

SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON QUALITY EDUCATION

ENSURING LEARNER-CENTERED EDUCATION

24-26 AUGUST 2019, KATHMANDU, NEPAL

Tel: 01-5522614, 5534318, 5542045 E-mail: icqe@ratobangala.edu.np Website: <http://rbf.org.np/icqe2019/>

CONCEPT NOTE

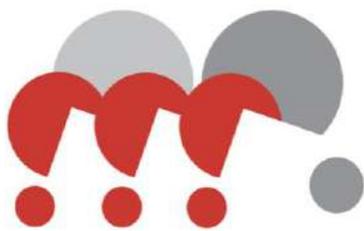
The second conference on quality education is being organised by the Rato Bangala Foundation in collaboration with the Ministry of education, science and technology (MoEST). It seeks to work towards achieving targets of the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) regarding quality education and Nepal's School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) Goals by focusing on providing quality education in the classroom, from early-childhood onwards. It recognizes that due focus on quality education is imperative in order to improve the lives and livelihoods of children in Nepal and ensure that Nepal reaches middle-income economy status by 2030.

1. Summary

Education plays a transformational role in human development, and on a societal scale it helps lift people out of poverty and raise living standards. To achieve Nepal's vision of attaining middle-income country status by 2030, as expressed in its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), education must not be limited to solving only the challenges faced today. Education must also meet the aspirations of Nepali citizens and provide them with the skills they need to live a sustainable and productive life in the profession of their choice in the 21st century. To achieve these goals there is no alternative but to provide quality education, starting in early childhood.

Engaged in seeking innovations to improve the quality of education in the classroom, the [Rato Bangala Foundation \(RBF\)](#) realized that meaningful conferences could be effective in sharing the message of the importance of quality education. It organized its first conference on the theme of quality education in 2003, followed by an international conference in 2013. Both conclaves were organized in collaboration with the [Department of Education under the Ministry of Education \(MoEST\)](#), Government of Nepal (GoN), [UNICEF](#), the [Royal Norwegian Embassy](#) and [Rato Bangala School](#). The second conference had additional partners, namely the [Asian Development Bank](#) and the [Open Society Foundation](#). Both conferences brought together classroom practitioners, education leaders, policymakers, researchers and other stakeholders, including parents and students, to share ideas and showcase best practices in school education from Nepal, South Asia and overseas. The innovations and ideas discussed during these two conferences contributed to the implementation of Nepal's own School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) (2009 – 2015).

The Government, for its part, has been consistently seeking to improve education quality in Nepal, given that access has been largely achieved, even through times of conflict and natural disasters. Working under its Child-Friendly School Framework in an effort to meet Millennium Development Goal 2, which aimed to “achieve universal primary education” by 2015, Nepal made significant progress in increasing access and gender parity at primary and secondary school level. However, there is much ground to cover in terms of providing all who attend school a high-quality education. Indeed, SDG 4 aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”, so RBF's focus on quality education has been most appropriate and essential.



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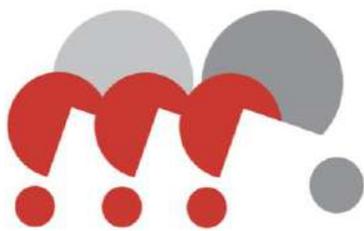
The August 24-26, 2019 Conference will concentrate on the theme of quality in school education, as did the earlier two conferences, taking into consideration advances in pedagogy, research and changes in the socio-political, demographic and cultural context of the country and around the world. The conference will cover the entire spectrum of schooling, from early-childhood to school-graduation, and will ask presenters and delegates to consider the following quality-related questions:

- What are the ways in which good-quality education can be offered to each child?
- What resources, human and financial, are required to achieve that ambitious goal?
- How can the required resources be assured?
- What innovations need to be put into practice?
- How will education be structured under the federal system to ensure quality?
- What are the roles for the Federal, Provincial and Local governments?

