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| Danish organization | Changing Stories |
| Title of the intervention | “Learning at Home: Distance Learning Initiative to Minimize Learning Loss Among Public School Students During COVID-19” |
| Partner name(s) | Changing Stories Nepal |
| Amount applied for | 100.000 DKK |
| Country(ies) | Nepal |
| Period (# of months) | 5 months (01.10.21 - 28.02.22) (Flexible) |

1. **Objective and relevance (the world around us)**

* ***What do you want to achieve through the intervention?***

In Nepal, COVID-19 has resulted in a year’s worth of school closures since the pandemic hit in the spring of 2020. Currently, all public schools remain closed following a surge in cases in May 2021. There is still no certainty when they will reopen. When they do, with low vaccination rates and new variants of the virus emerging, there is a high probability that schools will have to close again at a later point in time. In the absence of access to distance learning for students living in rural parts of Nepal, students are missing out on enormous amounts of learning. The ensuring learning gap will be challenging to bridge with public schools already facing a host of other challenges that have resulted in low learning outcomes among its students, even before the pandemic began[[1]](#footnote-1).

The objective of the “Learning at Home: Distance Learning Initiative to Minimize Learning Loss Among Public School Students During COVID-19” intervention is to ensure that public school students in the city of Tulsipur in mid-western Nepal remain actively engaged in learning at home during school closures. Utilizing low-cost and low-fidelity technology to reach students, the intervention will focus on improving literacy (Nepali) and numeracy skills of students.

The main objectives of the intervention are:

* **To minimize learning loss among public school students during school closures**
  + When children are out of school for extended period of time, learning outcomes decline[[2]](#footnote-2). This problem is more severe in rural areas like Tulsipur, where only 5% of students attending public school reported having WIFI access at home[[3]](#footnote-3). When schools reopen teachers in resource-poor environments often do not give sufficient remedial support to students, resulting in the learning gap becoming exacerbated over time. A study conducted in Pakistan showed in four years after the closure, affected students' test scores were on average 1.5 to 2 years behind students who were unaffected[[4]](#footnote-4). In order to minimize learning loss during school closures, there is a need for ongoing academic support for students.
* **To empower local youths:**
  + In this intervention, 30 local youths will act as facilitators for the enrolled students. For most of our facilitators, this is going to be one of their first job experiences. The training and teaching experience they will receive in their role as facilitators, and continuous support from the CS Nepal team, will help them build confidence in themselves and develop their leadership qualities.
* **To build evidence of the effectiveness of distance learning for future use:**
  + The intervention will be evaluated extensively with baseline and endline assessments of students learning levels and gathered in a final impact evaluation report, that we will share with stakeholders, partners, and publish online. The intervention and its effect can serve as a blueprint for other organizations to build on when implementing distance learning initiatives in the future.
* ***Why is the intervention important?***

65.9% population of Nepal is literate[[5]](#footnote-5), which is lower than the global literacy rate in 1976[[6]](#footnote-6). Over the past decades, there has been vast improvements in access to education for children across the world. However, as experience has proven, schooling does not always lead to learning. A World Bank Study concludes that only 10% of kids in low-income countries can read a text by the age of 12. The same number for high-income countries is 90%[[7]](#footnote-7). The United Nations enlist access to inclusive and equitable quality education as an important component of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG-4)[[8]](#footnote-8). If we fail to act now, when schools reopen, students will fall behind in their classes, lose interest in education and eventually drop out of school. In Nepal, the dropout rate for primary level students (Grade 1 to 5) is significantly higher at 19%[[9]](#footnote-9).

The first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic that hit in the spring of 2020, and the school closures that ensued, resulted in students losing out on a total of eight months of learning. In May 2021, a surge in cases in Nepal forced the Government of Nepal to once again close all educational institutions across the country. The school closures will inevitably exacerbate the existing challenges, why intervention is needed. Most families outside Kathmandu do not have access to any form of distance learning. A study carried out in Tulsipur municipality, where the project will take place, showed that only 5% of students enrolled in the 75 public schools in and around Tulsipur had access to reliable internet at home[[10]](#footnote-10). Since most families have access to either a regular phone or a smartphone a cost-effective alternative is to reach students through texts and phone calls. A comprehensive study of a distance learning initiative run last year in Botswana, using phone calls and SMS texts, proved the approach was effective at helping kids learn at home[[11]](#footnote-11).

