

Children's Reintegration



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Going Home: The reintegration of child domestic workers in Nepal

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Introduction

Study aims

This report documents a study of the reintegration (see Box 1 below for a definition of this term) of child domestic workers in Nepal. The research was carried out by a Nepali non-governmental organisation – CWISH – with the support of the international network Family for Every Child. This study is part of a larger three-country study, which examines the reintegration of street children in Mexico and children in residential care in Moldova. The overall aim is to identify successful elements in strategies to ensure the sustainable reintegration of children without parental care by examining the reintegration process from its initial preparatory stages through to after children have returned home (as defined in Box 1). For the research in Nepal this involved examining the reintegration of child domestic workers as supported by CWISH, looking at the following:

- Pre-reunification (one to two months before returning home – this term is defined in Box 1 below), including:
 - life at home before becoming a domestic worker
 - how the decision to become a domestic worker came about
 - the experience of being a domestic worker
 - how the decision to return home was made and the expectations, hopes and fears which children, parents and employers had about reintegration
 - how children, families and communities were prepared for reunification.
- Reunification: the views of children, families and their communities about the process of reunification approximately two to four weeks after they had returned home.
- Post-reintegration: the views of children, families, and their communities about the reintegration process six to seven months after reintegration, with a focus on home life, school life and life within the community.

Box 1: Defining reintegration, home and reunification

The study is based on the following definition of reintegration: the process of a child without parental care making a move to their biological parent/s and usually their community of origin or, where this is not possible, to another form of family-based care that is intended to be permanent.

The term 'home' is used here to refer to the place where the children have gone to live. It is recognised that whilst in most cases children will return to their biological parent(s) and a house they have previously lived in, in some cases children may go to live with a family member(s) in a house and/or location they have not previously lived in.

Reunification here means the moment a child is returned to the family. It is recognised that this is an event, different from the longer process of reintegration. The term is used deliberately here to mark a moment in the reintegration process from which follow-up study will take place.

Whilst at the pre-reunification stage of the study, all of the children interviewed were preparing to be reintegrated and intended to return home, in reality reintegration was not possible for some children. The reasons for this are also examined in the study.

The report begins with a brief outline of the context of child domestic work in Nepal and the work that CWISH is engaged in to reintegrate children, followed by an explanation of the methodology used for this study and the challenges faced. It goes on to discuss the key findings and lessons learned about:

- why children become child domestic workers
- life as a domestic worker
- the decision to go home
- life just after the child has returned home
- reintegration in the longer term (six months after returning home)
- why reintegration does not always work.

The report finishes by providing core recommendations for how to make the reintegration process more successful within the given context, based on work that could be done with the key stakeholders in the process, including children.

Country context

In order to be able to interpret the findings of the study, it is important to understand the context in which it was conducted and the programmatic work that CWISH was carrying out in conjunction with partners in Nepal to reintegrate the children studied.

Nepal has a population of 26.5 million, 44.2 per cent of whom are children (Central Bureau of Statistics 2012).¹ Out of these, an estimated one third (over 3.9 million children) are living under the poverty line (National Planning Commission 2010). Perhaps unsurprisingly then, there are an estimated 1.8 million child labourers in Nepal

(Central Bureau of Statistics 2012), 361,814 of whom are child domestic workers² (Sharma 2012), with research suggesting that over half of these children are working in urban areas, with many thousands working as domestic workers in the Kathmandu valley (Plan and World Education, 2012); Dharel 2009) estimates that one in every 18 households in Kathmandu has a child domestic worker.

Child domestic workers generally belong to a certain demographic. They typically come from rural areas, often belong to marginalised ethnic groups (47 per cent of child domestic workers are from 'janajati' communities)³ and are more often girls than boys (an estimated 57 per cent of domestic workers under the age of 14 are girls (Plan and World Education, 2012)).

