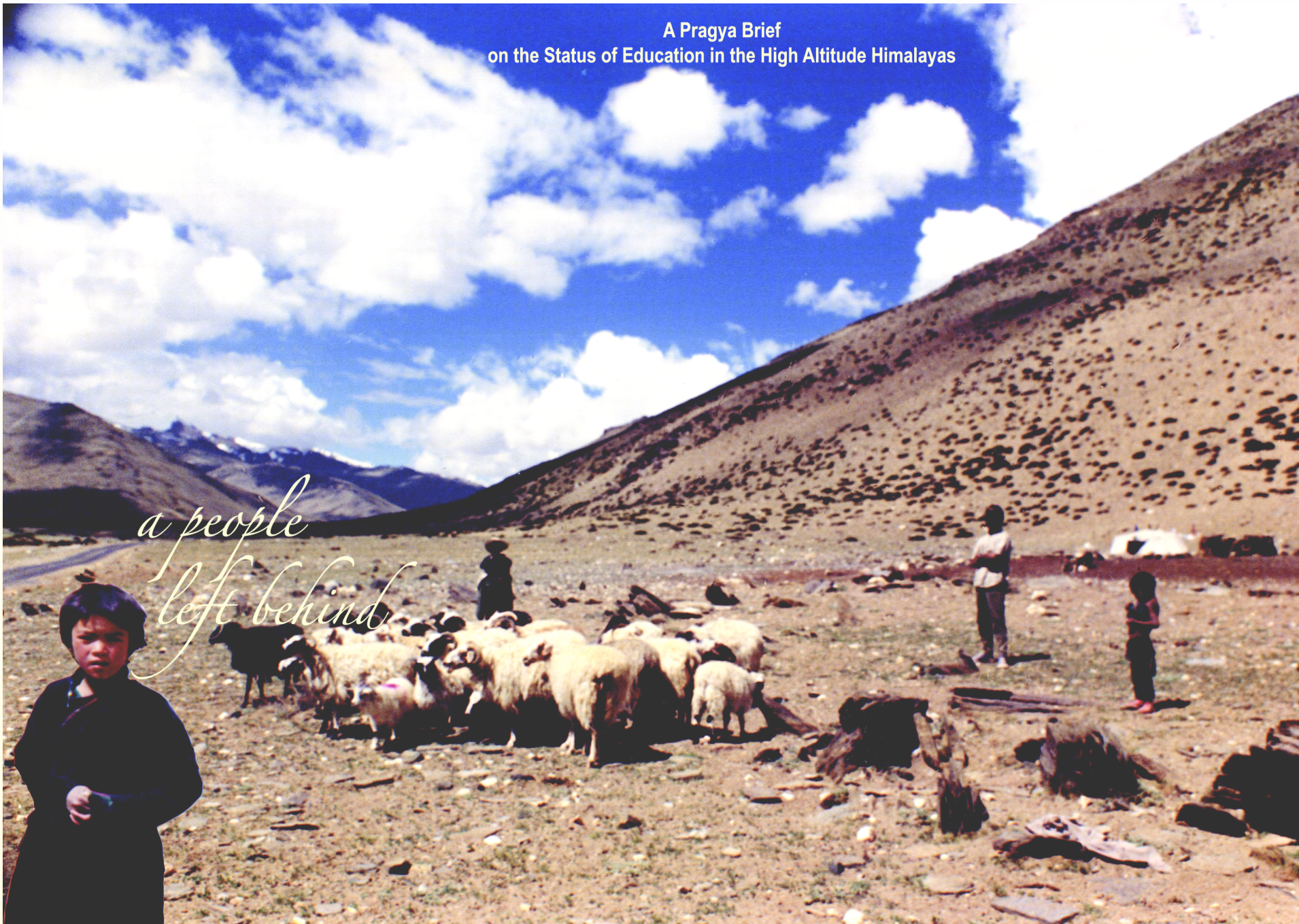


A Pragma Brief  
on the Status of Education in the High Altitude Himalayas

*a people  
left behind*





A people left  
behind



**India** has the largest education system in the World: 150 million children are enrolled in nearly 800 thousand schools. Despite this, not all of India's children are provided for: 35 million 6 to 14 year olds are out of school while half that number fail to complete the first five years of their basic education.\*\*

Notwithstanding the improvements witnessed in recent years, the task of providing effective and relevant education to all of India's children remains extremely difficult and centrally important to the future of India's economic and social development. It is through education that children from poorer backgrounds will be able to tap into the benefits of India's burgeoning economy and to lift themselves out of the cyclical deprivation that characterises the lives of so many of India's people.

