Children Working in Recycling Industry

Child Labour Status Report 2009
For many years one of the most recognizable sounds in the urban neighborhoods of Kathmandu and other cities of Nepal was the call of the recycling man 'Khali Sisi Purano Kagaj'. The recycling men were mainly male migrants from Bihar pushing bicycles to buy newspaper, empty bottles and other metal or paper. Over the past 20 years Nepal has added more than 10 million people to its population most living in urban areas. While Nepalis do not generate a lot of household waste compared to other nations the waste that is generated is poorly managed. Household garbage is often piled on street corners and empty lots. The city authorities struggle to manage collection and find waste dumping sites.

By the mid-nineties the sound of the recycling man was replaced by the sight of young boys clambering over piles of garbage to retrieve paper, plastic and bottles. Dirty and ill-kept they risked injury and illness to find salable items which they would quickly sell to purchase cigarettes or glue to sniff. Most residents and businessmen would feel little compassion for the situation they were in and instead discourage them by forcing them to move on.

Rapid population growth and civil war resulted in another wave of migration of the poor to the cities. Not finding work or places to live these families set up squatter settlements along riverbeds and on public land and started to eke out a living. Whole families would spend their days scouring the cities for recyclable materials which they would haul back to the squatter camps in sacks to sort and sell. The last few years have seen many private rubbish collection services set up across neighborhoods of the Kathmandu Valley. These collectors charge a fee for door to door daily collection and then use trolleys to take the rubbish to transfer points for the local government trucks to collect. Here these rubbish collectors screen the rubbish for recyclables. A few modest NGO programs have been working to get households to sort their rubbish but this is still rare. With the high value items mainly sold to the Indian recycling men on bicycles and the better management of household garbage by cities and screening of this by the collectors there are poorer returns for the efforts of street children and squatter families.
They are reduced to scavenging on waste land where poorly managed waste is dumped, and encroaching on to building sites and hospital grounds where collecting waste poses special dangers.

Recycling waste is a Worst Form of Child Labor under ILO Convention 182. There were an estimated 4,000 children working on the streets of urban areas of Nepal in 2001. Many of the children working in recycling are street children and some are living with their parents in the urban slum areas in Kathmandu, Pokhara, Narayanghat, Dharan, Biratnagar, Hetauda, Birgunj, Janakpur and Jhapa. Most of the children working in the recycling sector are runaways, orphans, abandoned children, children of poor migrant families from the rural areas or across the border from India. Most runaways are children of dysfunctional families with second marriages, alcoholism or domestic violence as factors. These children and youth do not have opportunities for education or recreational activities, because of the hours they work or because they are unwelcome in schools and other education programs. Recycling poses serious health risks. Children in this work are often injured with cuts and abrasions that can be easily infected due to the filthy conditions in which they work. Children are also tempted to recycle medical waste which poses even greater risks. The risks involved are compounded by substance abuse. Recyclers can earn a good income but children in these difficult circumstances often turn to drink, glue sniffing or drugs. While recyclers provide a valuable service to society it is no occupation for children who are unable to protect themselves.
Recyclable Waste Materials

The recycling industry involves large numbers of people who collect rubbish and waste, those who scavenge dumped waste, clean and sort waste materials, and workers in recycling depots that purchase and resell the recyclables in bulk. The recyclers in Nepal collect bottles, all plastic, cans, metal items, newspapers, paper and cardboard, sacks, rags, and some organic material for composting. Scraps of tin, aluminum, iron, brass and copper are stripped from electronics, wire or other equipment. The plastic, bottles, cardboard and metal fetch the highest price. Plastic waste such as bottles, milk packets and bags, used cardboard and paper products, and metal cans make up the bulk of recyclable waste. Recyclers get paid according to the ‘quality’ of the materials they sell to recycling depots or junkyards. At these centers, plastic, tin and aluminum waste products are heavily sought after while paper goods rank lower on the recyclable list. Recycling often takes place at dumpsites, along riverbanks, on street corners or on empty land in residential areas. Recyclers usually collect all the items that look recyclable in sacks then carry them to a central point to sort ready for sale. With the market for recyclable materials increasing and the relatively high incomes that can be earned, many poor families and street children have turned to recycling work as a means of survival.

Children in the Recycling Industry

In 2001, ILO did a rapid assessment and estimated that about 4000 children were working in Nepal in the recycling sector mainly scavenging for recyclable materials. Of these about 2000 were in the Kathmandu Valley with about 2000 in other cities of the Terai and Pokhara. Of these children in recycling 88% were boys and 12% were girls with the majority (66%) in the 10-14 years age range. At that time, 52% of the boys and 28% of the girls were literate. Boys were often from hill districts from Dalit, Brahmin, Chhetri and Magar groups with 23% of the boys from Muslim, Tharu or other Terai groups. In comparison the girls came mainly from Terai Muslim or other groups. The average family size was 5.4 members and while 60% of the children had both parents, significant numbers had a stepparent (18.7%), a single parent (13%) or no parents at all (8%). Of the children in the assessment, 58% were from families with non-agricultural livelihoods such as small businesses, mechanical work or low paid service work. It was common to see families in recycling
with 23% of all children, and significantly more girls (42%), having parents involved in recycling. In Nepal most families are engaged in agriculture but just 9% of children in recycling had parents with their own farms. The conclusion was that recycling was closely associated with landless families involved in low-paid, non-agricultural activities.