Whilst child domestic work (for children under 16 years) falls under the 'worst forms of child labour', as defined by Nepali legislation and therefore illegal within Nepal, in practice the law is applicable only at the institutional level (where there are more than 10 child employees, e.g. for factories or companies). This makes it very difficult to take legal action against employers since child domestic work is part of the informal sector, taking place in homes rather than institutions. Even if the law were clearer about child domestic work, the government's Labour Department only employs 12 labour inspectors who are responsible for tackling child domestic work along with all other forms of exploitative labour – an impossible task given the scale of the problem.

The role of CWISH

CWISH has been supporting child domestic workers since 1996 largely through ensuring that appropriate salaries are paid, enabling contact between domestic workers and their families, encouraging child domestic workers to attend school, and providing education or support through outreach centres, as well as promoting the use of adult domestic workers instead of

¹ It should be noted that under the Nepali constitution a child is anyone under the age of 16; however, for the purposes of this report, a child refers to anyone under the age of 18.

² A 'child domestic worker' is defined as any person under 18 who performs household chores in another person's home (including their extended family) for financial gains, opportunities and/or to pay off debts.

³ But not from the 'lowest' castes: people from the 'dalit' caste are not permitted to enter the kitchens of those from 'higher' castes due to their status as 'untouchables' and consequently cannot be domestic workers. However, it is thought that many domestic workers hide their caste in order to obtain employment.

children. It has also carried out a small amount of work rescuing children in dire circumstances and providing emergency support and reintegration. The current work on reintegrating children back to their families began in earnest in early 2012. The process begins with identifying child domestic workers (through house-to-house surveys, schools, local government child protection committees, and consultation within the community) and taking them through a 12-16 week phase of preparing for reintegration that includes:

- Group and individual counselling for children. This involves helping them to reflect on their current circumstances as well as their lives when they were with their families, and helps them explore alternative opportunities to domestic work; only those who say they would like to be reintegrated are supported to return home.
- Tracing the families of those children who want to return home, and some preparation of families through distance counselling by phone.
- Legal action if a child's rights have been infringed (e.g. sexual, physical or emotional abuse, not being sent to school), or a softer approach

whereby family, school and, where appropriate, the employer are contacted.

- Drawing up a care plan for how the child will be reintegrated, including what support and resources will be required in the short and longer term. This is done by CWISH staff, with some consultation with children. Owing to issues of distance, families are rarely consulted in the development of this care plan.

The child is then reunified with his or her family and his/her situation is followed up for two years, after which CWISH transfers the responsibility to parents and other agencies such as community-based child protection committees, district child welfare boards and local schools.

CWISH also acts as a mediator between other stakeholders and agencies that need to be involved in the process (e.g. the child's current school, the school to which the child will go, the labour office, central and district child welfare boards, village development committees, local NGOs, employers, etc.), ensuring that they coordinate with one another.

⁴ Employers are contacted only if the child thinks they will not try to prevent reintegration. Since parents have, in effect, delegated guardianship of the child to his or her employer it is felt to be important to gain the employer's support where possible so as to avoid conflict and potential risk to social workers as well as to the child and his or her family.

Methodology

The study process

Once the scope of the study had been defined, a study team made up of researchers and CWISH staff was trained to carry out data collection using a set of guide questions to explore the main areas of interest. They used focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews and, where appropriate, participatory tools such as timelines and drawings⁵ with the key stakeholders in the reintegration process (see 'sample' below). A national researcher oversaw and co-ordinated the research. The guide questions for Phase 1 (the pre-reunification phase) were piloted and necessary changes made; guide questions for Phases 2 (reunification) and 3 (post-reintegration) were developed based on the findings from the previous phase. All data were transcribed

and translated from Nepali and sent to the lead researcher for analysis, along with a summary analysis of key findings from the perspective of the study team. In addition to this report, which covers all three phases, two interim reports covering Phases 1 and 2 were also produced.

Sample

The tables below show the stakeholders interviewed in each phase. They came from three different locations: Sindhupalchowk and Kavre, (where two of CWISH's partner organisations – Mahila Atmanirvarata Kendra (MANK) and Forum for Wildlife and Environment Preserve (FOWEP) – are currently working), and the Kathmandu valley (where CWISH works).

