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PILOT OF DISTANCE TEACHING & LEARNING APPROACH ASSESSMENT REPORT

1. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PILOT

Under DFID's [GEC](#) flagship program, Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB), [People in Need](#) Nepal, in partnership with Aasaman Nepal is implementing "[Aarambha](#)" project. The Aarambha project is working with married out of school (M-OOS) adolescent girls of Rautahat and Bara districts with literacy, numeracy and life skills courses. For year 1 (Cohort 1), Aarambha is working with 1709 M-OOS girls through 83 Community Learning Centres (CLCs) across four rural municipalities (RMs) of the project districts. However, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, Nepal Government declared nation-wide lockdown on March 24, 2020 and the CLCs activities were suspended. To support and engage the M-OOS girls with continuous learning in this lockdown situation, the project, in consultation with the Fund Manager (FM), piloted the alternative approach, i.e. the distance teaching learning (DTL) through the use of mobile phone. This phone based DTL was the only feasible low-tech model that could be used due to low/no internet penetration in the community side-lining all other possible tech-based approaches (like social media, TV). The DTL Guideline (refer to Annex 1) was developed to facilitate the piloting process, among selected group of girls (the word 'participants' is used synonymously in the report).

I. Objective of the Pilot

The primary objective of the pilot implementation was to support and engage the selected project's primary beneficiaries for continuous teaching and learning in the lockdown situation; and to explore its feasibility for scale up during the lockdown period.

II. Strategic Process

Initially, situation analysis & internal resource mapping in terms of human resources, teaching and learning (T/L) resources, reflecting possible risks in the project's risk register (Annex 4) was carried out. Pre-implementation activities were carried out as per the DTL guideline, mainly the development of necessary SOPs, Code of Conduct (Annexes 2 and 3), staffs capacity development plan (Annex 5), revision of lesson plans and activity implementation plan (Annex 6), and necessary reporting tools and quality standard checklist for monitoring (Annex 7).

III. Beneficiaries Selection

In line with the DTL guideline, 200 (11% of total) M-OOS girls were selected for the pilot. Both internal monitoring data and the preliminary findings from telephone tracking were used to enlist the girls with access to mobile phones, their families' willingness/consent to participate, with key consideration on sub-groups representation. The pilot implementation was carried out between 3-15 May, 2020. Piloting was not possible to cover all beneficiaries due to uncertainty around this approach and limited resources.

IV. Implementation Process

Informed consent from M-OOS girls and their family (guardian) was the first step taken by the facilitators, who led the DTL. A fixed time of phone call (every week) was arranged with the participants as per their convenience. The families & guardians of the girls were pre-informed of the date, time and duration of the phone call, with necessary consent. The facilitators also informed the girls about the teaching and learning materials required on that day for the lesson. For girls who were contacted





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through neighbours' phones, the settlement arrangement was first considered to ensure safety and social distancing. Each girl received calls 3 times in a week; each call was on an average 10 minutes focussing on specific learning objective of that day in-line with pre-decided session and lesson plan (refer Annex 6). On every first call, facilitators would share information about COVID 19 and project's community feedback and response mechanism (CFRM) system including available services in local level. On the next call, facilitators would revise what she learnt and continue to next sessions/sub-sessions. Based on the home assignments, engagement of the girls during the telephone calls and facilitators' notes, assessments about the progress of girls' learning was carried out on weekly basis. During the implementation, facilitators also encouraged the parents and family members to support their children's education, safety and wellbeing at home, and how to care of their own wellbeing. In each call, facilitators mandatorily obtained consent from both family and the girls.

In order to continuously support the facilitators, supportive monitoring and supervision was conducted by the Education Officers and respective program team. A Quality Standard Checklist (QSC) was developed to ensure that the pilot was meeting basic quality standards and safety measures mandated by the DTL Guideline. A joint team of MEAL and Safeguarding oversaw the process by using the joint QSC (refer Annex 7), in close coordination with program team. Findings were shared and discussed during weekly team meetings and meetings with partners via online platforms.

2. ASSESSMENT OF THE PILOT

I. Purpose

The main purpose of this assessment is to explore the operational possibilities of DTL via mobile phone and assess the pros and cons of such an approach in the unique socio-cultural context of project beneficiaries.

