Children Working in Brick Factories

Child Labour Status Report 2009
Nepal has been going through a period of rapid population growth and increasing urbanization. This has fuelled a growing construction industry and the demand for bricks. Thirty years ago there were a handful of brick factories in the Kathmandu Valley and the Terai. Now hundreds of factories dot the landscape belching smoke from massive smokestacks with hundreds of workers moving like busy ants in the dusty environment during the dry season. Many of the workers are whole families that have migrated from Nepal’s rural areas in search of work. When families with children migrate for work far from local schools and support mechanisms there is a great temptation to put children to work to “keep them busy”. As the population of the Terai grows the brick factories struggling to find sufficient workers often resort to labor contractors or “dalals” who provide cash advances to families that result in whole families being mobilized to work in the brick factories.

Nepal is a signatory country of ILO Convention 182 that prohibits the use of children in any form of hazardous work. Working in brick kilns is considered as one of the worst forms of child labor in Nepal. The Children's Act (Protection from Engaging in Hazardous Work) from 1992, and The Child Labor (Prohibition & Regulation) Act 2056 (2000) prohibits children to be engaged in work that is likely to be harmful to the child's health or to be hazardous to the child's life or employing children aged above 14 years for more than 6 hours a day and 36 hours a week. In spite of this prohibition, in reality the children in brick factories, situated in the outskirts of the populated areas, often work for 12 hours a day. Children are involved in brick making, drying bricks, carrying sand, water and dry clay, placing the baked bricks into the kiln and loading finish on to trucks. Children working in the brick factories are mostly in the 8-16 years of age range. Unobserved and unnoticed by the outside world these children miss their education damaging their future prospects and at the same time damaging their health.

"Now, I don't have to go to work in the brick factory. I can give my full attention and time in my education and my business."

– Asha Chaudhary, Sunsari
Brick Factories - An Emerging Child Labor Sector

Work in a brick factory is time bound seasonal work, starting from October through May, until the monsoon season. Payments are made on piece rates set for specific tasks. In many cases, the children involved in brick factories work under debt-bondage conditions where income is gradually deducted by brokers or employers from family debt incurred during the previous year. The employers/brokers give these children and their families loans or advances so they are compelled to work in the same factory. Rates are also fixed in advance so that during the next season they cannot bargain for increased pay rates. Brick kiln work is usually easy to find and there is no need for specialized training or education. During the season, anyone who is interested can get this kind of work very easily.

Workers in brick kilns come from three sources. Nepalis who have migrated from other villages or districts; Indians who come mainly from Bihar in search of work; and poor local families brought in from poor local communities on a daily basis. Those who have migrated get shelters from employers. These shelters are usually very temporary, built of bamboo and piles of bricks usually lacking windows or a good ventilation system. These diminutive and cramped shacks are constantly cold and damp in winter and during monsoon. Sanitation is almost non-existent and poorly managed toilets and water supplies often pose a health risk.

The employers hire Indian families, mostly from nearby impoverished border areas in Bihar. These migrant workers are considered experts in brick firing, being an extremely risky job, and are skilled at doing this work without getting burnt.
As a result they have the best paid work in the brick factories. In comparison to the Nepali workers, who often rent modest shelters and employers provide them with poorer living conditions which are very basic and simple.

In most cases, those who migrate do so with their whole family. All are engaged in brick factories and children also work. Children are mostly involved in digging soil, molding bricks, preparing clay, loading or unloading bricks in to the kiln, and transporting bricks to trucks. As payment is made on piece basis/product basis, children tend and in most cases forced to work long hours without any break.

Children are hired through brokers or through friends and relatives. Hiring children does not lower production costs but the brick factory owners benefit as more bricks can be fired and moved quickly with more workers during the dry season. This brings greater financial benefits for employers.

Background of the Children Working in Nepal’s Brick Factories

Of the children working in brick factories identified in 16 districts that Brighter Futures worked 65% were Janajati and 18% were Dalit. In the Terai the Janajati were mainly from the Tharu community while in the Kathmandu Valley there was a mix from Tamang, Gurung, Magar and other Janajati groups.

In the Terai the workers tend to come from the nearby communities. In Kathmandu the children and their families migrate seasonally from many districts. The largest numbers of children in Brighter Futures were found to come from remote communities in Lalitpur, Makawanpur, Rolpa, Sarlahi, Kavre, Ramechhap and Sindhuli.
In most districts there are far more girls than boys in the brick factories. In Sunsari there were more boys and they made up about 23% of the children working. The Kathmandu Valley is an exception in that work opportunities are few and most employers will not hire children. As a result there were equal numbers of boys and girls found in the valley.
Helping Meet the Family Expenses

Kabita Chaudhary is a typical brick factory worker in Sunsari. She has just turned 14 and has been working in the brick factory every season for four years. Her mother, sister and younger brother also work in the factory. Her father works as a daily laborer and there is never enough money to feed and support the family. They have no land and live in a squatter settlement near the brick factory. The family dreams that one day they will earn enough to buy a small piece of land of their own.

When Kabita first started working alongside her mother it was to help the family make a little extra money. Over time she has worked harder and longer hours and now works all morning then has a break to eat and then works till evening. Now that she is older, Kabita likes to use some of her income to buy little things like clothes, jewelry and nail polish for herself.