Table 1: Children and caregivers interviewed in each phase

Phase	Reintegrated children		Children who were not reintegrated		Caregivers				
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Mother	Father	Sibling	Aunt	Neighbour
Phase 1	7	23	-	-	9	3	2	1	-
Phase 2	4	15	2	2	10	3	2	1	1
Phase 3	3	10	-	-	8	2	1	-	-

The children who participated in the study were between eight and 18 years old (at the beginning of the study), with the majority between 10-14 years old; they had been working as child domestic workers for between three months and five years, with the majority having been away for between one and three years (17/30 children in Phase 1) and a significant minority (11/30 children) between three and nine months. Most came from two-parent families with two or three siblings. The

children constituted all of the children who were involved in CWISH reintegration initiatives during the study period and who were willing to take part in the research. The parents and caregivers who participated mainly worked in agriculture (and the communities that children are originally from are largely agricultural) or else were engaged in physical labour (e.g. construction work) or as shopkeepers or restaurateurs.

5. Children, their parents (or caregivers) and specialists were interviewed using one-to-one methods; other stakeholders, such as community members, were more often interviewed in focus group discussions.

Table 2: : Other stakeholders interviewed in each phase

Phase	Employer	Teacher	Friend of child	Political party rep.	Community member ⁶	Journalist	Specialists involved in the reintegration process		
							NGO staff	Social worker	Govt. officials
Phase 1	6 ⁷	-	-	-	-	1	6	-	4
Phase 2	-	5	8	5	20	-	2	5	-
Phase 3	-	23	10	1	8	-	1	2	-

A small number of employers were interviewed before children had returned home. In addition, a variety of specialists who were involved in the reintegration process were also interviewed, and interviews or focus group discussions were held with teachers from the communities to which the children were returning, as well as with community members and friends of the children once the children had returned home.

Challenges of the study

A number of challenges were faced during the study.

- A lack of continuity of staff involved in data collection across the three phases of the study. To mitigate any potential negative consequences of this, the national researcher provided training and support to new members of the study team as they joined.
- Even though all of the children who took part in Phase 1 of the study had at that point decided to return home, in reality, a third of children either did not return home, did not stay at home for long, or were not traceable, resulting in a reduced sample size for the subsequent phases.⁸ However, this enabled the study to examine why reintegration does not always go to plan in some cases, which is valuable in and of itself.

- In the focus group discussions those with more 'social standing' spoke more and often dominated: *"The neighbours and children [from the community] were not very able to put forward their independent views as the 'educated' people and social leaders led the discussion."* (study team member)
To overcome this difficulty, people were asked to pick questions from a hat. They would answer the question from their perspective first and then other members of the group could add in their thoughts.
- Many stakeholders were reluctant to take part in the study.
 - Employers: most employers wanted nothing to do with the study. Those that agreed to be interviewed were therefore probably atypically 'supportive' employers and even then they showed reluctance, possibly because they were being interviewed by CWISH staff when CWISH had just started work on reintegration.
 - Some parents and children, because of the following:
 - A lack of time to build trust between themselves and the study team.
 - A fear of confrontations with employers for taking part in the study and/or the influence of employers over what should and should not be said during interviews.⁹

⁶ Community members include 'social leaders', neighbours, representatives of women's groups, parents' groups, and, farmers' groups.

⁷ Three employers were related to the children (one sister, one uncle, one aunt) and three were not.

⁸ Out of 30 children interviewed in the first phase of the research, four were not reunited to their families as planned. One girl was severely injured and in hospital care; two girls got married after being reintegrated into their families; six were reintegrated to their families but there were delays with this reintegration; and four girls could not be traced after the Phase 1 interview, one of whom is suspected to have been trafficked. Only 13 children were identified as reintegrated within the scheduled time of their plan to leave work and reunite with family.

⁹ This was felt to be true of those children who were not reintegrated in particular; employers were reluctant to allow them to be interviewed and often insisted on being in the room whilst the interview took place, restricting what the child was and was not willing to say.