II. Methodology and Limitations

This assessment primarily uses the quantitative data obtained through partner's weekly DTL tracker received for the duration of pilot. Further triangulation has been done through the use of information available in partner reports, monitoring tracking sheet and key informant interviews (KIIs). The KIIs were carried out jointly by the project's MEAL and Safeguarding team after online orientation on the KII topic guides, during which 4 M-OOS adolescent girls, 3 family representatives and 4 facilitators were interviewed. The respondents were purposively chosen to meet key criteria-sub-group representation, previous learning record and the level of engagements during the DTL pilot.

Since the assessment is entirely based on internal reports provided by the partner, the validity and reliability of quantitative data cannot be fully ascertained due to constraints of time and remote monitoring and tracking. No separate survey was done on this regard. Furthermore, this report does not include desk review and only showcases findings from program report.

III. About the Assessment Report

As mandated by the DTL Guideline, this assessment report is prepared to outline the key findings of the pilot, lessons learned, possible scope for scale up of the approach and next steps of preparation before making a scale up plan. The prepared guidelines, SOPs, lesson plans and other materials are annexed to the report.





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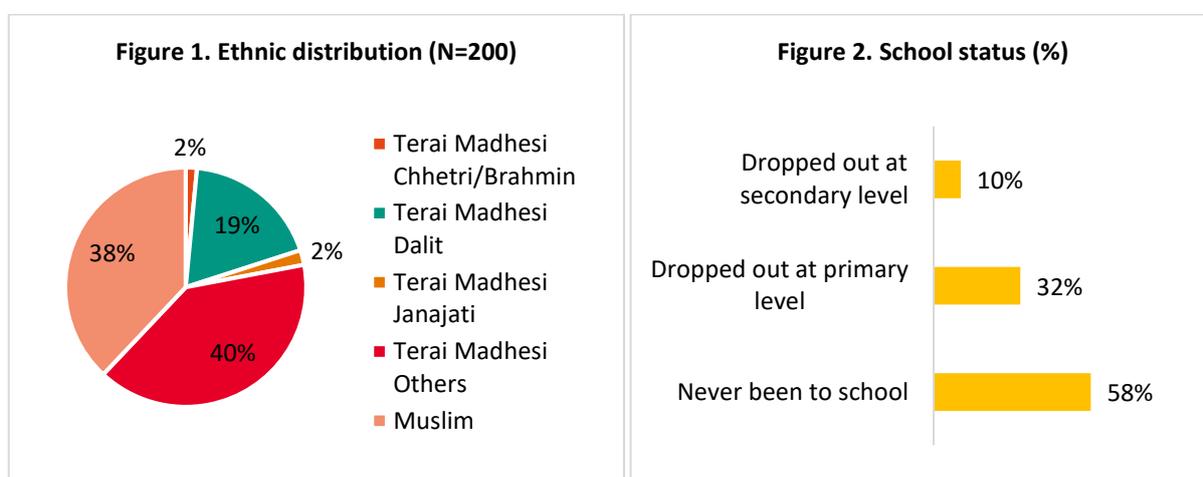
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3. KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

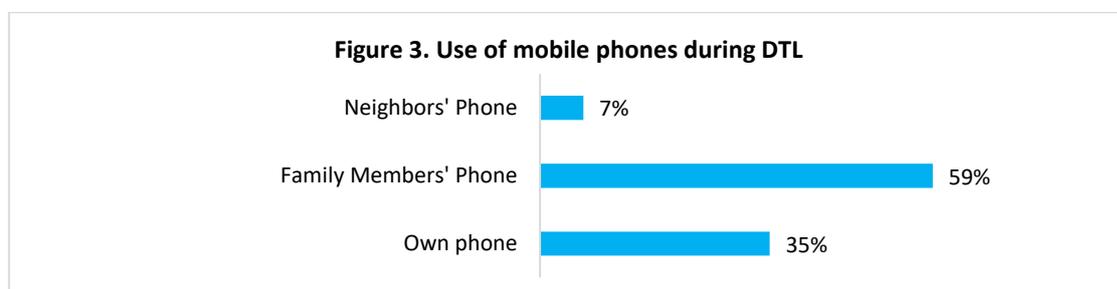
I. Socio-demographic characteristics of pilot participants (N=200)

A total of 200 M-OOS girls participated in the DTL pilot implementation, representing each of the four treatment RMs, i.e. Durga Bhagwati, Yamunamai, Devtal and Suwarna (refer table 1). While 38% of these girls were Muslim and 19% were Tera Madhesi Dalit (refer figure 1), majority of the girls were from the older age group of 15-19 years. In terms of school status, more than half of the participants had never been to school (refer figure 2).