In 2004, 35 million 6 to 14 year-olds were out of formal education. This figure becomes all the more revealing when viewed in the context of governmental pledges on education provision. The Constitution of India, when drafted in 1950, envisaged free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 by 1960. After over 50 years of delay and prevarication the situation is still far from ideal and the administration continues to grapple with the problems of inadequate access, poor quality and inefficiency in the schooling system.

It is in the more remote and disadvantaged regions where the problems inherent in providing free and compulsory education to all of India's children are most keenly felt. The state education system is stretched to its limits in these areas with high cost of operation and delivery, poor quality and monitoring, and ultimately very limited reach. The High Altitude Himalayas is one such region that is geographically difficult and politically isolated, educationally deprived and a challenge for the formal education delivery system. The indigenous tribal populations have little representation on the main-stage of Indian politics and thus no power to voice their grievances; their plight has been increasingly overlooked.

In light of the problems presented by the high altitude context, how might education and access to information be improved? How can we overcome the difficulties set forth by the terrain and climate? How can we meet the needs of the community without compromising their unique heritage?

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*\*\*Educational Statistics, 2004*

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# A people left behind

## *the high altitude himalayas*

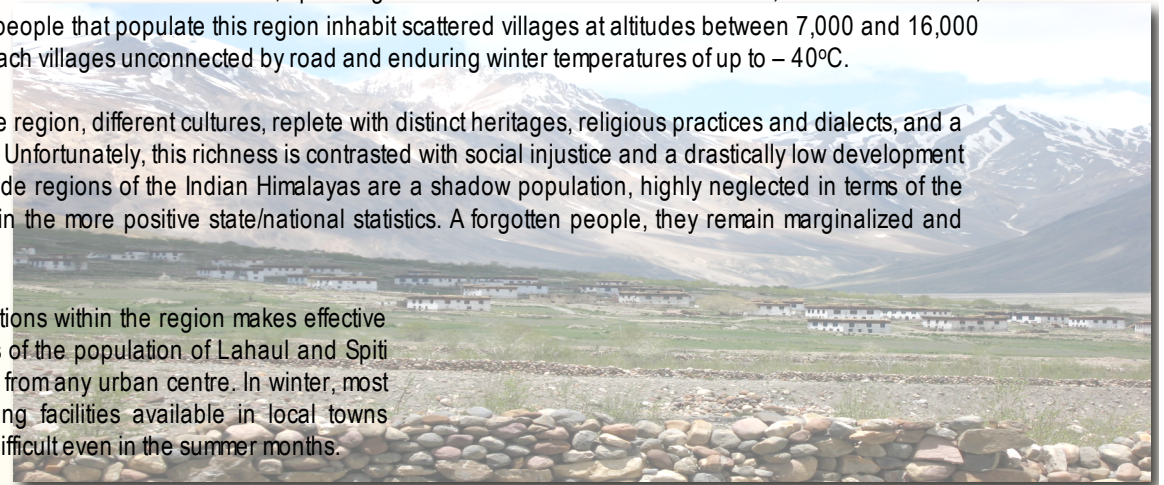
The **High Altitude** belt of the Indian Himalayas covers a vast swathe of the Sub Continent, spanning the six states of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Sikkim, hilly tracts of West Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh. The people that populate this region inhabit scattered villages at altitudes between 7,000 and 16,000 feet and live lives of considerable physical hardship, having to trek days to reach villages unconnected by road and enduring winter temperatures of up to  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$ .

This is a region of huge cultural wealth and unrivalled biodiversity. Across the region, different cultures, replete with distinct heritages, religious practices and dialects, and a variety of flora and fauna, are found within each group of interlinked valleys. Unfortunately, this richness is contrasted with social injustice and a drastically low development status amongst the indigenous population. The inhabitants of the high altitude regions of the Indian Himalayas are a shadow population, highly neglected in terms of the basic services of education and information, small enough to not show up in the more positive state/national statistics. A forgotten people, they remain marginalized and poorly equipped to participate in the development processes.

