then new relationships were constantly needed as new staff were not familiar with apprenticeship schemes.
- **Career Selection** – Even with career counseling, participants still prioritize familiar traditional occupations like tailoring which have little potential.
Lessons learned

- **Greater Promotion of Apprenticeship Schemes** – Apprentices especially those with limited literacy and numeracy skills become highly employable and sought after as a result of an apprenticeship. Greater efforts are needed to develop apprenticeship schemes and to recognize employers accepting apprentices. Budgets and testing need greater attention.

- **Non-traditional Occupations** – Child porters in remote areas have little access to the job market. By linking them with non-traditional occupations in their area through apprenticeships such as plumbing or electrical wiring they will be better placed to exploit new opportunities in their communities.

A New Start for Amrita

Amrita Biswakarma lives in Kaski District with her family. She has one younger sister and two younger brothers. As the family is extremely poor and landless, she had to drop-out of school in grade five. At twelve years of age Amrita started to work portering and sand mining with the other family members. When she was fifteen she got the opportunity to join the agro-forestry vocational program.

The participants formed a group in her community. With the skills she gained in the program Amrita leased one ropani of land near her home. She has planted vegetables and medicinal plants on this leased land. Three years later Amrita makes a profit of about Rs.1,000 monthly. Amrita has been using her income to support her younger sibling’s education and help meet the family’s basic daily financial needs. The family also eats some of the vegetables that Amrita grows. Amrita no longer porters loads and is now fully engaged in the vegetable and medicinal plant farming and is also still a member of her agro-forestry group.
D. Agro-forestry

**Most Successful Approaches**

- **Agro-forestry Group Formation** – To engage in agro-forestry often requires access to under-utilized public land. Groups formed for agro-forestry get greater support and co-operation than working with individual youth.

- **Engagement of Other Stakeholders** – Consulting and engaging the District Forest Office, Agriculture Office, Cottage Industry Office, NGOs and the Community Forest Users Group (CFUG) resulted in them providing valuable support for training, access to land and resources and mentoring of participants.

**Major Challenges**

- **Scattered Beneficiaries** - Child porters usually come from the poorest families in scattered remote hill hamlets. This makes it difficult and expensive to conduct training and activities for Agro-forestry Groups and to work with numerous communities and Community Forest User Groups to negotiate use of degraded land or forest.

- **Long term agreement with Community Forest User Groups** – Many CFUGs are reluctant to agree to long-term leases with these youth. Without a long-term commitment it is not practical for youth to invest time, energy and money in restoring this degraded land to productivity.

- **Partner Selection** – NGO partners need to be locally based with a long-term commitment to agriculture and forestry. They also need sufficient programming to retain good technical agriculture and forestry staff, make linkages with other technical agencies and develop a solid understanding of the potential and needs in the area.

“Education is great. Our children can study hard and they will get a good job. In the future, they will bring money back to our family and our financial situation will be improved”.

Shova Nepali’s mother
Lessons Learned

- **Long-term Planning and Commitments** – For agro-forestry to successfully engage child porters from the poorest households a long-term plan is needed. Preliminary meetings at the district and community levels are needed to build the commitments and develop a viable plan. Growing medicinal plants, tree crops or intercropping vegetables with forestry require co-operation and the support of a number of agencies. This type of initiative has untapped potential in many remote rural communities that can help diversify livelihoods and replace child labor in portering.

**Improving Family Livelihoods to Reduce the Need for Children to Engage in Child Labor**

To reduce the need for the poorest families to put their children to work as child porters a small number of the poorest families were supported. This support came in the form of income generation activities for families, such as vegetable farming, poultry farming and goat rising, to generate sustainable income that would allow for their children to discontinue working as child porters and instead pursue education or other safer income generating opportunities. In the Daulagiri area, 97 families of child porters were supported. In Dadhing, 70 families of porters were supported.

In Khotang 510 families were supported Jana Sewa Samaj Nepal. Of these 257 were provided with economic education. The other 253 lived in scattered settlements and were provided with support to design individual family strategies to improve livelihoods. All 510 families were supported to form savings and credit groups and were provided with livelihood workshops and technical trainings for livelihoods.

With the regular monthly savings, the 510 members have been able to accumulate Rs.1,23,900 (US$ 1,631) from which the members have taken loans for small income generating activities like buying seeds for vegetable farming, goat farming, small stalls selling basic goods, to purchase items for trading to more distant markets and other enterprises. In all the groups formed in Khotang have now loaned Rs.1,57,981 (US$2,079).
Keeping in mind the geographical diversity, insufficient water and compost for agriculture farming, the NGO conducted sustainable kitchen garden and livestock training—to build technical knowledge and skills related to crop and livestock production so that families can more effectively pursue their economic and livelihood opportunities.