- A lack of quiet and confidential spaces to conduct interviews.¹⁰
- The sensitivity of the topics covered during the interviews. Some children and parents showed signs of distress during the interviews; the study team did not want to go 'too deep' for fear of traumatising the interviewee by persisting with questions that raised negative feelings or caused distress. This was in line with the ethical protocol.
- Difficulty in collecting relevant information from those parents whose expectations of the reintegration process had not been fulfilled or where, for example, there had been delays in the delivery of support; these stakeholders used the interview as an opportunity to air their grievances since the interviewer was a member of the implementing agency.

¹⁰ Whilst every effort was made to find quiet and confidential spaces to conduct interviews, this was very often not possible. The presence of other people during interviews prevented some interviewees from 'opening up' as much as they might otherwise have done.

Key findings and lessons learnt

Below is a summary of the study's key findings and lessons learned, beginning with an exploration of why children become domestic workers and their experiences of domestic work, with the remaining findings organised by the different stages of the reintegration process, finishing with a short section on when reintegration does not go ahead according to plan. When interpreting these the findings, it should be borne in mind that this was the first time that this approach to reintegration had been used with child domestic workers in Nepal¹¹ and consequently the processes were completely new to all those involved.

Why do children end up as domestic workers?

There were two key factors that the majority of children and their parents mentioned as reasons for entering domestic work, namely poverty and the desire for a good quality education. Even though all but two (girl) children attended their local school before they became domestic workers, there was often a belief that the education received in the city would be of higher quality than the education in the village; there were also instances where changes in family circumstances meant that the family was no longer able to afford to send the child to school locally.

The key reasons for poverty included parents not owning their own land or business and thus relying on others for employment; having 'too many' children; and an absence of a primary breadwinner due to ill health, alcoholism, abandonment or death. These two factors tie in with some of the key characteristics of child domestic workers, namely coming from rural areas and belonging to marginalised groups, since both of these factors are linked to poverty

and a lack of access to quality education.

Another factor mentioned by a few children and about one-third of parents was violence at home (perpetrated mainly by fathers, but also by step-parents, extended family, and/or by siblings).

The gender bias that is found in domestic work can be explained by social norms that maintain that household chores are 'women's work'; girls are thought of as being better at housework, more loyal, hardworking, less likely to steal and less likely to rebel against their employer. In addition, parents are more willing to send girls into this sort of work since it is considered 'safe' (they are not on the streets) and because it prepares them for their future roles as mothers and housewives. Boys also have more alternative options for work, such as working in an industry. However, this gender bias usually lasts only until puberty when many girls will be dismissed because they are seen as a potential 'risk' to the employer's family, the risk being that they become pregnant by one of the male members of the household. It is often the most senior woman in the household that wants the girl worker to be dismissed; the implication is that there is a tacit understanding that sexual abuse is taking place and that this is accepted whilst it does not risk bringing 'shame' on the employer's family. Girls who are dismissed often leave their employer with few skills and can face discrimination on returning home. They are therefore considered at greater risk of being trafficked and/or ending up as sex workers. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a large number of young women in the sex or 'entertainment' industry in Nepal used to be child domestic workers. This point is crucial to understanding the circumstances of domestic workers and the reasons why they reintegrate or not at certain periods in the lifecycle.

¹¹ Reintegration per se was not a new concept in Nepal; since 1996 some organisations have been rescuing and reuniting child domestic workers who were victims of violence and abuse. Since 2001 organisations (including CWISH) have taken a legalistic approach to reintegration that has not always worked well since there has been no plan for support post-reintegration, with the consequence that many children have ended up in institutions rather than going home.

In addition to the ‘push’ factors that lead to domestic work as described above, there are also a variety of ‘pull’ factors. The demand for domestic workers from the urban middle classes has increased dramatically over the years, as the urban population itself has grown and as more and more women who would previously have carried out household chores now go out to work instead. So rather than parents (or children) actively seeking employment, in the majority of cases (90 per cent of those studied here), it is an employer or friend or relative who suggests and encourages the parent to send their child to be a domestic worker.¹² Many poor rural communities also subscribe to the (often

false) belief that things will be better in the city, so if things are difficult at home, it is easy to see how the (usually false) lure of better opportunities for work, education, and a fancy urban life – of “*high dreams and expectations*” – may tempt parents and children to agree. Indeed, over half the children studied here had actively agreed to go away (with 10 per cent instigating the move themselves), believing that their future opportunities might be greater in the city, as well as feeling a duty to their parents to help alleviate a difficult financial situation at home. About a quarter agreed to go, albeit reluctantly, and only ten per cent really did not want to go.

