

Girls' transitions to work through higher-quality TVET programs in Nepal

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACT	Access, Completion, and Transition (framework)
CTEVT	Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training
ILO	International Labour Organization
IT	information technology
MDG	Millennium Development Goal (United Nations)
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NLFS	Nepal Labor Force Survey
NVQS	National Vocational Qualification System
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal (United Nations)
TSLC	Technical School Leaving Certificate
TVET	technical and vocational education and training

ABSTRACT

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is widely considered an important tool in strengthening the school-to-work transition, reducing poverty, and achieving economic growth. However, significant barriers prevent girls in Nepal from realizing such opportunities. This paper, drawing from field research and desk review, identifies three major factors—education, the labor market, and social norms—underlying why girls are not able to leverage TVET to their advantage. Overall, an underemphasis and underinvestment in TVET by families, schools, government, and the private sector pose the greatest challenge to improving girls' participation in TVET and thus to girls' transitions to work.

Based on my study and professional experience working to enhance the right of children to education, this paper provides policy recommendations for government, private sector, and nongovernmental organizations to improve girls' participation in TVET in order to improve their labor market outcomes and life prospects. The recommendations are concentrated in three different areas: improving girls' access to TVET programs, enabling their *completion* of TVET programs, and facilitating their *transition* to work. Increasing investment in TVET—along with creating a gender-transformative approach that enables females to participate more fully in both TVET programs and the labor market—would meaningfully help to realize the promises of education in Nepal.

“Just as youth itself can be a period of identity crisis for the adolescents and young adults, so the education and training sector which aims to serve these youth faces comparable identity challenges.”

—Mark Bray, “Vocational Education and Training for Youth”

INTRODUCTION

Education is not just about earning degrees; it is much more than that. For decades, global and national development discussions have emphasized education as a powerful tool for poverty reduction, economic growth, and human well-being. Global policies like the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as national education sector plans reflect this widespread belief. However, poverty reduction and economic growth are also about earnings and making a living. As such, the school-to-work or education-to-employment transition becomes critical for realizing education’s potential in reducing poverty and thus should be closely tracked.

In Nepal, although education is a priority for all stakeholders—from students and parents to policymakers and employers—they have varying expectations on the promise of education. Students and parents expect education to provide better life outcomes, particularly successful employment and a decent living. Meanwhile, employers expect education to produce a workforce-ready population. But neither group is getting the outcomes they expect. Sadly, the education system has placed little emphasis on technical and vocational education and training (TVET), widely considered by international development agencies as an important tool in strengthening the school-to-work transition, especially when basic education does not adequately prepare youth for the world of work.

Access to TVET is very limited in Nepal, and additional barriers make it harder for girls to participate in TVET programs. Despite the country’s remarkable progress in enrolling girls in school, dropping out remains a problem. And, although boys and girls in Nepal are almost equally likely to drop out from school, boys benefit more from the choices offered by TVET and from the economic opportunities both domestically and overseas. For girls, persistent gender norms that stereotype male and female career choices further limit their access to the already limited alternative education options like TVET. As a result of this narrower scope of education and training, females have poorer employment outcomes than males, and their participation is skewed mostly toward the informal sector and female-dominated occupations such as nursing and caregiving.

This paper seeks to increase understanding of how to improve girls’ and young women’s participation in TVET and to help strengthen the bridge between their education and employment. The paper draws from field research conducted with female students, teachers, and TVET stakeholders in seven districts of Nepal: Baglung, Chitwan, Dang, Kaski, Kavreplanchowk, Rupandehi, and Syangja. Primary data were collected through a survey of 60 girls and young women (42 current students and 18 graduates of various long- and short-term TVET programs), mostly in the 15- to 24-year-old age group. Interviews were also conducted with 20 other stakeholders, including TVET administrators, government TVET officials, education and TVET professionals, and private sector stakeholders. Three focus group discussions with 28 teachers of three public schools were also carried out to solicit qualitative information about the current barriers preventing girls’ access to TVET. In addition, secondary data were collected from reports, journal articles, thesis papers, and books. For lists of the primary and secondary data sources, see Annex A.

The rest of this paper begins by discussing the Nepalese education system, labor market outcomes, and the gaps and challenges in the work transitions of girls and women. It then presents the findings from the fieldwork concerning the barriers to girls’ participation in TVET programs. These challenges are broken down into those related to education, the labor market, and social norms. The paper concludes by discussing the policy implications of these findings and recommending several high-level policy reforms for improving girls’ access to and participation in high-quality, gender-transformative TVET.

PROMISES AND OUTCOMES OF EDUCATION IN NEPAL

The Constitution of Nepal of 2015 (Article 31) guarantees the right to education to all citizens as a fundamental right (Constitute Project 2015). Everyone is entitled to free and compulsory basic education as well as free education up to the secondary level. To translate this provision into practice, the federal parliament has also enacted The Act Relating to Compulsory and Free Education, 2018 (Government of Nepal 2018).

One of the goals of education in Nepal is to contribute to workforce development and poverty reduction. However, the bitter reality is that mainstream education in Nepal has not been able to prepare people for the world of work. What students learn in schools or universities is often irrelevant to the needs of the labor market. The world of work is diverse, but the country’s education system has not been functional enough to address that diversity. Despite occasional attempts at reform, no concrete changes have been made in the education system’s functioning and outcomes. The only difference is that now more children and young people are in schools than before.

Whether to provide education is not a choice; what *type* of education to improve life outcomes and *how to do so* are the choices facing policymakers in Nepal. The major concern is the inefficiency of education in facilitating the transition from school to work. This is a persistent challenge for both families and policymakers and even more challenging for youth leaving school with few or no qualifications (Bray 2007). Global statistics suggest that more girls than boys are not in school and that this relative disadvantage worsens with poverty (UNGEI 2019). It is no different in Nepal. The vicious circle of poverty will simply continue if policies and programs ignore better preparation of girls for their transition into decent and gainful work.

Education and the school-to-work transition

Education is among Nepal’s priority areas, as reflected in its large share of the national budget. The education sector budget typically accounts for around 15 percent of the annual national budget, which is almost identical to the world average of around 14 percent in 2015.¹ More than half of this expenditure goes toward funding of basic education (MoEST 2018), and almost a quarter is spent on secondary education. Around 8 percent is allocated to tertiary education, and TVET gets the lowest share: around 3.0-3.5 percent of the total education budget.

The data in Table 1 illustrate the state of Nepal’s education system. The country’s increased emphasis on and investment in education have contributed significantly to improving access to school over the years. Tremendous progress can be observed at the primary level, especially in increasing girls’ enrollment. The net enrollment at the primary level has crossed 97 percent, and gender parity is said to have been achieved at all levels of school.

Table 1. Education system, number of students, and share of education budget, by education level, in Nepal, 2017

Education level	Grade	No. of years	Age group (years)	No. of students	Share of education budget (%)
Preprimary	ECD	1	3-4	958,127	2.30
Basic	Primary (1-5)	5	5-9	3,970,016	51.55
	Basic (6-8)	3	10-12	1,866,716	
Secondary	Secondary (9-10)	2	13-14	970,720	23.51
	Higher secondary (11-12)	2	15-16	584,072	
TVET	TSLC	1.5	15+	28,777	2.90
	Diploma	3	15+	19,714	
Tertiary	Undergraduate and above	4-12	17+	361,077	8.26