She never went to school even though she would have liked to. Neither of her parents have ever been to school. Her younger brother went to school for a couple of years but then dropped out because during the brick season he was needed to help his parents. Kabita expects that she will get married quite soon. Before she gets married her dream is to take tailoring training so that she can find some other work instead of being in the brick factory. She knows what a hard existence working in the brick factory is and hopes her husband is not in the factory other wise her children too will end up factory workers.
Education and Children in the Brick Factories

A national study on children working in brick kilns that was conducted in 22 districts (Concern 2005) found that 34% of the total labor force in brick kilns in Nepal were child laborers. It also found that 24% of the children in brick kilns were in the range of 6 to 12 years of age and 76% are in the 12 to 16 years age group. Of the 1,578 children working in brick factories that received services from the Brighter Futures Program, 34 were below 10 years of age (2%), 1,034 were in the 10-14 age group (66%) and 510 were above 14 years of age (32%).

Young children who accompany their parents, start working for fun and the parents allow them to carry bricks to keep them busy. As they get older more often the children work, according to their physical capacity, to increase their family’s income. Many parents prefer their children to work at a tender age rather than enrolling them in the schools. These parents view this as a form of “training” and see their labor as being critical to contribute to the families’ income.

The national study (Concern 2005) found that children who are living and working with families are often illiterate and that only one-third of the children had completed grade two. According to the Brighter Futures data; out of the 1,578 children that were reached, 912 (686 or 59% of the girls and 226 or 53% of the boys) were illiterate or semi-literate when joined the program. Some factories have good provision for very young children in Early Childhood Development Centers. These centers provide good care and stimulation for these children while parents work. However, older school age children are often not welcome in local schools as they are unlikely to stay through the school year.
Work Conditions in the Brick Factories

Two reasons brick factories are regarded as a worst form of child labor in Nepal are the occupational hazards and the harmful environment. Occupational hazards in brick factories result in many cases of injuries. Carrying loads of bricks on the head, result in headaches. Coughs and lung problems result from the dusty work environment and poor living conditions, backaches from portering bricks and dysentery and fevers from the poor sanitation are common among the children. Older youth and adults who load bricks into the kilns for firing or remove them after firing while still hot often risk injury.

Piece rates and Use of Income

To earn a cash income is the incentive which draws all children to work in brick factories. Although the financial incentive is the main reason for local children to enter into brick factories, their earned income is spent on different purposes. Besides providing financial support to the parents, some children spend money on their education, for fun and to fulfill their personal desires. In contrast children of migrants are more likely to pass the income earned to parents to help them survive and to save some to take home to the village after the brick season. Many families have taken an advance from a labor contractor or the employer and so are in debt on arriving in the factory and as a result save little. The incomes earned vary greatly depending on their age and ability to work and the time they spend working. For children incomes range from Rs.400 to Rs.3,000 per month in Sunsari and Lalitpur.

Efforts to Prevent Child Labor in Brick Factories

Brick factories are usually situated on the outskirts of urban areas. Children working in the brick factories go unnoticed by government and civil society. This is partly why to date, government has not initiated any programs targeting or focusing on the children working in the brick factories. There have been a number of small NGO initiatives over the years to address child labor in brick factories mainly in Bhaktapur district but few efforts outside the Kathmandu Valley.
The present Child Labor Regulations and Prohibition Act 2000 strictly prohibit the employment of children below 16 years of age working in brick production. Apart from this, the same Act strictly prohibits children who are 14 years of age, but under 16, working more than 6 hours a day and 36 hours a week. As payment is made on a piece basis, children in brick factories are encouraged to work long hours. Although there is a provision that the brick factory owners should take approval from DDC to establish brick factory, this is often not followed in practice and many factories are run without registration.

In some districts trade unions are active in preventing children working in the factories they are associated with. Some more responsible factory owners also prohibit children working or being in the work area of the sites.
Strategies to Provide Education
And Remove Children Working in Brick Factories

The Brighter Futures Program started working with children working in brick factories from 2005 and anticipated reaching 1,500 children. A combination of activities including nonformal education, vocational education, support to attend formal schools, work through Parent Teacher Associations to improve the quality of education in local schools and work with families to improve their economic status to enable them to keep children out of child labor were supported.

Altogether, 1,578 children from 16 districts benefited from the program. The NGO partners in the districts with the highest prevalence of children in brick factories provided support in Sunsari to 684 children, in the Kathmandu Valley to 316 children, in Sarlahi to 193 children, and in Dang to 101 children plus small numbers in other districts. Sunsari in the eastern Terai was found to have the largest numbers of children in brick factories. It is a major source of bricks for the cities of Biratnagar, Itahari and Dharan with large numbers of brick factories. Sahara Nepal worked intensively with the children working in the brick kilns as this was the main program focus in this district.

Over the last four years, Brighter Futures NGOs provided nonformal education, supported formal education, provided vocational training self-employment and occupation specific vocational skill training and apprenticeships for older children. Parent Teacher Associations were developed to improve the access and quality of schools in communities linked to brick factories and the poorest families were supported to improve their economic situation.

