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Summary and Key Recommendations of Report on Social Diversity and Learning Achievement

The Status of Primary Education in Rural Bihar

Summary

This report is an outcome of a study undertaken by Deshkal Society in two districts of Bihar, Gaya and Katihar, with the intention of tracking the present primary education situation in rural Bihar, India in view of large, recent increases in enrolment numbers. The increase which has mainly been attributed to first generation learners from marginalised communities has also created socially diverse classrooms. Hence, the report's main concern is how children from different social categories are performing in schools, and what factors may be

associated for their current learning achievements.

While the enlarged enrolment is obviously good news for the literacy scene in the country, this is not without its concerns for education quality and equitable outreach. According to DISE data, in 2002-03 the number of enrolment for class I to V was 99,91,379 and by 2012-13 the number increased to 1,32,98,802. Despite efforts to keep up with the needs of the enlarged enrolment there is a shortfall of classrooms and well trained teachers.

The report has revealed appalling depths of poor reading level of children. Worryingly, the poorer and socially deprived sections have been badly affected. Mathematics provides an equally sorry picture.



Objective of the study

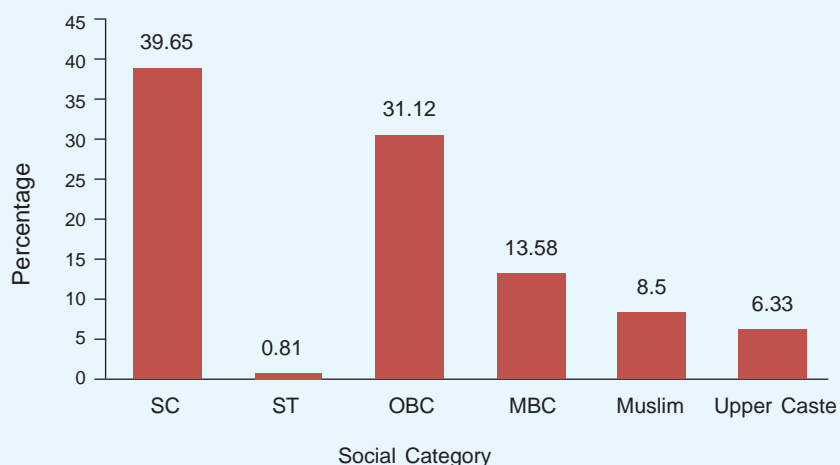
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Geographical coverage and research design

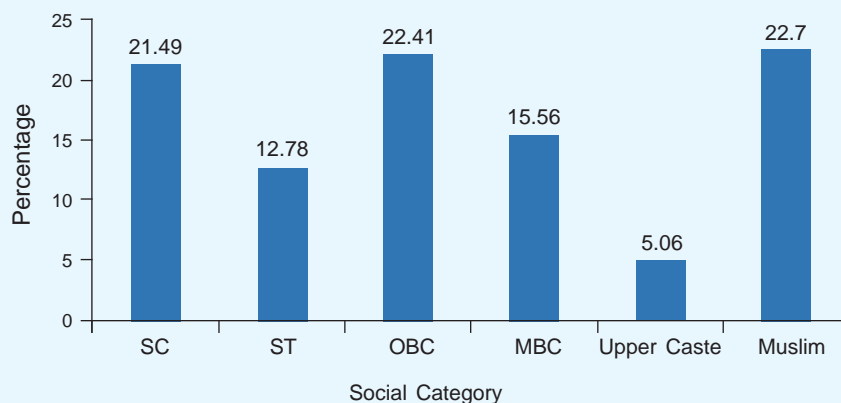
Districts Gaya and Katihar of the state were selected for the data collection for the report. The Scheduled Castes constitute 30% of the total population in District Gaya. On the other hand, district Katihar has 42.52% Muslim population. District Katihar also has 5.86% of Scheduled Tribe population, which is relatively higher vis-à-vis other major districts of Bihar.

The research design for the report employed a multi-pronged data collection process. It consisted of child's social profile survey questionnaire and learning achievement test tools for students (4,229 students in Gaya and 5,231 students in Katihar), focus groups discussions, in-depth interviews and classroom observations, involving all relevant stakeholders, i.e. parents, children, teachers, tola

Percentage of Children by Social Category (Gaya)



Percentage of Children by Social Category (Katihar)



sevak, CRC/BRC coordinators, district and block level education officials, trainers, villagers, community leaders, private school teachers and students. Collection of all the data has employed a combined balance of quantitative and qualitative research methods. The process of qualitative data collection was executed after the findings of quantitative data had emerged, and this largely determined the focus and course of the former data collection process.