Most families in Khotang are investing in agriculture and in trading through the bazaars. Livestock are more popular for investments than crops as the area suffers from severe water problems. Trade and portering have also been important in this community. Most adults carry loads for businessmen and shopkeepers from the road ends to distant markets, sometimes as far away as Namche Bazaar—a 10 day uphill walk with a load. Carrying loads for businessmen and shopkeepers is much less profitable than buying goods transporting them and selling them yourself.

The women with loans have been able to start buying goods and then the family transport and sell themselves for a greater profit. Popular items for trade are grains such as rice, wheat, corn and millet, kerosene, dry goods such as instant noodles and biscuits, cigarettes and Coca-Cola.

Krishna Kumari Majhi, Chasmitar, Khotang—Krishna and her husband have been surviving from fishing and portering but are now engaged in agriculture as well which has raised their food security and standard of living.

“After Tin Khamba my eyes are opened and now I can grow and buy the food we need and now my stomach is full all the time”.
Change Can Happen!

In the remote Majhi Village of Khotang on the banks of the massive Dudh Kosi River – the ancient settlement is believed to be 350 years old and is known locally as Ghopartaar which means big river terrace. The 30 families have no access to roads, electricity or telephone. In this village there are more women than men. Most exist from a little subsistence farming, raising a few goats and fishing. Every year the river floods and erodes their land. Men are leaving more and more to porter or work in other places. When JSSN first introduced the microfinance and livelihood program to the village the women were confused as to what to do. One year later the women were excited as the program has given them new hope and ideas. They said it was like having the darkness lifted. The Majhi community says this is the first development or education program in Majhi history of the area. They are confident it will help to change their lives for the better. Twenty-five married women formed Dudh Kosi Majhi Women’s Savings and Credit Group. In the first year they saved Rs.6,000. Every month they hold meetings and giving loans for different members for their family enterprises such as fishing. One of the most successful members is Shanta Majhi (35). Shanta used to run a small hotel and six months ago she took a loan of Rs.1,500 and enlarged her hotel and added a shop. Now every day her profit is Rs.200. She can now easily send her children to school and she has now bought two pigs and expects a good profit from them too. Shanta proudly says “This program has changed my life and my family’s life and brought us success.”
Services provided by other stakeholders – Government and NGOs'

During the eight years of Brighter Futures there were few other initiatives working around the issue of child porters in Nepal. Dzi Foundation was also able to work with porters in Solukhumbu and Khotang Districts. Community development initiatives continued in the Dauligauri region with the Livelihoods and Forestry project providing valuable support. In the eastern hills in Khotang, Okhaldhunga and Udayapur, development initiatives by the government and other donors in remote portering communities drew to a halt during the conflict.

Economic and Political Changes Affecting Child Porters

Overall, the total numbers of porters, including child porters, has decreased significantly in most districts in the past few years. Since the start of Brighter Futures there has been a marked decrease in the numbers of long-distance child porters due to the availability of new accessible roads being built by the government. This means that markets are now closer to the villages and porters only have to walk two or three days away to buy and sell goods.

The ten year Maoist conflict also impacted portering. During the war older boys of 15 to 18 were at risk of harassment by armed forces or forced recruitment and were replaced by younger children and girls who were seen as less likely to be affected. Families under pressure to join the Maoists, experiencing harassment by the armed forces, or forced to give “donations” left their villages and migrated to safer areas.

Community development and education efforts have also played a role reducing the number of families needing to send children to porter. Previously, whole families would lock up their houses and go portering for a week or more but now this is increasingly rare. The new presence of mule trains—a cheaper, easier to manage form of transport—has also cut down on the demand for porters. Migration, too, has changed portering. Many families have migrated to other districts or urban areas, attracted by potential opportunities and better job prospects. Many sons—males in their twenties—have left villages in search of work aboard. Their remittances have helped reduce poverty and the number of families engaged in commercial portering.
Brighter Futures faced some hurdles in implementing child porter interventions due to the political instability in the target districts. For example in Dhaulagiri Cluster, trying to enroll child porters into NFE learning centers was extremely challenging especially for the local NGO staff who had to convince parents that they were not engaging children with any political or armed group. Dedicated and capable local NGO partners did manage to sustain and carry out activities even during periods of violence. Many children were severely affected by the conflict environment around them. In one case, a child porter’s parents were killed in battle in Myadgi District and this child needs extra support. Despite the situation parents were very supportive of sending their children to education activities.