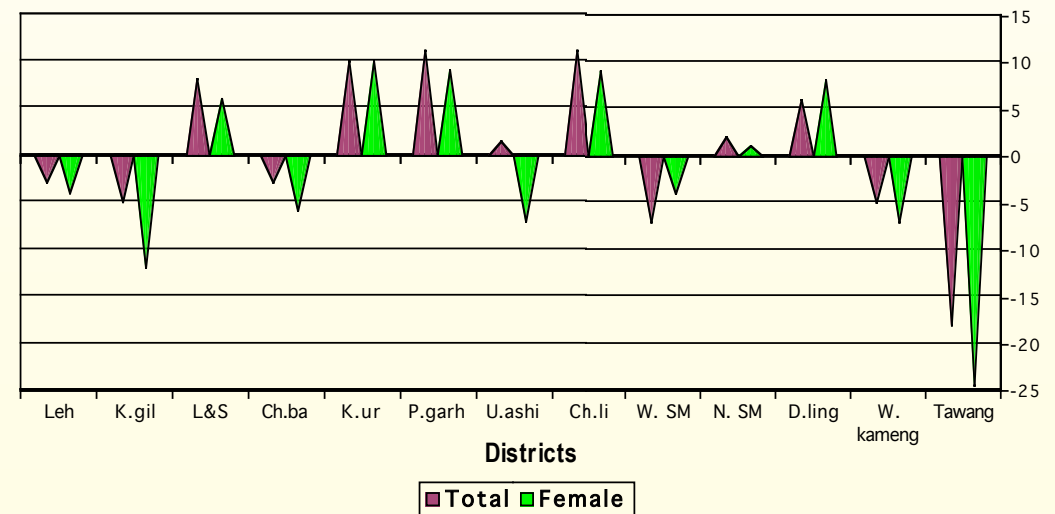
The geographical inaccessibility of the region and the remoteness of habitations within the region makes effective governance difficult for the administration. For example: over three quarters of the population of Lahaul and Spiti live in villages unconnected by road, that are sometimes up to 10 days walk from any urban centre. In winter, most villages are snowbound and entirely cut off from the rest of India, making facilities available in local towns completely inaccessible, while the almost impregnable terrain makes access difficult even in the summer months.

The density of population ranges from 2-10/sq.km., and such small, scattered populations in remote villages make delivery of basic services and infrastructure, difficult and costly besides. The bare facts speak for the abysmally poor situation: only 17% of villages in Lahaul & Spiti district possess any medical facility; 46.5% of settlements in W. Kameng are electrified; 39% of villages in Tawang have primary schools. This, combined with the social prejudice towards people of tribal backgrounds, has meant that policies implemented to aid development have been quite inappropriate and administered inefficiently. The poor physical and technological connectivity suffered by the people of the region has also meant that they have limited access to their rights and few ways of lobbying for change.

We believe that establishing an effective education system in this region will play a vital role in bringing it up to speed with the rest of India. The exceptional combination of tribal peoples and mountain terrain will, however, require innovative decision making to ensure that policies implemented are tailored to suit the needs of the region.



Literacy rate differ from National Average



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**Female literacy** is less than **7%** in the **Himalaya's remotest villages**

Over **1/2 of primary schools** are staffed by **solitary teachers** in the Tawang, a district of Arunachal, where over **60% of villages do not have schools** and **three quarters of children** aged between 11 and 14 **do not attend school** (Lumla and Mukto blocks in Tawang)

There are only **11 secondary schools** in the 14,000 square kilometers that make up the region of **Lahaul & Spiti**

In most **nomadic communities**, over **80%** of children **drop out of school after less than 5 years of education**

**State provision** of education in the region has, from its inception, been chronically mismanaged and under-funded and the current educational status of the community in the region is extremely low, when compared to the rest of India. Overall literacy stands at only 50%, and drop-out rate is very high. While 40% of the Chamoli population is educated up to Primary level, only 15% have been educated up to Junior High School level. In 7/13 high altitude districts, women's literacy is lower than the national average. In certain pockets and among some special groups, the picture is even more bleak: Uttarkashi in Uttaranchal has a 37% gap between male and female literacy rates, while its primary schools are only able to retain 71% of their pupils; in Darjeeling, one-third of the child population does not take part in formal education. In some of the most isolated villages, such as Jangda, Mago and Rho in Tawang, and Kharnak and Korzok in Ladakh, very little has changed since India gained independence. Among the nomadic Kharnakpas in Ladakh, only 40% of the school-going age groups (4-17 yrs.) are presently attending school.