Box 2: Why children end up as domestic worker

“The main reason was my poor economic situation. I have five children and I could not afford them. There was no other option.” (Father, Sindhupalchowk)

“I felt very bad but I thought that it was better for her to be out of home where she was always yelled at. [I thought] she would be safe and get an opportunity to study.” (Mother, Sindhupalchowk)

“Because of poverty, pressure from friends and relatives, parents’ alcoholism, parents travelling abroad for work, a lack of education, a lack of awareness programmes, children not getting parental love and care and so on – in that time if someone lures them with money and facilities then they will leave home.” (Focus group discussion with community, Sindhupalchowk)

There are two other key and interrelated factors to do with the socio-cultural conception of children in Nepali society that help explain why some children enter domestic work. The first is that children are deemed to ‘belong’ to their parents and as such have no independent identity or right to self-determination. It is also the case that within Nepali culture it is seen as the eldest child’s responsibility to provide for their family if the primary breadwinner is unable to do so. Both these beliefs make it easier for parents to see sending their child away as acceptable or as a positive step, and to convince children to accept becoming a domestic worker as part of

their ‘destiny’, as if they are something special because of this.

The experience of being a child domestic worker

Domestic work and life in the city did not fulfil most children’s expectations, with the majority not being happy because of a mix of large workloads, ill treatment at the hands of employers and missing home. Whilst the positive aspects of being a child domestic worker included being fed and clothed, having their school fees and materials paid for (for the 90

¹² Although this was not found in this study, it can also be the case that employers own the land that the parents work on, so a parent refusing to allow their child to become a domestic worker or a child being reintegrated from domestic work could potentially lead to loss of employment for the parent(s) as well.

per cent of children who attended school) and, in one-third of cases, feeling 'loved' by at least one member of the employer's family (usually because there would be one person in the family

who listened to their concerns and who would take their side in disputes), the negatives far outweighed the positives.

Box 3: Children's experiences of being domestic workers

"I feel very bad being a domestic worker as I am deprived of family love and care. It is very different from my home. I miss my village and my grandmother a lot." (Girl, Kavre)

"I wake up at 6:30 in the morning and sleep at 11 or 12 at night. I have to clean the bathroom, wash dishes and prepare tea at my workplace. I go to school at 9:30am after the morning meal. I come home from school, and work. The kitchen work is over at 8-9pm and I study for some hours before I sleep." (Girl, Sindhupalchowk)

"There is nothing good in that house. I don't like the beatings or scoldings, and not letting me go out. They also give me lots of work." (Boy, Sindhupalchowk)

Two-thirds of children said they worked from morning until night, mainly washing dishes and clothes and child-minding, with six hours of school and only six or seven hours of sleep. Child domestic workers also tend to be very isolated; they work alone, have minimal contact with friends and the outside world, and often do not have much contact with their families; nearly a third saw their family less than once a year,¹⁴ one-fifth saw them once every three to six months, and nearly a third saw them once a month or more. Other contact included phone calls home, although it was not clear how many children made these or how often these happened. It is easy for employers to maintain this isolation since once the child is in their home they take over the role of guardian from the parent(s)¹⁵ and thus have control over children's access to the outside world.¹⁶ It also means they can scold and beat them in the name of disciplinary action – of which almost half and

one-fifth of children complained respectively – with impunity, whilst the child suffers in silence.¹⁷ Other hardships mentioned included not being given enough time to study (for a quarter of children) and not being paid; only one third received payment (of between US\$5 to US\$20 per month) and for most this money went directly to their parents. This suggests that the three key reasons given by parents for sending their children away – namely that they would receive a better education, it would alleviate poverty and it would remove the child from an abusive situation in their original family and community – were in many cases not being fulfilled.