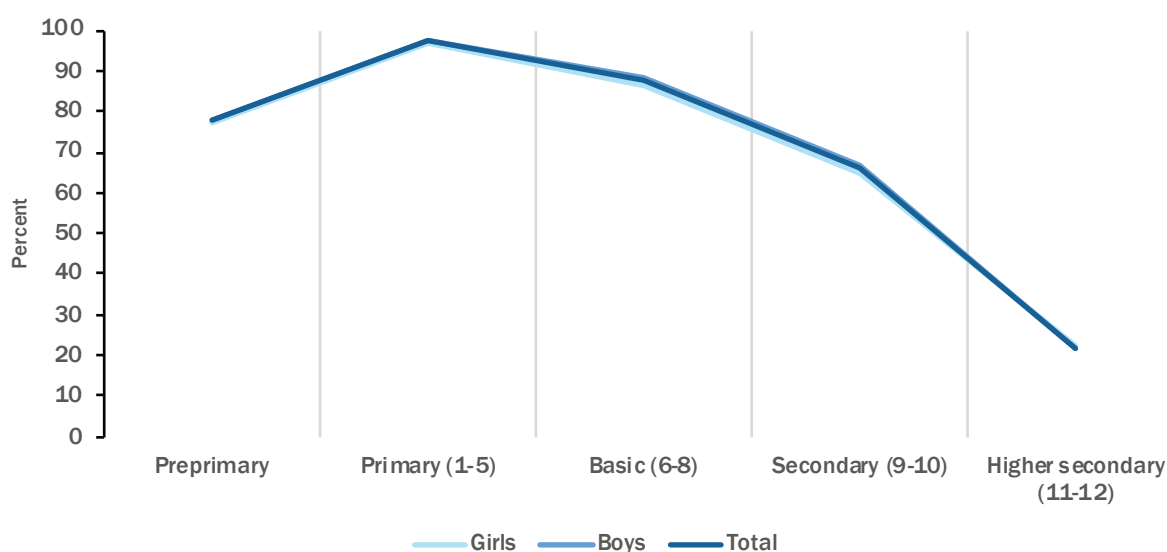
Source: MoEST 2018.

Note: ECD = early childhood development. TSLC = Technical School Leaving Certificate. TVET = technical and vocational education and training.

However, despite the progress, retention is a persistent challenge. The reduced enrollment rate in each subsequent higher level indicates that dropout is a rampant problem (Figure 1). Almost 80 percent have already left the education system before completing the secondary level of education. Calculations from the enrollment rate estimate that around 2 million school-age (primary to secondary) children are not in school. At the basic level (grades 1-8), 15.4 percent of girls are not in school compared with 13.3 percent of boys. Likewise, more girls than boys are not enrolled at the secondary level, grades 9-12 (MoE, UIS, and UNICEF 2016). Early marriage, workloads at home, grade repetition, poverty, lack of girl-friendly school environments, cost, distance to school, and other factors are associated with school dropouts (NPC, UNICEF, and New ERA 2010).

The data suggest that the education sector's major focus has been to achieve universal basic education (grades 1-8), which, in its present state of delivery, does not guarantee that youth have the necessary knowledge and skills to secure a job, a source of income, and a pathway out of poverty. In contrast, given the prioritization of resources and attention to basic and secondary education, the 80 percent no longer in school are left largely unsupported by the education sector to transition to the labor market. Although the gender disparity in primary and secondary enrollment is gradually narrowing, the gender disparity in labor market outcomes (discussed next) points back to a troubling gap in the support that girls, especially out-of-school girls, receive to transition to the workforce.

Figure 1. Net school enrollment rate of girls and boys, by education level, in Nepal, 2017



Source: MoEST 2018.

Note: "Net enrollment" refers only to pupils of official school age for a given grade level, whereas "gross enrollment" includes pupils of any age. Numbers in parentheses are the range of grades within an education level.

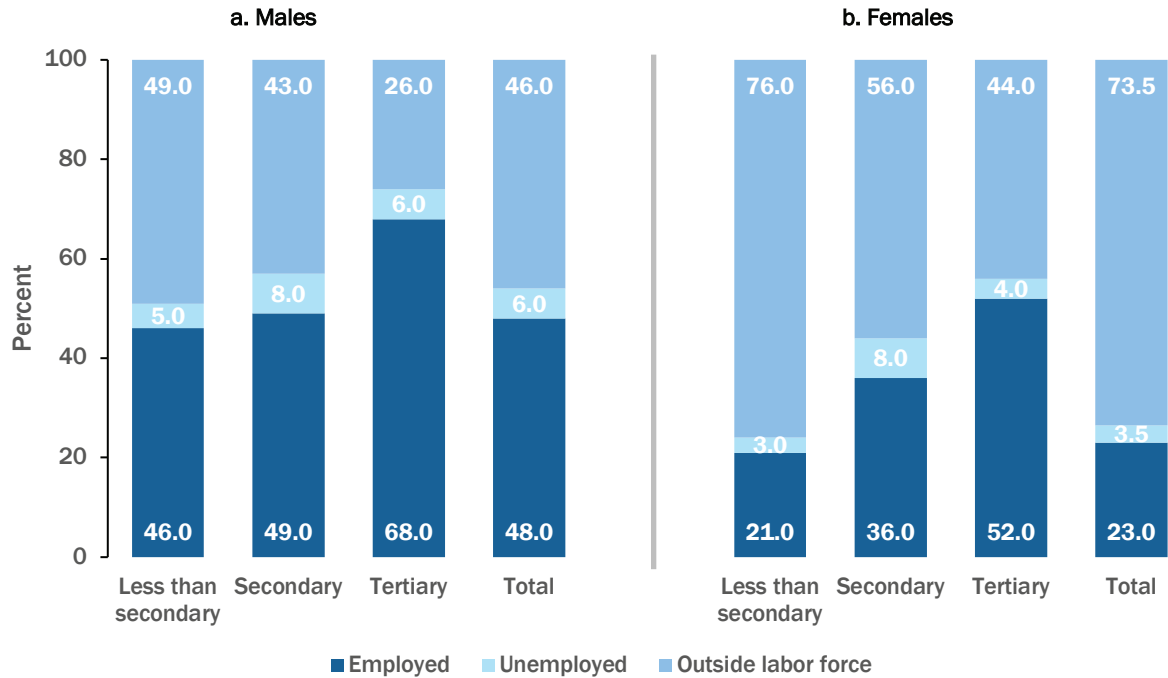
Labor market outcomes of education

If the return on educational investment is measured by labor market outcomes, then the link between education and employment in Nepal is either missing or very poor.

The 2017/18 Nepal Labor Force Survey (NLFS) reports that, of the total working-age population of 20.7 million, only 7.1 million were employed (CBS and ILO 2019). A huge gender disparity is also evident. Despite making up 56 percent of the total working-age population, females are underrepresented in the labor force: only around 26 percent of working-age females are in the labor force, compared with almost 54 percent of their male counterparts. Of those females, many are engaged in the informal sector, characterized by poor working conditions and environments.

Figure 2 shows the role that education plays in improving labor market outcomes, because people with higher educational attainment have higher employment rates. However, the figure also indicates that labor market outcomes are not the same for females as for males even with similar education levels.

Figure 2. Labor market indicators, by educational attainment and gender, in Nepal, 2017/18



Source: CBS and ILO 2019.

The unemployment rate is strikingly high among young women between the ages of 15 and 24. Their employment to population ratio is 15.4 percent, which is less than half the ratio for their male counterparts, 31.2 percent. More strikingly, almost one in two female youth and young adults (ages 15-34) is not in employment, education, or training (NEET), while that status applies to only around one in five male youths.