Parents' education level

This report reiterates the well known finding that parents' educational level influences children's educational achievement. It provides ample data of percentages of children by social category and educational level of both parents separately. That is, the report tells us, what percentage of children have fathers or mothers who have completed primary education or not, or reached other levels. This indicates those who are first generation learners and may have special learning support needs. Large sections of parents in this sample had low or no-education. The report indicates that in both districts of Katihar and Gaya, high percent of fathers respectively from Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Muslim communities were deprived of any kind of schooling and even higher percentages of mothers respectively from Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Muslim communities did not receive any school education either.

Economic background of family, vulnerability and migration

The level of family income as well as the family's social standing has been found to be interlinked. About 60% of households in the sample do not have any land. This is overlapped with socially deprived groups. About 80% of Scheduled Castes and slightly less Scheduled Tribes households do not have any land in Gaya and Katihar.

Over 60% Muslim households are also without any land ownership in Katihar. Those who own land may actually own very small pieces of land so that they are not self sufficient. The report finds that large proportions of both mothers and fathers take up casual labour in both districts. If those taking up casual labour are also those who do not own much land, this group would be economically very vulnerable.

Migration

The pattern of migration along with family income impacts the scheme of school enrolment and attendance of children. Though it appears that only small sections of children migrate, many parents appear to leave their native place, leaving behind their

children. About 38% Muslim and about 35% MBC parents in Gaya migrate without their children. Even if children do not migrate, it is very likely that their schooling is disrupted if the parents move out of the habitation.

Status of children's learning

An achievement survey is usually undertaken in order to check the health of the system rather than to check the learning level of individual children in the system. Though the individual child's achievement may also be tracked – but that is not the purpose of an achievement survey.

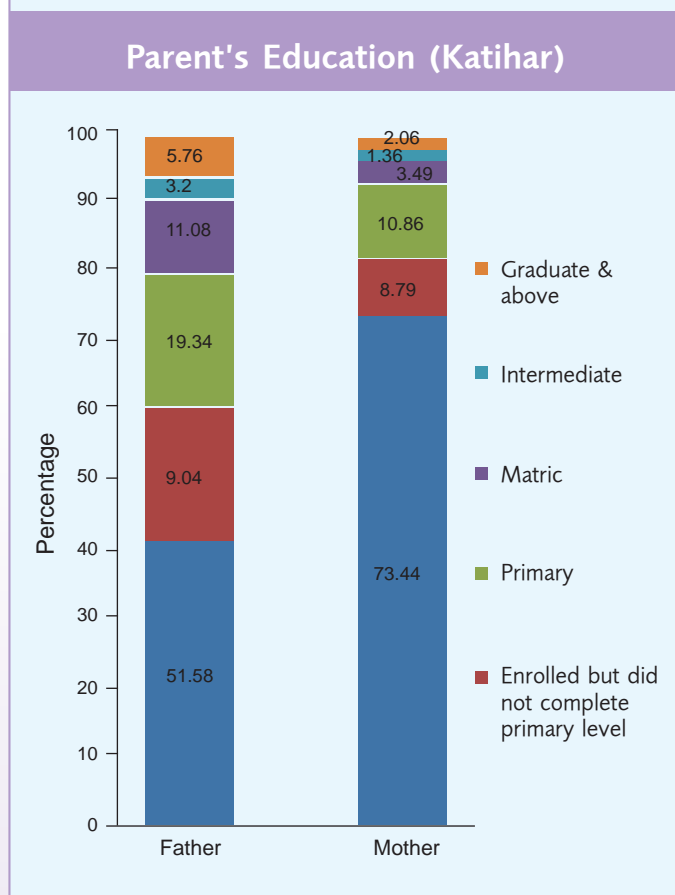
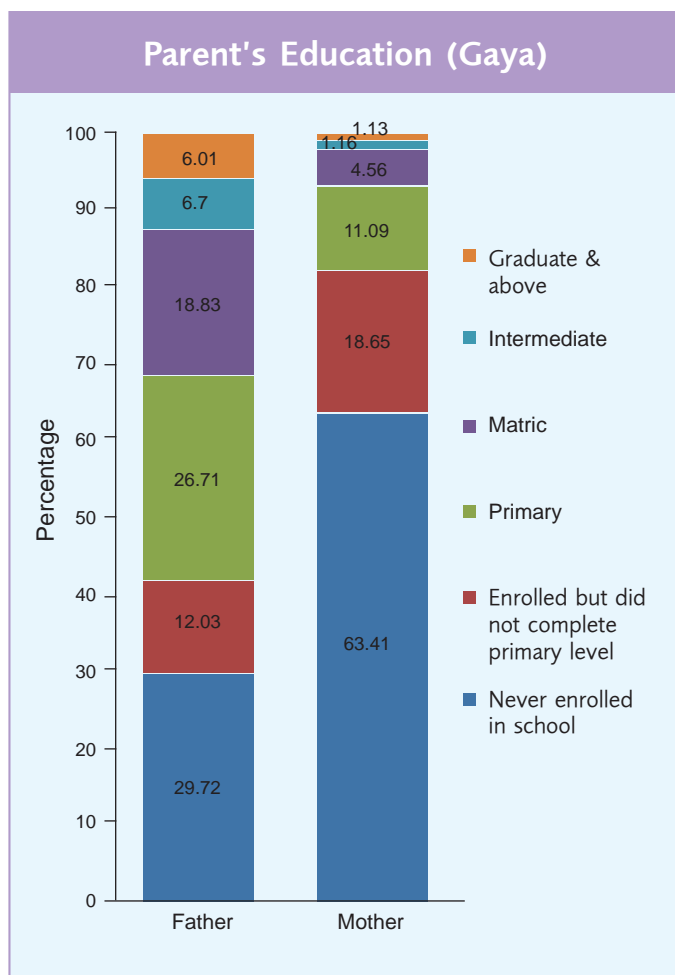
The report has revealed appalling depths of poor reading and arithmetic level of children as reflected in following tables.