In 2005-2006, Pragya, supported by CfBT, carried out a study entitled 'Education and Information Gap in the High Altitude Himalayas'. The aim of this study was to highlight the issues with respect to education and access to information in the high altitude belt of the Himalayas, with the ultimate intention of improving the status and catalysing policy and development action. The study involved a comprehensive survey across the entire high altitude belt of the country. We found a population that has been left to continue a subsistence existence, deprived of the basic minimum services, unnoticed by the state authorities, the central government or the global community. As the rest of India speeds its way through the development process, the people of the Himalayas are being left behind.

Poor educational status is one of the most important factors preventing the high altitude Himalayas from joining the development process witnessed on the plains. As long as half the population continues to be unable to read or write, any development initiative implemented is guaranteed to have little effect.

Whilst 31% of all children across our region do not attend school, the education that is received by children who are enrolled does not equip them with the skills required nor enable them to access higher education. Failure rates are very high. 72-81% of the students achieved below 40% marks in every subject last year; a tiny 3% of the region's entire population have graduated from university. The low educational status of most of the population confines them to the lowest levels of job market and thus traps them into a cycle of poverty and deprivation. At the same time, the current curriculum puts their knowledge of life skills in jeopardy and reduces their capability to deal effectively with their traditional occupations. Low educational status also serves to compound their geographical isolation from the rest of India as it inhibits their ability to interpret information and to access rights. The adult population too lives a completely insulated existence, blocked from the changes in the world; technologically isolated, they lack access to developments that would lighten their load.

A critical situation that calls for innovative solutions that are socio-ecologically adapted, a committed decision-making and all-stakeholder collaboration in order to ensure the sustainability of the Himalayan peoples' future.





# A Survey Across the High Mountains

The **high ranges** of the Himalayas form a barrier to the flow of information out from the insulated Himalayan valleys and plateau, leaving the policymakers and development agencies in the dark about the problems and gaps to be addressed. In order to gain a thorough understanding of the needs of the high altitude community and the condition of the education system that serves their children, we conducted a comprehensive survey in the area between September 2005 and March 2006. 5904 children and adults from 110 villages of 29 valleys across 13 districts in 6 states in the Indian Himalayas, spoke to our surveyors of the problems they face with respect to education and information.

The villages that formed the sample of the survey were selected using a system of disproportionate stratified random sampling, and data was thus collected from nearly equal number of villages representing those connected by road, those connected by fair-weather roads, and those that are extremely remote and typically, unconnected by road.

## Areas covered by the Pragya survey ~

State	District
Jammu & Kashmir	Kargil, Leh
Himachal Pradesh	Chamba, Lahaul & Spiti, Kinnaur
Uttaranchal	Pithoragarh, Chamoli, Uttarakashi
Sikkim	North Sikkim, West Sikkim
Arunachal Pradesh	Tawang, W. Kameng
West Bengal	Darjeeling

Statistical data from the survey was combined with descriptive information gathered through interactions with key informants and observational recordings by our field staff. In each village, interviews were conducted with school children, dropouts, children that had never enrolled and their parents; interviews were also held with village heads, youth representatives, women's group leaders, local teachers and education department officials.

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In each district, a Grassroots Workshop was also held with key stakeholders of the area, in which the issues that emerged from the survey were deliberated and brainstormed on for innovative, socio-ecologically appropriate solutions.

Category	Male	Female	Total
School going children	1278	1134	2412
Dropouts	378	354	732
Never enrolled children	173	141	314
Parents	1137	1309	2446
<b>Grand Total</b>			<b>5904</b>

# A people left behind

## Limited Access to Schools

There are difficulties inherent in the process of running a school and maintaining its infrastructure in the troublesome terrain of the High Altitude Himalayas. The fact remains, however, that if a child has to walk long distances over difficult terrain to reach school, the chances of his attending classes, especially during the cold winter months, or during the torrential slide-prone monsoons in the central and eastern Himalayas, are very low.

