



UDAAN: Empowering Out-Of School Girls to Re-Enter Formal Education

UDAAN Approach

The *UDAAN* model, facilitates the enrollment of out-of-school adolescent girls aged 10-14 in Karnali, Madhesh and Lumbini Provinces. *UDAAN*, which means "flight" or "flying high," is an accelerated education program designed to offer a second chance for girls who have either never attended school or dropped out early to transition into formal schools. The accelerated curriculum for the *UDAAN* program is developed and endorsed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) and Center for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD).

CARE Nepal launched the *UDAAN* program in 2013 in Kapilvastu District, Lumbini Province, to provide out-of- school adolescent girls in the district with the opportunity to get an education through existing community learning centers (CLCs). In Nepal, each ward within a municipality is supposed to have a CLC, though many of these spaces are temporary and dependent on external project support. CARE aims to revive and utilize these spaces to host *UDAAN* classes. In addition, CARE, in collaboration with CEHRD, has been strengthening CLCs through capacity building efforts such as training on the Non-Formal Education Management Information System (NFE MIS). With the recent updates to the *UDAAN* curriculum, CARE and other development agencies implementing the *UDAAN* program are also training local facilitators on both the content and delivery of the updated curriculum.

Since 2013, CARE has led the establishment of 190 *UDAAN* centers across Lumbini and Madhesh Provinces and 49 mentor run *UDAAN* classes through mentorship model in Karnali province. In these areas, since adolescents are unable to travel to learning centers, facilitators travel to the communities and conduct sessions at centrally located sites that are convenient for participants.

What are we doing?

Consultation with the local stakeholders: CARE Nepal facilitated consultative meetings with local stakeholders to introduce them to the *UDAAN* approach. The project staff coordinated with government stakeholders in education first at the province level and then at the district level to identify the municipalities with the highest dropout rates. Working in close coordination with the municipal education unit focal points or coordinators, mayors, and chief administrative officers, the *UDAAN* facilitators were able to identify communities with the highest rates of out-of-school girls and dropouts.

Capacity building of *UDAAN* facilitators: CARE Nepal hired facilitators on a contractual basis to serve as focal points, responsible for conducting classes at *UDAAN* centers following the curriculum for levels 1, 2 and 3, which are developed and endorsed by the MoEST and CEHRD. Before launching the *UDAAN* centers, facilitators received 7-day training on the activity-based learning approach, including learner portfolio management, aligning with the newly updated accelerated, condensed curriculum. Refresher training sessions, review meetings, and regular check-ins are conducted with the facilitators to ensure their capacity continues to grow, that questions and concerns are addressed, and they are up to date with the curriculum. The facilitators from the local community use the local language to teach, which is in line with the constitutional mandate in Nepal.

Curriculum overview: The initiative aims to reintegrate out-of-school girls into the formal schooling system at an appropriate level based on their competency, capacity, and demonstrated learning level. This model entails participation in an intensive and condensed 11-month curriculum, comprised of 832 credit hours for Level 1 and 1024 credit hours for Level 2. Level 1 targets girls who have never attended school, covering Grades 1-3. Level 2, designed for girls who dropped out before completing early grades, covers Grades 4-5. Level 3 is designed for girls who dropped out in grades 6-8.

Revised accelerated curriculum: When Nepal upgraded its formal education curriculum in 2019 for Grades 1-10, there was no equivalent update for non-formal education. Recognizing the need for revision, CARE, in partnership with UNICEF, advocated for and facilitated the update of the non-formal curriculum into a condensed format. Hence, CARE collaborated with CEHRD to develop a condensed curriculum based on the formal curriculum, ensuring comparable learning outcomes. This curriculum was endorsed by the National Curriculum Development and Evaluation Council at MoEST. Following endorsement by the Council, CARE and CEHRD disseminated the revised curriculum across all seven provinces and the National Association of Rural Municipalities in Nepal (NARMIN) helped disseminate at the municipal level. CARE also assisted CEHRD in creating the "NFE-Lifelong Learning Opportunities Operation and Management Standard," which is currently awaiting government approval.

Empowering adolescent girls: The 11-month accelerated learning curriculum not only facilitates the completion of primary education (Grades 1-5) for girls but also fosters leadership and life skills development. Based on the government's newly endorsed curriculum, it is designed to address discrimination faced by girls and uphold the principles of equity and inclusion. The curriculum includes themes that promote broader objectives of rights and equality and encourage students to cultivate a critical mindset. Through *UDAAN*, the girls are empowered to challenge the social stereotypes that exist in the community. Furthermore, the program engages parents, communities, schools, and government bodies to transform the harmful social norms that impede girls' access to education.