As no SDG is a stand-alone goal, the achievement or under-achievement in each goal will have implications for the fulfillment of others. Education in particular is a key goal, one that will influence other goals related to hunger, health and the environment. The worldwide SDG programme, which has been specifically developed by the countries of the global South, provides Nepal with an opportunity to transform its school education system, to transition from numerical accumulation to quality-led programmes. Nepali society must learn from the decades-long failure in introducing quality education in the classroom, particularly in relation to government schools, which about four fifths of Nepal's children attend.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) is partnering with RBF to host the Second International Conference in Quality Education titled "Ensuring Learner Centered Education". RBF is seeking other institutional stakeholders in education – who understand the urgent need to graduate from numerical expansion of the education sector to providing quality learning and instruction – to partner in organising the Conference on August 24-26, 2019.

It is vital that the achievements of the past be supported as the national state structure is reconfigured through three-tiers – the federal, provincial and local governments. Further, the restructuring under the new Constitution of 2015, which has gone into implementation through elections at all three levels, must be used as an opportunity to improve instruction and learning in government schools. This alone will ensure a bright future for Nepali society as a whole.



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2. Background and Rationale

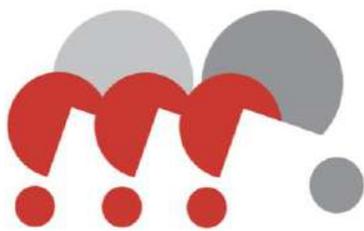
2.1 School Sector Reform and Development Plans

Nepal's School Sector Reform Plan SSRP (2009-2015) set out to achieve 15 key educational indicators. The MoEST, together with Development Partners (DPs) and support from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), expended its resources to complete the SSRP within seven years. The focus of the SSRP was to "expand access and equity, improve quality and relevance" for all the children in Nepal. However, the joint evaluation of Nepal's SSRP concluded that "in spite of good results in access and equity, the poor quality of education still produces school graduates who have not acquired the necessary competencies to improve their economic situation." Lack of quality in education poses a threat in terms of reversing the trend in access achieved through decades of hard work – the students will drop out of the government schools and seek other providers or drop out of school altogether.

In addition to quality concerns, there is the problem of funds: the allocation of resources to education by both the GoN and the development partners (DPs) shows a concerning decreasing trend which indicates that education is not at the core of planning as it should be. The current School Sector Development Plan SSDP (2016-2023) was developed to complete the work started but left unfinished by the SSRP. The SSDP's mission is ambitious, to say the least, and goes beyond creating capable students to improving the economy of the country by "producing human resources that will elevate Nepal's economy to that of a middle income country." The goal is commensurate with the mission, and places hope in creating human resources.

The SSDP's purpose is to improve equity, quality, efficiency, governance and management, and consider. 1. Equity will ensure access, participation and improved learning outcomes, particularly to underserved populations. 2. Quality encompasses all aspects of learning including the environment, curriculum teaching methods, use of material and assessment. 3. Efficiency entails strengthening and reorienting government management systems and making them accountable to local government. 4. Governance and management will adjust to the restructuring of the education sector in the federal system and will figure out a way to share costs between the center, province and local government. 5. Resilience includes strengthening school infrastructure for reduction of disaster-related risk.

The SSDP expects that most financial needs of government schools will be met through cost-sharing at the federal, provincial and local government levels. The SSDP recognizes that it is impossible to achieve quality education for all without adequate resources, and that without quality education, Nepal will not be able to graduate from least-developed to middle-income status by 2030. The responsibility for achieving this ever-important goal of quality education for all lies with each and every individual and institution working in the field of education, particularly the large numbers of teachers who are charged with developing the minds of children.