The two groups of children in recycling are very distinct runaway boys living on the street; and children of families in squatter settlements that are engaged in the recycling industry. Poor families in squatter settlements are more likely to involve girls in this work though boys are also involved. In some settlements children go to school and collect waste early mornings or at night.

**Street Children — Children in Recycling**

**“Of the Street”** - Children who live on the street support themselves in a variety of ways including begging, getting food from shelters and NGOs, theft, temporary jobs and recycling waste are described as being “of the street”. Not all children “of the street” recycle waste.

In a large survey of 430 street children in Kathmandu only 49% were involved in recycling waste materials (CPCS 2007).

**“On the Street”** - Children who do not live on the street but live with families or in rented accommodation may work “on the street”. Many children can be found selling goods, recycling waste, begging, or looking tea stalls or other businesses.

**“Children in Recycling”** — the greatest majority of children recycling waste materials do not live on the street but live with families. Most work on the street to collect materials but some work in junkyards or at home sorting and cleaning recyclable materials.

Therefore — not all street children do recycling and not all children in recycling are street children!
Where They Come From and Where They Work

In Kathmandu, many of the most visible children in recycling are “street children” living on the streets. They often spend their days and nights begging around the tourist hubs and are heavily engaged in substance abuse with glue sniffing being common. These children also occasionally work in recycling but most of their earnings are generated from begging. Children living with their families in urban slums along the rivers and road edges often scavenge with parents or siblings in groups checking road edges and dumping sites. As waste management improves they are often found working at night when rubbish is dropped to go through it for recyclables before early morning collection. Others come from poor dysfunctional families and spend most of the day outside their homes working in recycling. Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN), a partner in the Brighter Futures program and Child Protection Centers and Services estimated that there were between 800 to 1100 street children in the Kathmandu Valley alone in 2007. NGOs estimate that every year around 500 new children enter the streets of Kathmandu from different districts of Nepal. In Kathmandu Valley, most of the children in recycling have migrated in from neighboring districts such as Nuwakot, Makawanpur, Kavre, Dolkha, Sindhupalchok and Dhading.

The Brighter Futures program identified and worked with 1,760 children actually engaged in recycling work over the past eight years. Most of the children who were found doing recycling work in Kathmandu came from poor rural areas, particularly the hilly districts with 96% of the children from hill districts and 3% children from the Terai plains. In the Terai, however, most came from poor settlements within the districts or nearby districts with some from India. In Parsa, most children working in recycling came from the same district and only few had migrated into Parsa from Sarpali district along with their family. In the Terai districts more girls than boys are engaged in recycling with most coming from the Madhesi community. In Dhanusha, most of the children who work in this sector live with their families while spending their day recycling garbage but both Madeshi and children who have migrated with families from the neighboring hill districts of Sindhuli and Udayapur are involved. In Jhapa and Morang, the children involved were found to have come mainly from the same districts.
Recycling Waste Materials to Survive or to Help the Family Survive

Children from the recycling sector have many stories about how they came to be in recycling. Most of the children of this sector belong to poor and marginalized groups and have landless families squatting on public land. They are sent by their families on to the street in search of recyclables to help support the family.

Others have fled their homes due to domestic violence or alcoholism or conflicts with a parent or stepparent or teachers. The loss of a parent or the introduction of a stepparent can have a significant impact on child, as Nepalese culture does not favor the adoption of stepchildren, and many stepparents may see these children of a previous marriage as a hindrance or threat to their own children. Some have been abandoned or orphaned. Others leave in search of adventure or dissatisfaction with village life.

Recycling requires few skills and instant cash is paid for materials. Junkyard owners are also often willing to provide small advances to children to encourage them to keep working when materials are scarce. Children are then attracted to work in this sector as there are no formalities to get work and even the smallest quantities of recyclables can be sold to survive. Relative to many other jobs good money can be earned with children often reported earning up to Rs.700 in a day. Many street children live day to day and quickly go through this money and spend a good percent on cigarettes, glue to sniff, drugs or alcohol. Children in families are less likely to even see the money as parents sell the goods and their labor contributes to a family livelihood.

"I could not tolerate the behavior of my stepmother so I came here". says Bidur.

Bidur now 14 was born in Udayapur district, lost his mother when he was five. Later on, his father got remarried. In the beginning, his stepmother treated him well but after one year she had a baby of her own and he felt she stopped caring for him after that. Bidur then moved to Dhanusha.
Working Conditions and Hazards

Most children doing recycling work all year round, often in the early morning and late evening, when most people dispose of their garbage. The children usually work at least six hours per day to survive, and earn an average of Rs.50-300 per day. In the monsoon season, when materials get wet and dirty, recycling proves difficult and unprofitable. In addition to hunger, a number of children in the sector are also exposed to hazardous working conditions and fall sick due to exposure to contaminants, cold, or due to wounds inflicted by sharp glass or metal objects. Lack of money draws these children to either borrowing money from junkyards, which puts them in a ‘bonded’ labor situation, or has them resort to begging or petty crime such as stealing or pick pocketing to survive.