Building girls' agency: In *UDAAN* centers, in addition to regular academic curriculum, a diverse range of activities are organized to enhance the girls' agency and self-efficacy. These include girls' assembly or "Balika Sabha" sessions where girls demonstrate leadership skills and express their opinions on topics like child marriage through essays and art. They also receive information on reproductive health with support from nearby health facilities. Furthermore, the girls participate in Social Analysis and Action (SAA) sessions designed to strengthen their confidence in negotiation and decision-making. To help *UDAAN* girls build relationships with in-school students and staff and successfully transition to formal education, CARE Nepal runs the "*UDAAN* Friend Initiative."

Involvement of school management: Meetings with school principals are held to review *UDAAN* girls' learning progress and address other issues such as Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities in toilets as well as separate toilets for girls with running water. Parental involvement sessions are organized across all *UDAAN* centers to share learning and address concerns like absenteeism.

Transition to formal schooling: Upon completing the specific *UDAAN* curriculum, girls are integrated into appropriate grades within mainstreamed formal schools after undergoing government exams. Their follow-up is combined with ongoing discussions with school management committees and parents. CARE staff visit these girls in their schools and homes to offer continuous support and mentorship to facilitate a smooth transition to formal education. The program has developed a tool to capture the status of the graduated *UDAAN* girls and identify any support needs to ensure they are retained in schools.

What are Enabling Factors?

Coordination with local government authorities and parents: Working in close coordination with the local government and schools facilitated access to spaces for converting to *UDAAN* centers and provided opportunities to enroll girls in school after completing the *UDAAN* program. Engaging parents of the adolescent girls from the outset helped to gain their trust and support to send the girls to *UDAAN* centers and secure commitment to transition them back to formal schooling.

Cross-verification of dropouts: Schools track school enrollment through the Integrated Educational Management Information System (IEMIS). However, the database may occasionally include incomplete or inconsistent information. To supplement and verify the information in the database, the *UDAAN* facilitators conduct household surveys to gather data on out-of-school and dropout cases. The program supports a monitoring and verification system for schools to ensure the completeness and accuracy of data in IEMIS.

Criteria for inclusion in the UDAAN program: The out-of-school girls were selected for the UDAAN classes in close consultation with schools and the local government, based on the following criteria:

- Girls between the ages of 10-19 years
- Either have never attended school or dropped out of school for at least one year
- Reside in the same ward where the UDAAN program is being implemented
- Both the girl and her parents consent to participate in the program
- Parents commit to supporting their daughters in completing the UDAAN curriculum

What are the Challenges?

Stringent criteria: While the program is designed to reach marginalized communities, the requirement of a birth certificate for enrollment into formal schooling may lead to exclusion of potential participants. This barrier can undermine efforts to fully include marginalized communities in the program. CARE Nepal is working diligently with the municipalities to address this.

Non-functional community learning centers: Many community learning centers are non-functional making it difficult to implement UDAAN sustainably. It is important to assist municipalities with planning, implementing and monitoring the progress to operationalize CLCs and also build capacity of CLC facilitators. This will enable the centers to use appropriate channels to access federal conditional grants through local governing bodies, helping to make them functional long-term.

Lack of standard learning assessment tools: The government has not developed a standard learning assessment tool for UDAAN to periodically evaluate the progress of girls' learning. Though the project has developed its own assessment method, there is an opportunity to collaborate with the government to develop a standard tool for consistency.

Learnings

Orientation to schoolteachers and municipal authorities on non-formal education approaches and curriculum enhances their understanding of the barriers faced by out-of-school children and support required for them to catch up. Hence it helps to create supportive environment in schools for these children to continue formal education.

There's a need for adaptation in the government curriculum to integrate content related to Adolescent reproductive health and child marriage and other contextual social norms. This inclusion will help to empower girls with knowledge to address issues that impact their wellbeing and life.

To ensure continued participation of girls, it is crucial to offer flexibility in class timing and duration, taking into account the local context with considerations to cultural festivals and the farming and harvesting calendar. Aligning class schedules with the availability of UDAAN girls and employing learner-centered pedagogy to make learning enjoyable are key to ensuring consistent attendance.

Considering adaptations in facilitation such as having multiple facilitators or multi-grade methods is important. It is difficult for one facilitator to manage both types of learners - those who

had never enrolled in school and those who had dropped out. Switching between the levels is also cumbersome for the facilitators. As some municipalities have allocated budgets for facilitators, there is an opportunity to advocate for budgets to train facilitators in multi-grade, multi-level methods for Levels 1 and 2.

Way Forward

Overall, the accelerated curriculum for out-of-school girls aims to empower girls holistically, extending beyond traditional academic learning to get girls back in school. Keeping girls in school will ultimately help to reduce early child marriage in the community as well as support girls to maintain healthy and informed lifestyles.

Moving forward, *UDAAN* must consolidate its efforts to ensure sustainability and persistently draw insights for ongoing learning and adaptation. Equally crucial is advocacy with the local government to include resources for *UDAAN* facilitators in community learning centers in their budget. The proportion of dropout is higher among adolescents aged 15-19, CARE plans to expand the Level 3 courses for girls 15 years and older the future. This presents opportunities to connect to the local governments' existing efforts in advancing education for all.