Nonformal Education

Nonformal education was a major strategy for providing education for out-of-school children in the 10-14 age group. Nonformal education helps these children to acquire literacy and numeracy skills that will allow them to enroll in school an age appropriate grades. Two curriculums were used; Jeevan Shiksha for mixed groups of learners – boys and girls and different levels of past education; and the GATE (Girls Access to Education) curriculum when the learners were all girls. The program also included modules that focused on occupation safety and ways to protect themselves from health hazards in their workplace.
The baseline survey conducted before the beginning of the program found more than 1,000 children who work in brick factories in priority VDCs who needed basic literacy skills. Over four years, 912 children attended nonformal (NFE) classes; 654 Jeevan Shiksha and 258 GATE. The literacy classes were conducted using two approaches; structured nine months of classes that ran two hours a day, six days a week or the second approach, which saw 134 attend Open Learning Centres that were center based classes with flexible attendance.

**Most successful approaches**

- Offering different approaches (both flexible and structured) was essential in order to accommodate the different needs of children.
- The module on occupational safety was extremely useful. Children were more aware of dangers and claim they now have fewer accidents. They are more aware of the hazards of dust but lack access to masks. They are also unwilling to carry excessive loads on their heads.
- There are more girls working in the brick factories than boys. The GATE approach that is focusing specifically on girls is providing the most appropriate curriculum to equip them with the necessary life skills.
Raja's Journey

Raja Shah, lives in Bishanpur, Sunsari with his parents and five brothers. His father trades livestock to support the family. With a family of seven, and limited profit from the livestock trade Raja's family was constantly struggling. To make ends meet all the family members including their mother were compelled to work in brick factories. Raja Shah started working in the brick factory when he was 10 and he is now 14 years old.

Raja Shah, dropped out of school when he was in third grade. He enrolled in NFE Jeevan Shiksha classes through the Brighter Futures Program. The facilitator of his class speaks very highly of him and specifically mentions his regularity, seriousness about his education and inquisitive nature. Raja, after the completion of the NFE class, enrolled in grade five in school.

His aim in life is to start his own garage. He has made plans for his future and wants to complete school, then join a vocational training course in motorcycle repair. He says, "In order to learn about motorcycle repair work, know about the spare parts and be able to run my own garage, I need to complete my high school education. I think it is a basic requirement for me. I will continue my education until completing high school."

Raja appreciated the NFE class and says it was a great opportunity for him. He thought the content of the curriculum was extremely useful for his life and for returning to school. He speaks highly of the savings habit that he developed during the course. He has since used his savings numerous times to help his family in times of need to buy necessary medicine and other urgent domestic use. While working in the brick factory he earned about Rs. 700 per month working part time. He says he has also learnt about work hazards in the factory and how to protect himself.

At the moment he is not working in the brick factory. He is attending school and in the free time he helps his mother in running small tea and grocery shop that his family has started.
Challenges

- Changing the parents’ attitude and to convince them to prioritize the children’s education.
- The nonformal programs need at least nine months to one year of regular attendance to prepare children for formal school or to master basic literacy and numeracy skills for totally illiterate children.
- Migrant families who come to work in the brick factories often go back to their districts or move to another work place before the children gain the skills they need.

Lessons Learned

- Continual migration of children associated with the brick industry requires a greater focus on short-term condensed NFE courses.
- Greater efforts are needed to offer flexible schooling through schools in host communities along with easy transfer and connectivity with children’s schools in home communities.
- Of the NFE graduates 20% joined formal school (182 out of 912 graduating children). Most were unable to afford the admission fees. Even though this is illegal, most schools were found to be charging fees. Others migrated back to home districts beyond the reach of the program. Children who had been working in their local community were more likely to join school and this was true for both boys and girls.
- Of the 912 children who attended the NFE classes and have mastered the curriculum, 20% transitioned into school and 48% continued on to vocational training.
Formal School

Scholarship Support

Of the children found working in brick factories 293 received in-kind scholarships for school enrollment in grades one to eight. In Sunsari, many of the children working in the brick factories (particularly in secondary level) need money to help meet the costs of education expenses and therefore work part-time or seasonally in these factories. The children working and enrolled in the schools in Kathmandu Valley go back to their home districts for their final exams.

Brick factory work is seasonal and those who migrate from other districts experience problems with different standards of education in their home district compared to the work district which puts them in different grades. After months out of school and working they experience problems readjusting to the school environment. Children are usually registered in their home VDC for school. When they migrate to other areas for work they cannot be registered in their working district without a government transfer certificate or an extra payment. All these are obstacles and challenges for school enrollment and retention of children working in the brick factories.

During the first year of school support, the child receives full scholarship, for the second year of support, the program’s contribution decreases to 50% and in the third year to 15%. During these years, the parents are obligated to share the school expenses.

"I am happy now... I don’t need to ask money from my parents to buy stationary for school. In the past, I felt guilty whenever I asked money from my parents. Now I will do my homework without tension. I can do extra practice as well."

(School support beneficiary in Sunsari)
Most successful approaches

- **Work closely with parents and school for identification and selection of children** – as there are many children and youth working in the brick factories in the target districts, the program needs to work closely with the schools and parents to ensure that the most needy and marginalized children are selected for educational support.