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Providing high-value education requires a curriculum that meets the demands of the 'fourth industrial revolution' and teaches 21st century skills, requiring: trained teachers that employ effective teaching methods and draw upon a variety of resources rather than rely solely on textbooks; a learning environment conducive to the overall, holistic development of children; and a system of assessment that is continuous and accurately captures achievements and points out areas for improvement. To make such a system a success, classroom teaching methods need to change: far more attention must be paid to learning-by-doing and ensuring maximization of time-on-task. Concerned educators, including those at RBF, feel that it is unfair to assess children unless they are allowed genuine opportunity to learn. While Nepali children do not currently fare well on standardized assessments, if they are provided with a supportive and effective system of education they are bound to excel. To provide children with their basic right to quality education, teaching and learning in Nepal must be transformed drastically during the seven-year period allocated to SSDP.

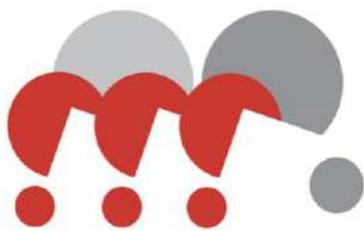
2.2 SDG 4: Quality Education

The Conference will focus on two of the seven outcome targets of SDG4, Target 4.1 and Target 4.2. Nepal faces several hurdles to improving its system of education and thereby achieving target 4.1, which calls for achieving universal coverage at secondary education level with effective learning outcomes as a foundation for lifelong learning by 2030. As public schools are increasingly lacking in quality teaching methods and proper learning environments, aware parents are choosing to send their children to private schools. Unfortunately, at the time when maximum input is required for education, to ensure the national future, the Government of Nepal and international community both have tightened their budget in this area. Thus, while the expectation and rhetoric is towards realizing SDG 4, the possibilities of achieving this goal are being made tragically slim.

It should be incumbent on Nepal, given the importance of proper education and care at a very young age to make concerted efforts to achieve Target 4.2. Unfortunately, the SSDP does not give much hope that early childhood development (ECD) and universal pre-primary education will receive adequate focus. It is clear that without this focus it will be impossible for Nepal to achieve the Mission and Goal of the SSDP

Enrolment saturation in public schools will be possible only if resources are increased and innovative interventions put into practice. To ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality ECD (care and pre-primary education) so that they are ready for primary education, we require standard definitions of 'quality' at this level, as well as 'learning environment'. Such definitions are the first steps in prioritizing ECD at the national and sub-national levels.

It is imperative that Nepal adopt clearly-defined, realistic and measurable targets from ECD right up to adult technical and vocational learning in order to achieve SDG 4, "to ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning." This conference seeks to urgently address the requirements for high-quality education from ECD to school-graduation, with particular focus on government schools.



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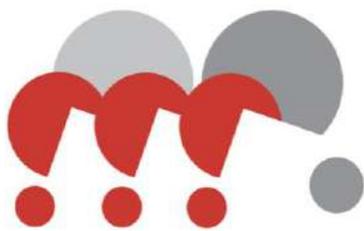
2.3 Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST)

As the apex institution of all education organizations, the MoEST is responsible for overall development of education in the country. The Ministry is responsible for formulating educational policies/plans and managing/implementing them through the myriad institutions under its umbrella. Centre for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD) works under the MoEST to implement and monitor these policies and plans effectively throughout the country. CEHRD provides technical support to educational institutions and agencies to build their capacity in field of access to quality education. It also provides monitoring and evaluation to ensure the achievement of National goal of school education.

The School Sector Development Plan (SSDP), which runs from 2016 to 2023, was developed by the Government of Nepal (GON) and development partners. The SSDP serves as the GON's education sector strategy document and supports Nepal's vision to graduate from the least developed country status to a middle income country by 2030. The MoEST developed the SSDP based on the Theory of Change model (ToC), which uses past experience and data to identify gaps, progress and challenges in order to bring about transformative change in the education sector. The SSDP aligns Nepal with the international commitment made towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), unveiled at the UN General Assembly in September 2015. Building upon the lessons learned and the gains made in the sector under these programs, the SSDP is designed to enable the school education sector to achieve the targets defined under SDG 4: "Ensuring equitable and inclusive quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all."