Reading level (Hindi) of children of grades I to V

Grade	Can read nothing		Can read letters		Can read words		Can read simple paragraph		Can read small story	
	Gaya	Katihar	Gaya	Katihar	Gaya	Katihar	Gaya	Katihar	Gaya	Katihar
Class I	677 (69.29%)	531 (58.35%)	253 (25.90%)	322 (35.38%)	32 (3.28%)	41 (4.51%)	12 (1.23%)	11 (1.21%)	3 (0.31%)	5 (0.55%)
Class II	294 (36.89%)	326 (37.47%)	320 (40.15%)	383 (44.02%)	105 (13.17%)	80 (9.20%)	46 (5.77%)	49 (5.63%)	32 (4.02%)	32 (3.68%)
Class III	150 (18.12%)	213 (21.69%)	274 (33.09%)	405 (41.24%)	162 (19.57%)	145 (14.77%)	136 (16.43%)	114 (11.61%)	106 (12.80%)	105 (10.69%)
Class IV	62 (8.07%)	140 (12.92%)	150 (19.53%)	340 (31.37%)	129 (16.80%)	167 (15.41%)	187 (24.35%)	198 (18.27%)	240 (31.25%)	239 (22.05%)
Class V	26 (3.78%)	44 (4.40%)	96 (13.95%)	201 (20.12%)	95 (13.81%)	118 (11.81%)	134 (19.48%)	210 (21.02%)	337 (48.98%)	426 (42.64%)
Total	1209 (29.79%)	1254 (25.88%)	1093 (26.93%)	1651 (34.08%)	523 (12.89%)	551 (11.37%)	515 (12.69%)	582 (12.01%)	718 (17.69%)	807 (16.66%)