- **In-kind support** – school support must be provided in the form of in-kind support (uniform, bag, and stationary) as the parents tend to spend this on daily expenditure instead of spending it on the school related costs.

- **Involvement of PTA and SMC in distribution of scholarship** – This ensures their full involvement and participation in the process that leads to support and follow-up in cases of absenteeism or drop-out.

Major Challenges

- **Change of attitude** – Some parents do not value education and only send their children to collect school supplies and then not send their children to school regularly, until final exams.

- **Limited support** – Providing school support limited to one year of schooling is often challenging as the families cannot afford to continue sending their children to school after the program is over.

- **Irregularity during work season** – As the work in the brick factories is seasonal, children who are enrolled in school often become irregular during the work season. They usually miss classes for periods of three to four months and even drop-out.

Lessons Learned

- **Need for a long-term support** – In order to be completely withdrawn from work in the brick factories, the scholarship children need ongoing support until finishing the primary level or secondary level.

- **Parental commitment** – Parents of children working in brick factories must be encouraged to commit to share the costs for their children’s education after the program’s phase out.
Coaching
A small pilot with 44 children working in brick factories was started in the 2063 (2006) academic year. The children had originally been enrolled in school in their home communities. When they relocate each year to the brick factories with their families for seasonal work, they usually do not attend school. Each year they return to their home village and re-enroll in the same grade and start over, never progressing or progressing very slowly. The NGOs started by getting the local schools near the brick factories to enroll the children and then provided coaching to increase their chances of attending school regularly, passing in their grade level and to reduce the likelihood of them being engaged in producing bricks.

Challenges
- **Different Standards for Grade Levels** - Having overcome the hurdle of getting the children in to school, the children in Grade Two in their home community were unable to cope with that level in the new schools they were matched to. The schools standards in Lalitpur (Kathmandu Valley) are considerably higher than in the remote village schools these children come from.
- **Overage For Grade** - The children are determined to go to school like other children but many are more than six years older than the usual age for the grade level.
- **Remedial Versus Coaching** - Most coaching classes morphed in to remedial classes to prepare students to re-sit exams for the grades they had already technically passed in remote areas.

Lessons Learned
- **Coaching For Younger Students – Accelerated or Flexible Classes for older Students** - Where constant migration results in high repetition and over age children coaching classes may prove more appropriate for the younger children while a more remedial accelerated learning approach may be more suitable for older children wanting a chance to complete school.
- **Need to Build Relationship Between Origin and Work Site School** - Enrolling children in two locations is against government policies as both schools then want budget allocations. There is a need to work more on building relationships between teachers and schools in origin and destination communities.
IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The Brighter Futures project worked with public schools in the areas around brick factories to help them provide a better quality of education. Three impacts were sought:

- to encourage children to stay in school and not drop out even seasonally to work in brick factories
- through PTAs to address governance and income generation so that schools would be less costly and more accessible for poor students
- to experiment with ways to attract and support migrating children whose parents were working in the brick factories.

Brighter Futures worked directly at the school level through formation and mobilization of Parent Teacher Associations to improve the quality of education in schools where the program beneficiaries were enrolled. PTAs were involved in enrollment campaigns, preparing School Improvement Plans, holding elections to governance boards, monitoring attendance of students and teachers, doing upgrades of the infrastructure and a number of other activities. PTAs in the schools near brick factories proved most effective at ensuring regularity of classes, keeping the children in school and convincing the parents to prioritize their children’s education. Their support was crucial for NGOs to enroll former child workers, support them to stay and complete their school education.

Brighter Futures also worked with the government and UNICEF to address problems at the system level in education and worked with the DEO’s to provide training, support and resources to schools. Communities with brick factories in Sunsari and Sarlahi were benefited by this collaboration.

Most successful approaches

- **Involvement of District Education Office** - Working closely with the DEO in all activities (from school selection process to orientation of the PTA, PTA Network formation and Network meetings) resulted in greater support for the schools and greater sustainability.

- **Regular Monitoring Visits** - Joint monitoring by DEO staff, partner NGOs and World Education encouraged schools, teachers and parents, and helped solve problems as they emerged.

- **Exposure visits** - Exposure visits to other better schools gave ideas and encouraged schools to improve. They were often highly motivated to perform better after seeing the successes of other schools.
Lessons Learnt

- **Difficulty Enrolling Migrant Children Mid-year** - The brick factory season does not coincide with the academic year and schools are reluctant to enroll late comers. Poor migrant families rarely organize the needed transfer certificates. Schools near factories are unable and unwilling to make the effort to enroll these migrant children especially as the government provides no extra textbooks or funds.

- **Need For Sustainable Training System For PTA Executive** - As the Executive Committee of the PTA changes, orientation for new PTA members is needed. This should include use of the Quality Education Resource Package to address access and quality issues.

- **New PTAs Need Extra Support** - Project staff need to work closely with the PTA members in the initial stage of PTA formation until they gain confidence and experience.

- **Recognition and Awards** - to motivate PTAs there need to be awards and recognition of the most active PTAs.

Challenges

- **Engaging Poor Migrant Parents in PTAs** - It is difficult to engage parents in PTAs as they also work full time in the brick factories and are too busy to attend school functions and activities.