About half of parents' descriptions of life for their child were much more positive than the descriptions given by their child (and indeed these parents were more likely to think their child would miss the benefits of living in the city than was the case in reality). However, half of

¹⁴ Note that given that almost two-thirds of the children in the study had been domestic workers for more than a year, this means that about half of children who had been away for a year or more saw their families less than once a year.

¹⁵ This blurring of the boundaries between employer and parent is further exacerbated by the fact that the children are not referred to as 'employees', rather they are usually called 'kanchhi' or 'kanchha' (meaning 'youngest one') or given a new name; similarly, employers are usually called 'uncle', 'aunt', 'mother, or 'grandma'.

¹⁶ This is another example of the concept of the child as 'belonging' to an adult(s), rather than as having rights independently of them.

¹⁷ Their isolation also makes them less visible to labour movements who could play a role in eliminating child domestic work by helping to replace children with adults.

parents' descriptions concurred with that given by their child. Where parents knew that their child was not being treated well they would want the child to return home, but faced a difficult choice. Returning home could mean their child missing out on school for the rest of the year (since government policy means children are not accepted into school mid-way through a school year) or longer (if, for example, they could not afford the school fees), yet receiving a formal education could be critical in securing a better future in the long term. Hence, the risks associated with their child's placement as a domestic worker could be considered a necessary evil in protecting the child's future, a future that only schooling is understood to provide. In addition, whilst this was not so evident in this study, it is also often the case that employers have multiple ties with the family of the domestic worker. For example, they may give the family access to rural land in order to make a living, they may give them material goods, and simply having a relationship with a 'powerful and influential' person from the city (the employer) can give the family social standing in their rural community. So the costs of the child returning home can be multiple.

The decision to go home and preparing to leave employment

For the majority of children (and parents), the main reasons for deciding to return home were the same as those for not enjoying domestic work – they missed their family and home and they wanted to get away from the ill-treatment they suffered from their employer(s) (although notably, parents were far less likely to mention the latter than were children). A couple of children also said they needed to return home to look after sick parents. Before they had returned home, 90 per cent of children said that the decision to do so came from them, even though ultimately it was the parent who would decide whether to accept the decision, and only a third of parents mentioned CWISH's intervention as a contributing factor. However, when asked about how the decision had come about after the child had returned home, the role of CWISH was emphasised a lot more. In the vast majority of cases as explained by both the children and their parents, CWISH was said to be either instrumental in the child returning (in the sense that the suggestion came initially from CWISH and children and parents agreed), or at the very least CWISH was directly involved in helping the child to return home. Only one child and two parents did not mention CWISH being involved in the process.

Table 3: How reintegration came about according to children and caregivers after the children had returned home

How reintegration came about	CWISH suggested it	Child wanted it and CWISH supported the process	Parent wanted it and CWISH supported the process	Parent and child wanted it and CWISH supported the process	Child wanted it and no mention of CWISH's involvement
No. of children	7	7	3	-	2
No. of parents ¹⁸	5	4	2	1	4

¹⁸ There are one fewer answers than the number of caregivers interviewed because one of the caregivers (the neighbour) was not in a position to answer this question since they had not been involved in this aspect of reintegration.

In general, CWISH seemed to have spoken to children in their schools and to their parent(s) – usually on the phone initially and sometimes in CWISH’s office – about children’s rights and the illegality of child domestic work, and offered to support in the child’s return home. However, most children and parents were not clear what this support would actually involve and there was no mention of care plans being drawn up prior to the child returning home.¹⁹ Out of those children who discussed it, the majority said that on returning home they would need help with school costs (such as materials and fees); about a quarter also mentioned needing help with the

travel fare home, clothing, and financial support more generally, and about 10 per cent wanted support to be able to grow or otherwise garner sufficient food. The vast majority of parents said they needed financial support in general as well as support for education costs (and specialists concurred with this). One-third of children thought that CWISH would provide them with the necessary support whilst almost a quarter expected support to come from extended family; parents seemed unclear about exactly what support they would get or when or how, although they said that they would like organisations such as CWISH to provide this support.²⁰