Arithmetic level of children of grades I to V

Grade	Can Do Nothing		Can Recognise Numbers 1- 9		Can Recognise Numbers 10-99		Can Subtract		Can Divide	
	Gaya	Katihar	Gaya	Katihar	Gaya	Katihar	Gaya	Katihar	Gaya	Katihar
Class I	301 (30.81%)	356 (39.12%)	581 (59.47%)	460 (50.55%)	76 (7.78%)	76 (8.35%)	14 (1.43%)	12(1.32%)	5 (0.51%)	6 (0.66%)
Class II	75 (9.41%)	134 (15.40%)	426 (53.45%)	504 (57.93%)	188 (23.59%)	150 (17.24%)	94 (11.79%)	60 (6.90%)	14 (1.76%)	22 (2.53%)
Class III	31 (3.74%)	52 (5.30%)	298 (35.99%)	450 (45.82%)	239 (28.86%)	257 (26.17%)	169 (20.41%)	147 (14.97%)	91 (10.99%)	76 (7.74%)
Class IV	14 (1.82%)	27 (2.49%)	128 (16.67%)	355 (32.75%)	188 (24.48%)	286 (26.38%)	239 (31.12%)	216 (19.93%)	199 (25.91%)	200 (18.45%)
Class V	5 (0.73%)	6 (0.60%)	77 (11.19%)	144 (14.41%)	117 (17.01%)	248 (24.82)	196 (28.49%)	250 (25.03%)	293 (42.59%)	351 (35.14%)
Total	426 (10.50%)	575 (11.87%)	1510 (37.21%)	1913 (39.48%)	808 (19.91%)	1017 (20.99%)	712 (17.55%)	685 (14.14%)	602 (14.83%)	655 (13.52%)



Mathematics provides an equally sorry picture. Recognition of mathematical numbers poses a problem therefore to expect these children to master the mathematical concepts is unreal. Worryingly, the poorer and socially deprived sections have been badly affected. To make matter further awkward, teachers appear not to be confident in handling the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation method.

Non-encouraging Ambience

The catalogue of predicaments that causes non-encouraging ambience, resulting in poor learning achievements of children is long. These are, among others, inadequate classrooms, adverse Pupil-Teacher Ratio, insufficient teacher education, non-academic distractions of teachers, and lack of cooperation between school and SMC members. The present state of primary education underlines the yawning gap between the aspirations of parents and policy makers on the other hand.

Pedagogic transition

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) and the Bihar Curriculum Framework (BCF) has been part of a pedagogical transition which mainly focuses upon children creating their own knowledge. The transition is directed towards inclusive and student centred classrooms. Unfortunately, this system requires appropriate number of teachers and teachers who are well trained themselves. All curriculum change should be contingent upon the skill upgradation of teachers. This is especially obvious in the teaching of English. A new language cannot be introduced to children by teachers who are themselves not proficient in the language. The report has dwelt at length upon these pedagogic lacunae.

Private teaching arrangement

The continuing problems facing the school system has helped erect the private teaching or coaching structures. The social category-wise aggregated



Social profile such as parents education and occupation status, pattern of migration in the family, availability of private tuition, and ethnic and social background of students will help teachers, education officials and community members to assess and analyse the social factors behind the performance of any or category of students.

data by social class provides important insights. Children from less deprived social category or upper castes attend private tuition more than that of children of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Muslims. In Gaya only 29.27% and 9.09% SC and ST children receive private tuition vis-à-vis 62.03% children from Upper Castes. Their respective percentages in Katihar are 36.31, 38.45 and 61.22. This may directly lead to inequality within classrooms because children from disadvantaged groups are usually first generation learners. Another divide is created because more boys are provided private tuition than girls.

Key Recommendations

The report recommends measures to infuse educational equity in schools that are needed for children primarily from marginalised communities who are first generation learners and do not have learning support at school and home. To this end, the report proposes the following measures, which will initiate and reinforce policies, rules and practices of educational equity, thus, enabling children from socially diverse

backgrounds to excel their learning achievements.

Development of children social profile

The state government has evolved a commendable *Chhatra Pragati Patrak* that takes into consideration the academic progress of the students. The patrak, however, does not place the academic performance of a child in the social and economic context. Social profile such as parents education and occupation status, pattern of migration in the family, availability of private tuition, and ethnic and social background of students will help teachers, education officials and community members to assess and analyse the social factors behind the performance of any or category of students. These added information to *Chhatra Pragati Patrak* will also encourage teachers' effort to acknowledge and respect the individual and communitarian experiences of children, especially of those who are from SC, ST, minority and multilingual communities.