- **Mutual Distrust** - The teachers complain about the parent’s negligence and parents accuse the teachers about not being consistent and serious about their children’s education.

Saving Money Managing Money

“The advantage of this program is that we increase our savings, which is our own, and learn a skill that is also ours. We tell our employers when we have a group meeting, and come to the meeting. That work is temporary. The work we do for the group is for us and we are learning something for ourselves, while saving for our future. We will be able leave the factory if we can learn skills like this to increase our income.”

Srijana Tamang, 15, SEEP Participant - Lalitpur
Leaving Bricks, for Books

Gayabati Chaudhary, 16, is now in school through support from Brighter Futures. Many children from disadvantaged communities work at the brick factories in Sunsari District. Like Gayabati’s, they are indebted to employers, earning scarcely enough to meet monthly expenses, let alone repay loans.

Gayabati completed the Self Employment and Economic Education curriculum, which equips youth with skills, knowledge and practical experience to start small businesses. Gayabati started a fish farm. With her profits, she says she will contribute to her siblings’ and her own education so she can put the brick factory behind her.

David duChemin
Vocational Education

Close to the brick factories, it was difficult to offer a range of vocational options as with other child labor sectors. Most families had little land that was often some distance away so even though agriculture may offer potential for some families it was difficult to offer training. Most children were with families and it was not possible to provide them with residential vocational training elsewhere. As a result the Brighter Futures program focused on self-employment for older children in brick factories. Small numbers were supported for agro-forestry and occupation specific skills.

Self-employment and Economic Education Program - SEEP provides economic education using discovery learning for children/youth in the 14-18 age group for starting their own small business with a small investment. Over six months participants complete the business/economic education phase followed by six months of practical discovery learning with experimental business. In all 443 children working in brick factories have attended the SEEP Program. Children with basic literacy and numeracy skills are able to participate in the program and so graduates of NFE, school dropouts and over age students unlikely to complete school can all be included. Participants learn valuable life skills such as time and money management as well as learning about how to run a small business. Self-employment is the only option other than exploitative work in many communities and especially for girls with limited mobility in rural areas.

The SEEP program was extremely effective as it provided youth economic literacy skills, helped them to develop the habit of saving regularly, and helped develop the knowledge and skills to explore self-employment opportunities in their community. The children learn that one can be self-employed with a small investment and how to get started when self-employment is more profitable or when there are no other work opportunities other than exploitative child labor. Participants are now able to explore other livelihood options at the local level other than working in the brick factories. Graduates from the SEEP classes have started a range of businesses with small tea shops, grocery, fruit and vegetable shops being most popular. Others have invested in raising poultry and livestock with a few doing commercial vegetable crops, snack foods, incense making and tailoring. Candle making proved popular in the Kathmandu Valley where power cuts of 20 hours per day create insatiable demand.
Most successful approaches

- **Discovery Learning** – Children learnt more quickly and gained real life experience running a business through the discovery learning component.
- **Formation of Small Help Groups** – Even after the completion of SEEP business phase, the formed saving groups have decided to continue their saving activity showing a high degree of sustainability.
- **Formation of group management committee** – It is essential for supporting the group members during their business phase.
- **Inclusion of Adult Facilitators** – When adult facilitators are included in the groups and also take part in the savings activity trust is promoted and there is an increased seriousness and commitment of group members and program staff.
- **Involvement of Parents** – Engaging parents during the business planning phase helps support the young entrepreneurs and encourages them to be more active and responsible for the business activity.

Major challenges

- **Limited market** – The local markets are often limited for the business activities and the profits are therefore low and the business opportunities are also limited.
- **Limited business fund** – Some of the children need to wait for their turn to take loan and start their business activity.
- **Lack of Confidence and Competitors** – The youth who start their business are usually inexperienced and can be easily taken advantage of by other adults in their community and face difficulties in handling market competition.

“We, girls, can start doing business and manage from that even after our marriage.”

Ram Suwari, SEEP Participant Sarlahi
Lessons Learned

- **Results in Removal From Child Labor** - As soon as the youth gain confidence and business knowledge, they are able to earn alternative income and be completely withdrawn from their work in the brick factories.

- **Suitability** - Self-employment is an appropriate alternative for rural girls that work in brick factories as there are opportunities for small businesses in the rural areas, possible even with small investment capital.

- **Access to Credit** - There is a need to link participants with local cooperatives for larger loans.

- **Mobility and Access to Markets** – Self-employed youth have limited mobility and need skills and assistance to explore wider market outlets and not be limited only to their own village.

- **Parental Support** - Parents are extremely pleased with this program helping their children develop self-employment options. Most parents do not want their children to work in the brick factories and also see it as a start in helping the whole family develop an alternative livelihood.

- **Confidence and Self-esteem** - Initially children from brick factories came to classes, used bad language, abused and harassed each other. Most had little expectation that any alternative was possible in their lives beyond the dirty and back breaking work they were doing. Over time their optimism returned and with it participants became more visibly clean, motivated and self disciplined.

A Small Business So We Can Go To School

“The program is giving us the skills we need to run our own businesses. We’re going to school too, and while studying, we get new ideas to build on what we learn through SEEP. At the factory we have to work from 4AM till 10PM. It’s hard work, especially in winter, when we have to wake up early, work the bricks and then go to school. We have to please the factory owner. With our group business, we can work in our own time, when we have free time.”