* ***Describe the context of the intervention:***

Tulsipur Sub-Metropolitan Municipality (hereafter Tulsipur Municipality) lies in Dang District, one of Nepal’s 77 districts, 450 kilometers away from the capital city of Kathmandu. In Tulsipur, 33% of primary level students attend public schools while the remaining 67% attend institutional (private) schools[[12]](#footnote-12). Public schools in Tulsipur Municipality face a number of challenges: schools are severely underfunded, have management problems, lack qualified teachers, and do not have adequate teaching and learning materials. In Tulsipur, 22% of parents with children attending public school at the primary level have never attended school or have received any form of informal education themselves. Only 3% of parents have completed secondary level (Grade 10)[[13]](#footnote-13). Due to a host of factors, parents are often unable to help their children in their studies, afford a private tutor, or ensure access to high-tech distance learning – limiting childrens access to learning, especially during school closures.

* ***Describe the conditions that apply in the area where the intervention will take place, and which are expected to influence the intervention (e.g. social, economic or political conditions, or other projects or activities in the area that can supplement the intervention).***

In Tulsipur Municipality, the main source of income for almost two-thirds of the population is agriculture. However, less than 15% of the total cultivable land has an access to irrigation all year round resulting in crop production being severely limited[[14]](#footnote-14). Hence, agriculture alone thus far has not been able to bring economic prosperity in people of Tulsipur. Most of the cultivable lands in Tulsipur are near to the sources of water (like rivers) - and during monsoon (i.e. months of June to September) they are therefore at high risk of floods. Beside agriculture, people are engaged in small scale business opportunities, work for public/private institutions or work oversees to send remittance home to their families.

Though there is always risk of natural disasters in Nepal, the uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 in Nepal will likely prove the most challenging as cases rise and fall. However, it is not expected to significantly hamper or stop the intervention from being completed, as the majority of activities are conducted over the phone, or online. Most of the activities in our intervention will be either carried out online (via Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft teams), phone calls, or in the form of text messages. As of now, parent meetings and assessments are the only activities that will require in-person interaction. If the on-ground situation demands it (i.e. further surges in COVID-19 cases and lockdowns), we are ready to switch all intervention activities to ensure that they will not require any in-person interaction. The CS Nepal team will coordinate with Tulsipur Municipality to ensure other potential initiatives will not negatively interfere with the project.

* ***Describe how this intervention can contribute to supporting collaboration, public engagement, and civil organizing and how this in time will contribute to social justice (realization of people’s rights, reducing inequality and fighting poverty, participation in decision-making processes, equal access to resources, and just institutions).***

Education is one of the best short- and long-term investments in creating a more just and equal society. Additional years of school have been shown to result in individual having higher earnings over his/her lifetime. A study found that in low-income countries like Nepal, the ‘social rate of return’ of one extra year of schooling is approx. 16%[[15]](#footnote-15). In addition, education encourages people to engage in democratic process and fight for their rights, if they are ever denied. Education leads to better participation in civil society and civic engagement in general, food security improves, and is an effective tool in the fight against poverty. The intervention will be implemented in close collaboration with the local government, who we will invite to participate in project activities and share results and findings with at scheduled meetings. The long-term aim is to build evidence for the effectiveness of distance learning initiative and capacity in both Changing Stories Nepal and Tulsipur Municipality to launch similar initiatives in the future. Likewise, the involvement of local youth is meant to further public engagement in solving the learning crisis and a unique opportunity to positively impact their communities.

* ***What climate- and environmental conditions do the partnership and/or the intervention need to respond to? And how have the partners responded to it? This could be in relation to the conditions of the target groups, the number of flights or the activities of the intervention, and how these affect the environment or climate in the area.***

The intervention itself does not directly respond to any climate or environmental conditions. The intervention does, however, indirectly in the sense that the education of girls has been suggested as one of the top ten best ways to deal with the climate crisis[[16]](#footnote-16). The intervention does not require any stakeholders involved to travel extensively either in the field or to and from the field. And when it does, this will be done using public transportation (buses, auto taxis, etc.). Due to the project nature, the current COVID-19 situation, environmental considerations, and the fact that the partnership between Changing Stories and Changing Stories Nepal is well-established and effective, no monitoring visits will be made to the field from Denmark. Additionally, CS Nepal already has the organizational capacity to implement the intervention, needing no further in-person training or workshops.

