



WORLD EDUCATION

Futures Beyond Bricks

A holistic approach to mitigating exploitative labor





A leader in education and development in Nepal since 1976, World Education collaborates closely with the Ministry of Education and other government bodies and partners with more than 45 national and local NGOs in 27 districts of Nepal to prevent child labor and human trafficking and to promote sustainable agriculture, livelihood development, micro-credit, health, and non-formal education activities. World Education also supports educational innovations in the formal education system from the school level to the national policy level. Across all sectors and programs, World Education anchors communities at the center of decision-making by equipping individuals and local partner organizations with the technical, management, and financial skills they need to develop, manage and evaluate community-driven programs.

This publication presents the challenges created by exploitative labor practices in Nepal's brick factories and World Education's efforts to develop a successful model for mitigating the adverse impacts through the Building Better Futures initiative under the Naya Bato Naya Paila project. We are proud to have partnered with the following NGOs to implement our activities:

Child Development Society
(Bhaktapur, Kathmandu, Lalitpur)



Child Protection Organization
(Sarlahi)



Nari Chetana Kendra
(Kavre)



Suryodaya Samaj Sewa
(Ramechhap)



the ‘home and away’ approach

Persistent poverty, debt, climate change, natural disasters and other push factors lead families to brick factories, where they too often become trapped in cycles of debt and exploitation that do not spare children from back-breaking labor. Through a decade of sustained engagement with brick factory laborers, World Education has emerged as a leader in Nepal in combating exploitation in brick factories and has developed a proven, holistic model for expanding economic opportunity for financially insecure communities. The Building Better Futures initiative built on past interventions that demonstrated substantial impact in reducing vulnerability to exploitative labor. World Education’s multidimensional strategy focused on imparting education, diversifying livelihoods and building the capacities of communities to be resilient in the face of financial shocks and natural disasters.

Building Better Futures targeted the most affected districts and communities where data showed concentrations of families bringing children to the factories: the Kathmandu Valley, Sarlahi, Ramechhap and Kavre. World Education’s tailored “home and away” strategy supported economically insecure families both in their home communities and in the factories, both during the brick production season and when factories closed.

World Education’s holistic approach employed interventions in six complementary areas that together mitigated the negative consequences of brick work and built families’ resilience to avoid exploitation: (a) improved education; (b) financial literacy and services; (c) improved alternative livelihoods; (d) safer work environments; (e) meeting needs of unaccompanied teenagers; and (f) advocacy and capacity building. In target communities, World Education and NGO partners supported families who work in the brick industry by strengthening and expanding microfinance services to accommodate seasonal migrant workers and by diversifying their livelihood options.



the problem

A 2012 World Education Rapid Assessment estimated that **about half of children working in factories are below the age of 14**. Of children surveyed, **30% worked at least 12 hours per day**.



Each autumn after festivals end, entire families move from their villages to distant brick factories. There, they work seasonally for a six-month period with the intention of paying off advanced loans previously borrowed from *naikes*, or moneylenders, in their home communities. These loans often accumulate quickly and trap workers in indentured servitude.

In the factories, all family members—even young children—are involved in the production of bricks. Each family earns money on a per-brick basis, which incentivizes parents to involve their children in brickmaking in order to increase production and money earned, even at the expense of the children's schooling.

what motivates families to take up seasonal labor in brick factories?

- » **Lack of sustainable income** generation opportunities
- » **Underdeveloped financial institutions** for saving money or taking out credit, hindering microenterprise development
- » Limited financial management acumen and **financial pressure** from loans taken during festival season, which often have exploitatively high interest rates—as high as 60%
- » Decreased agricultural production and increased food insecurity as a result of byproducts of **climate change**, such as reduced annual rainfall, scarcity of natural water spouts and springs, irregular weather patterns, deforestation and warmer than average temperatures
- » Utilization of basic agricultural techniques and outdated equipment leading to **low crop yields**
- » General **difficulty meeting basic needs** related to food, water, shelter, and healthcare
- » Perception of better opportunities for adults and children alike outside of villages

how does exploitation begin?

