



WORLD HUMANITARIAN DAY 2022 BLOG: SCHOOL CLOSURES AND CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION DURING COVID-19 BY VOICE OF CHILDREN (VOC) NEPAL

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About VOC: A child protection organisation for street and sexually abused children in Nepal

[Voice of Children \(VOC\)](#) is a non-government organisation working and advocating for street and sexually abused children of Nepal. VOC was established in 2000 with a motive to work for children living/working in the street and sexually abused children. The organisation aims to prevent a further increase in the number of street children by working with vulnerable families living in urban areas; slums and low-rent areas to empower them and spread awareness as many children come to the street from such families. As VOC believes that family is most important for children, it emphasises social reintegration of children living/working in the street by improving their life skills and capacity for self-sufficiency. VOC also focusses on protecting children from any form of sexual abuse, by raising awareness on child sexual abuse and offering legal, social and psychological support to sexually abused children and their families.

Context during COVID-19: Responding to school-closure related child protection risk and protective factors

Voice of Children is implementing a Self-Help Project named “*Family Empowerment*” in Sunsari district in the eastern part of Nepal. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, all schools remained closed and school-aged children were forced to stay at home without any activities. These measures led children to be outside, roaming towards the rivers, hunting birds in the jungle and fishing in local small rivers and ponds. This resulted in children becoming engaged in child labour (especially in the agriculture sector) and increased the number of child marriages, and incidences of sexual violence. These activities were dangerous for children and during that period there were high levels of protection concerns.





What did VOC do in response to the COVID-19 crisis? **Awareness raising, capacity strengthening and cross-sector educational support**

Major initiatives included:

- The VOC staff made groups of children under each Self-Help Group (Woman Group) and started to organise awareness activities about the COVID-19 pandemic in small groups (max 10 children) with the support of adolescent girls and SHG members.
- At first, recreational activities were conducted for the children, which included activities such as drawing/art, painting, singing, dancing, local games, etc.
- As the pandemic continued, VOC coordinated with school teachers to discuss children's education and started educational classes with the help of SHG members.
- Lastly, VOC supported the educational activities of children, where more children were able to participate and benefit from the initiatives.



What are the remaining challenges? **Worsened economic conditions continue to be a major barrier for children returning to school**

- Most of the children's routines and habits were now diverted towards working or roaming here and there. As a result, some children didn't return to school to study and instead went to work in big cities and in India with family and/or neighbours.
- Children who are from impoverished communities are still not able to study due to capacity gaps and lack of quality remote education.
- Some families' economic condition has worsened and they continue to struggle to recover.

What still needs to be done? **Facilitating activities to increase the economic status of families and providing adequate funding for education**

- Encourage parents and communities to contact their children who have left home for work and encourage them to return home.
- Manage any additional coaching/tuition classes for children who need more support in school and ensure these are adequately funded.



- Facilitate activities to increase the economic status of families, such as referring families to service providers for income generating activities.

Conclusion: Coordination between sectors is vital in the protection of children in humanitarian action!

Voice of Children has played a vital role in the education of children during COVID-19 pandemic in coordination with the SHG, adolescents, schools and Ward Offices of Rural Municipality.