



We hope you enjoy this edition of *OLE Nepal Newsletter*, a bi-monthly email newsletter from Open Learning Exchange (OLE) Nepal. It provides current news and information about the organisation and its activities and will keep you up to date with OLE Nepal's work to provide high quality education for children in Nepal.

OLE Nepal An Introduction



Open Learning Exchange (OLE) Nepal is a Kathmandu based organisation working in conjunction with Nepal Government's Department of Education (DoE) to introduce an Information and Computer Technology (ICT)-based education approach in Nepali public schools. Recognising that technology provides us with the medium to rapidly and effectively address the urgent need for higher quality and greater and more even access to education in Nepal today, the organisation has undertaken a first of its kind project that aims to systematically integrate technology in classroom teaching. Technology, however, is merely a means to an end; content creation is at the core of what OLE Nepal does. OLE Nepal is attempting to transform the public school system in Nepal through technology, with a deliberate focus on content creation, teacher preparation, capacity building and network and power infrastructure building. *(Full story on page 2)*

Partnering With the Government

The Director General of the DoE Mr. Haribol Khanal visited existing OLE Nepal programme schools as well as prospective schools in Dadeldhura, along with the Deputy Director of the DoE Mr. Baburam Poudel, who is also the government's focal person for the OLPC project, representatives from OLE Nepal and World Food Programme and other education ministry officials. To students, parents and community members who had gathered to welcome the visiting team, the DG encouraged the school communities to make the most out of the OLPC programme and emphasized the importance of cooperation from the entire community to make it successful. *(Full story on page 3)*

OLE Nepal, a Global Pioneer

Open Learning Exchange Centres from around the world met in Nepal to learn from its most vibrant and successful centre. OLE International Founder Richard Rowe highlighted that there is much that can be learned from OLE Nepal, which he believes is emblematic of the model that is being implemented in other countries with OLE Centres. Within this model, three factors are instrumental in making a project like this successful, all of which OLE Nepal has been able to put together: leadership by a social entrepreneur, a committed and supportive board of directors, and a strong relationship with the local government, which is necessary to achieve educational

Latest Developments

- » Second round of deployment completed in Mustang
- » Refresher teacher training conducted in Mustang
- » Workshop with Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) officials
- » Programme Schools in Kapilvastu connected to the Internet
- » Alliance to promote libraries in Nepal setup with partner organisations

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transformation on a large scale. OLE Centres from around the world learnt about OLE Nepal's work from various presentations and from visiting programme schools. *(Full story on page 3)*



OLE Nepal, An Introduction

Open Learning Exchange Nepal (OLE Nepal) is a Kathmandu based organisation working in conjunction with Nepal Government's Department of Education (DoE) to introduce an Information and Computer Technology (ICT)-based education approach in Nepali public schools. Recognising that technology provides us with the medium to rapidly and effectively address the urgent need for higher quality and greater and more even access to education in Nepal today, the organisation has undertaken a first of its kind project that aims to systematically integrate technology in classroom teaching, with a deliberate focus on content creation, teacher preparation, and capacity building. In its two years of operation, 2200 XO laptops (made by One Laptop Per Child) have been deployed to teachers and students in 26 schools in six districts and 125 teachers have been trained to integrate the laptop-based approach in classroom teaching. By May 2010, the programme will have expanded further to a total of 4400 students in eight districts and will have trained approximately 200 teachers.

Technology, however, is merely a means to an end; content creation is at the core of what OLE Nepal does. This primarily includes a lessons and exercises package (E-Paath), that is directly related to the curriculum goals set out by the government's Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), and a free and open educational digital library (E-Pustakalaya), that includes materials ranging from literature in Nepali, English and other Nepali languages to materials on health, education and civic responsibility for students as well as resources for teachers. E-Paath as well as E-Pustakalaya can be accessed through the Internet as well as through a simple and inexpensive network that have been set up at

programme schools.

While these new resources empower students to engage in self-learning in a fun and interactive way, we still believe that teachers are fundamental to driving education and this new process forward. In order to enable teachers to professionally develop in this new capacity and to collaborate with each other to improve children's learn-



ICT integrated classroom in Dadelhdhura

ing, OLE Nepal has been working with the government's training body, the National Centre for Education Development (NCED), to prepare teachers to integrate this new method in daily classroom teaching-learning pedagogy.

Additionally, believing that the only way for this project to be fully scalable is for the government to take on the initiative, OLE Nepal has also been involved in building the government's capacity to implement this novel project on its own. OLE Nepal works with government trainers who then train teachers together alongside OLE Nepal's trainers. Government bureaucrats from DoE, CDC, and various District Education Offices (DEO) are also involved in the planning stages, in training, in the selection of schools, in the imple-

mentation, monitoring and support of the programme.