Families and individuals inadvertently enter cycles of exploitation at the hands of brick factory owners and *naikes* due to a suite of complex, interrelated factors. Numerous unfavorable circumstances, rather than one isolated challenge, typically contribute to financial insecurities that lead families to feel they have few options other than to accept potential exploitation in the brick industry.

Due to low wages and high caloric needs to sustain extreme levels of work, families frequently fail to earn enough to create financial freedom, and debt bondage perpetuates migration to the brick factories for years, decades, and sometimes generations.

The practice of engaging children in labor means that the majority of children in brick factory-going households cannot attend school continuously or focus on learning. The consequences are compromised learning outcomes, high dropout rates and grade repetition. Without intervention, children will have no better opportunities than those available to their parents and grandparents.

what challenges does seasonal migration create?

Students who migrate with their parents to brick kilns for six months each year show **poor academic performance and chronic absenteeism**, resulting in inadequate learning outcomes.

Farmers who move to brick kilns generally have small land holdings with **low agricultural productivity**. Neglect of farms while families are at the brick factories exacerbates this challenge and reduces productivity, which, in turn, tightens the trap of cyclical financial insecurity and exploitation.

Adverse health effects, including respiratory issues, chronic fatigue, and illness from poor sanitation.

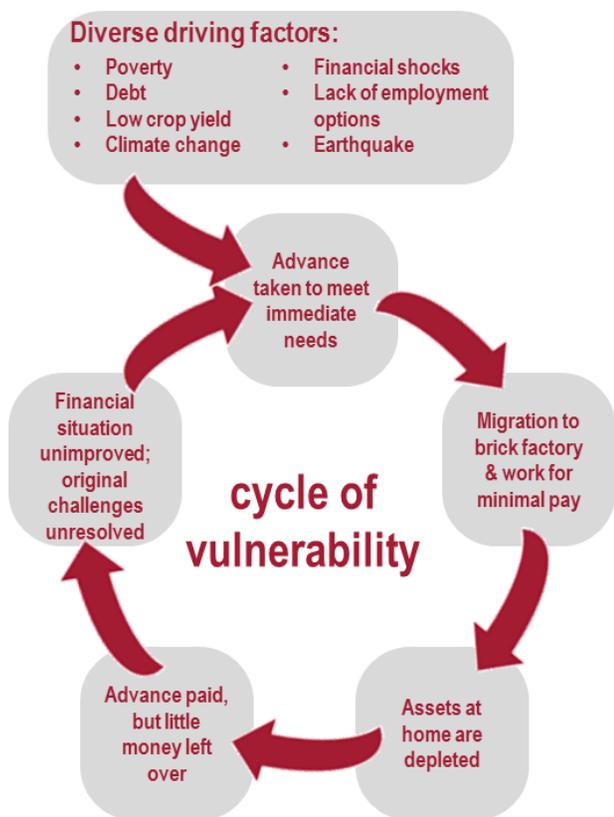


case study: mitigating environmental changes in Hiledevi, Ramechhap

Water once ran freely through Hiledevi, Ramechhap District, but Hiledevi’s residents now struggle to adjust to a steep decline in water availability brought on by climate change, degradation from construction projects, and the demands of a rising population. A few years ago, Nar Bhadadur Pandey from Hildelvi only had to walk five minutes to collect drinking water. Now, the nearest water sources are an hour’s walk away, and Hiledevi is in Ramechhap’s driest VDC.

The culminating result of environmental pressures in Hiledevi is seasonal—and in some cases permanent—migration to dangerous brick factories in the Kathmandu Valley and the Terai, where families are prone to exploitation and cycles of indebtedness. Seasonal migrants cannot tend to their land, and crop yields decrease accordingly. Many Hiledevi migrants also stopped raising livestock because of seasonal absences, but with the loss of livestock comes a loss of organic compost needed for farming. Instead, villagers buy chemical fertilizer and pesticides which further degrade the soil and environment.