- A very large number of Himalayan villages are unconnected by all-weather motorable roads. 72% of Lahaul & Spiti lives in scattered villages unconnected by road and a major part of the roads in W. Kameng are navigable for only a part of the year. There is no bus facility available in a single high altitude village of Chamoli and Pithoragarh.
- Average primary school radii ranges from 1.5km in Lahaul to 3km in Tawang while those for Upper Primary schools reach as high as 8.7km in some regions. Khorzok village in Nyoma block (Ladakh) is 10kms from the nearest Primary School.
- An average of only 70% of school days are completed even by the enrolled children due to road blockages.

## what the children feel...

*A stimulating, welcoming and well looked after learning environment is essential for encouraging children into education and for maintaining their attendance. However:*

*71% of the students find their school infrastructure to be highly inadequate.*

*48% of the students believe this inadequacy results in de-motivation amongst students; more than half the students believe that the poor physical infrastructure of their schools makes for a monotonous and oppressive learning environment which ultimately contributes to them falling behind in their studies.*

*73% of students believe the teaching-learning materials available are highly inadequate (ranging from 48% in Sikkim to 86% in Chamba) and nearly 60% believe that this seriously affects their understanding of lessons.*

## Our Findings

### Barriers inhibiting children's access to education

We discovered a complex web of cultural factors and failings within the present education system, underlying the status of education in the high altitude Himalayas.

### The Education System in the High Altitude Himalayas

The present education system is woefully short of the need and the requirement of the difficult mountain regions of our country. The failings range from infrastructural to curriculum to teacher quality to evaluation system and naturally the children of the Himalayas are the worst sufferers!



### Problems of physical educational Infrastructure

The most basic failing in the educational infrastructure present in the area is, especially in the more remote regions, a simple lack of school buildings.

- 25% of the villages have no education facilities (varies from 6% in Leh to 43% in Tawang).
- 72% of villages have no educational facilities beyond upper primary schools (varying from 80% in Tawang to 67% in Lahaul); secondary schools are only found in 4% of villages (reaching as low as 2% in Tawang).
- 40% of the classrooms are in dilapidated condition (varying from 17% in North and West Sikkim to 60% in Karol).  
Despite government regulations stating that all classrooms should be equipped with Maths and science kits, maps, charts and blackboards, few possess these teaching aids and very few among those that do, actually put them to the use they are meant for.
- Modern teaching aids are available in only 37% of the schools; it is not adequate, nor used, even in those that have such aids.
- Only 10% of schools have library facilities; 90-95% of schools do not have any laboratory.



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## Problems with teachers

There is a chronic shortage of teachers right across the high altitude belt of the Himalayas:

- more than 90% of schools up to elementary level are multi grade due to a lack of teachers and a limited number of students; 27% of primary schools are staffed only by one teacher.
- There also appears to be a culture of absenteeism amongst teachers employed by the state:
- 77% of students revealed that teachers remain absent for an average of five days every month, regardless of season.

## Unsuitability of curriculum and teaching methods

The curriculum taught in schools is largely unrelated to the local cultural context. Textbooks commonly use examples based on life in mainland India leaving the children alienated from the material they are learning. No effort has also been made to include local knowledge and skill requirements within the teaching programme. The medium of instruction used in schools is either English or Hindi. As most children's first languages are either *Bhoti* or other indigenous dialects, this method of teaching reduces their capacity to understand and absorb.



There is a serious dearth of co-curricular activities, such as physical education and art classes, in the curriculum. Nearly 80% of the primary schools have no open space for physical activities. The system of assessment is entirely dependant upon annual written examinations, allowing for children even at kindergarten level to be branded as 'failures'.

## *what the children feel...*

*62% of students perceive the present syllabus to be excessive and mostly irrelevant to their cultural context (ranging from 47% in Labaul to over 75% in Leh and Tamang). More than 75% of students feel that their teachers use non-participatory, lecture based, traditional teaching methods; 61% believe that this is a major factor in their poor performance and or dislike of certain subjects.*

Thus at every level of their experience of education, whether it be in the state of their school buildings or the methods of their teachers, children from this area face multiple disincentives, drastically reducing their ability and desire to continue with their studies. While many might suggest that such problems could be mitigated through extra investment in the area, we must think about ways to ensure effective management of extra resources. We must also try to ensure that focus is placed upon quality within the education system rather than mere quantity of teachers and school buildings.