1. **The partnership/collaborators (our starting point)**

* ***Describe any previous acquaintance or cooperation between the partners, and how these experiences have fed into the development of the proposed intervention.***

CS and the team behind CS Nepal have been working closely together on learning initiatives in Nepal since early 2017. At the time, staff members were employed by our then implementing partner Institution for Suitable Actions for Prosperity. As the project grew, the team decided to establish a separate and independent entity, Changing Stories Nepal, as a registered NGO in Nepal in 2018. CS Nepal has a working vision to build a Nepal where every kid learns. Since 2018, CS and CS Nepal have had an official and established partnership focused on running effective learning initiatives in public schools in two different districts in Nepal. With support from CS, CS Nepal launched a small-scale version of the intervention to test its feasibility for four weeks in May-June 2021. It proved successful and resulted in a decision to seek funding to launch a new and larger-scale project. CS Nepal has built a strong organization foundation, strong reporting and financial capacity, and now consists of a team of 7 full-time staff members, a small but active volunteer group, and a professional board. The organization is headquartered in Kathmandu with a local office established in Tulsipur. CS Nepal has established a productive working relationship with the education office at Tulsipur Municipality, having worked with them extensively over the past two years on learning initiatives, and expect the relationship to be further strengthened through this intervention. The Tulsipur Municipality is progressive in terms of promoting educational initiatives and have themselves initiated a multi-year reform process to improve its 75 public schools. This project will serve as an addition to the municipality’s reform process.

* ***Describe the partners and other actors’ contributions, roles, and responsibilities. Justify substantial payroll costs, and if payroll costs are included for the Danish organization, describe the tasks and why Danish personnel is best positioned to undertake these tasks.***

The core team at CS Nepal have designed the project with Changing Stories in an advisory role. The project will be fully implemented and managed by CS Nepal and supervised by Changing Stories. Both organizations will contribute financially to the project, outside of grants and other funding sources. As with previous collaborations between the two organizations, coordination, meetings, check-ins, and updates will be relayed and discussed on our shared project management platform, Basecamp, and through regular Zoom meetings. Tulsipur Municipality, and in particular their education office, will be a close partner and actively take part in project activities and supervision of the intervention locally.

1. **Target groups, objectives, and expected results (our intervention)**

* ***Who will benefit from the intervention? How many people will benefit in total? How will they participate in the intervention?***

The primary target group for the intervention will be 500 public school students in Tulsipur, Dang. The intervention will also benefit 30 youths who will function as facilitators and gain access to valuable job- and teaching experience. The intervention will reach out to a wider population, as the school administration, parents, and the local authorities will be directly involved in the implementation of the project. Lessons from earlier distance learning initiatives have shown that the involvement of, and support from, parents is crucial to the successful implementation of the intervention. Without parental support its difficult to consistently reach students over the phone, and students themselves lack the emotional support and encouragement to stay engaged in the intervention. Students enrolled in the intervention will receive academic support via phone calls and text messages twice a week. The facilitators will take part in rigorous 6 days pre-service training before the program begins. They will also participate in bi-weekly support sessions designed to provide support and assist them in their personal and professional development. The intervention will require municipality staff to be present during coordination meetings and will be encouraged to share inputs and feedback.

* ***Describe how the intervention will be implemented: what activities will be carried out? With whom? And when?***

