



## Six-Month Progress Report for Dining for Women

June 30, 2020

### 1. Organizational information

**Organization name:** Street Child US

**Project title:** Breaking the Bonds

**Grant amount:** \$49,180

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### 2. Recap

Women and girls of Nepal's Musahar caste are among the world's most marginalized, humiliated and economically disenfranchised people. 'Untouchable' even among Dalits, linguistic segregation and prejudice from outside communities leaves them with no access to earning, health, hygiene, education or voting. 99% are landless. Born/sold into bonded labor to pay off family debts, almost all Musahar women are married with children by age 15. 100% drop out-of-school by age 10, and 96% cannot write a single word. Domestic and sexual violence and child marriage are prevalent.

To break the cycle of poverty and slavery, in 2018 Street Child launched a 3-year program providing 3,000 Musahar girls age 15-18 with a holistic package of 1) accelerated learning in functional literacy and numeracy; 2) enterprise and employment training and opportunities & 3) life skills & rights awareness counselling and training, underpinned by 4) advocacy for stakeholders e.g. employers & teachers to reduce prejudice and open genuine pathways to prosperity.

In November 2019 Dining for Women awarded Street Child a grant of \$49,180 towards *Breaking the Bonds*. This amount represented direct support of 187 girls through the full program.

### 3. Funding

There has been good progress towards filling the remainder of the gap. We have also successfully won \$50-\$100k in funding specifically for COVID-19 relief efforts.

### 4. Significant changes

Unfortunately due to COVID-19 there have been significant changes to the program, although it is still ongoing. The two biggest changes are to the timeline and mode of instructional delivery. This is discussed below in section 6 Challenges.

### 5. Beneficiary numbers

The number of beneficiaries has not changed, despite COVID-19. We are still able to reach 3,000 direct beneficiaries (187 DFW number).

## 6. Challenges

COVID-19 has been a major challenge for the program since end-March 2020. The Dining for Women-funded cohort was just gathering steam with accelerated learning and life skills when the government put out circulars warning against public gatherings, towards the end of February. Our priorities shifted rapidly due to a suspected impending lockdown when the government instructed all educational institutions to complete the 'semester' by March 18, to be followed by an indefinite school closure, so we diverted our efforts towards disseminating COVID-specific information around preparation and mitigation. Our field movements were minimized towards the end of February and by March 20 we had suspended all our field operations. The national lockdown came into effect on March 23 and has only just lifted.

The pandemic has had a major impact on Musahar girls and their families. In-person education and training are currently impossible. 100% have lost their earnings and 75% have not received food support. Since lockdown there have already been several suicides of young women due to the isolation and starvation they are experiencing (plus increased intimate partner violence due to men's changing gender roles e.g. loss of income). Many girls have had to eat the ducks they received for their duck farming enterprise. Compounding this, Musahars have not received food relief because of prejudice from local government agencies. For this reason we spent the first 4-6 weeks of lockdown providing food relief and hygiene support through handwashing stations and sanitation equipment and supplies.

Street Child's province of operation has recorded the highest number of COVID-19 cases in Nepal (4,210) making it the highest risk area in the country. The risk of recurrence is also high, and the region could experience repeated school closures over years. For stability, continuity, and consistency of delivery, we will pivot to remote learning for the remainder of the program, which has been approved by core funder DfID. This remote learning will cover accelerated learning, life skills and financial literacy. Vocational and in-the-field training will be on hold until it is safe to continue, which we anticipate will happen soon (lockdown has lifted and trading is imperative for the Musahar, so we will prioritize restarting that as soon as possible).

## 7. Objectives

Despite the challenges, our objectives have not changed. We have devised a remote learning piece based on our original teaching methodology and have trained social workers, community educators and business trainers to be peripatetic providers, delivering learning packets to girls' houses and supporting them with phone and SMS support. They will also check in safely with each girl once per day to offer teaching and wellbeing support to reduce the risk of attrition from the program. Evaluations throughout the project have shown that shorter, more intensive learning interventions are more effective and efficient in increasing learning levels than longer interventions; for this reason, we believe we can achieve outcomes at the same level as before pivoting to remote learning.

## 8. Progress

The program was put on hold due to COVID-19 on March 20 and learning has only just resumed, so we have been unable to do any assessments on the girls supported by Dining for Women. We are however able to report outcomes for the previous cohort and believe that outcomes for the Dining for Women cohort will be in line with these.

### **Strand 1 – Accelerated learning**

- Goal – 65% of Musahar girls demonstrate functional literacy and numeracy knowledge and skills

*Accelerated learning results to date*

Our Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) pedagogical approach has been effective in supporting girls to progress towards foundational literacy and numeracy, essential to them running successful enterprises and accessing increased opportunities as right holders. Latest results from our midline learning assessments for Cohort 2 show that after 3 months of participation in accelerated learning:

- 41% of girls were able to read at story and paragraph level compared to 1% at baseline;
- 72% were able to recognize 1- and 2-digit numbers compared to 9% at baseline; and
- 77%, 70%, 19% and 5% were able to perform addition, subtraction, multiplication and division respectively compared to 8%, 3%, 0% and 0% at baseline.