## Cultural and Regional Factors

**Children** of the high Himalayas have to break through an incredible array of cultural and region specific barriers, in order to access education. Whilst these barriers may not be as immediately obvious as crumbling school buildings or absent teachers, they are vitally important to a true insight into the issue of education in the region. Equally, any effort to improve access to education in this area must lay focus on both institutional and cultural inhibitors.

### *Education and the social psyche*

Perhaps the most important cultural barrier is the endemic sense of suspicion of education amongst the older sections of society. The curriculum taught to children is irrelevant to their culture; this has bred a sense of contempt amongst the older sections of society. The older generation are wary of the replacement of traditional knowledge and skills with 'bookish' learning and link young people's pursuance of education to a lack of respect for their cultural heritage. Thus, while there clearly has to be modification to the school curriculum, there must also be a simultaneous shift in attitude towards education amongst parents.

### *The Information Blind*

Another important factor to be considered is the near-total information blind that the high altitude Himalayas suffers from. Penetration of newspapers in the region is limited, copies only being available in the summer months in district headquarters. People living in remoter villages have no access to these, nor public libraries. Himalayan communities are also technologically isolated: intermittent internet access is available only at a few urban hubs and while televisions are available, formal relay is rarely accessible.

- Newspapers are not available in a single village of Leh, Chamoli, Pithoragarh, Tawang, and W. Kameng; more than of the villages in Tawang and Uttarakashi are not serviced by 'Doordarshan'.

There are few adult education and vocational training centres and limited avenues for continuing education.

- Vocational training is not available in a single school, nor is computer training.

### *Poverty*

In any society, regardless of cultural differences, poverty always affects access to education. In high Himalayan society, 35% of the population lives below the poverty line. Income generation in the region is reliant upon agriculture and animal husbandry. With agricultural production presently below subsistence level, however, there is little scope for the selling of produce to generate disposable income. Since all work is in the primary sector, occupational life requires no formal qualifications and little technical knowledge, and this has increased the perception that education is irrelevant and unimportant. Most non-enrolled children and a high percentage of the drop-outs help their parents in earning the family livelihood.

- 16- 40% of population in the region are living Below Poverty Line; 85-95% of the total population is engaged in agriculture with low cash incomes.
- On an average, one child from every family in the region is not sent to school purely so that he/she could take care of household chores or participate in the family livelihood.

# A people left behind

### *The Himalayan climate*

Winter lasts nearly half the year and due to the extreme weather conditions, schools are forced to have very long winter breaks (sometimes stretching up to four months). This greatly reduces the ability of students to retain information learned and often results in children having to repeat an academic year, with persistent repetition almost always resulting in high drop out rates.

The long winters make the growing and harvesting season in the summer months very short. The growing season clashes with the school term and many children are forced to miss days of school in order to assist on their family land. The summer season also brings tourists to the area and many children prefer to exploit this economic opportunity as opposed to attending their classes.

### *what the children & parents feel...*

*48% of parents report no interest in sending their children to school as they believe that the education they would receive would not help them in securing a job; this disinterest is not confined to the older generation; 60% of children that had never been enrolled in school share their parents' views.*

# A people left behind

## Gender Bias

Gender discrimination shows up in many forms in high altitude society, and these are especially pronounced amongst some sections of the population, and particularly in remoter regions. This reduces a girl child's chances of enrolling and thereafter, completing her education. Parents maintain the view that their male offspring should be the principal breadwinner and are thus more inclined to send them, as opposed to their sisters, to higher classes. The girls that do enroll often do so much later than their peers in the rest of India, meaning that by the time they reach Class VII they can be as old as 17. It is at this age that parents arrange marriage for their daughters, and hence they are compelled to leave school before completing the eight-year cycle of education.

- Female literacy is at an average of 45% in high altitude Himalayas; it is less than 10% in very remote villages and in nomadic areas. Female literacy rate in Tawang district is 30.87% and in Kargil 40.96%.
- The gender gap in literacy rate is as much as 37% in Uttarkashi, 27% each in Chamoli & Pithoragarh.
- Girl children are more prone to dropping out - in Tawang, Leh, Lahaul & Spiti and Chamoli; only 1.5% of female population from the region have completed graduation, as compared to 3% of their male counterparts.