Box 4: Explanations of how reintegration came about

“I didn’t like to stay there because [my employer] always scolded me. I missed my family, home and community a lot. Then CWISH found me. CWISH told me that working in another’s house is against children’s rights. I told my mother [that the employer scolded me]; she called me and through CWISH this idea came to go back to my own family.” (Girl, Kavre)

“Some people from CWISH were in my school and they talked to me. It was about children like us who were living at other’s homes. They asked me if I wanted to go back home and I said yes. They helped me to return home.” (Girl, Sindhupalchowk)

“Sisters from CWISH came and asked me to take my daughter home. I was called to [CWISH’s] office. Then I came to know that CWISH will support the expenses of my daughter’s education and heard that CWISH will give me some money as well.” (Mother, Sindhupalchowk)

Support needs aside, most children and parents did not predict any problems on returning home; a few were fearful of being teased by other children in the village, or of financial difficulties at home, and being scolded or abused at home. Some girls were also fearful of facing early marriage and some parents were concerned about possible negative influences in the village. Whilst about two-thirds of parents seemed pleased that their children would be returning home, the other third seemed fairly ambivalent or unenthusiastic – several were relieved that

their daughters were returning because they had reached puberty and so “they may face problems” if they stayed with their employer. Few if any parents seemed as eager as the children, who looked forward to having more love and support and being free.

“My friends will like [that I am home]. They love me. I will go to school and I will study. This is our time to study. I will help my mother as much as I can.” (Girl, Kavre)

¹⁹ It is possible that since children and parents were interviewed prior to children’s return home they had yet to go through the aspect of the preparatory phase in which needs were assessed and care plans drawn up.

²⁰ It should be noted that the interviews were conducted by staff from CWISH so it is possible that when parents were asked about where they would expect support to come from, the most obvious candidate to mention was CWISH.

“When I am home I can share my feelings. Here I cannot say whatever comes to my heart. That is why [it will be pleasing]; I have no fears.” (Girl, Sindhupalchowk)

The greatest worry about reintegration was about how the employer might react and so most children chose not to tell them but rather simply planned not to return to work after a visit home:

“This is my own decision. I talked about this thing with my mummy and she also agreed.” (Boy, Sindhupalchowk)

“I have told my parents but not [my employer]. I think [my employer] will say: ‘Why stay for one year only?’ and try to make me live here.” (Boy, Sindhupalchowk)

Even though all the employers interviewed said they had no objection to the child returning home, in reality about a third of children and almost half of parents said that the employer had shown some resistance to allowing the child to return home. This usually manifested itself in the employer trying to convince the child and his/her parent(s) to allow the child to stay, often through promises of receiving a better education (although in one instance the child had been severely beaten by the employer when they said they were going home).

Specialists also spoke about employers often obstructing the reintegration process even if at first they had agreed to the return. This included trying to convince parents to not receive their child home, spreading rumours that NGOs were making money out of the reintegration process or trying to discredit the NGO(s) through their influence with people in power, and in some extreme cases even issuing death threats to NGO staff. Consequently it was often felt that it was better not to let employers know that their domestic worker was going to be reintegrated.

Life just after the child has returned home

For the majority of children, reunification had gone well. Most children had returned to their mother and father and (generally two to three) siblings and their lives had gone back to how things were before, with a typical day involving: *“I wake up at 6am and then I study for an hour. Then I go to school at 9am. I return from school at 3pm and I go to cut grass for cattle. Then I play with my friends and then do homework. I study for about 30 minutes and then I sleep at 8-9pm.”* (Boy, Sindhupalchowk)

Out of those children who were not with their parents, three had remained in the city: two were living with an aunt, and one was living in rented accommodation with his brother since his mother had recently travelled overseas to find work; his father had mental health problems and was consequently unable to look after him and had remained in the village. Another child was living with her sister in her village, whilst her parents had gone to live in Kathmandu with her brothers in order to earn a better living. None of the children were employed apart from one whose mother had moved to the city to be with her; this girl was still working part time as a domestic worker.