MoEST has partnered with RBF in the past to organize the national conference on education in 2003 and the international education conference in 2013, bringing together classroom practitioners, education leaders, policymakers, researchers, and other stakeholders, including parents and students, to share ideas and showcase best practices in school education in Nepal and, more broadly, in the region and across the globe. With this second conference, RBF plans to organize such an international conclave focused on Nepal's school education every two years, with a long-term vision to make quality child-centered education the norm in all public and private schools. The biennial conference will allow us to work with more deliberation, continuity and sustainability as we showcase best practices, promote research and raise the level of awareness and commitment to quality education. Pre and post conferences at the provincial level in between the biennial conclaves will help bring the agenda closer to the grassroots.

As is the case with all countries that belong to the Global Partnership for Education, to implement the SSDP, Nepal must seek its own resources to attain quality education and reduce its dependence on donor funding. Similarly, within the country, each rural and urban municipality, now charged with running the educational system within its area, should independently develop a workable plan to attain the goals of the SSDP. One step in that process is to set SMART targets, as the upcoming conference proposes. RBF, in partnership with CEHRD



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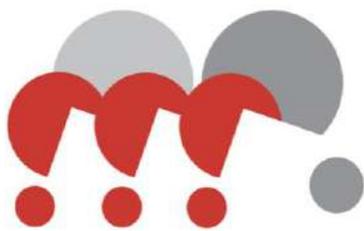
under MoEST, seeks broader collaboration from institutions involved in education in Nepal to make this Conference a success.

2.4 Rato Bangala Foundation (RBF)

RBF is a non-governmental organization that works to ensure the right of children to access quality education, which allows them to develop their personalities, talents, and abilities within a safe school environment. RBF responds to the dire need for quality education in schools in large parts of Nepal, particularly in government schools. Nepal's own educational shortcomings are not dissimilar to those in much of the developing world – Nepal is in the category of countries of sub-Saharan African and South Asia where over 80 percent of student's reach adolescence without reaching adequate levels of literacy. This tragic state of affairs is exacerbated by the fact that these very regions are the most populous areas of the world – and Nepal itself has the highest density of population for any mountainous region – leaving millions of children without the wherewithal to have a decent and respectable life.

Since its inception, RBF has focused on providing training to primary and secondary school teachers, helping develop their skills and improve their instructional strategies and practices. RBF runs a Primary Teacher Training Programme in partnership with Kathmandu University and the Bank Street College of Education of New York City, and provides a certified primary teacher course. RBF also conducts needs-based development training packages catering to the specific requirements of individual schools and their teaching staff. RBF has developed and implemented an Early Grade Reading package as well as a holistic ECD programme with practical hands-on training, with specific non-negotiable requirements for developmentally appropriate practice that includes the teaching methods as well as classroom material for in-service and pre-service teachers.

The guiding philosophy of RBF is to take high quality education to the grassroots level by introducing child-centered teaching and learning to government schools so that they become joyful, child-friendly community institutions. Over 16 years the Foundation has trained over 6,000 teachers, members of parent-teachers associations and school management committee leaders. It has reached community leaders in nearly 650 schools across 23 districts. RBF thus has a robust track record of implementing changes in teaching and learning methods and techniques, at both public and private schools. In 2012, the foundation was awarded the international UNESCO-Hamdani Bin Al-Maktoum Prize for Outstanding Practice and Performance in Enhancing the Effectiveness of Teachers, which was received for the Dailekh School Project run by the Foundation between 2009-2016. The Project, whose goal was to go 'to scale' rather than carry out 'model' projects, consisted of a districtwide programme of training that benefited all 513 government schools of the district. It was this experience and the recognition of its success as well as an eagerness to develop and expand its work by sharing experience and expertise that inspired RBF, in partnership with the GoN and the development partners, to host the first international education conference in Nepal in 2013, under the title 'Quality in the Classroom: A Conference on School Education'.