Schools also display an insensitivity to girls in terms of facilities, and this compounded by the cost of education and distance of schools from the home leading to fears of safety of girl children while commuting to the school, results in parents resisting enrollment of girl children.

- Male-female ratio among teachers averages 3:1; in Tawang it is 7:1 - a contributor to lower enrolment among girl children; only 12% of the schools have separate toilet facility for girl students.

The problem of gender bias was found to have an inter-generational effect. Many studies have shown that a mother's level of education is an important precursor to their child's attendance and performance in school. Thus the children of women who were denied education in their youth are less likely to enter into or complete their formal education.

With an average female literacy rate of a mere 45% in the high altitude Himalayas, from birth, over half the girl child population in the region suffers a palpable educational disadvantage.

## The Nomadic population

Large numbers of the population are semi-nomadic and their intermittent moving from place to place vastly decreases the feasibility of their children enrolling in and attending school.

- Literacy rate is lower than 20% in Changthang (Leh) and Zaskar (Kargil) inhabited by nomadic communities.
- In Khamak and Khorzok, a nomadic belt, only 40% of the 4-17 yrs. age group are presently attending school, and about 30% of total child population has never been enrolled in school; there has not been a single graduate from this belt.

### *what the children feel...*

*70% of the girls report experiencing gender bias within their own families; 67% of the girls perceive that boys are preferred over girls for higher studies. 43% of girl viewed that their study hour is hindered due to household activities*

## Political attention

Degree of remoteness from the central administration and political attention and stability, also have an effect on status of education of an area. The peripheries of the country demonstrate the worst educational status.

- The maximum un-enrolled children are found in Tawang followed by Leh; only 31% (Tawang) and 50% (Leh) children of 4-17 yrs are attending school.
- BPL families are the highest in these peripheries; poverty is the highest in Tawang with the lowest average family income at Rs. 9750/- and highest BPL at 40%.
- Access factors are at their worst in the peripheries; motorable roads and access to newspapers, television, telephones and other sources of information are extremely limited.

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## Cause and Effect ...

To **enhance** our understanding of the relationship between the barriers to education, cultural and institutional, and dropout rates, levels of non-enrollment and achievement at school, we performed two statistical tests on the data compiled.

Through *Principal Component Analysis*, data from the survey was translated into four distinct, independent indices:

- the **Education Index**, a composite of literacy rate, participation at all levels of education, and availability of schools at the village level
- the **Economic Index**, comprising factors such as BPL percentage, annual household income, percentage of people relying on agriculture
- the **Information Index**, a composite of TV, radio and newspaper and library availability

The above indices and the factor of Village Remoteness were treated as Predictive Variables.

Predictive Variables (Village)	Criterion Variables			
	Drop outs		Never Enrolled	
	B	r	B	r
Constant	23.84	-	10.66	-
Edu-Index	-3.86	-0.65**	-5.01	-0.76**
Info-Index	-2.82	-0.41**	0.01	-0.30*
Eco- Index	-2.5	-0.34**	-0.89	-0.35**
Remoteness	0.82	0.13	-0.77	0.10
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>0.446</b>		<b>0.637</b>	

\*Significant at 0.05 level

\*\* Significant at 0.01 level



Using *Multiple Regression Analysis* we tested whether there was a causal relationship between the predictive/independent variables and drop out rates and percentage of never enrolled children (both of which stand as dependant/criterion variables). The predictive variables were found to be responsible for 44.6% of all dropouts and 63.7% of children who never enrolled in school.

- The **negative association** between the Indices (Education, Economic and Information) and the Criterion Variables indicates that as educational and economic status and access to information decrease, dropout rates and levels of children never enrolled, rise.
- The **positive association** between village remoteness and the Criterion Variables indicates that increasing remoteness promotes increasing dropout rates and levels of non-enrollment.

Were we able to enhance the education facility and education status of the village by just 1%, we could achieve a 4% reduction in dropout rate and the never enrolled would decrease by as much as 5%. Similarly dropout rate would decrease by 2.8% and 2.5% if just a 1% improvement in information services and economic status could be wrought.

# A people left behind

A similar test, once again using *Multiple Regression Analysis*, was performed on data collected from schools to determine the relationship between school related variables, such as teacher-class ratio, school amenities, etc., and mean achievement in school as well as drop out rates. It was found that all the predictive variables tested have an effect on drop out rates and mean achievement of school.