To make sure the programme is on track with the goals set out for it, OLE Nepal is in the process of conducting a comprehensive evaluation of the programme. The first step of the evaluation, a formative evaluation, has already been concluded in 2009 with positive results. The next step, of conducting an impact evaluation, is well underway and its findings will be available by the fall of 2010. With definitive results in hand, the organisation and its partners will be able to confidently expand the project to more schools, grades, and children all over the country, making modifications if deemed necessary.

The potential achievements of a program like this reminds us of the old adage "give a man a fish, feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and feed him for a lifetime." Education is undoubtedly an integral part of all development models today. Even the biggest critics of formal education would be hard pressed to argue that education in some form is not essential for development. If education is so essential, then logic demands that giving the very best education possible must be a priority for effective development. The model being implemented by OLE Nepal both bolsters the current education system as well as aims to bridge the gap in access to information between different socio-economic realities. The success of the project will bring the students from different backgrounds in Nepal to a much more level playing field than before. If we are to make progress in leaps and bounds, we must focus on treating problems rather than just washing away the symptoms and this project aims to do just that.

Partnering With the Government

Dadeldhura in far-western Nepal is one of the six districts where the OLPC programme was piloted in the current academic year that began in April 2009. The programme in Dadeldhura has been implemented in three schools by OLE Nepal, in collaboration with the District Education Office (DEO), Department of Education (DoE) and World Food Programme (WFP) Nepal. A team consisting of representatives from all collaborating organisations visited the district from March 2-6 in order to study the feasibility of expanding the programme to two more schools there.

During the visit, the DoE was represented by the Deputy Director Mr. Baburam Poudel, who is also the government's focal person for the OLPC project, WFP by its Country Programme Coordinator, Ms. Pramila Ghimire, and OLE Nepal by its Executive Director, Mr. Rabi Karmacharya. The Programme Officer from WFP Dadeldhura Sub-Office Mr. Prem Singh Nayak and the School Supervisor from Dadeldhura DEO Mr. Dharma Singh Ayer also joined the team in visiting prospective schools. In total, the team visited four prospective schools in three different Village Development

Committees (VDCs). In addition to inspecting the school infrastructure and checking the school records, the team met with teachers, School Management Committee (SMC) and community members, and parents to discuss their roles and responsibilities in the programme.

On the fourth day of the visit, the team was joined by the Director General of the DoE, Mr. Haribol Khanal, who took time out of his busy schedule to spend three days in Dadeldhura to gather first hand knowledge about the programme. He was accompanied by the Chief District Education Officer of Dadeldhura Mr. Ram Hari Das Shrestha. In addition to visiting one programme school and one prospective school, he met with officials from the DEO to discuss ongoing education activities in the district. He was also briefed by the WFP Sub-Office staff on WFP's involvement in the district through programmes such as Food for Education (FFE) and Food for Work.

The DG observed grade 3 students in Janajyoti School in Hamtad, Alital, using E-Paati laptops to learn Nepali lessons through the learning activities prepared by OLE Nepal, E-Paath. The school had organised a special programme to welcome



DG of Dept. of Education in Dadeldhura

the visiting team. In attendance were students, parents, teachers, SMC members, local community leaders, and journalists. Speaking at the programme, the DG encouraged those attending to make the most out of the OLPC programme and emphasized the importance of cooperation from the entire community to make it successful.

The DG also visited Selaling School, which is one of the four prospective schools. A large group of students, parents and community members had gathered there to welcome the visiting team. After the school principal informed everyone about how the school was established through the collective effort of the community, the DG praised the high priority that they had placed on education even though most of the parents were illiterate.

OLE Nepal, a Global Pioneer

OLE Nepal, a founding member of the Open Learning Exchange Network, hosted OLE Global Assembly in November in Kathmandu. The Assembly included OLE Centre representatives and other partners from Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America who met in Nepal to learn from OLE's most vibrant and successful centre.

OLE International Founder Richard Rowe highlighted that there is much that can be learnt from OLE Nepal, which he believes is emblematic of the model that is being implemented in other countries with OLE Centres. Within this model, three factors are instrumental in making a project like this successful, all of which OLE Nepal has been able to put together: leadership by a social entrepreneur, a committed and supportive board of directors, and a strong relationship with the local government, which is neces-



Presentation on OLE Nepal by Rabi Karmacharya

sary to achieve educational transformation on a large scale.

Participants at the Assembly learnt of the content and learning

activities developed by OLE Nepal that can be used whether a student is online, on a computer that is offline, or simply on paper. The Centre works closely with Nepal's Curriculum Development Centre to align the content with curriculum goals set out by the government. OLE Nepal also has an education-focused library (E-Pustakalaya) made primarily for school going children.