The intervention will begin during the first week of October 2021. In coordination with Tulsipur Municipality we will select 25 public schools to partner with. In all project schools we will conduct a baseline assessment with students in grades 3, 4 and 5. The baseline assessment will be used to assess basic mathematical concepts and Nepali language skills among students. Once all students have been tested, students who test below grade-level proficiency in Nepali and Math will be enrolled in the intervention. The facilitators will be recruited among youths from Tulsipur Municipality through a simple online recruiting process. Selected youth will take part in an online training on the content and curriculum of the intervention for a total of 6 days. The content and curriculum will be developed by the CS Nepal team. Each facilitator will be responsible for 16-17 students. A facilitator will make two phone calls per week to each student. Each phone call is estimated to last around 45 minutes. During the phone calls, facilitators will introduce concepts in Math and Nepali tailored to the student’s learning level. In Math, focus will be on teaching basic arithmetic, and in Nepali on oral reading fluency. The aim is to both help students retain their current level and introduce concepts at a slightly higher difficulty than their current level. Texts will be utilized to send assignments and for further support, should a student need it. Each student will be provided with a workbook to practice the concepts and materials introduced by facilitators in between phone call sessions. Workbooks are handed to students during the first parent meeting. In subsequent phone calls, facilitators will ensure that each student has revised/worked on the concept presented in the previous phone calls. Facilitators will call students for a total of 12 weeks and during this period each student will be reached approx. 24 times. Upon completion of the intervention, we will conduct an endline assessment to assess the learning levels of students enrolled in the intervention. We will then analyze results comparing the baseline and endline assessment and publish a report with the findings. A presentation will be conducted either online or in-person, depending on the COVID-19 situation, with participation from key stakeholders.

**Project Timeline & Activities**

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| **Date** | **Activity** | **Participants** | **Output** |
| Oct. 1 - Oct. 15 | 1. Baseline Assessment | Impact Officer, Students | Students in partner schools are assessed. 500 low-performing students are selected and enrolled. |
| Oct. 15 - Oct. 30 | 2. Facilitators Recruitment | CS Nepal team members | 35 potential facilitators will be selected. |
| Nov. 1 - Nov. 6 | 3. Facilitators Training | CS Nepal team members, Facilitators | The final 30 facilitators are selected and receive training in teaching techniques. |
| Nov. 8 - Nov. 15 | 4. Parents Meetings | CS Nepal team members, Parents, Principals | Approx. 500 parents are informed about the intervention and its objectives. |
| Nov. 16 - Feb. 16 | 5. Texts and phone calls from facilitators. | Facilitators, Students | 500 are engaged in learning at home and have improved learning outcomes in Math and Nepali. |
| Dec. 1, 2021 | 6. Facilitators Support Session (Every 14 days) | Facilitators, Program Officers | 30 facilitators take part in support sessions with their fellow facilitators. |
| Feb. 16 - Feb. 25 | 7. Endline Assessment | Impact Officer, Students | An endline assessment of the 500 enrolled students is conducted. |
| Feb. 25 - Feb. 28 | 8. Final Report Preparation | CS Nepal team members | A report with findings from the evaluation is published. |

1. “National Assessment of Student Achievement: Report on the National Assessment of Student Achievement in Mathematics and Nepali for Grade 5 (2018)”. Nepal Ministry of Education. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “Project Awasar: Round 4 - 7 Months Post Report''. Changing Stories Nepal. <https://changingstoriesnepal.org/impact/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “Tulsipur Technology Access Survey: Students & Teachers”. Nitishala and Tulsipur Sub-Metropolitan City. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Andrabi, T., Daniels, B., Das, J. 2020. “Human Capital Accumulation and Disasters: Evidence from the Pakistan Earthquake of 2005.” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “National Population and Housing Census 2011”. Government of Nepal. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/WLD/world/literacy-rate>, accessed 01.08.21. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. “Ending Learning Poverty - What will it take?” The World Bank. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>, accessed 03.08.21. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. “Education in Figures, 2017 (At a Glance)”. Ministry of Education, Science and Technology; Nepal. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. “Tulsipur Technology Access Survey, 2020”. Nitishala and Tulsipur Sub-Metropolitan City. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Angrist, Noam et. al. “Stemming Learning Loss During the Pandemic: A Rapid Randomized Trial of a Low-Tech Intervention in Botswana” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. “Tulsipur ASER 2019”. Teach for Nepal and Tulsipur Sub-Metropolitan City. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. “Round 5 Student Survey”. Changing Stories Nepal. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. <https://www.tulsipurmun.gov.np/sites/tulsipurmun.gov.np/files/profile%20of%20tulsipur%20.pdf>, accessed 10.08.2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Pradhan et al. (2018) - “Monetizing the value of just one externality of education - reduced mortality” [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. <https://drawdown.org/solutions/health-and-education>, accessed 02.08.21. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)