District	RMs	#
Rautahat	Durga Bhagwati	49
	Yamunamai	45
Bara	Devtal	43
	Suwarna	63
Total		200



Similarly, the pilot participants also included 12% pregnant and 49% lactating girls. Furthermore, 3% of the girls in pilot had some form of functional limitation¹. In terms of the use of mobile phones during DTL pilot implementation, almost 60% of the girls were reached through their family members' phone, most of whom were their husbands. Some girls were also reached through their neighbour's phone, as provided by the girls before the implementation of the pilot (refer to figure 3).



¹ Washington Group- Child Functioning questionnaire (<http://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/washington-group-question-sets/child-disability/>) was used to identify the functional limitation during pre-baseline of Cohort 1 girls in March/April 2019.





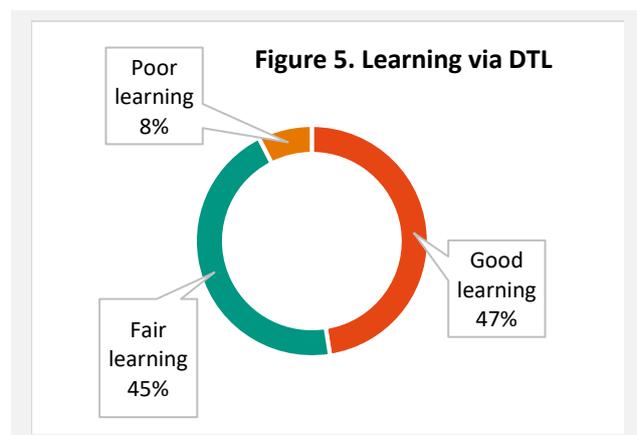
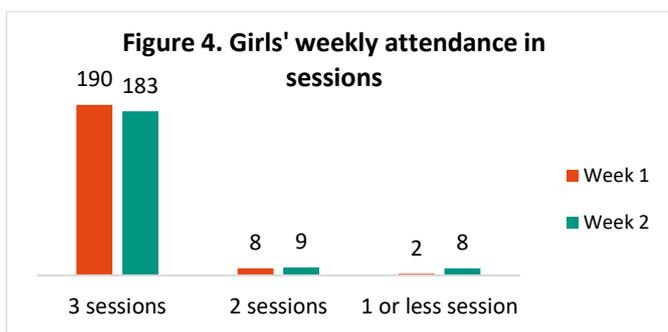
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II. Analysis of the Learning through DTL

As per the DTL guideline, 3 sessions/week was planned to deliver the pre-defined lessons. The weekly sessions tracker shows that majority of the girls participated in all 3 sessions, while some of the girls could not be engaged in all 3 sessions due to network problems (refer to figure 4). The duration of each sessions varied depending on the convenience of the participants and session objectives for the day, ranging from minimum 2 minutes to 20 minutes. In an average, the participant spent 29 minutes per week for the DTL. This time duration does not include additional time the participant may have spent for home assignments.

With regards to tracking the progress of girls' learning, the assessment was carried out each week. The basis for such assessment was girls' conduct of home assignments, level of engagement during the sessions and facilitators' daily notes. The facilitators also included the comparative learning and engagements of each girl during "normal" classes at CLC and the phone calls. As such, the learning assessment was very subjective to facilitator's own reflections on how the girls are progressing.



The basis for learning assessment (poor, fair or good learning achievement) was girls' conduct of home assignments, level of engagement on question and answer during the sessions and facilitators' daily notes. Based on these observations, figure 5 below shows that in an average, majority of the girls seemed to be learning well (45% fairly, 47% good). However, 8% of girls who seemed to have difficulties in learning via mobile-based teaching. Since facilitators considered the individual girls' context, her performance in the DTL process

through participation/engagement, understanding T/L content, performance in home assignments and her own reflection through daily notes, it is crucial to contemplate technical drawback entailed in this approach while making a concrete interpretation of these findings in the absence of physical monitoring and verification. Whatsoever, to a greater extend these reflections provide some idea on whether DTL approach can indeed be appropriate to improve girls' learning.