Bijaya Lama, grade 8

“This program gave me the idea to start a tailoring business on my own. Before this I could not imagine that a girl like me could start business.”

— Pramila Pariyar, Sunsari
Agro-forestry, Apprenticeships and Occupation Specific Skill Training

Small numbers of children working in brick factories in the 14-18 age group were provided with training or apprenticeships to gain practical skills for specific occupations. The project hired trainers, hosted agro-forestry training, sent children to vocational training centers, or arranged apprenticeships with a local craftsman. From the brick factories 46 youth received practical skills training from vocational training centers (25), agro-forestry (18) and apprenticeship (3).

Most successful approaches

- **Training Related to Rural Economy** - Rural youth who are living in their own villages prefer agro-forestry training that will provide them skills to earn an income in their locality.
- **Use of Vocational Training Centers** - Vocational centers offer greater flexibility to train small numbers in different occupations. They are more appropriate for children living and working in the urban areas where more centers and trainers are available. There are also more employment opportunities in the urban areas for these graduates.

Challenges

- **Selection of appropriate training and occupation** – The youth usually focus on immediate needs without conducting viability studies of the demand for different vocations. These youth require thorough guidance before selecting skill training.
- **Determining employment opportunities** – Children in both the brick factories in the Kathmandu Valley and in the rural target districts find it hard to determine which training is most appropriate. They are confused as to whether to gain a skill that is in demand in their home district or near where they are currently working.

"We will continue our business as a group. One day we are sure we will be able to make more candles and earn more."

— SEEP Participants, Lalitpur
Improving Family Livelihoods and Reducing Reliance on Brick Factory Income

Family poverty and a lack of economic alternatives are major factors behind families taking children along with them to work in brick factories. Brighter Futures worked with 150 families of children working in brick factories to improve family livelihoods and income generation efforts. The main focus for brick factory workers was to get them engaged in microfinance programs and provide training and raw materials for livelihood activities. This strategy supports the family to increase it's income so that they will be able to send their children to formal school or NFE classes instead of having to have children work in the brick factories. The families have benefited most from learning to manage money and have increased incomes from different livelihood activities. Most though are not able to completely replace the income of brick factories and some members of the family continue to work but with fewer children involved. Over time incomes from these alternative livelihood activities will increase and make a greater contribution to family livelihoods.

**Few Sources of Income**

The Chaudhari family had a small piece of land in Ekamber VDC Sunsari on which to raise their three daughters and one son. The income was never sufficient so the whole family worked in the nearby brick factory. Although Phunturiya enrolled her children in school they did not give school a high priority and were frequently absent to work in the brick factory during the brick season.

Phunturiya’s two daughters joined the SEEP classes. Both these girls joined a savings group and took small loans totaling Rs.2,500 and started a small shop. When Phunturiya joined a family support group she too started saving and was inspired by her daughters to also take a loan of Rs.4,000 and join together with her daughters to increase the size of the shop and run it as a family business. The family is now earning about Rs.4,000 monthly from the shop. Phunturiya has now joined the local co-operative saving bank and has Rs.12,000 saved for emergencies. Phunturiya’s husband has now quit working in the brick factory and taken a rice mill on rent and is operating the mill and earning a good income. Now all four children are attending school and none of the family works in the brick factory.
**Most successful approaches**

- **Formation of small Self-help Groups** – Being in small SHG has helped these poor families save and manage money better. Once in a small group they are less dependent on labor contractors and brick factory owners for loans. This improves their bargaining power and reduces the need to involve children in brick work.

- **Facilitating Women Factory Workers to Join Existing Savings and Credit Groups in their community** – Where women come from scattered areas locally linking them to existing groups is effective.

- **Non-agriculture Based Enterprises** – Families drawn to brick factories rarely have much land. They are also very risk averse and need to start small. As a result small trade, businesses such as little retail shops selling groceries or fruit and vegetables, teashops and livestock are most favored.

**Challenges**

- **Getting Parent’s Time** – Parents work from early morning to dark and are often too exhausted to attend any sort of training or vocational opportunities. Their hand to mouth needs over-ride their interest in developing other livelihoods.

- **Lack of Co-operation From Families** - Getting support from the family members especially parents-in-law and sisters-in-law is essential for mothers to engage in the business and livelihood activities. In-laws do not see the benefit of helping if profits are invested in the grandchildren or nieces or nephews.

- **Risk Averse** – Extremely poor families are reluctant to risk scarce resources starting enterprises that may fail. Often they feel trapped working in poorly paid brick factories where at least survival can be assured.

- **Lack of Local Markets** – Many brick factories are located in rural areas where there are few economic activities and weak markets. Wealthier farmers prefer to shop in larger towns.
Services provided by other stakeholders

There are several organizations that have provided services to the children working in the brick factories, but they are quite limited in scope and coverage. In the Kathmandu Valley, the local NGOs CONCERN, Child Development Society, SAMAY and Ama Milan Kendra have activities like nonformal classes, coaching centers and some school scholarships. The UN and American women’s organization’s have supported early childhood centers and school scholarships. These local efforts have been on a limited scale and only involve a few factories.