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Today, the Foundation believes meeting the SSDP goals requires involving all institutional stakeholders in education (governmental, non-profit and private) as well as individuals – whether government officials (at federal, provincial and local levels), educators, teachers, parents or members of the larger civil society. All stakeholders will have something to contribute, and they will have something to learn from a) international advances in the field; b) Nepal's own experiences of seven decades in providing access and quality; c) experience from the classrooms, particularly at the grassroots level. RBF is also keen to share its own experience in training teachers over nearly two decades. Overall, the Foundation believes that the Conference will positively inform how the SSDP is to take on various challenges facing society as it moves towards enhancing quality in education, particularly through teacher preparation.

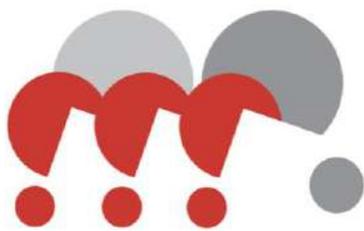
The philosophical outlook of the Foundation has been to bring a symbiotic programme through 'lived' and 'worked' experience from the Nepali educational sector over decades, informed by the latest international advances in pedagogy, philosophy and methodology that can be adapted to the Nepali situation. In trying to achieve these goals, whether it is in the Dailekh School Project or the ongoing work in ECD, the Foundation has always believed and acted on its belief that the work has to be done in collaboration with the Government of Nepal and its educational institutions starting with the MoEST.

RBF has been privileged to work with the Government at the national level as well as the district level, and believes that the new federal structuring requires new partnerships to take quality education to all seven provinces. Given the continuing challenges in improving government school education, the Foundation believes in taking the opportunities provided by the federal re-structuring under the new Constitution of Nepal (2015) to work in all three tiers of government to make the new structure an advantage, not a hindrance, when it comes to school education.

3. Partners and Participants

The MoEST is a partner for the Conference as in the past, committed to support by providing input in the planning and running of the conclave. A new key partnership is with the Lalitpur Municipality, where RBF is located and whose leadership is committed to help evolve the Municipality as an exemplary education provider. Both the MoEST and the Municipality are also committed to inviting national and local level participants including speakers and workshop leaders, as well as other stakeholders working in the field of education. Policy and decision makers will participate and present at the Conference leading to a better understanding of the SSDP and the governance of education under the newly introduced federal system. Besides MoEST and the Lalitpur Municipality, as in the past, RBF will reach out to key national and international institutions and organisations with a mandate and commitment to improving school education in Nepal.

The Conference participants will represent diverse stakeholders across the country and provinces. They will include the following:



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- Teachers and School leaders (60%)
- Educational organisations and companies (5%)
- National and international research organisations (3%)
- Civil Society Members (2%)
- Media Personnel in Education (2%)
- Development agencies and INGOs and interested embassies (10%)
- Representatives from tertiary learning institutions and universities (3%)
- Representatives from relevant government ministries and local bodies (15%)

The Conference will have international participation and, as with the earlier conclaves, while the overseas experts will take away valuable insights of Nepal's challenges and achievements in education, the Nepali participants will benefit immensely for being updated on the latest developments in international thinking and best practices.

4. Conference Theme and Sub-Themes

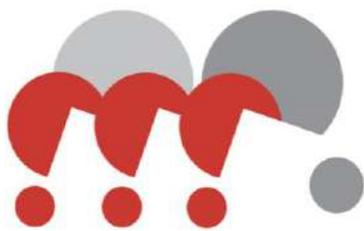
The Second Conference on Quality Education is focusing on the theme "ENSURING LEARNER CENTERED EDUCATION", as it is clear that without responding to the needs of the learner himself/herself, effective learning will not take place. It also needs to be emphasized that the youngest learner is the most responsive learner, who will have lifelong advantages as a result.

The Conference seeks to support the Government in achieving its SSDP reform agenda on quality education. SSDP has prioritised three pillars of 'access', 'equity' and 'quality', and plans to work in three components through a) basic education, ECD and lifelong learning; b) secondary education, and c) institutional capacity-strengthening.