The numbers of recycling children in Nepal are relatively small compared to other child labor sectors. The Brighter Futures partner’s district estimates suggest that there are probably fewer than 2000 children doing this work nationwide at any one time. However the work itself is seen as distasteful and involves serious health risks. The children that live on the streets often have very poor hygiene and are unwelcome in government clinics and so are more likely to fall ill due to lack of care. Often a reason children are willing to leave the street and enter NGO shelters and rehabilitation centers is that they get sick and need care.

In addition, the prejudice and attitudes of society towards children and adults involved in this work result in discrimination and harassment. Of the children actually found doing recycling work by Brighter Futures partners more than 60% of the recycling children belong to the Dalit or the 'untouchable' community compared with approximately 17% of Dalit population in Nepal. This results in dual discrimination often closing them off from access to vital child protection services. There is also particular concern amongst the public at the perceived link between street children and criminal behavior. Many of the children resent being called “khate,” a derogatory name often used to encompass both street children and recyclers.
As a result many end up being sexually abused, using drugs or engaging in other high risk behavior such as comfort sex to escape or cope with the hardships and life they lead. A study of children (CPCS 2007) on Kathmandu streets found 80% had substance abuse including abuse of hard drugs. The children also experience serious verbal and physical abuse from the general public, security services, others living and working on the streets or from relatives or junkyard staff. Sexual abuse is also common with 40% being found to have been sexually abused by other male street children but also by adult Nepalis and foreigners. Many report to NFE facilitators that they are sexually active. Several NGO partners know of children who have become HIV positive as a result of intravenous drug use, sexual abuse or other high risk behavior such as unsafe sex.

Education for Children In Recycling

The Brighter Future Program began working with children in recycling in 2002. Baseline surveys were conducted annually and in all, 2,980 children were identified as doing recycling work. Of these, 1,760 children (576 girls and 1,184 boys) were prioritized for support through education. Of the recycling children identified in the recycling sector, 23% were Dalit, 22% were Janajati, 19% Brahman/Chhetri, 9% Terai caste and 9% Muslim. The Brahman/Chhetri beneficiaries represent the poorest families of these castes. In total, there are more boys than girls engaged in recycling (33% are girls and 67% are boys). At night, boys usually sleep on the streets while girls live in rented housing or in slum dwellings.
The youngest and most needy children in the most difficult circumstances were prioritized for support. Most were in the 10-14 age range and most of the children in this group were identified as ‘runaways’. Both the “runaways” and those with family, had started to work between the ages of 10-14 years. Only 12% of the children supported were over 14 years of age, and all lived on the street with no adult supervision, and were found to be involved in varied criminal activities. On the other hand, younger runaways were forced to beg due to lack of food and money. The surveys were conducted in all 28 target districts and found that most children in recycling were located in and around the Kathmandu Valley, and in Chitwan, Kaski, Makwanpur, Morang, Parsa, Jhapa, and Dhanusha districts. Many of the children had moved from neighboring districts to urban areas in search of a better life, failing which they were forced them to live and work in the city streets. The majority, 78% of the children involved in the recycling, were illiterate. The rest were literate, having received some formal education, and/or dropped-out of school. Of the children, 61% came from families who were unemployed or relied on the income from recycling to survive, while 30% came from families who earned daily wages. About 6% of these children had families involved in some form of agriculture work, while close to 2% had parents running a small business such as footpath vending. Only 1% of the children had families employed in the service sector. Most of the children either lived in the slum areas with their families, lived on the streets on their own, or with other relatives or in shelters.

Many of the children first needed nonformal education followed but scholarships to attend school or vocational training. After participating in educational activities more than one third joined school with small numbers going on to vocational training. Many decided to return to their families often in villages in other districts. Most children were able to leave hazardous recycling work within a year of joining the educational program.
In all, Brighter Futures partners identified and supported 1,760 children with educational services. Most children needed support for nonformal education followed by a scholarship to attend formal school or vocational training. While there were many older children in need of vocational training the youngest children doing recycling work were prioritized resulting in many more being in nonformal education or formal school.

Nonformal Education

With 78% of the children identified doing recycling work being illiterate, some form of nonformal education was essential. In addition, even those children that had been in school often needed to be in nonformal education (NFE) classes for socialization and to re-engage with education in preparation for a return to school or vocational education. The program gave priority to the youngest child workers, hence most children identified and enrolled were too young for vocational education.

Children in recycling often live very unstructured lives and are initially reluctant to join classes with rigid class times or curriculums. As a result approaches using flexible curriculum were found to be most appropriate. Initially the government’s Naulo Behani curriculum was used but the content was not found to be suitable. As a result more relevant content for working children including those in recycling was built in to the flexible modular curriculum Jeevan Shiksha that World Education developed. A small number of girls attended Girls Access to Education (GATE) classes using Lalima– a health focused curriculum. Many of these girls were from conservative Muslim or Terai communities and these girls only classes were most appropriate and met their needs.
Jeevan Shiksha – A relevant modular curriculum

Two delivery models were used with children in recycling using the Jeevan Shiksha modular curriculum. This curriculum can be used in a multi-level and multi-grade approach and the content is specifically tailored for learners who are engaged in exploitative forms of child labor. The NFE modular curriculum covered issues related to health and safety hazards involved in recycling work and was of immediate relevance and benefit to these children. Learners can choose which modules they want to study at each level depending on their ability and interests. Children in the program found they needed the nonformal education classes to develop their basic literacy skills before continuing to school enrollment or vocational training. The curriculum was appropriate both for children who had never attended school as well as school drop-outs. In some locations where numbers were small regular classes were held where in locations with larger numbers of children an Open Learning Centre approach was used which could stay open for longer hours with learners coming at times more convenient for them.