- The positive relationship between mean achievement and the predictive variables indicates that a rise (or improvement) in the predictive variables would lead to a similar rise in achievement at school.
- The negative relationship between dropout rates and the predictive variables also indicates that an improvement in the predictive variables would lead to a fall in number of students leaving education.

The predictive variables were found responsible for 73.3% on mean achievement in school and 31.2% on dropouts

Predictive Variables (School)	Criterion Variables			
	Mean achievement in School		Dropouts	
	B	r	B	r
Constant	15.887	-	12.408	-
Av. no. Teacher/class	0.914	0.587**	-2.031	-0.423**
Classroom Condition	0.793	0.565**	-0.575	-0.327**
School facilities	0.651	0.638**	-0.699	-0.403**
Teaching Learning Aids (TLA) - Index	2.176	0.784**	-0.999	-0.41**
Incentive schemes	0.939	0.581**	-1.146	-0.555**
Community Participation (CP) - Index	0.733	0.575**	-1.133	-0.475**
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>0.733</b>		<b>0.312</b>	

\*\* Significant at 0.01 level

Quality of teaching is strongly related to educational performance. If the extent of use of teaching learning material were to increase by just 1%, the mean achievement of the school could be enhanced by 2%. Teacher attention, or the lack of it, as indicated by no. of teachers per class, is a prominent cause for students' dropping out. The dropout rate could be reduced by 2% with a 1% increase in the average number of teachers per class. The drop-out rate could also be reduced by an increase in community participation and incentive schemes- a 1% increase in the latter would bring about a concomitant increase in the former.

Thus, one can infer that everything from remoteness of villages to the adequacy of teaching aids has a demonstrable effect on access to and achievement in education. Interestingly, one can also see that it is village and family related variables, like economic and educational status, that play the most significant role in encouraging dropout rates, highlighting the need for a community based focus on efforts to improve children's access to education in this area.



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# The next step?

**How** might we begin to break the barriers to education and access to information in the High Altitude Himalayas?

## ***Issues in the Education System***

- How can we provide education in the Himalayas that is comparable to that found in the more developed regions of India?
- How can the High Altitude context be included into efforts to improve physical access to schools?
- In what ways can the curriculum be changed so that it is more relevant to local culture; can we incorporate local knowledge?
- Can the status of co-scholastic and vocational activities be increased?
- What alternative assessment systems can be introduced?
- How can we manage the distribution of extra resources to schools that are not connected by road?
- By what measures can the classroom environment and Teaching and Learning Methods (TLMs) be made more interesting and more stimulating?
- How can we attract higher quality teachers to the region?
- Can teacher attendance in the most remote schools be monitored?
- How can the learning environment be made more attractive to the region's girl child?

## ***Issues in the community:***

- How can we improve access to information in remote villages?
- What is the best way to establish effective links between the education system and tribal and nomadic communities?
- How could these links be utilized at their maximum potential; does the community have a role to play within the education system?
- How can we increase the educational status of the adult population, and particularly that of women?

**Can central policies be altered to suit the requirements of the high altitude context?**

After seeing some of my friends work for the army, doing some labour work and earning handsomely, I quit school when I was in the 8<sup>th</sup>. **Now 2 years later, I do regret it.** The work with the army dried up and I am back to looking after the family livestock. I wish some skill related training could be provided that could help me improve my position and my earning.

**16 yr. old Rukchen** from Chamsen, Nubra valley



I have not been able to go to school. My father died when I was very small and I am the eldest male in my family. So I have to work to earn money and help my mother and look after my younger brother and sisters. I work for a contractor, on road-repair, building construction, and other kinds of labour. I feel so embarrassed when I have to ask my mates to calculate my wages and count the money, and also when I have to put a thumb impression for receiving my wages.

**If I could only write my name.**

**15 year old Lhamo**, Khinmey, Tawang

I am from Karzok. The nearest school for our village is at Puga, which is 95kms. away. I was sent there by my parents but I hated staying in the hostel there, and one day I ran away and am now looking after the family sheep. I had liked studies though. **I want to learn computers** but I do not know what destiny has in store for me.

**14 year old Tsering**, Changthang region



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