"Content is at the core of all the work we do," said Rabi Karmacharya the Executive Director of OLE Nepal, and the current global trend toward free and open educational software and content is key to enabling OLE Nepal to do its work. The fact is that with 6.5 million primary school children in Nepal, buying 6.5 million software licenses "would be beyond what we could afford," he said. By contrast, once OLE Nepal makes a learning activity or text available in its digital library, it is freely avail-

able to anyone who has the means to access it.

Even as he spoke of millions, though, Rabi emphasized that OLE Nepal has a very phased approach. "We cannot massively deploy from the start." The focus so far has been on grades 2, 3, and 6. Curriculum development and content aggregation in OLE Nepal's digital library have primarily targeted literature (to develop a reading culture in the children), art, Nepali, English, math, and teaching support materials, such as lesson plans. Interesting to note: Among the guidelines

to teachers is often the advice that laptops should not dominate a lesson, but perhaps take only 20 – 25 minutes out of a 45-minute session.

Teacher training is another emphasis of OLE Nepal's work, and the Centre has been working with the Department of Education to train educators to teach in a new way. As described by Dr. Prativa Pandey, chair of OLE Nepal's board of directors, the idea is to rely on teachers to drive education but empower students to engage in self-learning as well. The kind of creativity this fosters in children is exactly what

the nation of Nepal needs to build a future generation of entrepreneurs and leaders, she said.

"We have OLE Nepal to thank not only for hosting this successful Assembly but for showing us the way forward," said OLE International CEO Richard Rowe. "Breakthroughs in low-cost technology and open source content are making it possible as never before to give children the quality education that is their basic human right. This is not merely theoretical; it is beginning to happen today in Nepal."

Latest Developments

Mar 15, Lalitpur: OLE Nepal has joined forces with like-minded organisations with the aim to promote reading culture amongst children in Nepal through the establishment and expansion of physical and digital libraries in the country. OLE Nepal, together with Nepal Library Foundation (NLF), Help Nepal Network (HeNN), Room to Read, Kathmandu Valley Public Library, Prakash Community Library, CCS Italy, Children's Community Library group, and READ Nepal have agreed in principle to work on four major areas to develop libraries all over Nepal – advocacy, training teachers and librarians, resource mobilisation, and ICT issues. This close collaboration amongst the various partners will help overcome hurdles in the fight against widespread illiteracy, and highlight the importance of reading culture and libraries in Nepal's development. The group also plans to collectively attract the Nepal Government's attention towards the importance of libraries and its importance in enlightening and developing a nation. OLE Nepal is the leader in Nepal in the development and deployment of digital libraries, and has developed a first of its kind education-centred digital library,

E-Pustakalaya. OLE Nepal hopes to expand access to E-Pustakalaya and other reading resources in Nepal through this alliance.

Feb 22-Mar 6, Mustang: The program schools are now entering the second year of the OLPC project. 59 new laptops were deployed in Mustang district, bringing the total there to 418 XOs for students and teachers and 7 for government officials at the District Education Office. Deployment of XOs took place earlier there than in other program districts because of the different academic cycle in the cold mountainous regions. Our program now covers grades 2, 3, 4 and 6 there. Laptops given to last years' grades 2 and 3 students rose up a grade with them and new laptops are being given to incoming students of grade 2.

Feb 24-27, Mustang: Refresher Training for Mustang district was held at Janahit Higher Secondary School, Jomsom. There were 42 participants, which included 36 teachers from the program schools and 6 officials from the District Education Office. The training was conducted jointly by trainers from OLE Nepal and National Center for Education Development (NCED). Also, Deputy Director of

the Department of Education Mr. Baburam Poudel attended part of the program in Mustang. He collected feedback and suggestions from the teachers as well as the district officials and expressed a firm commitment to continue the effort to integrate ICT-based approach in Nepal's education system.

Feb 26, Lalitpur: A workshop was organized for CDC officials at Yalamaya Kendra in Patan Dhoka. The agenda was to update CDC officials on the latest content development happening at OLE Nepal and to get their feedback. Also on the table was a discussion about designing comprehensive courses, with detailed guides for teachers on integrating ICT into their regular teaching process. The aim is to help teachers understand the linkages between lessons- both e-path and textbook- and the curriculum. The CDC officials present at the workshop were very receptive to the idea and gave useful feedback.

Feb 16-26, Kapilvastu: OLE Nepal's network team connected schools in Kapilvastu to the Internet. They are the first government schools in the district to have access to the Internet.