Regular Class Sessions

Non-formal education classes were held on a regular class schedule using the Jeevan Shiksha curriculum. In all 579 children participated in these regular class sessions.
Most successful approaches:

- **Community orientation prior to starting the classes**—Community members became aware about the program’s objectives and aims. During the community orientation program, the NGO staff oriented the parents about the class facilities, duration and the roles and responsibilities of the program staff. It helped them to understand the program and encouraged them to be more involved.

- **Formation of Class Management Committee (CMC)**—The members of the CMCs are parents of learners and these groups were formed during the orientation program. The CMCs were extremely valuable for the benefit of class management and regularity. The children working in recycling are often absent from classes as they work at nights and therefore it was important to involve the CMC members in regulating the participation. The CMCs held monthly meetings with the class facilitators in which they discussed the participants’ attendance, major achievements and any problems occurred during that month.

- **Linkage and coordination with ILO partners for extra curricular/recreational activities**—ILO provided supplementary services to children working in recycling who attended the NFE classes in Biratnagar, Mahendranagar, Hetauda, Narayanghat and Pokhara. These services included health check-ups and recreational activities for the children. These additional services helped to encourage the children to attend the classes regularly.

- **Periodic test/exam helps the children to be regular in the class**—The Jeevan Shiksha package included periodic exams that played a vital role in encouraging the children’s regular attendance in class.

"I’m very happy to be able to read different books in this class. Now I completed the basic level and moved to the intermediate level of my studies. I feel like I completed Grade One. Through the life skills module, I learned about the disadvantage of smoking cigarettes and now I am trying to quit smoking."

* Santosh Tamang, 14 years of age, Makwanpur
Major challenges

- **Two Hour Classes** – Using Jeevan Shiksha in structured classes was hard for the children working in recycling. It was found that they have a short attention span compared to other working children and they cannot sit and concentrate and participate in a classroom for a whole two hours. These children are usually extremely active, talkative and sometimes violent and require a more flexible learning approach.

- **Discrimination among the children** – In some target areas the recycling children were encouraged to join classes with children working in other sectors. The children working in other sectors were often teasing the recycling children, calling them “dirty” even though facilitators worked hard to fully integrate them. This discrimination led to absence and drop-outs from some of these classes.

Lessons learned

- **Development of Child-friendly Materials and Teaching-Learning Methods** – More child-friendly materials that fit these children’s needs should be developed. In addition to reading and writing more recreational activities that promote learning need to be incorporated. Games and tasks that require physical mobility and active/fun learning, dance, song and meditation have all proven useful for enabling these children to learn.

- **Greater Flexibility** – Time flexible and open learning approaches are needed to work successfully with these children as opposed to using a fixed time and materials. These children are often very savvy and street smart and resist using fixed materials as they always want to do new things. They are also already familiar with many of the functional messages provided through NFE curriculums and need to be challenged to expand and learn new things and gain a greater depth of understanding.

- **Some Structure For Transition to School** – Using modular NFE helps with socialization and rebuilds confidence for a return to school. A short bridging period using the government’s flexible schooling package would be useful to prepare children transitioning to formal schools.
Open Learning Center

Based on the lessons learned during the first phase the delivery modality was changed to Open Learning Centres. These Open Learning Centres could be tailored to more specifically meet the learning needs of children working in the recycling sector. The Open Learning Centres still used the Jeevan Shiksha curriculum but in a more open learning environment. The centers opened six days a week for six hours a day. The facilitators were present and helped the students throughout the day, using a child-friendly, multi-level and multi-grade teaching approach. There was also a library corner, playing materials and arts/craft activities. In all 511 children working in recycling participated in nonformal education through the Open Learning Centres (23% of all the supported children in recycling). Open Learning Centres were provided in Pokhara, Biratnagar, Hetauda, Chitwan and Kathmandu.

"After completing the GATE class, I have received scholarship from SYC. Now I am studying in grade five. I would like to complete grade ten but my parents are unable to support me. If I will get continued support from SYC, I would be able to continue my studies".

Kâhoo Satar, 14 years old, Parsa District
Most successful approaches:

- **Community orientation before starting the Open Learning Centers**—The community orientation helped the community members to become aware about the program’s objective and aims. The program staff members explained about the class duration, introduced the class facilitators and explained their roles and responsibilities. This was most effective with slum settlements in Dhanusha, Morang and Parsa districts.

- **Daily Volume of Learners**—As learners visited the centers at different times more than 45-60 participants on average attended sessions in the centers over the six hours they opened. The children participating were also more regular as they could attend at times that suited them.

- **Library corners in the class rooms**—When children were free, they used the library and different study and recreational books. It helped the facilitators to keep the children busy when the center was crowded and contributed to the children’s learning.

- **Role of Recreation**—In addition to providing literacy, numeracy and life skills, the Open Learning Centers also functioned as recreational centers with the children often organized to visit the zoo or picnic sites and participating in weekly extra curricula activities. The children also celebrated international events that are relevant to their reality (e.g. International Child Labor Day, World AIDS Day).