III. Discussions around DTL approach

Both pros and cons have been observed while implementing this new approach of teaching and learning

with M-OOS adolescent girls. The direct positive aspect of the DTL was that it was able to continue the learning of the girls under the circumstances. There have also been positive responses, both

"In this long period of lockdown, she is gradually forgetting her learning. She is at least participating in teaching even in this lock down. This helps them (CLC students) to enhance knowledge. I think this is beneficial for her."

-Husband of M-OOS girl





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from the facilitators, the girls and their families who appreciate such an initiation from the project despite vivid challenges.

The M-OOS girls with children, in particular, have found this method useful. For them, going to CLCs had been difficult due to additional layer of responsibilities concerning baby-sitting, which resulted into low attendance. Because of this, it was also observed that the girls who did not attend CLCs previously due to reasons of childcare were actively participating in the learning via mobile. Such an observation is reflected in both the quantitative data and the findings of the remote monitoring carried out by both safeguarding and MEAL team.

Besides the direct participation in learning, the DTL pilot also provided a platform for some M-OOS girls to keep their minds away from the stressful pandemic situation. Additionally, the DTL also had effect on building the trust and relationship between the M-OOS girls and their families. In a very restrictive norm, many girls were accompanied by their mothers-

in-law (or any trusted female members) to go to the CLCs. Now that the learning was being conducted via phone and at home, the family members could see (and sometimes listen) how their daughters/daughters-in-law were actually reading/writing. One of the girls also mentioned how her family members would listen to the facilitators in loudspeaker during the sessions. Family members such as husbands and in-laws were lending their mobile phones and helping the participants to get connected with facilitators for the distance teaching and learning process.

"I can give more time to learn and one thing became great that my family understand the value of my time giving in CLC now. Now they are feeling that I stay in CLC with special agenda to be literate and nothing else."

-M-OOS girl, 18 years, never been to school

"I am interested in learning, so even feeling alone in home, learning through mobile makes me engaged. This mobile is provided by my Ami and Aba so I can use it based on my need."

-M-OOS girl, 19 years old, mother of 2-years baby, Muslim, never been to school

Despite some girls receiving support from their families on this front, it was not the case for everyone. Some of the participants also expressed that learning through mobile phone was difficult since they did not have their own phones. Furthermore, even with girls with convenient access to the phones, the challenges remained due to poor network connections, low electricity and recharge access, and other technical issues. And for those girls who used their families' phone, the calls were at times disturbed by the members who owned the phone.

Regarding the delivery of teaching and learning via mobile, the weekly record sheet reflects timely completion of planned lessons. Most facilitators expressed positive attitude towards the mobile-based orientation and refresher

"I assign homework to the girl after the end of the chapter. In the next day of class I check the homework verbally by asking them to answer the given exercise of the chapter. While in CLC, it was easier to correct and teach them to write by holding their hands. It is quite hard to check and ensure the answer verbally. Some girls who are weak in studies and those who do not have any educated member to assist them find difficult to do their homework and learn."

-CLC facilitator, 33 years



follow ups conducted by the project at the start of the pilot. The primary concern was with regards to the assessment and verification of home assignments and learning progress of the participants. Facilitators found it challenging to track whether the participants were really progressing and how to provide additional tailored support in the current situation. This can be reflected in the quantitative data shown above. The facilitators' concern was especially for those majority of the participants who did not have literate members in their families, who could be involved in this remote teaching learning process.

IV. Reflections from the Field Implementation

This section highlights some critical reflections from the aspects of actual implementation of such an alternative approach in the project setting, both in terms of team structure and the dynamics built upon as a result of COVID-19 emergency situation. A quick synthesis shows that establishing core Technical team, remote monitoring mechanism, safeguarding and protection measures, identifying skill gaps of facilitators in this changed context and providing necessary capacity building are key strategies to somewhat successfully deliver such an approach 'in the field'. In particular, capacity assessment of available human resources to deliver DTL was one of the fundamental challenges. This challenge was strategically responded by developing a thorough capacity building plan most appropriate to the staffs, for instance using applications like skype and messenger for online training, orientation and refreshers. Furthermore, weekly meetings were held with technical staffs to address immediate issues so as to strengthen the capacity of field team. Also, the revision of lesson plans and making them more structured in a smaller and engaging sessions made their delivery effective by use of mobile phones. Keeping facilitators at the centre point of capacity building and providing regular technical support as required played a crucial role to minimize the issues and supported to carry such approach of teaching and learning.