### **Strand 2 – Livelihoods**

- Goal – 89% of Musahar girls aged 15 to 19 establish income earning enterprises
- Goal – 65% of Musahar girls aged 15 to 19 report increase in average annual income as a result of employment or establishing an enterprise

#### *Livelihoods results to date*

Following completion of training nearly 75% of girls established small businesses by March 2020. Progress was curtailed slightly by reduced mobility in the period leading up to lockdown, and lockdown itself. The project has also registered early successes by promptly adapting to the rapidly evolving COVID-19 context. Girls who successfully completed accelerated learning were supported to carry out face mask production through their tailoring enterprise – 500 face masks were produced in the first round, which were marketed locally. In the second round, girls will be producing 7,000 face masks to be included in hygiene packs for distribution locally.

Field assessment conducted during COVID-19 lockdown in March/April found that 100% of girls randomly surveyed (114 girls) had achieved an increase in their income. Businesses set up by girls prior to the lockdown include mushroom farming, duck rearing (picture enclosed), tailoring and mobile repairs.

### **Strand 3 – Life Skills**

- Goal – 75% of Musahar girls report increased participation in decision-making

#### *Life Skills learning results to date*

Tremendous progress has been made within the Life Skills Protection Circles. According to midline assessment results for Cohort 2:

- 81% demonstrated understanding of gender-based violence (GBV) compared to 2% at baseline;
- 62% demonstrated knowledge of voting rights compared to 0% at baseline;
- 91% demonstrated knowledge regarding citizenship compared to 11% at baseline;
- 80% demonstrated knowledge of child rights compared to 10% at baseline;
- 89% of girls reported increased knowledge of their reproductive health rights; and
- 54% of girls reported an increased ability to resist human trafficking.

### **Program participation**

Goal – 75% of Musahar girls participate in Accelerated Learning and Life Skills learning 4 days a week

#### *Participation results to date*

While this is not directly relevant to remote learning, it does indicate the high levels of engagement we are able to obtain from the communities, an energy we will also bring to remote learning. Results include:

- 80.5% girls attended Accelerated Learning Program 4 days a week
- 72% girls attended Life Skills class 4 days a week

## **Teacher skill development**

Goal – 90% Community Educators, Community Advisors and Social Workers demonstrate skills to deliver Accelerated Learning Program, Livelihood Support Program and Life Skills Program respectively.

### *Training results to date*

The project has actively recruited facilitators from the Musahar community and other marginalized ethnic backgrounds to ensure their representation within project design and delivery, achieving appropriate responsiveness. By the end of Year 2:

- 95% Community Educators had satisfactory skills to facilitate Teaching at the Right Level;
- 85% Community Educators demonstrated required skills to deliver financial literacy sessions;
- 100% Social Workers met the skills required to deliver protection circles.

## **9. Timeline**

We estimate that there will be a 3-month delay in completing the program. This is due to the initial period of uncertainty, the 4-6-week period of emergency relief, and the following period of evaluation of programs and consequent development of a remote learning piece

## **10. Photos**

High resolution photos have been added to the Dropbox folder. These include four COVID-19 relief images, one education image and one livelihoods image (duck farming). These can be used in all formats and media and all beneficiaries have consented.

## **11. Message to members**

The program does not look exactly the same as it did when you learned about it last October, but it is going to be even more valuable than we all could ever have imagined. COVID-19 is compounding existing inequities to healthcare, food and income generation, especially for a disenfranchised population like the Musahar and even more so for the women. Without the psychosocial support to build confidence and skills to resist harm (violence in the home and sexual exploitation such as transactional sex and sex trafficking across the border are all increasing due to COVID-19) and without the ability to earn income for prosperity and to protect against future shocks, the risk that Musahar girls will experience harm and / or starve without access to the program is extremely high. Learning is the fundamental basis for change in the above, and our commitment to keeping girls on the program and driving learning is stronger than ever. We have very close relationships with these communities – for some people, our food relief is the only thing between them and death – and that is helping caregivers and girls to maintain trust in the program.

Of the previous cohort, we have already been able to stop 3 child marriages thanks to girls' own courage in reporting relatives to social workers, and assessment of outcomes from cohorts 1 and 2 found that 100% of girls surveyed had increased income just weeks after launching their businesses. The program is working, and we will not fail these girls.

## **12. Expenses**

We are currently unable to access an expenditure report from the office due to COVID-19 lockdown, but we can report that there have been no variations to the budget. We hope to be able to access a list of expenses shortly.