In Sunsari, CISCA was the first organization that addressed these children’s needs. It offered multiple interventions like literacy classes, vocational skill training, formal school enrolment, counseling, and community awareness raising programs on child rights. Its coverage was limited to certain VDCs with UNICEF support. Being seasonal in nature, brick factory workers are often unemployed during the off season. Workers also move work places frequently and NGOs find it difficult to provide continuity to support children and families. NGOs have been heavily dependent on donors for work with brick factory children and few communities have been able to access government NFE or Flexible Schooling resources for the children in brick factories which would have the greatest scope for continuity and sustainability of work with brick factory children for education.

Political and economic changes that affected child labor in brick industry

Since the political conflict began in the country, the instability and poor security in the districts forced many people to move to the district headquarters and from there to Kathmandu Valley for better security and employment. For the poorest migrant families, the brick factories were an easily accessible work option. Although the conflict has ended and a peace agreement has been signed, many of the displaced have not returned and continue to seek seasonal work in brick factories.
Increasing urbanization and construction of new buildings, roads and bridges is rapidly growing. This construction has accelerated the demand for bricks. Brick production is a labor intensive industry and requires a large labor force but does not require great skill. All these pull factors are becoming incentives for families to become involved in brick production and to involve their children as well. In the Kathmandu Valley there has been some union activism and government monitoring resulting in factory owners prohibiting use of child labor on their sites. However, this is not widespread yet.

**Specific trends in the sector that appear in certain geographic regions:**

**Eastern Terai:**

In the eastern Terai districts of Sunsari, Udayapur, Jhapa and Morang large numbers of children were found working in brick factories. Under Brighter Futures Phase I many of these children were listed as porters as the main task they perform in brick factories is portering bricks. In Phase II, 736 children (575 girls and 161 boys) were identified for removal and enrolled in education programs. Of the enrolled children, 55% were in the 10-14 age range and 45% were above 14. The majority were Tharu (70%), with 16% Dalit, 5% Muslim and 4% other Janjati in this region.

Families of children working in the brick factories are usually extremely poor. In this area it is common practice for marginalized families to send their children to work, especially girls who are school dropouts, to help the family income, to pay debts or to pay for sibling’s education. Many families suffer from cross-border migration, alcoholism or displacement and are forced to place their children in the work in these factories. Among the children, some are school dropouts while others attend school in the morning and work in the factories during the evenings and weekends. Labor law enforcement in this area is also weak. Traditionally, the girls are mainly engaged in carrying the brick loads on their head and the boys are mainly engaged in soil digging.

In a survey carried out in 2001/2002 by CISCA, a Sunsari NGO, they identified 2,800 children working in 20 brick factories. They found that 80% of the workers originate from Sunsari whereas 20% migrated from adjoining districts and most from Bihar, India. The survey report showed that 40% were in the 10 – 14 years age group.
Specific challenges and lessons learned in the Eastern Region:

- Many families engaged in work in the brick factories in Sunsari District are marginalized migrants from India. Any support provided to the working children must be complemented with cross border efforts to address the poverty of these families and the children’s education.

- Child Labor Day is well covered in the media in Sunsari every year. This has created a positive response and large scale awareness of the communities and local government agencies of the issue of children working in the brick factories.

- In Sunsari, a District Child Labor Forum and District Child Labor Coordination Committee were formed in order to eliminate child labor in the district, especially in brick factories. These forums have not functioned well due to a lack of leadership and strong commitment of the members. World Education and its partners helped set up the child labor database in the DDC which has encouraged members to become more concerned about the issue. They have allocated Rs. 50,000 for NFE classes and school support for brick factory children and have mainstreamed these programs into their annual budget and workplan. Special staff members have been assigned in the DDC to coordinate the program and maintain the database on working children.

- It is less challenging to enroll and retain local children in school compared with migrants in other areas like the Kathmandu Valley. Most of these families do not migrate during the work season and the children can be enrolled in their home VDC.
Kathmandu Valley

Kathmandu Valley is a destination for families with children from across the country to work in brick factories. Most of the families who are engaged in brick factory work in Lalitpur originate from neighboring districts and migrate to the Kathmandu Valley for this work. Due to the rapid population growth and urbanization in the capital that occurred over the last 10 years, brick factories quickly spread in rural areas and the government has registered 200 factories. Little skill is needed to work in these factories as much of the work involves digging, moulding bricks or portering them to and from the kilns. The numbers of children working is constantly fluctuating at any given factory. Brighter Futures enrolled 316 children (163 girls and 153 boys) most in the Lalitpur area. Of these children, 10% were below 10, 70% 10-14 years of, 20% above 14. Most came from more remote, rural VDCs of Lalitpur, Makawanpur, Rolpa, Sarlahi, Kavre, Ramechhap and Sinduli.