It is imperative that Nepal adopt clearly-defined, realistic and measurable targets from ECD right up to adult technical and vocational learning in order to achieve SDG 4, "to ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning." This conference seeks to urgently address the requirements for high-quality education starting from ECD.

With the SSDP agenda forming the backdrop for the design of the Conference, the sub-themes that will allow the participants to delve into the core issues are:

- **Learner Centered Early Childhood Education**
- **Learning by Doing**
- **Role of Leadership**
- **Education Financing**
- **Private Sector in Education**
- **Education for Sustainable Development**



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5. Goals and Objectives of the Conference

The Conference will bring together national, regional and overseas education practitioners and experts to share information and knowledge in order to develop equitable, quality education through improved teaching and learning, in order to help achieve the SSDP goals by 2030. The key objectives of the Conference are to:

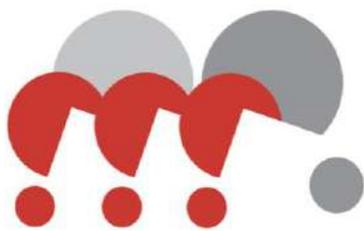
- Provide a forum for sharing local and global experiences surrounding quality education
- Suggest ways to strengthen the structural environment to ensure quality in the classroom and equity in education
- Suggest ways to make early childhood education a priority, in order to make teaching and learning build a strong foundation for life of its citizenry
- Suggest ways to move forward to make schools truly child-centered
- Build on good practices and suggest ways to improve GoN's SSDP reform initiatives
- Reflect upon the "Kathmandu Commitment to Education" developed in the Quality in the Classroom Conference (2013), launched by the Secretary of Education, GoN
- Explore necessity of strengthening education after administrative power was devolved to provinces and local government

6. Expected Results

- Sharing of local and global experiences on quality education
- Showcasing and documenting best practices, national and international
- Suggestions for SSDP and implementation of its reform agenda
- Development of network of stakeholders engaged in achieving quality education
- Recommendations for enhancing quality in education
- Recommendations for the roles of key stakeholders, from GoN to development partners, local communities, school management, teachers, etc.
- Agreed-upon criteria for bringing high standard to early childhood education

7. Conference Programme

The first evening of the three-day conference will include the inaugural ceremony that will contain: address by chief guest, keynote speech, introduction to the conclave, and an introductory reception and dinner. The following two days will include keynote plenary lectures, presentations, workshops, exhibits and installations. In addition to the plenaries simultaneous presentations and workshops will provide participants the opportunity to select which sessions to attend. Each day will start with an address at plenary by a keynote speaker, and there may be more keynote events as required. The focus of the conference throughout will be guided by the key words 'quality school education'. The highlight of the Conference will be the diverse range of experiences which will be shared in keynotes, presentations and exhibits with the goal of introducing quality education in the classrooms of Nepal.



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Proposed Plenaries and Keynotes

1. National, provincial, and local level intervention to reduce disparities and ensure that all children have equal access to all levels of education
2. Requirements for Developmentally Appropriate Early Childhood Education.
3. The impact of Learning by Doing in the overall development of students.
4. Benefits that can be achieved through stakeholders' (parents, teachers, school leaders and community members) understanding of child development and the need to provide a conducive environment for each child.
5. Role of Leaders in ensuring quality education.

8. Conference Venue

Rato Bangala School
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Lalitpur, Nepal
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9. Conference Preparation

A steering committee will guide preparations for the conference. Members will represent MoEST, RBF (sister institutions), representatives of provincial and local governments, as well as prominent Nepali educators and development partners engaged in quality education. The steering committee will hold regular meetings to brainstorm, plan, and innovate the best ways of facilitating and organizing the Conference.

10. Language

Nepali will be the working language, and Nepali-to-English simultaneous translation will be provided where possible.