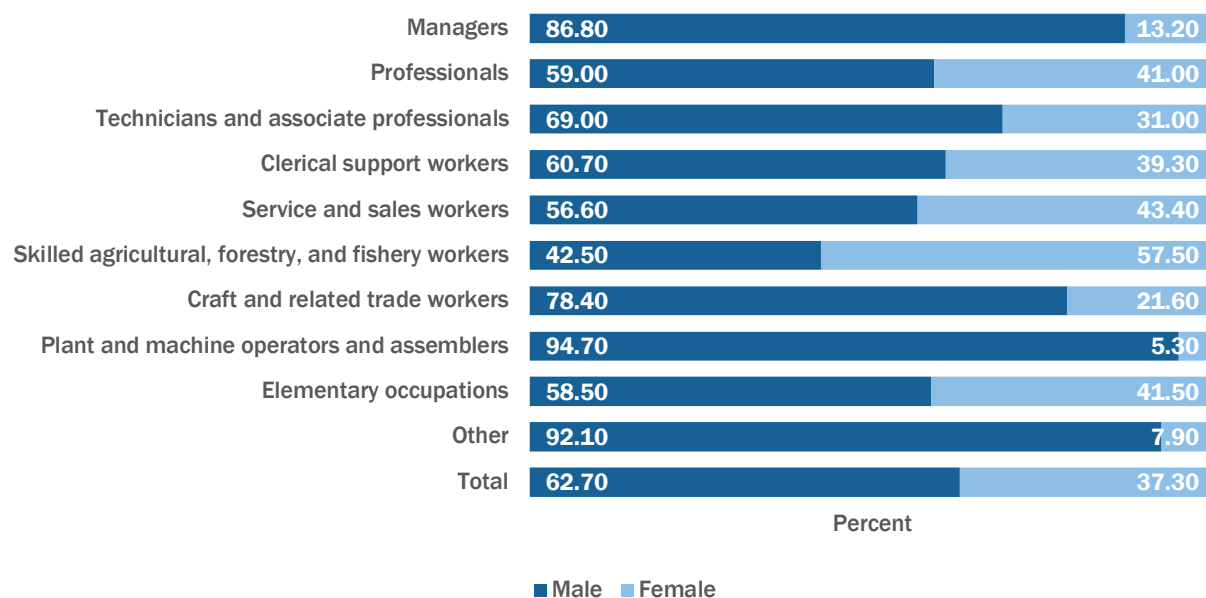
Once females do make it to the workforce, they are paid less than males, and their chances of getting high-level professional jobs are even rarer (Figure 3). The average mean earning of Nepalese employees in 2017/18 was NPR 17,809 (US\$161.36) per month, with women earning on average NPR 5,834 (US\$52.86) less than men.²



Students in a service course discuss their occupation.



Girls taking an automobile engineering course gain practical experience in a workshop.

Figure 3. Share of male and female employment, by occupation, in Nepal, 2017/18

Source: CBS and ILO 2019.

Note: Data were gathered through the Nepal Labor Force Survey (NLFS), a national survey conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics every 10 years to update the labor force statistics in Nepal. The third NLFS (2017/18) collected information from 18,000 households to analyze the patterns of key labor market outcomes and trends. “Elementary occupations,” according to the International Standard Classification of Occupations, refers to simple and routine tasks that mainly require the use of handheld tools and often some physical effort (CBS and ILO 2019).

Such statistics from the NLFS suggest that educational gains do not translate into labor market gains for women. In other words, the gender parity that has nearly been achieved in education is still a long way from being realized in the labor market. This indicates that there may be a mismatch between expectations (what people want as a result of their education) and outcomes (what people actually get as a result of their education)—a gap that should be corrected by shifting the focus toward bridging education to employment. This paper suggests that TVET can be one such solution to preparing youth for this transition.

TVET’S PLACE IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Despite its potential for addressing youth unemployment, poverty, and competitiveness in skills development toward current and projected opportunities and challenges (McGrath 2005), TVET has long been underemphasized in Nepal. Many international agencies such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the World Bank are advocating TVET as a lifelong learning instrument not only to strengthen the school-to-work transition but also to offer second chances to anyone at any time outside of formal education. Perhaps because of this increased focus, TVET found important space in SDG 4 (“Quality Education”) and explicitly Targets 4.3 and 4.4, which the MDGs had overlooked.³

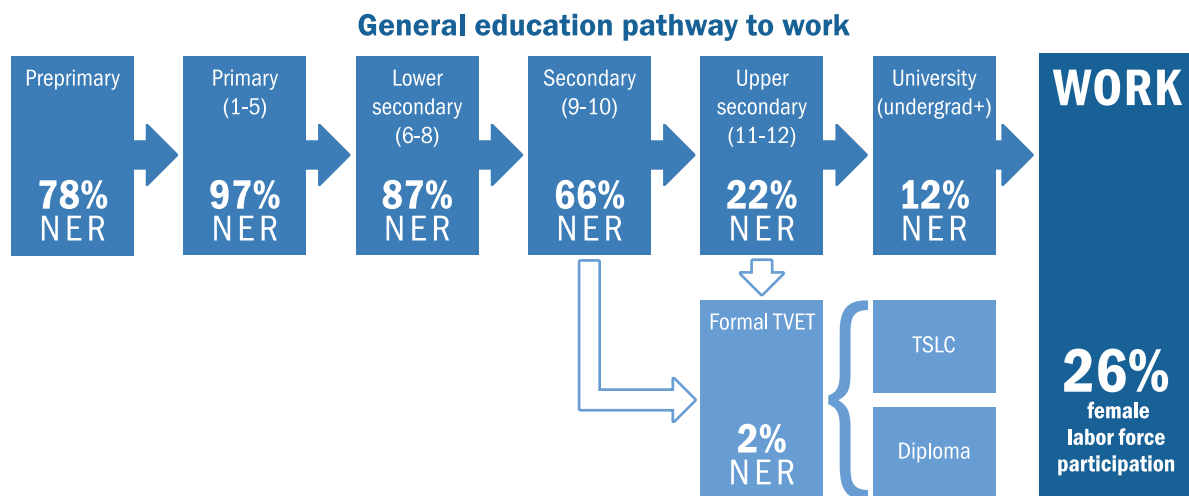
TVET, as a subsector of education, exists in Nepal but at a minimal scale: annual national spending on TVET is less than 3 percent of total education sector expenditure. A separate body under the Ministry of Education—the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT)—executes, oversees, and regulates the TVET sector. Because the TVET sector lacks a systematic data-keeping system, reliable information about participation is not readily available. However, the inaugural “Comprehensive TVET Annual Report 2016/17” suggests that TVET is greatly underused and not accessible to the population that needs it the most (MoE 2017).

Currently there are three levels of technical and professional education in Nepal:

- *High skill level:* University-level (bachelor’s degree and above) professional courses such as medical sciences, engineering, agriculture and forestry, and science and technology that are run by different universities and their affiliated campuses
- *Middle skill level:* Secondary-level Technical School Leaving Certificate (TSLC)⁴ and higher-secondary (diploma)⁵ technical courses (that can be pursued after completing grade 10) such as health, engineering, agriculture, hospitality, and so on that are run by the CTEVT and its affiliated institutions
- *Low skill level:* Informal, short-term vocational courses on different occupations such as masonry, carpentry, electrical, plumbing, beauty and cosmetology, tailoring, housekeeping, and so on run by various agencies including the CTEVT, various other government agencies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector

As mentioned earlier, only around 20 percent of all children in primary school make it to the higher-secondary level (grades 11-12)—a prerequisite to entering university-level programs—and barely 2 percent of all youth have access to TVET programs (Figure 4).