Portering when connected with trading can be extremely profitable. For most families it is done out of necessity. As roads penetrate remote parts of the country new livelihood opportunities need to be found for the poorest families. In Tamang areas that traditionally lived from firewood sales these families now send children into a range of child labor sectors to survive. If households dependent on portering are not supported these communities could become a new source of child labor for other sectors. Some families have been able to fill the gaps in employment left by villagers who have migrated. Farming families on marginal land required the supplemental income from portering to survive the lean months. This loss of portering income is a mixed blessing. Families no longer have the cash incomes but many are focusing more on farming. While their income is less, their lifestyles and health have improved. Previously, they spent any non-farming months working as porters—an extremely demanding occupation both physically and mentally. They would be away from home and family, living in caves, and eating marginally nutritious food for long periods. Without the necessity to porter, these families are now staying at home, working less, and not putting their body through such grueling labor. Many say their health is better and their day to day livelihood is easier; however, they miss the extra cash to spend on schooling and other necessities.
Best practices / recommendations

The past eight years have taught us many lessons on how to effectively work in the child labor sector of child porters. These include:

**Long-term Community Based Planning** – In remote rural areas longer term planning is needed to address the situation and needs of child porters. Concerted efforts engaging local government, schools and district line agencies are needed to plan flexible interventions that are responsive to their specific needs.

**Flexible Educational Options** – As child porters may be away for long periods of time – educational interventions for them should focus on flexible schooling or use flexible NFE approaches with timing that can accommodate long absences.

**Schools As Focal points in Rural Communities** – School support programs at the community level such as mobilization of PTAs and quality education activities have proved to be effective at reducing child portering under the Brighter Future Program and need to remain a focus of any child porter initiatives in the future.

**Holistically Addressing Family Poverty** – Addressing family poverty is essential to reduce child portering and to prevent families losing portering income from sending children into other forms of child labor. Intensification of agriculture helps reduce the need for children to porter. Linking portering families to microfinance and helping the poorest families to develop their livelihoods have had major impacts on these families. Livelihoods related to agro-forestry, livestock, vegetable crops and small trade have been successful. Few of these very poor families have been able to take advantage of the tourism economy for reasons of caste, location or lack of resources/credit to invest. Increased production and incomes are first used to feed families and provide education. They also have an immediate effect of removing child from full time portering though some still do limited portering during school holidays. Awareness raising activities along with income generating activities at the community level help improve the communities understanding of child rights as well as generate community support for families engaged in portering.

**Vocational Programs For 14-18 Year Olds** - Few efforts are made to provide vocational education in hilly remote areas and those that do rarely include girls. Practical vocational trainings have proven to work well. The majority of child porters, identified at the start of the program, have returned to school or are now involved with other safer income generating activities. More serious efforts are needed to provide vocational education in rural areas.
Promoting Self-employment in Remote Communities - Employers are few in rural Nepal and most youth need to focus more on self-employment. Building vocational skills along with basic financial literacy has been most effective for older child porters. Vocational trainees who started their own business initiative are increasingly independent as a result of their business initiative. For self-employment greater support from NGOs, access to credit and BDS services and help from local government and line agencies is needed to diversify opportunities especially for landless families.

Sustainability in maintaining the current progress reducing child portering efforts to coordinate with the District Education Office and other stakeholders to continue providing scholarships, training, technical help and other services is needed. Local stakeholders—NGOs, PTAs, SMCs, CFUGS, savings and credit groups and DCWBs need to monitor and support the remaining child porters and link them to existing services offered by local organizations and government and combine efforts to leverage additional funding to meet the needs of them and their families.
World Education Brighter Futures partner NGOs providing services for children working in portering.

- Rural Reconstruction Nepal
- Gramin Bikash Manch
- SAHARA
- Jana Sewa Samuha Nepal
- Porters Progress
- Community Legal Resource Center
- Nepal Red Cross
- Community Family Welfare Society
- Nepal Education and Social Development Organization (NESDO)
- Community Women Development Center
- PRAYAS-Prayatnasil Community Development Society
- Integrated Community Development Center
- Rural Environment and Empowerment Center (REEC)
- Chartare Youth Club (CYC)
- Ama Milan Kendra (AMK)
- Pokhara Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Backward Society Education (BASE)
- Samudayik Digo Bikash Karyakram (SADIKA)
- Child Development Society
- Concern - Nepal
- Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN)

The Brighter Futures Program is an eight year initiative supported by the USDOL with matching support from UNICEF, WFP and private donors to eliminate child labor though education. Over eight years the project has provided educational and other support to 43,291 children working in the worst forms of child labor in Nepal and 72,140 children at risk.

Child Labour Status Report 2009
preparing by World Education and its NGO partners