- **Children As Peer Mentors**—The Open Learning Centers facilitators received support from older children who functioned as mentors. These young ‘mentors’ helped the facilitators during the busy hours of the day and they sometimes took the lead on facilitating the class themselves in cases when the facilitators were sick. The mentoring responsibilities helped to develop these children’s confidence and leadership qualities.
**Major Challenges**

- **Difficult to get appropriate venues**— Community members often stigmatize children working in recycling and it is very difficult to convince house owners to rent space for running Open Learning Centers for these children.

- **Cost**— Good Open Learning Centers need to hire staff for longer hours, include library corners and recreational activities and more child-friendly teaching-learning materials. All this adds to the per learner cost compared to more structured NFE classes.

**Lesson learned**

- **Two Facilitators Per Open Learning Centres**: Having only one facilitator in an Open Learning Centre is challenging when dealing with recycling children. To deal with the behavioral and socialization issues these children have, using a multi-level and multi-grade teaching approach and keeping continuous assessment records of each individual participant, is hard for many facilitators. Ideally each Open Learning Centres should have two facilitators.

- **Positive Impacts on Learners Lives**: The children working in recycling who attended the Open Learning Centre have positively changed their behavior and habits around smoking, substance abuse and social manners.
Two Boys - Two NFE Modalities - Two Futures

Ramesh (13) and Sanjaya (12) were working as recyclers in two neighboring districts of Morang and Jhapa. Ramesh worked with his mother whereas Sanjaya, influenced by his friends’ free life took up recycling work without letting his mother know. Sanjaya’s mother works as a domestic worker in four households to support the family. Ramesh and Sanjaya both attended Brighter Futures NFE classes using the Jeevan Shiksha curriculum. Both left recycling and joined school and both are now studying in grade four. Soon after enrolling in school, Ramesh left recycling work, whereas Sanjaya works part-time at a biscuit factory to help his mother who is single parent. Sanjaya is currently earning Rs. 150 per month most of which he gives to his mother and spends some of it to meet his personal needs. Ramesh’s mother is a widow and is staying with her parents and so Ramesh is less burdened with family responsibilities.

Both Ramesh and Sanjaya, as well as their mothers, are keen that they complete their school education. The mothers are committed to bear their educational expenses at any cost, even after the Brighter Futures program ends. Ramesh’s grandfather, Jitendra Paswan thinks poorly of parents who deprive their children of education in the name of poverty but do not hesitate to spend all their money on alcohol and cards. Sita Bihari, Sanjaya’s mother says "education is the only way to make my son’s future bright".

Ramesh and Sanjaya attended nonformal education classes in two different settings. Ramesh was illiterate when he joined the regular classes, run for two hours a day for nine months. Sanjaya was a grade one drop-out when he was enrolled in Open Learning Center. Although younger than Ramesh, Sanjaya seems to be more serious towards his future and he is confident and aware of his responsibilities towards his mother. He has developed confidence. Ramesh is still shy and not as confident.
When comparing the impacts of the different delivery approaches for nonformal education it seems that the Open Learning Center has been more effective in helping Sanjaya develop social skills and confidence. Being open longer and having more activities makes these centers more child friendly creating a greater attraction for such socially excluded children. Flexibility in class time also enabled Sanjaya and his friends to stay in the class for more than two hours.

Both of the children have a clear vision of their future. Ramesh plans to start a teashop and expand it up to be a small restaurant. Sanjaya dreams of moving to Kathmandu or abroad for a well-paid job and if not, start a mechanics workshop/garage in Birtamod (the district’s highway town). Both Ramesh and Sanjaya learned a lot about personal health and hygiene, and the benefits of saving even from a small income. They both say they are aware of the bad effects of smoking and drug use and committed not to smoke or use drugs. Sanjaya says that for now his only ambition is to get education. Sanjaya says his experience in recycling has taught him that “Education is the only thing that no one can take from me. Everything else can be taken or lost.”
Scholarship for School Support

A few children were directly enrolled in school but most children first needed to attend nonformal education classes. In all, 703 (32%) of children working in recycling received in-kind scholarships. Most of the children were enrolled in grades four and five. Before joining the Brighter Futures program the majority were illiterate and after 9 months to a year were ready to enroll in school. The scholarship provided in-kind support in the form of school uniforms, school bags, stationary and school fees (if needed).

Most of the school support beneficiaries were in Biratnagar, Janakpur, Birgunj and Pokhara. These children were living with their families in urban slum areas, many of them migrant families who moved permanently to these urban areas. It is hard to retain the children in the school due to the extreme poor conditions of the families and the loss of earning due to the children’s school enrollment. The girls in Janakpur, Birgunj and Biratnagar often dropout of school when they are married off on reaching puberty.

In case of the Kathmandu Valley, Narayanghat, Butwal and Hetauda, the majority of children working in recycling are young unaccompanied migrants from other districts or rural VDCs. It was more difficult to keep these children in one place for long time and many returned home or moved away. Many are known to have returned to their families and to school but tracking them is difficult when they come from so many scattered hill communities.