Embracing diversity and community in teacher education

In order to take advantage of the usefulness of the assessment and analysis of children' profiles, it is

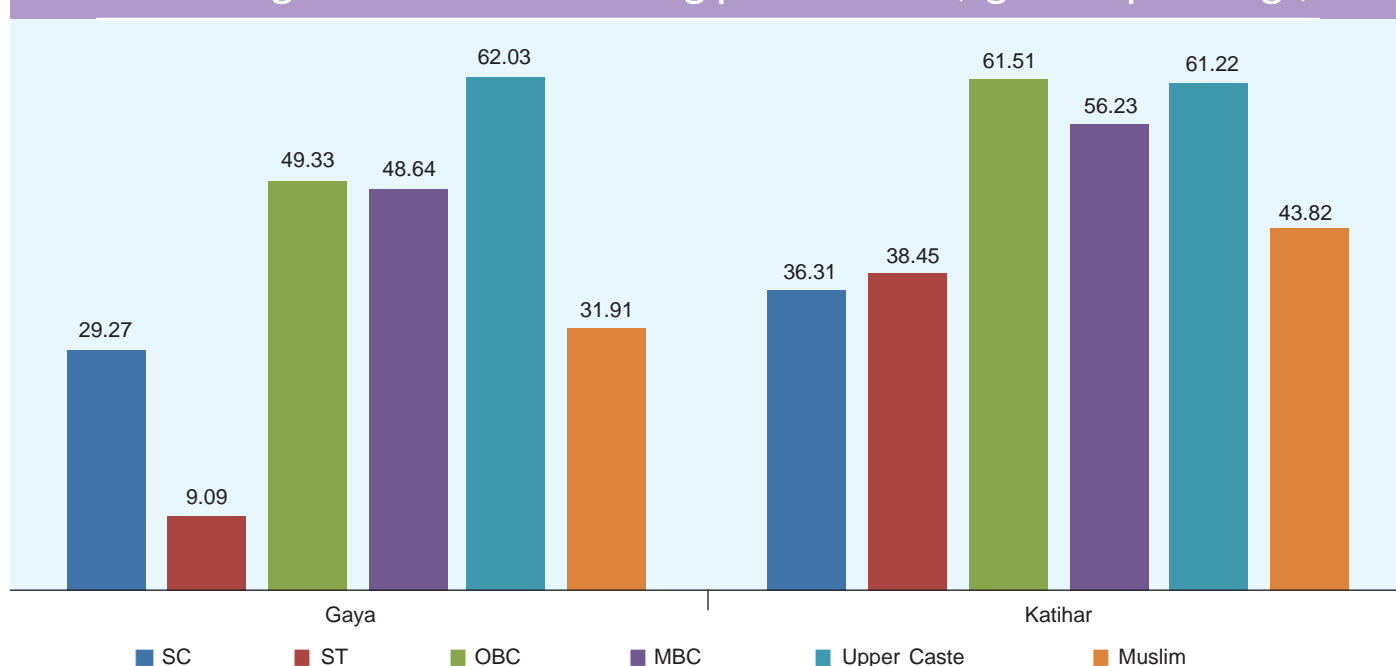
necessary that teachers are trained to face the evolving primary school landscape that has been populated by socially diverse children, many of them first generation learners. Teachers need to be educated about the complexities and skills required in educating such children. Without any academic help available at home first generation learners depend on schools to acquire their learning. Therefore, to ensure level playing field in classrooms teachers need to distinguish between first generation learners and those who are not.

Similarly, Teachers should be given special training to support children who use different dialects/languages in different circumstances. Children should be encouraged and not looked down upon if they are multilingual. Equally, teachers should also sensitise students, who primarily use mainstream language, towards multilingual children.

Extensive training on CCT and CCE process

Both CCT and CCE employ a complex and multi-disciplinary concepts to carry out its implementation. Therefore, teachers should be given much needed trainings on its processes. It is expected that assisted by children profiles and informed training on socially diverse classrooms, teachers

Social categories of children receiving private tuition (figures in percentage)



will appreciate the necessity and contextual relevance of CCT and CCE.

Strengthening the institution of *Tola Sevak*

Only optimum infrastructure and capable teachers may not be enough to bring children from Mahadalit communities to schools. Mostly first generation learners, these children and their parents need motivation to appreciate the importance of education. Hence, for such a community

mobilisation assignment *tola sevaks* require regular and customised training programmes. *Tola sevaks* also have to develop strategies to discourage child labour among school going children. If they undertake remedial teaching sessions for struggling children, they need to be given very specialised and comprehensive training. The remedial teaching may also dissuade Mahadalit parents from engaging private tutors for additional academic support to their children.