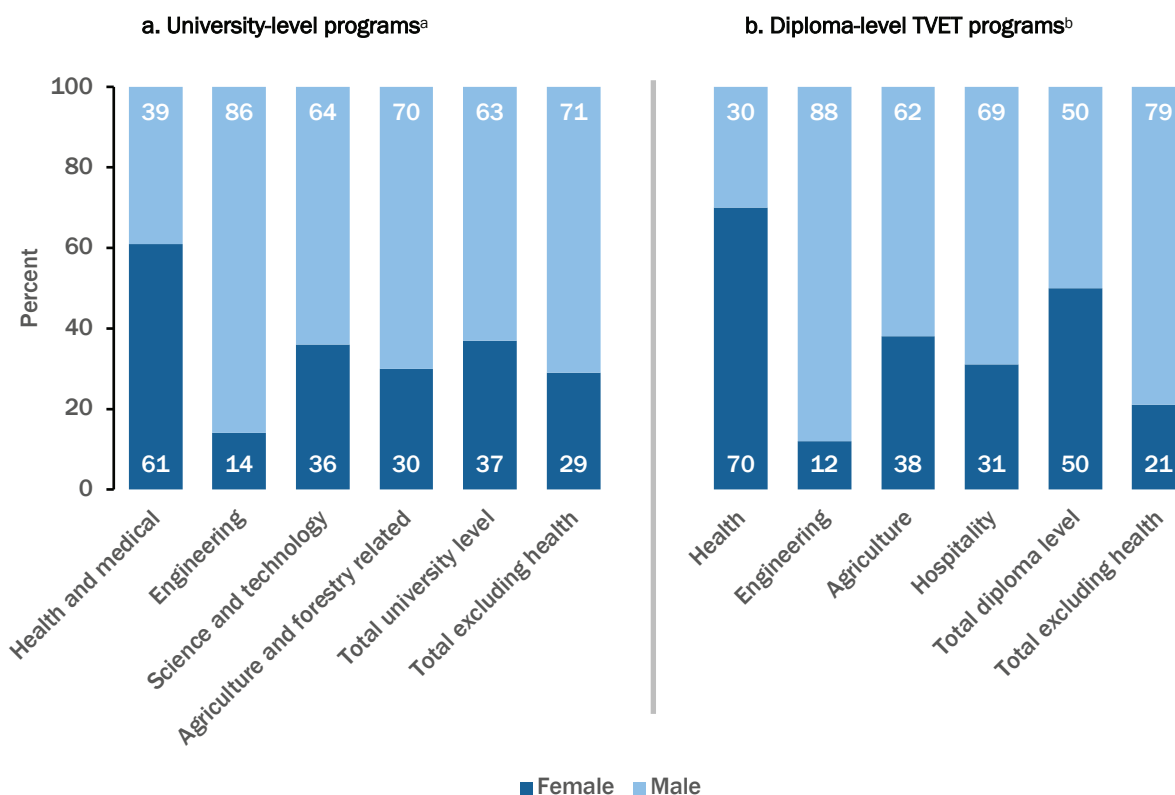
Figure 4. TVET’s place in the education system of Nepal and pathway to work, by net enrollment rates



Sources: Data from CBO and ILO 2019; MoEST 2018.

Note: NER = net enrollment rate. TSLC = Technical School Leaving Certificate. TVET = technical and vocational education and training. “Net enrollment” refers only to pupils of official school age for a given grade level, as opposed to “gross enrollment,” which includes pupils of any age. Numbers in parentheses are the range of grades within an education level.

The data show that in university-level professional courses female enrollment is 37 percent of the total enrollment (Figure 5, panel a). The ratio of female enrollment in diploma-level programs looks even more progressive, at 50 percent (Figure 5, panel b). Although the latter suggests that girls and young women do not face an access problem to TVET, this statistic is misleading and overshadows an underlying problem with females’ participation in TVET.

Figure 5. Share of male and female enrollment in postsecondary professional and technical courses, by type, in Nepal, 2018

a. Total enrollment in university-level professional technical courses (such as medical and engineering): 65,944.

b. Total enrollment in diploma-level TVET programs: 73,413.

Sources: CTEVT 2019; MoEST 2018.

Note: TVET = technical and vocational education and training.

Specifically, girls' participation in TVET is highly skewed toward health programs, especially in nursing, which is stereotyped as a female profession. Notably, of the total 17,693 places in diploma-level TVET programs in 2018, health programs alone constituted 59 percent (CTEVT 2019). Nursing covered 43 percent of the total health programs and 25.5 percent of the total intake of all diploma programs. This oversupply of nursing opportunities helps to explain the gender parity achieved in diploma-level TVET. However, if nursing is taken out of the calculation, the female participation rate in TVET decreases by more than half. And, if all the health programs are excluded, then female participation rates in university-level professional programs and diploma-level TVET programs are only 29 percent and 21 percent, respectively (as shown in Figure 5). Such consideration gives a more accurate picture of girls' participation in TVET.

Traditionally, girls and young women have enrolled at high levels in nursing programs for two reasons: First, nursing is open to females only, so it has come to be perceived as the best alternative education for females outside of mainstream higher-secondary education. Second, the field offers relatively higher chances for employment, both within the country and abroad. In recent decades, there has been an increase in private nursing colleges in the major cities of Nepal, which are producing around 5,000 nurses at the diploma level annually. Several studies have pointed out that the nursing profession in Nepal has almost reached saturation level because of a massive production and oversupply of nurses in Kathmandu and other major Nepalese cities (Adhikari 2015; Chhetri and Koirala 2017; Prakash, Yadav, and Yadav 2018). In fact, nurses constitute an important group of out-migrants, with Nepal estimated to be one of the top-ranking countries sending nurses to countries like Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Subedi 2014).

Meanwhile, girls' and young women's participation in nontraditional TVET programs is alarmingly low, as indicated in Figure 5. Reflecting this problem, female participation is extremely low in an apprenticeship program offered by the Enhanced Skills for Sustainable and Rewarding Employment (ENSSURE) Project, a four-year (2016-19) project implemented by the CTEVT and financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) (CTEVT 2018).

“The ENSSURE project has targeted to reach 64,000 Nepalese youth (60 percent from disadvantaged groups and 50 percent women in total). However, there is only less than 10 percent female participation in nontraditional occupations, and they are hopeful to make it at least 10 percent by the end of the project period.”

—CTEVT official

Therefore, although access to TVET is limited for both males and females, the gendered nature of TVET means TVET alternatives are more constrained for females. Their very low participation in courses other than health is a clear reflection of gender-biased socio-cultural norms.

WHY INCREASE GIRLS' PARTICIPATION IN TVET?

The young people who are not in NEET pose a serious security threat in Nepal because they are easy prey for participation in armed conflict, terrorism, crime, and drug abuse (Atchoarena 2007). In the case of girls, this status also translates into exposure to the risks of early marriage, early childbearing, slavery, unsafe migration, trafficking, and long-term social marginalization (NPC, UNICEF, and New ERA 2010, 96).

Most young people, notably girls, are out of school before reaching the secondary level. But even many of those who have completed secondary school are out of work, with little hope for a better life. The current mainstream education, focused on providing general skills, does not always match well with labor market needs. The inattention to TVET is undercutting the goals of education, especially for girls.

TVET, therefore, would be an important investment to help bridge the gap. Because TVET provides specific skills required by specific occupational areas in the labor market, TVET graduates can have higher employability. In fact, when TVET programs are managed and run well, with a strong link with the industry, transition rates to the workforce can be up to three times higher for those with TVET qualifications than those without (CTEVT 2016). In an ILO-funded school-to-work transition survey in Nepal, respondents who had received vocational education were the least likely to be unemployed (Table 2).

“[A] very small number of youth [are] engaged in vocational training. Only slightly more than 129,000 have attained the secondary or higher vocational level, which is far fewer than those who have obtained a university or postgraduate degree (around 317,000)... It could be that youth's inclination to engage in higher education is a reflection of the poor opinion they have about vocational education in Nepal, although the demand for labour ... shows a strong need for people trained in technical occupations. This important issue must be addressed by policymakers to better shape the educational profile of the youth population.”

—Nicolas Serrière,
“Labour Market Transitions of Young Women and Men in Nepal”

Table 2. Activity status of youth in Nepal, by level of completed education, 2013

Level of completed education	Employed (%)	Unemployed (%)	Inactive (%)
No schooling	74	7	19
Primary	70	9	21
Secondary	67	8	25
Vocational secondary	67	0	33
Higher vocational	88	4	8
University	68	24	8
Postgraduate	84	8	8

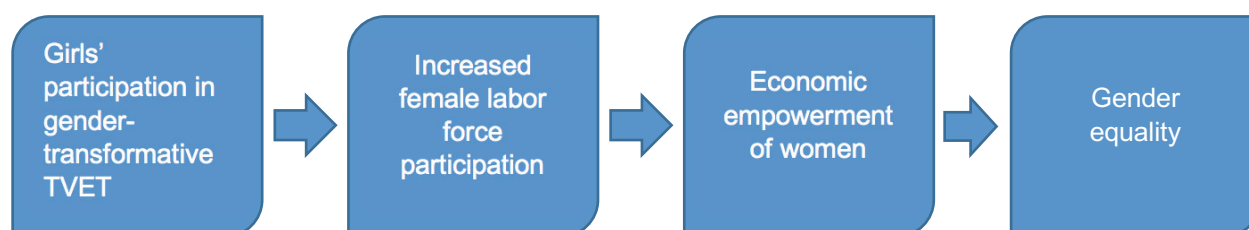
Source: Serrière and CEDA 2014.