Specific challenges and lessons learned in the Kathmandu Valley:

- Kathmandu Valley’s brick factories are located on the periphery of the city and migrant families who work there have little exposure to other livelihood or work options. It is therefore hard for them to get out of this kind of work. They are not integrated in to the local communities and work long hours to be able to earn as much as possible in the shortest period. Few efforts are made to improve their living situations.
- Migrant children receive little attention from the District Education Offices and even though these children are easily accessible no provision of Flexible Schooling has been made to date for these children. Greater efforts are needed to improve the provision of transfer certificates to keep these migrating children in school.
- Short-term vocational skills training such as candle-making are in high demand by youth working in this area. Kathmandu has an insatiable demand for candles due to power cuts and as these youth have little time or resources to explore other products or markets this has been an extremely profitable option.
- Unions are more active in the Valley and have been discouraging child labor and advocating for improved work and living conditions. Labor Inspectors rarely visit these factories or respond to under age workers being present.
Central Terai Region

There are 59 brick factories in Sarlahi most with child workers. Children from Sarlahi also migrate to Nawalparasi and Kathmandu Valley to work in the brick factories. Most of the working children in this district are marginalized Janajati (Tharu, Magar and Tamang) and Dalit. The DDC has not been paying any specific attention to the issue of child labor. A District Child Labor Coordination Committee (DCLCC) was formed in the district with initiation by ILO but neither this committee or the DCWB is active on the issue of child labor. Brighter Futures supported 264 children working in brick factories in the central region – 193 in Sarlahi, 67 in Chitwan and 4 in Makwanpur (4). 83% of these children were in the 10-14 age range and 17% are above 14 with, 42% Tharu, 22% Dalit, 20% other Janajati and 11% from Terai castes.

Specific challenges and lessons learned in the Central Terai region:

- Modular NFE using the Jeevan Shiksha curriculum followed by scholarships to school or self-employment after the SEEP program proved most successful in these districts.
- The families of these children suffer from extreme poverty, and greater efforts to address poverty alleviation are needed to compliment direct services to children.
- Sarlahi is one of the weakest overstretched education districts in Nepal. Sarlahi is also emerging as one of the largest source districts for migrant child laborers. Efforts to support addressing the quality of education in this district have started but need to be scaled up.
Western Regions

Brick factories can be found in almost all the districts but there are smaller numbers with child labor. The greatest numbers of children found working in brick factories were in Dang. Brighter Futures identified and supported 189 children in Dang (101), Banke (39), Bardiya (36) and Kanchanpur (13). Of these, 69% were aged 10-14, 29% were above 14 with 41% Tharu, 21% Dalit, 20% Muslim and 11% from Terai castes.

Best Practices/Recommendations:

- **Alternative Income Generation with Families** – Families in the brick industry earn well during the season then incur debts during the off season. This results in a cycle of indebtedness and cycle of poverty. Greater efforts are needed to help these families diversify their income sources through income generation or livelihood programs.

- **Microfinance** – Greater efforts are needed to expand microfinance programs to reach families in the brick industry. Access to microfinance can enable them to save and smoothen out consumption reducing indebtedness.

- **Parenting Education and ECD** – Greater efforts to involve parents in brick factories through parenting classes and ECD have resulted in greater support of parents to educate their children. More efforts like these are needed.

- **Awareness Campaigns** – Stronger efforts are needed to make parents, employers, DDC members, brick factory owners and media aware of occupation safety hazards concerning the work of children in the brick factories.
- **Flexible Schooling and NFE** – The government and NGOs need to make greater efforts to use the government provided quotas to reach these children and ensure they can complete their basic education. Local schools need to be more engaged in planning for and taking responsibility for migrant children in their community.

- **Mainstreaming to School** – Children withdrawn from child labor and receiving scholarships for school need additional help within schools including coaching to enable them to catch up and succeed in school.

- **School Dropouts** – Greater efforts are needed to keep children in school until they are of legal working age especially Tharu girls.

- **Compulsory Education** – This is a new policy for both Nepal and India and communities, teachers, political leaders, SMCs and PTAs need to be made more aware of their obligation to provide education for migrant children and ensure the attend school. They also need to make efforts to involve migrant parents in the school.

- **Vocational Training** – More efforts are needed to provide vocational training to school dropouts so that they have options other than dangerous or exploitative work. These options should include apprenticeships and self-employment.
Children Working in Brick Factories

- **Health Posts** – Many children who work in the brick factories suffer from damaged eye sight, skin diseases, fever and wounds that occur due to accidents at work. Migrant families do not know how to access health services or cannot afford medical care and children often end up in a critical condition. Greater outreach by health posts to these factories is needed.

- **Occupational Safety and Health** – Families of children working in the brick factories and community campaigns need to be more aware of the impacts of the dust and hygiene conditions in brick factories on children’s health. Greater efforts are needed to protect both adults and children.

- **Labor Law Enforcement** – The brick factories are all regulated and should be visited by Labor Inspectors on a regular basis to enforce child labor laws. Civil society groups need to demand to know when these inspections take place and what action is being taken to remove child laborers below 16 in these factories.
World Education Brighter Futures partner NGOs providing services for children working in brick factories.

- Sahara Nepal
- Nari Bikash Sangh (NBS)
- Community Legal Resource Center (CLRC)
- Bal Sanrakshan Sanstha (BSS)
- Community Women Development Center (CWDC)
- Rapti Green Society (RGS)
- Narayangadh Youth Club (NYC)
- Women Awareness Protection Center (WAPC)
- Pokhara Chamber of Commerce & Industry (PCCI)
- Ama Milan Kendra (AMK)
- Samay

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.

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