Most successful approaches

- **In-kind Materials** - The in-kind support approach has proved effective as the school materials were handed directly to the children and not misused by them or any other family members.
Major Challenges

- **Linkages with government supported scholarship program**—The government provides scholarships to marginalized Dalit children and girls on a quota system. The NGO partners have been trying to link the program beneficiaries with these scholarships but due to the specific criteria and policies used by the government few have been successful. Often distribution does not follow the criteria, the beneficiaries are ineligible or insufficient scholarships are provided to the school.

- **Attitude of teachers and other children towards former child recyclers**—Some teachers and other children tend to stigmatize children that did recycling or whose families do recycling work, who enroll in schools and treat them poorly in the classroom, calling them “Khate”. This behavior pushes the children out of school and in many cases the program staff members need to intervene and try to positively influence these attitudes.

- **Parent awareness**—Most parents find it difficult to handle the lost family income when children enroll in school. Some parents push their children to dropout of school and return to their work and therefore program staff need to work more closely with the parents in emphasizing the value of education for the children and their families. More alternative family income generation efforts are needed.

Lessons learned

- **Orientation for Teachers**—Prior to school enrollment, an orientation on integrating former working children into the school classroom is needed.

- **Long-term commitment**—Scholarships for school enrollment should be provided to children working in recycling for at least five years. One-year support is not sufficient for mainstreaming these children into the education system and without constant follow-up and support there is a high risk of these children dropping out.
Vocational Training

The main objective of the vocational training was to provide children working in recycling the opportunity to develop skills for work in other safer occupations in order to be able to leave their current hazardous work. The majority of children working in recycling are from migrant families who are under 14, the minimum age for full time work. So as not to encourage minors to work before the legal working age, vocational training was only provided for those already over 14 or those that would turn 14 before the end of their training. As a result only a small number of children were enrolled in vocational activities (3%) and most had already attended nonformal education before joining the classes.

NGOs started by using the Life and Work Planning package which is a self-guided career planning package with the children. Using this package and doing their own research the children themselves were responsible for selecting their preferred vocational skill. The trainings were selected based on the market needs assessment, resources and the capacity of participants. Training was provided for house wiring, plumbing, candle making, motorbike repair, restaurant cook, tailoring, gardening, bangle and handcrafts, paper craft, liquid soap making, and driving.

Most successful approaches

- **Use of Career Counseling Tool**—children working in the recycling sector are usually very ambitious. Before starting the vocational and apprenticeship, children use the career planning package that helps and guides them in choosing an appropriate job. Before starting the training, the children were drawn to appealing jobs with often limited future livelihood prospects. After using the package and receiving the career counseling, they were convinced to participate in more practical skills training that were more appropriate to their age, needs and local market.
Challenges

- **Basic literacy level**—For house wiring (electrical assistant) training, children attended the six-month course. They had difficulty understanding the names of all the instruments and tools.

- **Attitude of trainer**—It is very difficult to adjust recycling children as apprentices because trainers were not ready to keep them in their workplace. They often had misconceptions about the children and were worried that they might steal or break their instrument and tools. Despite this apprenticeships helped many, boys in particular, to gain valuable life and work skills that later helped them secure good employment.

Lessons learned

- **Need for residential rehabilitation facility**—A residential rehabilitation facility is needed for many children working in recycling before starting vocational training as most of these children are migrant workers and they do not have any proper accommodation.
A Step Up For Bikky

Bikky Limbu is a sixteen-year-old boy and is from a large family. His father was a daily laborer while his mother stayed at home and looked after their five children. Due to poverty and family tensions, the father was not able to provide for all the family members. Bikky was sent to Kathmandu to live with his relatives in Satdobato. In Kathmandu, his relatives were unable to cater to Bikky's basic needs and he preferred to spend time with ‘friends’ in the streets rather than live with his relatives. With no work and means of earning any money, Bikky left his relatives’ home to live on the streets of Baneshwor. Once there, he worked collecting and recycling materials in the daytime to make a few rupees, and slept on the streets at night.

An outreach worker from SathSath, a Brighter Futures NGO partner, who worked with other street children in the area convinced Bikky to join the program. First Bikky joined nonformal education classes at an Open Learning Center in Gwarko. He then joined a vocational training in paper craft production. Two years later he has left his previous job and is working full-time preparing paper craft goods.

Bikky says “I am very happy that I was able to participate in the program. I hope that my future life is going in a good direction.”

Trends and Common Strategies to Address Children in Recycling Work

Local NGOs and government agencies are running a number of programs and services that while often focused on street children provide support for children in the recycling industry. Some of these work in several districts while others are focused in just one district. Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN) has been a pioneer in the rehabilitation and family reunification of street children and has provided education support and vocational skill training to street children. Other organizations working directly with street children for their socialization and social re-integration in Kathmandu include Child Protection Center (CPCS), Child Welfare Society (CWS), and Sath-Sath.
Outside Kathmandu Under Privileged Children Association (UPCA) Dhara, Child Protection Centre Children Contact Center (CCC) Butwal and Youth Club of Narayanganj (YCN) in Chitwan are supporting children. Mostly, these NGOs provide contact center facilities, shelter, and education services to these children. Some NGOs are also able to provide health service facilities. Many children have benefited from services such as literacy classes, awareness raising activities and guardianship. The children engaged in recycling also benefit from efforts to address poverty and the conditions in the slum settlements. One major organization providing services, including education, in slums, is Lumanti.