Note: Survey respondents (n=3,584) were ages 15-29 years.

Moreover, girls' participation in TVET can substantially help to increase their labor force participation, but it must be gender-transformative. Too many times, girls and women in Nepal have been deprived of TVET opportunities to learn and acquire skills for higher-paying professional and occupational areas often associated with men. As a result, females have been pushed to fields of TVET study that fit their social and reproductive roles while keeping them in economically disadvantaged positions (Milovanovitch 2016).

For TVET to provide a pathway to improving the work transition of females (Figure 6), not only must girls' and women's skills be better aligned with demand—including through TVET combined with entrepreneurship and life skills (Chinen et al. 2018)—but there must be also an opportunity to break through gender stereotypes and achieve gender equality in and through TVET (Khan et al. 2017). After all, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development envisions the world with full gender equality, where women and girls are empowered (SDG 5), have equal access to quality education (SDG 4), and have equal participation in the labor market (SDG 8, “Decent Work and Economic Growth”).

Figure 6. Theory of change for gender equality through girls' and young women's improved participation in TVET



CHALLENGES OF GIRLS' PARTICIPATION IN TVET: KEY FINDINGS

Although we know promotion of TVET for girls and young women in Nepal could reap important social and economic benefits, several barriers stand in the way. This section identifies the major barriers to girls' and women's participation in TVET that emerged in my research: education factors, labor market factors, and social norms-related factors (summarized in Table 3).

Table 3. Barriers to girls’ and young women’s participation in TVET, particularly in nontraditional programs: Summary of major findings

Education factors (school and family level)		Labor market factors (employers)	Social norms factors (society and family)
Education policy and system much focused on general education; TVET underresourced and underemphasized	Parents’ lack of awareness about educational options, inability to provide children with career guidance	Largely unregulated labor market; unenforced labor law and rules	With no perceived ROI from girls’ education, sons get parental preference; girls are more engaged in household works
TVET not easily accessible because of low intake capacity, distance, and restricted entry requirement	Many girls unaware of TVET as an alternative to general education	Labor market biases against females; males preferred in many jobs and few policies or incentives for women	Social expectation to be economically dependent on father before and husband after marriage
Lack of career guidance at school; teachers not fully aware of current and future market needs	High expense of TVET relative to general education; inadequate subsidies and scholarships for girls	Youth unaware of labor market needs, including labor market prospects of different subject areas	Practices like early marriage, early childbearing, and child labor that put girls at risk of abuse and exploitation
Limited participation of girls in extracurricular activities such as sports and other exposures	High absenteeism and poor performance by girls in school	Ignorance of labor market stakeholders about the importance of connecting with the education sector, including TVET	Limited career choices for girls; TVET perceived to be only for males; where girls have access, they are pushed into gender-stereotyped courses such as nursing
Lack of gender-sensitivity in schools; girls’ needs are overlooked	Little time for girls’ study and other educational activities at home	Low emphasis on entrepreneurship and self-employment	Restrictions on girls’ mobility, limiting ability to leave home for education or job

Source: Field survey, 2019.

Note: ROI = return on investment. TVET = technical and vocational education and training. Table represents a compilation and synthesis of responses to the question, “What do you see as the current barriers of girls’ participation in TVET?” Respondents (n=108) represent different groups: girls, schoolteachers, TVET administrators, educational experts, and employers. The responses in the table have been organized in order of the significance of barrier. There is some overlap between the factors, especially regarding social norms as they operate across all factors and levels.

Educational factors

Educational factors, in general, are systemic issues within the education system that affect both girls and boys. Some factors are more specific to girls, but in large part girls’ and boys’ participation in TVET is affected by these factors. In this realm, I will discuss three primary barriers that mostly affect girls’ participation in TVET programs.

Early school dropout rates

Almost 80 percent of schoolchildren leave school before reaching the higher-secondary level, around 55 percent of whom are girls. The question is where they go after leaving school without graduating. The entry criteria for formal TVET restricts access: applicants must have at least a School Education Examination (SEE) degree.⁶ So there is no chance for the school dropout to access formal TVET, and, sadly, Nepal’s education system lacks alternatives to help dropouts in their work transition. Though there are some nonformal

education programs and short-term vocational training programs, they are not properly managed and are often run in isolation without any connections to the labor market.

Girls who drop out are in a particularly more vulnerable position because they are left without any choices. Boys' freedom of mobility would provide them with the option of going abroad for foreign employment (a common phenomenon in Nepal) or to leave hometowns in search of employment elsewhere in Nepal. For girls, the alternatives would be to either help parents at home or become victim to early marriage and early childbearing, domestic slavery, trafficking, and so on. Some may find employment in the informal sector, such as working in private households and in unregistered factories and business enterprises, although those choices again come with a higher likelihood of exposure to abuse and exploitation.

"I left school when I was 12 years as it was very difficult for my parents to afford school for all their five children. Being the eldest child, I had greater responsibility to support my parents. So, I started working as a housemaid for a wealthy family in the city after leaving school. The house owner had promised to send me to school and give 5,000 rupees per month as my salary. I had to wake up early morning every day and do all the household chores such as cleaning, washing, cooking, taking care of the child in the house, etc. Likewise, it would be very late to bed after finishing all my works. However, I was never sent to school as promised and was also not given monthly salary. They used to give me some pocket money whenever I had to go home and that was all."

—Girl, age 17

Limited TVET intake capacity

One of the biggest challenges of the Nepalese system is that the 80 percent of children who never complete secondary level, most of whom are girls, have hardly anywhere to go in the education system to help support their transition to work. Even for those with a secondary school degree, access to TVET is difficult mainly because of its limited intake capacity. The current capacity is only around 50,000 compared with around 600,000 students at the higher-secondary level (MoEST 2018).

"If we look at the numbers only, gender inclusion in TVET could somehow be observed but at the cost of female participation in traditional occupations, mostly in health and particularly in nursing programs that are open only for girls. Girls' participation in nontraditional courses is very low, suggesting that TVET is not gender-inclusive in a true sense. We need to encourage and attract girls in nontraditional courses through policy measures. One of the main reasons for girls' poor participation in TVET [is] the merit-based intake system. Whoever gets higher scores in the entrance test is selected. Very few girls have been able to get through this selection process, and sadly there are no reservations for girls."

—TVET professional

In addition, the merit-based, highly competitive intake examination system for TVET programs makes it more difficult for girls to enroll in those programs. Those who tend to achieve top scores and gain admission to TVET are boys. With no quotas allocated for girls in nontraditional TVET subjects, nursing becomes the default choice for girls as boys do not elect this subject. Yet, given the limited intake capacity, even if every girl in Nepal wanted to study nursing, she would not get the opportunity to do so.

Lack of information and career guidance

Lacking access to information and career guidance is symptomatic of how the education system does not give TVET enough emphasis compared with general education. This might be because of general perceptions of TVET as second-class education. Many consider TVET to be an unattractive pathway leading to dead-end jobs, resulting from the impression that it is an inferior alternative to general education (Eichhorst et al. 2012). These perceptions show that the education system is not considering how it might need to proactively support youth in bridging school to work by providing them—early on—with knowledge, information, role models, and so on.