Non-discriminatory treatment to Madrasas

Madrasas are often treated as outside of the education system. They are deprived of equitable facilities by the state, be it distribution of textbooks in Urdu or education promotion schemes or any other support mechanism that government schools enjoy. The unjust process creates a two-tier education system, denying the madrasa stakeholders equal citizenry and legitimises discrimination. There

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There must be even handed treatment to the institution of madrasa, and the state education system should remove all unfairness that accords lower priority to madrasas in its routine and promotional programmes.

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Sensitisation and training of SMC members

Learning achievements of children from diverse backgrounds will continue to be undermined until community members, especially SMC members, do not pledge their leadership and ownership of schools. Even appropriately sensitised and trained teachers and *tola sevaks* require the support of SMC members for the dispensing of quality education.

For, the training of SMC members about their roles and responsibilities should be taken up in earnest. However, training for SMC members of marginalised communities, including women, should be made a priority in schools attended by overwhelming number of marginalised children. In addition, there must be appropriate balance between academic and non-academic activities undertaken by SMC members. Members should be encouraged and sensitised towards academic activities that have been largely neglected by them

Independent education systems assessment study

In addition to the departmental monitoring and evaluation systems, an independent education systems assessment study should be periodically carried out. The study should assess and evaluate the support and cooperation workflow among various educational institutions, whether it is School, SMC, CRC/BRC, block/district education offices or PTEC/ DIET/ SCERT, which are critical in improving the learning achievements of children. The assessment and evaluation should locate the gaps and bottlenecks, and suggest the mechanism to remove such hindrances. It should also anticipate the ever evolving primary school scenario and suggest future strategies and work plans to enable primary schools to successfully compete with private educational institutions.

Need for studies from critical and comparative perspectives

The report is aware of the additional research required for this kind of study. A broadened geographical coverage, involving multiple states will bring much needed comparative perspective that underscores both distinctive and common features of respective

primary education programme: its positions of strength and weakness, learning achievement gaps linked to social and economic indicators, related institutional policies and implementation practices, and the location of children from marginalised communities within institutional structures and their intervention strategies.

Besides the above mentioned recommendations arrived at through the key findings of the report, the following steps are critical to support the schools achieve the desired learning level, to provide quality education to children and to infuse educational equity in schools. These are: (1) Provision of optimum infrastructure and teachers that enables and realises principle of "one teacher-one classroom", required pupil-teacher ratio (30:1 for primary and 35:1 for upper primary classes), and adequate availability of classrooms, boundary wall, toilets (especially for girls) and drinking water facilities in the school premises; (2) Improving and strengthening pre-service and in-service teacher training competence, building teacher education capacity at all levels, and developing sympathetic and attuned curriculum that are in sync with the prevalent competency of most

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teachers; (3) Less involvement and distraction of teachers in non-academic programmes and activities, including Mid-day meal programme, education promotion schemes and excessive paper works that are not strictly related with school based academic activities; and (4) Strengthened monitoring and evaluation apparatus of the state education system based on steady and coherent feedback mechanism that goes beyond the format filling exercises and gather information from grassroots stakeholders (e.g. teachers,

parents, community members) by means of face to face contacts.

It is significant that the Government of Bihar, Dept. of Education, its Educational Administration as well as Research and Training institutions of Bihar have been going forward at levels of policies, rules and their implementation to improving the learning environment of the schools and making education inclusive for children with socially diverse backgrounds. It is the need of the hour to address the **critical gaps** and

challenges in the implementations of these policies and provisions in the light of the **key findings** and the recommendations of the report.

It is hoped that these initiated or strengthened steps will improve the classroom performance of socially diverse children, and boost up the learning achievements of school children to an acceptable and satisfactory level.



Deshkal Society, since 1995, has initiated and innovated research, advocacy and grassroots interventions to further the inclusion and equity of marginalised communities in a democratised mainstream society. Issues of social exclusion/inclusion, marginality and diversity in education, land rights and entitlements, and culture and sustainable livelihoods are the main focus where we continue to develop a conceptual understanding of the mainstream discourse and how it has evolved to limit and marginalise the underprivileged communities.

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