The Building Better Futures project’s Farmer Field School (FFS) trained farmers in Hiledevi and other communities to improve land fertility through irrigation system management, composting and improved technologies. Knowledge built through FFS sessions enabled them to increase production, diversify higher value crops and reduce the application of insecticides and pesticides by utilizing organic control measures instead.



“Over 175,000 workers, of whom as many as 60,000 are children, labor in unhealthy and unsafe conditions in Nepal’s brick kilns.”

Source: Global Fairness Initiative, Nepal

the solution

Understanding the interrelated nature of factors that lead to debt bondage, World Education has developed a multidimensional approach with diverse interventions that tackle different challenges to break the cycle of exploitative labor. Using a holistic strategy, World Education and our partners educate the children of brick workers, expand livelihood options for adult brick workers through Farmer Field Schools and Livestock Development Workshops, and build financial resilience through financial literacy classes and the Self-Employment and Economic Education Program.



our interventions

Six interlocking intervention areas together reduce the vulnerability of project beneficiaries, mitigate the negative effects of brick work, and build resistance to future financial shocks: (a) improved education; (b) financial literacy and services; (c) improved alternative livelihoods; (d) safer work environments; (e) meeting needs of unaccompanied teenagers; and (f) advocacy and capacity building.

Improved education

Regular school attendance is a challenge for seasonal migrants' children. Experience shows that our tailor-made interventions are effective and efficient in reintegrating children into schools both at home and near factories, keeping children in school, and achieving greater learning outcomes overall. These interventions include: coaching classes which provide a "bridging" option for missed lessons to help students effectively link what is taught in their home communities with lessons at schools near brick factories; in-kind support to children at risk of dropping out, including uniforms, stationery, and school bags; modular classes that target out-of-school children in the Sarlahi brick factories to integrate them into formal schooling; and basic literacy classes, which enhance illiterate mothers' basic calculation skills and their capacity to participate in microfinance groups.

Financial literacy and services

To improve financial stability and resilience to the pressures that lead to brick work, World Education works to build financial management skills of families in brick factories. Families have empowered themselves, developed sustainable financial habits, reduced debts and increased their savings as a result of interventions that include: financial literacy classes, which ensure that non-saving participants, who had not understood the importance of managing their finances, learn systematic ways to save money, establish linkages with microfinance institutions and either join pre-existing groups or form their own saving and credit groups; and an outreach banking platform that enables users to remit savings that average NRS 200-300 thrice a month to spend on food and other necessary goods upon returning back to their villages.

Meeting needs of unaccompanied teenagers

Our activities prioritize the rescue, referral and rehabilitation of unaccompanied adolescents who were brought to work in brick kilns under false pretenses. World Education and our partners have begun to support rescued adolescents in re-enrolling in schools near their home communities and to coordinate with local government line agencies which are responsible for continually following up on their well-being. Targeting interventions towards unaccompanied minors is an emerging challenge that will require continued prioritization in the future.

Improved alternative livelihoods

World Education provides people at risk of exploitation with means to diversify their livelihoods through capacity building trainings. The activities in this component included Farmer Field Schools, the Self-Employment and Economic Education Program, Livestock Development Activities and Livelihood Development Workshops. Brick kiln workers selected viable options for new income streams based on the market situations in their villages. By forming agricultural cooperatives, opening shops, raising animals, and engaging in other entrepreneurial activities, families have been able to free themselves from feeling compelled to enter cycles of bonded labor and have built resistance for future economic shocks.

Safer work environments

Families working in the brick industries are subject to great risk and vulnerabilities. Considering this, World Education and our NGO partners collaborate with employers and their employees to establish safer work environments and minimize the risk factors associated with working in brick kilns. The program also conducts inspection visits to brick kilns to identify and remove child laborers.