Instead, the system is narrowly focused on general education, which at the end of the day leaves youth, especially those who drop out, without clear ideas about their options for further education and training. Students do not get any occupational and career guidance while they are in school. In many cases, they also do not have anyone in the family who can guide them properly. The girls in my study confirmed these observations. My study also demonstrated that many girls lack clear ideas about which subject area to study or what type of postsecondary education to pursue—hence creating the conditions for eventually choosing to either continue mainstream general education or go into stereotyped TVET courses, as has been the norm.

“After completing secondary school, I had no idea what to study at higher secondary level. I have no one in my family who could advise me as they are not very educated. At that point, I really wished that I could have learnt about different occupations and career choices while I was in school. As per the suggestion of one of my seniors in school, I am now doing diploma in geomatics engineering. I never knew before that this kind of course exists.”

—Girl, age 17

Social norms-related factors

The prevailing traditional beliefs and practices against girls cannot be overstated because they underlie deprivations and constraints throughout girls’ life cycles (World Bank 2014). In Nepal, a patriarchal society with a strong son preference culture, social norms operate and intervene at multiple levels to limit the choices, hopes, and opportunities for girls and women. Lower priority and investment for girls in education, mobility limitations, and traditionally defined gender roles are all outcomes of the country’s persisting social norms, which emerged strongly during the field survey.

In addition, because TVET is viewed as second-class education for poor and disadvantaged people—and then, too, for men only—women are not encouraged to participate in TVET. This leaves them with fewer options to avail themselves of the opportunities TVET could have offered them.

And, even when girls can access TVET, social norms push them toward courses that are traditionally defined as female occupations such as nursing and caregiving, beauty and cosmetology, tailoring, and so on. This traditional socio-cultural belief is also a challenge to their participation in TVET.

“It is unfortunate that TVET has been labeled as kamdarko sikchhya (education of the working class) and perceived as only for men. This kind of wrong and misleading notion gives the impression that TVET programs are only for the men from disadvantaged groups. This is an unfair treatment and outlook against TVET, [which] has a huge potential to improve employability, economic growth, and poverty reduction.”

—TVET professional

Labor market factors

The labor market conditions and environment also directly or indirectly influence female participation in TVET. My study illustrated how perceptions of labor market conditions might inform girls’ and women’s participation in TVET. Young female students in my study who were enrolled in TVET programs had a more positive view of the labor market, believing that it was attractive and welcoming to females. Such perceptions are likely linked to their decisions to pursue TVET. However, this was not a common perception. In the context of Nepal, where economic growth has not been realized, most people I spoke with perceived that there are fewer employment opportunities.

One of the TVET professionals whom I interviewed said, “The labor market is relatively biased against women in terms of giving equal employment opportunities and equal wages. The labor market should equally be favorable to women as it is to men. When it becomes attractive and welcoming to females, it would surely encourage girls and women to pursue TVET. Lack of regulation and enforcement of labor laws and policies has left little incentive for women to participate and enabled employers to actively discriminate against women with equal qualifications.” Employers in my study agreed that they preferred males, especially for the jobs that required physical strength, operation of machines, and travel to outdoor working sites.

Just as there is a barrier within the education system in terms of a lack of information and career guidance, there is also no system or mechanism in place through which information about the country's current and future labor force and labor market needs is communicated to the public or to the education system. According to most of the TVET professionals interviewed for my study, having such a system would immensely help in providing schools and parents with the information to guide students in making more informed career decisions. This would not only increase the number of students in TVET, including girls, but also substantially help to expand TVET education in the country. In the absence of such a mechanism, TVET institutions do not necessarily have the information to align their programs with labor market needs.

WHAT'S HAPPENING: CURRENT INITIATIVES BY STAKEHOLDERS

Over the past few years, some attempts have been made by various actors to promote girls' participation in TVET. Though such interventions have had some positive effects in increasing their access to TVET, their scale of implementation was very limited and thus inadequate to reduce the gap. However, further policies and programs could be devised by learning from those practices and experiences. The following policies and practices have, directly or indirectly, contributed in improving girls' and young women's participation in TVET, though more efforts are needed.

Government initiatives

Special scholarship for technical education program

A program launched by the government in 2010 and executed by the CTEVT has been providing scholarships for various long-term TVET programs (diploma and TSLC level), specially targeting girls from ethnic minorities and from impoverished and marginalized communities. According to the CTEVT Annual Report (2018/19), since the program began a total of 7,266 girls and young women have received the opportunity who would otherwise never have had access to TVET (CTEVT 2019). Of the 60 total respondents to my study survey, 42 were currently taking some TVET courses, and 18 others were graduates. Of the 42 current students, 16 were also benefiting from the program. All of them said that without the scholarship it would never have been possible for them to enroll in the program.

Reservations for women in public service jobs

Girls and young women have been attracted to TVET because of the government provision of allocating at least one-third of public sector jobs to women, according to one of the government TVET officials interviewed in my study. Traditionally, public service jobs have been dominated by men in Nepal because the sector—which also includes high-skilled technical positions in various fields of engineering, information technology (IT), agriculture, forestry, and others that require technical education—has been stereotyped as masculine. But a provision set in place in 2007 that allocated at least one-third of the public sector jobs to women not only encouraged more girls to pursue technical education but also assured them a higher chance of securing a job after completing a technical training course. The increase of female students, mainly in the engineering and agriculture-related courses in recent years, can be associated with the reservation system. When asked about their plans, almost all the respondents in my study who were enrolled in diploma-level programs answered that they would be preparing for civil service commission exams to secure public sector jobs. Moreover, there is a good demand for such jobs in the private sector, which further increases their employability.

Development and adoption of a TVET policy in 2012

A milestone in the TVET sector, the 2012 policy seeks to expand TVET opportunities on a national scale and aims to provide employment-oriented training programs to youth and adults, mostly targeting women and people from deprived communities across the country. It also foresees the development of a National Vocational Qualification System (NVQS) to recognize all modes of learning and skills acquisition and to create a clear pathway for transition to and progression in work. The policy focuses on five areas: expansion of training, inclusion and access, integration of various training modes, quality and relevance of the training programs, and sustainable funding for TVET. However, the effect of the policy has not yet been realized because no concrete outcomes have been achieved so far. Though the NVQS has reportedly been prepared, the government has not approved it yet.⁷

Technical Education in Community Schools

The Ministry of Education is directly implementing a technical stream of education in community schools, which was initially piloted in 100 community schools as planned by the School Sector Reform Plan (MoE 2009). The program has been continued by the School Sector Development Plan (MoE 2015), with the target of 540 schools offering TVET in one of the five subjects (electrical engineering, civil engineering, computer engineering, animal husbandry, and agriculture). At the same time, the CTEVT is also providing a similar program called Technical Education in Community Schools (TECS) in 397 schools (CTEVT 2019). So, there seems to be some duplication between the programs offered directly by the Ministry and by the CTEVT. A head teacher of one of the schools, who has been providing technical education since 2014, said they were lacking adequate infrastructures for practical learning and that finding and retaining teachers was another big challenge.

Project-based TVET programs

Executed by the Ministry of Education and implemented by the CTEVT, such projects are funded by various development partners. They are mostly focused on providing short-term, informal training courses to youth from underprivileged groups—mostly those from poor families, remote areas, females, *dalits*,⁸ and ethnic minorities. Some of the examples are Enhanced Vocational Education and Training (EVENT), the Skill Development Project (SDP), and ENSSURE. The projects are helpful in providing skills training opportunities for disadvantaged youth, both females and males. However, they are time-bound, and their continuity depends largely on their respective donors.

Nongovernmental initiatives

Nonformal TVET programs

In addition to the efforts from the government sector, several nongovernmental stakeholders are also trying to emphasize and promote TVET. NGOs and the private sector have also been providing TVET programs, mostly short courses of one month to one year in length, though few of them are also providing long-term diploma-level courses. Such programs are largely targeted to school dropout youth from disadvantaged backgrounds as a second chance to develop their livelihoods. Not all of them have been effective, but some if not all of these programs have also had lasting impact and can become good models for the government and other organizations to replicate. Some examples include the Butwal Technical Institute and Right4Children.