The Nepal government has assisted this work with the Child Welfare Boards by building capacity to outreach workers and conducting awareness campaigns. The government has also formed Child Welfare Boards in each district which have supported awareness raising activities through NGOs. UNICEF has also addressed the issue of street children by working through local NGO partners, by focusing on education and vocational training. In 2002, other local organizations working with street children formed a network entitled "Street Net" to address the emerging problems of street children in a more focused and consolidated manner by working directly with street children for their socialization and social re-integration. Despite these activities comprehensive efforts are needed to completely withdraw children working in the recycling sector from hazardous work and prevent them being replaced with new children.
NGOs often perceive boys to be more ‘vulnerable’ within recycling as culturally boys are seen as being more independent, headstrong, and likely to get involved in high risk behavior or criminal activities. On the other hand, girls involved are more likely to be living and working with families and while exposed to health hazards are less at risk in comparison. In interviews with children in the Brighter Futures program, NGO partners identified specific trends in geographic regions. Children involved with recycling outside Kathmandu valley are younger and more fall between 10-13 years of age. The age range of street children in the Kathmandu valley is older and many more are 14-16. NGO staff suspect that as children engaged in recycling in Kathmandu tend to be migrants from rural areas and either migrate on their own or with other family members they are more likely to be older. The children outside the valley live with their families while being engaged in this work and therefore start at a younger age. The largest numbers of children working in this sector belonged to the poorer Dalit caste groups in the Terai whereas in Kathmandu most belonged to ethnic minority Janajati communities.

Geographic Regions

Eastern Cluster (Jhapa, Morang, Sunsari, Udayapur and Dhanusha)

In all, 293 children working in recycling were enrolled in the Brighter Futures program in the eastern cluster (141 girls and 152 boys). The majority of children working in recycling in the eastern cluster were living with their families and all were from the same district. In terms of ethnicity, 77 (26%) were Terai caste, 42 (14%) Dalit, 26 (9%) Brahman/Chhetri and 18 (6%) were Janajati. In terms of age breakdown, the majority (93%) were in the 10-14 age range.

Specific challenges and lessons learned

- Most of the children living with family in the urban slum areas need family support, as well as the school support program, in order to continue their education.
- Parent orientation programs (especially the focus on child rights, importance of education and role of parents) are needed for parents of recycling children.
Central Cluster ( Parsa, Makwanpur and Chitwan)

In all, 305 children working in recycling were enrolled in the central cluster (92 girls and 213 boys). The representation of girls and boys was different in comparison to enrollment in the eastern cluster. District wise, different trends were found in central cluster. In Parsa district, the majority of recycling children were living with parents, and are from the same district. Some of the children had migrated from neighboring districts. In Makawanpur and Chitwan, most of the children had migrated from other districts. Some of the children in Makawanpur and Chitwan had migrated from the Kathmandu Valley and most of them are either living with friends or sleeping in the streets. As for the children’s ethnicity; 108 (35%) were Dalit, 64 (21%) Janajati, 54 (18%) Terai caste and 52 (17%) Brahman/Chettri. In terms of the age 79% were in the 10-14 age range and 17% were 14 and above.

**Specific challenges and lessons learned**

- Enrolled children in this region require mixed types of programs such as; family support and access to residential rehabilitation centers (though none exists in Makawanpur).
- Children who have migrated from other districts require psychosocial counseling, transit home facility and life skill training.
- Some of the children in this cluster show an interest in returning home and more emphasis on family reunification is required.
Western Cluster (Kaski and Rupandehi)

In all, 282 children working in the recycling sector were enrolled in the western cluster. Of the children beneficiaries found in western cluster 78 were girls and 204 boys. In Kaski, the majority of children working in recycling have migrated from rural areas of the district and some of them are from the slum areas of Pokhara sub-metropolitan city. Children from eastern hills and Terai have migrated to Pokhara and started recycling. Similarly, in Rupadehi, most of the children are from the same district and some have migrated from neighboring hill districts. In terms of ethnic breakdown, 149 (53%) were Dalit, 62 (22%) Brahman/Chetri, 42 (15%) Janajati and 8(3%) are Muslim. As for the age of beneficiaries, the majority, 223 (79%) were in the 10-14 age range.

Specific challenges and lessons learned

- **NGOs With Erratic Support** – The NGOs working with street children and those in recycling in these districts are not as well supported as those in the valley and rely heavily on volunteers. This reduced their effectiveness to consistently provide services.

Valley Cluster

The greatest concentrations of children working in recycling were enrolled in Kathmandu Valley with 795 children (220 girls and 575 boys) supported. Kathmandu is a major destination for work, study and business for young migrant youth arriving from the rural areas. Many children who arrive end up living in the streets and working in the recycling sector. There is also a relatively large number of girls who are staying with their families in the slum areas. In terms of ethnic breakdown; 248 (31%) were Janajati, 185 (23%) Brahman/Chetri, 88 (11%) Dalit, 57 (7%) Newar and 14 (2%) Terai Castes. In comparison with other districts there were a relatively large percentage of children from high castes and ethnic groups. This is an indication that many of the children that live in the streets of Kathmandu Valley are from middle-class families who for some reason (drugs, abuse or domestic violence, separation of parents) are now living in the streets and working in recycling. As for the age breakdown, the majority 544 (68%) are in the 10-14 age range and 195 (25%) were 14 and above. Substance abuse is a bigger issue in Kathmandu with even young children sniffing glue.
The majority of the children working in recycling participated in NFE program because most of them were illiterate. After completing the NFE, only few children went on to receive the scholarship for schools or vocational training. Most of the children leave the streets within a year or two but a few hardcore are fiercely independent and refuse and are often engaged in criminal activities such as: drugs, trafficking, and petty crime.