The indirect family engagement in this process was the key to creating enabling learning environment for girls. The support was ensured through engagements of field staffs such as social mobilizers and community engagement officers, who are always in direct communication with the families. During piloting, family engagement was carefully maintained from obtaining consent for girls' participation to using their mobile phones in the process. The families were lending their mobile phones for the girls to take part in the DTL. Similarly, while girls used to come to the CLCs before, their families were unaware about what the girls are exactly involved in. In the process of DTL, they got an opportunity to witness girls' actual involvement in the types of activities, and at the same time the learning processes of the girls. In this way, they have been indirect part of this process that enabled project to create favourable environment for girls to learn during this pandemic.

4. CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

The overall assessment of the DTL pilot shows mixed results. This alternative approach has been able to bring out some positive finding vis a vis supporting girls' continuous learning in an uncertain lockdown period, engaging girls positively in stressful situations, disseminating essential health messages, services availability etc. via facilitators during the call, creating positive relationship and trust between girls and their families, and also between the project and the communities through direct contact. However, the weekly reported quantitative data analysis and interviews with both the facilitators and the girls show the technical difficulties in terms of content delivery and tracking the learning progress of the girls via phone-based learning. The results of the learning assessment also corroborate this concern. And although the assessments were based on facilitators' subjective reflections on girl's engagement, and



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her achievement through mobile phone, these findings still provide substantial evidence to retain girl's learning attitude, and keeping the learning achievement intact during this unprecedented crisis.

As anticipated, the actual implementation of the DTL demanded a completely different framework and strategic approach. Considering such a unique community context of the M-OOS girls, initially there was the feeling of uncertainty and doubt within the staffs as well; both in terms of delivery of teaching and learning via phone, but also on the overall acceptability of such a method by the girls themselves and their family members. This gradually turned into a great learning experience and motivation to strategize for better delivery of DTL. Hence, the notable positive aspects of the pilot not only incorporate the positive changes from the side of M-OOS girls, but also includes the capacity building of field team on how to directly engage with the girls and sensitization on need of continuous learning even at such unprecedented time.

In nutshell, the project needs to further carefully weigh both the risks/challenges and benefits/successes outlined in the report before expanding the DTL approach to wider beneficiaries. There are substantial results showing how the DTL benefitted certain girls, especially those with small babies, to continue the learning from home. However, there is also the issue of girls' 'real' access to mobile phones even if they were allowed by the families to use the phone. Similarly, additional emphasis must be given to girls with specific learning needs. But most importantly, critical considerations must be given to those girls who did not participate in the pilot. Family support and access to mobile phone is key for the DTL approach to work. Reflecting on the overall assessment, the project can explore these areas further while implementing such an approach in future:

- Leverage engagements of influential members such as Change Champions and members of CLC management committee to ensure continuous motivation and participation of family members.
- Evidences show use of low-tech approaches, including the use of social media and other communication medium (skype, whatsapp) could bring synergy in this kind of distant teaching learning. However, with considerable limitation in internet penetration in the community, mobile phone-based approach can still be an option to retain girls learning. Even so, it is essential to consider strategies to reach & engage the girls who do not have access to mobile phone and/or do not have favourable home environments.
- Establish strong monitoring and assessment mechanism for quick identification of girls' learning needs/support and barriers. This will include adaptation of existing assessment strategies in relation to the changed T&L delivery mechanism.
- Even after the situation gets back to 'normal', DTL can be used for revisions and providing quick assistance for home assignments, etc.
- Incorporate lessons from different cluster meetings and webinars on DTL to include best practices.

5. ANNEXES

- I. DTL Guideline for Pilot
- II. PIN ASN_COVID-19 Safeguarding Guideline
- III. Code of Conduct
- IV. Updated Risk Register
- V. Staffs Capacity Development Plan
- VI. Revision of lesson plans
- VII. Quality Standard Checklist for DTL monitoring