Butwal Technical Institute (BTI) has been providing diploma-level TVET programs for more than 55 years now.⁹ It is well recognized both within and outside the country for its high-quality trainings. BTI follows a dual training model—school-based learning and industry-based apprenticeship. All of its training programs and the number of trainees to be trained each year are fully industry-based. The industries not only provide apprenticeship opportunities for the trainees but also finance their training. This industry-financed model has helped to sustain BTI for over half a century. In the beginning, the trainings were offered to males only. BTI started to open its training programs to females about 23 years ago. Within this period, around 100 girls were trained, and all of them were employed right after the training.

“I graduated Diploma in Electrical Engineering from Butwal Technical Institute eight years ago. The training was very intensive with a lot of practical learning exposures in the actual work sites. Being the only girl in the group, it was quite difficult and challenging for me to complete the training, but I did it. I was offered a job even before completing the course. I have a good job in Nepal Electricity Authority now and an electrical business too. Had I studied other general subjects after my school, I would have been nothing more than a housewife now. I have a daughter and I also want her to pursue technical education in the future.”

—Woman, age 31

Right4Children (R4C) provides hotel- and hospitality-related TVET programs to youth from disadvantaged backgrounds.¹⁰ The training programs are targeted to school dropout youth—both girls and boys from difficult backgrounds—and are usually of six months to one year in length. The training program includes occupational skills along with classes in language, life skills, and IT. Since beginning to offer such programs five years ago, R4C has already trained over 250 youth, and almost half of them were female. Because many girls from the

targeted groups may lack access to information about the opportunities, R4C uses a girl-targeted outreach approach to find them. The strength of R4C's training programs is the involvement of multiple partners, including donors and the private sector. The donors sponsor the trainees from poor backgrounds. The private sector finances the trainings and also provides on-the-job training and job placement opportunities for the trainees. The trainees have a high chance of being employed upon graduation: the job placement rate is over 80 percent on average. In fact, it is even higher in the case of girls.

"I did a six-month course in housekeeping from Right4Children's hospitality training program four years ago. Immediately after the training, R4C helped me to find a job placement in a five-star hotel as a housekeeper. The training proved to be the life-changing opportunity for me and my family. Recently, I have been promoted as a housekeeping supervisor. I am glad that I have been able to support my family in many ways, especially in the education of my younger siblings."

—Woman, age 23

REMOVING THE BARRIERS: RECOMMENDATIONS

Immediate and thoughtful intervention is required to address the challenges and the gaps if we are to promote girls' and young women's participation in TVET and support them for their transition to work. The barriers to their participation in TVET are usually caused by the three major factors identified by the study: educational factors (mostly related to access for both girls and boys), social norms (motivation and support to take up and complete TVET), and labor market (transition to work).

My recommendations are organized under the three different areas and phases of TVET education: access, completion, and transition, or the "ACT" framework (Caubergs and Verhofstadt 2017). Though government is primarily accountable to resolve all those issues, other actors such as NGOs and the private sector also have responsibilities to help the government in removing the barriers. I would like to make the following policy recommendations based on my learnings, particularly from the field study, desk research, and personal experience.

Improve girls' access to TVET

Integrate all TVET programs under one implementing agency, and increase government expenditure in TVET

TVET is fragmented into multiple programs under different ministries and departments. Therefore, all TVET programs must be integrated into one structure, and the Ministry of Education should be made the responsible agency for the execution of the programs. TVET currently receives less than 3 percent of total education spending, and only 2 percent of secondary and postsecondary students enter TVET (NIRT and AIR 2017). It is essential to expand the TVET programs so that they are available to many and especially to reach out to the 80 percent of students who leave school. Updating the curricula, providing scholarships to those from poor families, and preparing and training teachers require greater funding. Equally important is to develop a gender-transformative approach in TVET to make it possible for girls to benefit from the choices of different occupational courses that are relevant to labor market needs.

"A gender transformative approach goes beyond addressing 'symptoms' to explicitly tackle the root causes of gender inequality, particularly unequal gender power relations, discriminatory social norms and systems, structures, policies, and practices. It improves the daily condition of girls while advancing their position and value in society."

—Plan International (2018)

Especially in the case of dropouts, adopting flexible pathways of progression through the NVQS that connect informal learning to formal TVET systems would contribute greatly to reducing the barriers to TVET participation for both girls and boys.

“There should be a clear career pathway in any education and occupation. It is one of the barriers in Nepal. There should be no dead end in education and career mobility in a democratic society. The system must open the door of further opportunities and possibilities. NVQS serves as a liberal approach to facilitate the career mobility.”

—TVET professional

The government should also think of strategic ways to attract private sector partners in delivering gender-transformative TVET programming that is mutually beneficial. The private sector will not only share TVET costs but also benefit from the increase in the skilled workforce its industries require. At the same time, such a partnership will also encourage employers to break some of the gender biases within the labor market and lead to better employment outcomes for women.

“Especially in TVET, partnership and collaboration with the labor market stakeholders is very important, which is sadly not happening in Nepal. We talk much about participation, but participation alone is not enough; it is only the first step. Participation should [be followed] by engagement and should ultimately lead to partnership. Strong and reliable engagement of and partnership with private sector and labor market stakeholders is missing.”

—TVET Professional

Begin exposure to the labor market early

The exposure and information students get in basic and secondary education could help prevent dropouts. Besides, it will also increase students’ understanding of available alternative pathways and possibilities after basic education (that is, TVET). One of the ways of doing so is through occupational orientation and career guidance at the basic level through adoption in the formal school curriculum. This will fill the gap of information and orientation on TVET, one of the key issues identified by my research. All groups of informants in my research highlighted that many girls are not aware of TVET programs, where they are available, and what future prospect different courses have. Providing career guidance at the basic level in school will, importantly, help both girls and boys to have informed career choices. It also helps to establish better connections between education and the labor market as students transit to the secondary and postsecondary levels.

Create an enabling environment for girls to complete TVET programs

Change community-level social norms

Improving girls’ access to TVET is not enough given the socio-cultural norms that are likely to prevent girls and young women from completing the programs. This is where NGOs and community-based organizations—especially those that work in education, women’s empowerment, and workforce development—have a greater role to play. Social norms and practices operate at the community and family levels, where the government does not have the same access as NGOs do. Therefore, government can mobilize and support NGOs to reach out to communities and families with social awareness and advocacy programs at the ground level along with mass media campaigns.

Make TVET gender-responsive and gender-transformative

Completing the programs also depends largely on the internal environment of the TVET institutions and programs. Ensuring gender-responsive curricula and a female-friendly environment is one aspect, but another important aspect is to develop gender-transformative TVET programs so that girls can participate in programs that enable them to break out of gender norms that are typically perpetuated by gender-blind TVET programs.

Facilitate girls’ and young women’s transition to work

Transition to work is the last but not the least important area. It is the outcome of all the efforts and investment in the earlier phases. To ensure smooth and successful transitions to work upon the completion of the TVET programs, government must collaborate with the private sector. Their involvement is needed not only in developing and updating curricula but also in ensuring that curricula are gender-transformative. This will help to match curricula with market needs while also serving the need for social transformation advocating gender equity. Similarly, the government must enable the private sector to make the labor market attractive

and welcoming for women and free of gender bias through improved labor laws and regulations. NGOs can play a supportive role by promoting and advocating for equal rights and opportunities for men and women.

Within the ACT framework, many factors need to be addressed simultaneously at different levels with collaborative efforts of multiple actors. Table 4 uses this framework to summarize my recommendations as actionable steps.