Advocacy and capacity building

Our partners maintain constant communication and coordination with government agencies and their personnel, especially Child Rights Officers. This linkage ensures alignment between our activities and the government's initiatives to address the needs of exploited children.

the impact



“My home collapsed and I lost everything [in the earthquake]. I thought I would have to go back to the brick factory. Now I know how to read, write, and grow my farm. I can support my family.”

**Manju, Participant
Ramechhap District**

- » **Improved school attendance among migrant children:**
Following our interventions to improve the quality of schooling available to migrant children, many of the students who used to leave villages several times each year have now stopped going to the factories altogether, thereby increasing school attendance rates.
- » **Smoother integration of migrant children into schools:**
World Education coordinated between schools in source districts and near factories to transition children into the appropriate grade levels over the course of migration. This decreased instances of students being held back because of enrollment midway through the school year. Through non-formal education classes and coaching programs, many children who had previously dropped out were supported to re-enroll into schools.
- » **Increased financial resilience via microcredit programs:**
Financial literacy and savings groups increased economic security at the household level, allowing families to develop the confidence to make bigger investments in education, household consumption and to start small businesses. In addition, they encouraged participants to speak up in group settings and have enhanced social harmony by empowering people from marginalized groups to voice their opinions.
- » **Diversified livelihoods build resistance to financial and climate shocks:** Beneficiaries identified income generation options with resilience to the effects of climate change which are enabling them to adapt to shocks in weather patterns. Participants learned to conduct cost-benefit analyses, formulate livelihood plan feasibility studies, map resources and identify proper marketing channels. Families have launched their own businesses using locally available resources, and youth participants of SEEP classes have generated incomes between NRS 5,000-30,000 per month.

the impact, continued.

- » **5,709 children** benefited from **improved education** support activities, including nonformal basic literacy and modular classes, coaching, and school support.
- » **3,728 people** benefited from **alternative livelihood activities**, including Farmer Field Schools, the Self-Employment and Economic Education Program, Livestock Development activities and Livelihood Development Workshops.
- » **5,380 adult participants** benefited from **financial literacy classes** and either joined existing savings and credit groups or formed their own.
- » **2,901 adults** participated in **occupational safety and health orientations** which included information on maintaining sanitation, reducing alcohol consumption, and identifying and avoiding exploitative labor.
- » **14 teenagers** were **rescued** from exploitative working conditions in brick kilns and were supported in readjusting to life and school in their home districts.

the way forward

After decades of leading formal and nonformal education activities proven to mitigate the negative impacts of seasonal migration, World Education has learned that sustained engagement with at-risk communities is imperative to ending the financial pressures that motivate families to enter cycles of exploitative labor in brick factories. Adults must receive sustained support for livelihoods and microfinance activities, and children must receive specialized academic support before, during and after migration so that their learning outcomes are unencumbered.

The unpredictable nature of seasonal migration poses a unique challenge to planning and implementing education interventions. Government, school and civil society actors must work together to meet the needs of migrant children by supporting their education both at home in the villages and away at brick factories to limit disruptions in schooling. Stakeholders should work with schools in source communities and around brick factories to integrate migrating students and provide targeted educational support and remedial activities to account for days lost while relocating. In cases where it could be unrealistic to expect older out-of-school children to reenroll, education interventions to develop vocational skills should be offered.

“I am very happy to be able to provide services in my community; I meet with different people and address different types of animal health problems. I’m grateful to Building Better Futures for the opportunity.”

Avi Chaudhary, Participant, Sarlahi District



Avi Chaudhary, from Sarlahi district, began working in the brick factory as a boy because his family was extremely poor. As a young man, he did not have the skills or education necessary to find work anywhere else. Through Building Better Futures, Avi learned to become a Village Animal Health Leader during an intensive 35-day training and received start-up support consisting of veterinary instruments and an initial supply of medicines. Today, he provides animal health services for more 10,000 animals belonging to more than 3,000 households in his home community and the areas surrounding the brick factories. He earns about 12,000 NPR (~\$120) per month, and his neighbors earn more too, now that their animals are healthier.