Specific challenges and lessons learned

- **Residential facilities**— Providing or referring the children to complementary residential support when no other option is available helps to increase the success rate.

- **Comprehensive Case Management**— Comprehensive case management is needed that includes socialization, residential facilities, family reunification, family support psychosocial counseling and vocational training.

- **Apprenticeships**— Most employers do not trust children working in recycling and do not want to hire them as apprentices. Efforts targeting employers with awareness campaigns on issues related to child labor and providing them with incentives to encourage hiring these children are needed.
A Successful Entrepreneur

Rupak Shrestha lives in Chagal, Lalitpur. When Rupak was growing up, his family was well respected and rich with a big house in Dilli Bazaar. However, Rupak’s father was an alcoholic and spent most of his money on gambling and drinks. He gambled away their home once drunk, and was later afflicted by cancer. After his death, the family was left with no means of income. Rupak’s mother did start to work, but was not able to feed the family of five. As a result Rupak and his brother took to earning money from kabad (recycling).

Rupak worked hard at recycling and the money he earned from the “kabadi” yard he gave his mother for their rent. His two little brothers were able to stay in school, while his older brother married and moved out.

SathSath, linked Rupak first to nonformal education under the Brighter Futures program when he was sixteen. Later he participated in trainings using the Street-Kids Business Toolkit. SathSath was supported to translate and pilot using this by UNICEF. Rupak then started his own street business, making momos, with the support of SathSath. Today he earns close to Rs. 500 to 800 a day from this business.

Rupak is happy now and says “Nowadays I am very happy because I have my own business and from that business I am able to support my family. If SathSath had not helped me I would still be working in kabadi.”
Lessons Learned

- **Empowerment** – Interviews with children highlighted that they valued education and the opportunity to access school and/or other trainings. They appreciated the books that were provided to them and felt empowered by the information imparted to them regarding their health and safety.

- **Need For Comprehensive Services** – Although providing NFE training to children in the recycling sector was seen as useful and motivated children to learn and progress, on its own it was not sufficient in order to withdraw them from street work. Most of the children want to earn money immediately and the parents too also applied pressure on them to support the household. The children who attended the NFE classes and three months vocational training felt that they needed longer school support and advanced skills training in order to gain more expertise in their vocation, and a need to be actively linked to practical vocational training, or get re-enrolled in formal school to sustain the gains.
Further Schooling Followed By Vocational Training— School support especially where children still live in their own communities followed by vocational/apprenticeships were seen as the most successful strategy to withdraw these children from this exploitative occupation.

Self-employment - Self-employment as a vocational alternative was not as effective a strategy to address the special needs of recycling children as they were often too young and lacked the skills to form a group business with little or no peer trust and plenty of skirmishes to go around.

Facilitator Skills— The children working in recycling are usually seem as extremely difficult to reach, unruly and very hard to control. The facilitators usually found it very difficult to handle these children and stated a need to acquire more specific professional skills for handling them. Also, flexible interventions such as in Open Learning Centres instead of a time-bound structured learning class was seen as a better alternates to structured classes.

Rehabilitation center— When needed, residential rehabilitation facility should be provided to children before and during the provision of educational services.
Good Riddance to Rubbish

Sonam Tamang left the recycling business behind for an unexpected passion in theater, supported by a not for profit, and World Education partner organization, Sath Sath. Partnering with an organization that focuses strictly on street children has aided the success of World Education’s interventions with a complex group of kids. Street children are very mobile, and accustomed to a lot of freedom—from routine or responsibility—and are also generally more in control of their income. It takes time and trust to pry them off the streets. Sath Sath’s approach relies on outreach workers building a rapport with the children in their environment. The children come to Sath Sath out of their own volition. At that time, Sath Sath assess skills, interests, and education to re-enroll the younger ones in school, and offer the older ones training in a suitable trade. Through support from World Education’s Brighter Futures II program, Sonam took nonformal education classes and is receiving support to stay in school, and while at Sath Sath, he pursues his interest in theater. Says Sonam, “On the street we earned, but had no care for tomorrow. At Sath Sath, we learn to make a future.”
World Education Brighter Futures partner NGOs providing services for children working in recycling industry.

- SathSath
- SAATHI
- Community Women Development Centre (CWDC)
- Narayanghat Youth Club (NYC)
- Child Contact Centre (CCC)
- Pokhara Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI)
- Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN)
- Suryodaya Youth Club (SYC)
- Community Family Welfare Association (CFWA)
- Nari Bikash Sangh (NBS)
- SAHARA Nepal
- Gramin Bikash Manch (GBM)

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 through education. Over eight years the project has provided educational and other opportunities for 43,291 children working in the worst forms of child labor in Nepal and 72,140 children at risk.

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