Table 4. Recommendations to specific actors, by action area

Action areas	Actors and recommended actions		
	Government (Ministry of Education or CTEVT and Ministry of Labor)	Private sector	NGOs (working on education and women's empowerment)
Improve girls' access to TVET	<p>Integrate all TVET programs under one structure and increase investment in TVET; emphasize and use TVET:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote partnership with the private sector employers in the financing and delivery of TVET.^a <p>Promote an interministerial approach to the development of gender-sensitive TVET policies with important elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing gender sensitivity training for all staff Promoting girls' enrollment through scholarships or adaptive entry criteria Creating gender-sensitive school environment with necessary facilities and ensuring safety and protection of girls Making TVET gender-transformative <p>Mobilize and support NGOs and the media community to educate communities on the importance of TVET and to eliminate gender-stereotyped messaging in the TVET field.</p>	<p>Support and partner with government in financing and delivery of gender-transformative TVET:^b</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design and provide firm-based informal training and apprenticeship programs, prioritizing girls. Collaborate with the government TVET body (CTEVT) for the recognition and accreditation of the training programs. 	<p>Encourage families to invest in girls' education, particularly in TVET education.</p> <p>Inform girls and parents about the opportunities of TVET programs:^c</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Motivate girls to join TVET programs, using role models. Approach men—fathers, brothers, husbands, employers—to change their views on girls' participation in TVET and especially in breaking the social norms around gender segregation of career choices. <p>Continue to run TVET programs, especially targeting girls, because government programs and intake capacity are very limited.</p>

<p>Create an enabling environment for girls to complete TVET programs</p>	<p>Monitor and supervise TVET institutions and programs to ensure training delivery is competency-based, responsive to girls’ needs, and geared toward transforming persisting gender inequalities.</p> <p>Provide necessary financial and technical assistance to institutes and programs in their efforts to help girls complete the programs.</p> <p>Provide professional development opportunities for school leaders, teachers, and instructors to improve their efficiency.</p>	<p>Build and maintain the relationship with the relevant TVET institutions and programs during all the phases of the program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit and monitor the delivery of training programs (curriculum application phase),^a and provide feedback for improvement to ensure the linking of skills with market needs. 	<p>Conduct meetings and interactions with family to enable them to support girls in continuing and completing the programs.</p> <p>Within the organization’s financial capacity, sponsor a number of girls in TVET in collaboration with TVET institutions or programs.</p> <p>Carry out education and awareness-raising programs for girls, parents, family, and community members around gender-biased socio-cultural norms.</p>
<p>Facilitate girls’ transition to work</p>	<p>Ensure that the TVET curriculums match labor market needs and are updated in accordance with the time and technology:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a job and labor market survey and forecast every five years. • Engage the labor department and private sector to evaluate and update trade offerings and curricula according to market needs. <p>Encourage the private sector to adopt and apply the reservation system in employment, as in public sector, to ensure job opportunities for females in all areas.</p> <p>Make it mandatory to have a placement unit in all TVET institutions and programs to support graduates in transition activities and ensure that they are effectively functioning.</p> <p>Develop women’s job centers with services such as job counseling, identification of job profiles, job matching, and so on.</p>	<p>Collaborate with TVET institutions to provide work-based learning opportunities such as apprenticeship and on-the-job training programs.</p> <p>Strengthen the link with the training institutes and programs by having formal agreements to provide job placements to the training graduates, with provision of certain reservations for female graduates.</p> <p>Create a favorable environment for women in the labor market by ensuring equal opportunities in employment and career growth, discouraging gender segregation of occupations vis-à-vis labor laws and regulations.</p>	<p>Analyze the situation of young women in the job market, and formulate measures to tackle the identified constraints.</p> <p>Promote women entrepreneurs, and encourage women in self-employment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run PSAs with women entrepreneurs to help shape student, parent, and community perception.

Include entrepreneurship and life skills as part of TVET curricula to promote self-employment among youth and facilitate their access to loans.

a. Renold et al. 2018.

b. Moses, Muladi, and Syaviri 2016.

c. Nanda et al. 2017.

Note: CTEVT = Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training. NGO = nongovernmental organization. PSA = public service announcement. TVET = technical and vocational education and training.

CONCLUSION

Nepal is committed to achieving the SDGs by 2030. SDG 4—which is about inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all—explicitly stresses the need for affordable and quality TVET to substantially increase the number of youth and adults with relevant skills for decent employment.

There has been linear progress in general educational attainment of girls and young women in Nepal, especially in attending school, and gender parity is almost achieved. But this improvement in girls' and young women's educational attainment is not reflected in the labor market and life outcomes. The female labor force participation rate is very low compared with that of males. Where females are engaged in employment, it is mostly in the informal sector and in the occupations characterized as female. Despite the improved access in school-level general education, access to TVET is very limited for both girls and boys. However, girls are proportionately less likely to enroll in nontraditional TVET programs outside of health-related courses.

The public expectation from the education system is that it should prepare young people in the best possible way for their introduction into the world of work. However, the education system has not been able to offer people the right choices for their careers. Along with ensuring that all children complete basic education, attention has to slowly shift toward helping them transition into the formal economy. And, for this, more emphasis and investment in gender-transformative TVET would be beneficial.

Nepal should not miss the opportunity to capitalize on economic gains from its demographic structure. There is a large share of youth in the population, with more young women than men. Therefore, Nepal must prepare its youth as a competitive and skilled workforce through appropriate policies and programs. Promoting young girls' participation in TVET would be an ideal strategy. It would substantially contribute to the economy as well as reduce the gender gap by helping empower girls and women. To that end, policies should focus on removing the barriers that limit girls' educational choices and opportunities. Increasing investment in TVET and expanding TVET opportunities that target girls would particularly help them in their transition to work; nevertheless, it would benefit boys as well.

ANNEX A. MAIN DATA SOURCES

Primary sources

Field survey with 60 girls (42 current students of TVET and 18 TVET graduates), 10 administrators, 10 education and TVET experts, and 4 employers. Information was collected using different sets of semistructured questionnaires for the interviews with girls, administrators, education and TVET specialists, and employers. A checklist was used to facilitate focus group discussions with 28 public school teachers. All of them were selected purposively based on their availability.

Secondary sources

- Nepal Labor Force Survey (NLFS 2017/18), a national survey carried out every 10 years to update the labor force statistics in Nepal. NLFS 2017/18 is the third such survey. It collected information from 18,000 households throughout the country that was used to analyze the patterns of key labor market outcomes and trends.
- National Population Census Report, 2011
- Nepal Living Standards Survey Report, 2011
- Annual reports of the Ministry of Education
- Flash reports of the Ministry of Education
- Annual reports of the CTEVT
- Comprehensive annual TVET reports (2017, 2018)
- “Labour Market Transitions of Young Women and Men in Nepal,” an ILO survey (Serrière and CEDA 2014)

NOTES

¹ Education expenditure data from UNESCO Institute for Statistics, retrieved from World Bank Open Data, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GB.ZS>.

² US\$1 = NPR 110.37 per Central Bank of Nepal's exchange rate of August 1, 2019.

³ SDG Target 4.3: "By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university." SDG Target 4.4: "By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship." (Source: "Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all," Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, United Nations: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg11>).

⁴ The TSLC results from completion of an 18-month course equivalent to completion of the School Education Examination (SEE).

⁵ The diploma is earned after completion of the higher-secondary, three-year course that can be undertaken after completion of the School Education Examination (SEE), the final board examination at the end of grade 10.

⁶ SEE is the national board examination, taken at the end of grade 10.

⁷ For more information about the NVQS, see "Nepal Qualifications Systems (NVQS)," Projects, Swisscontact: <https://www.swisscontact.org/nc/en/country/nepal/projects/projects-nepal/project/-/show/nepal-vocational-qualifications-system-nvqs.html>.

⁸ "Dalits" are members of a caste group traditionally considered as "untouchables."

⁹ For more information, see the BTI website: <https://bti.org.np/>.

¹⁰ For more information, see the R4C website: <http://right4children.org/>.

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