The majority of children reported being very happy to be home (and parents concurred); they particularly appreciated feeling the love of their family, being able to play, no longer having to work, and having time to study.

“I felt happy to come back home and be with my family. I am enjoying being loved and cared for by my parents.” (Girl, Kavre)

“I felt good [coming home] ... I was happy that I do not have to do hard work at home and it is fun to play and study with my brothers and sisters.” (Boy, Sindhupalchowk)

21 If anything, employers worried about how families would cope if the child returned home: *“Her family is poor ... [they are] facing a hard time to sustain their lives. Such difficulties may hamper the future and study of [the child domestic worker]”* (Employer).

22 When CWISH comes across cases where the child domestic worker has experienced abuse and violence they take emergency protective action, removing the child from the situation immediately and taking legal action against the employer.

Although about one-fifth of children and a third of parents mentioned squabbles and scoldings, these seemed like typical family relations. Indeed, if anything relations may have improved, as if the separation and subsequent reunification had made the family members appreciate each other more.

"They treat me well. They care about me more than when I lived here before." (Girl, Sindhupalchowk)

"[Name of child]'s behaviour has changed. She didn't use to respect other people while she was here. But she has been good since coming home." (Sister, Sindhupalchowk)

Only one child and two parents explicitly mentioned unhappiness at being home and this was because the fathers were alcoholic and scolded or beat the children; even then, the children expressed happiness at being with the rest of their family. Also, the two children who were living with a sibling expressed dismay at not being with their parents: *"I can't get my parents' love and care so I feel sad."* (Girl, Sindhupalchowk)

Other fears about returning home, such as being teased or possible negative influences in the village, were not borne out in general. The children were all attending school and those who discussed it talked positively about it and particularly enjoyed having friends there, and they also, in the main, got on well with neighbours, who were felt to be there for them in times of need, such as when someone was sick and/or there was a need for some financial assistance: *"[The neighbours] help us in difficult times. They help us by lending us money during times of illness, and they give us company in our work and share things"* (Father, Sindhupalchowk). Relations with the broader community were more mixed: people generally treated the children reasonably well, but the children did not like it when people quarrelled or got drunk (which about half the children mentioned):

"Sometimes many people drink alcohol and shout at night time. I'm afraid of such people." (Girl, Sindhupalchowk)

"Sometimes [community members] quarrel with each other about land, their fields and so on because they have taken alcohol" (Girl, Sindhupalchowk)

Some specialists discussed possible fears that *"in some cases the child may have lived with better facilities and opportunities in the workplace. At such times, the child may miss the luxury or things at his or her home."* (Social mobiliser, Sindhupalchowk), but in reality, all of the children preferred to be home. Over half unequivocally said they did not miss the workplace at all, and about one quarter mentioned missing friends or the employer's child(ren). Only a couple of children mentioned missing academic opportunities. If anything, parents were more likely to think their child missed the workplace – or the opportunities and/or material goods there – than was actually the case; this reflects a common assumption that children place great importance on material goods whereas research in this area shows that children prefer the love and care of friends and family over living in material privilege (even when very basic).

It was too early to tell whether or how family finances would be affected by the child's return home and whether the support provided (if any) was sufficient. What was clear was that children and parents did not seem very aware of what they were entitled to (from CWISH or elsewhere) or when they would receive support. At the time of interview about one-fifth of children and one-quarter of parents said they had not received any form of support.²³ Out of those who had received support, the most frequent form was school materials (e.g. stationery, uniforms), with about half of children and almost two-thirds of parents mentioning this.²⁴ Other forms of support included school fees, transport home and money from employers and extended family. Fewer than

23 Since interviews took place within two to four weeks of returning home, it is possible that support needs had yet to be identified or that support had yet to be received but was on its way.

24 In a couple of instances the support had been promised but not yet received.

one-fifth of parents (and no children) mentioned instigating or enabling reintegration to happen in the first place as a form of support received from CWISH. Those who had received something seemed either neutral or grateful for support received and hoped it would continue in the longer term.

“It is very good to have some support from CWISH, because of financial poverty at home which causes difficulties in affording school costs.” (Girl, Kathmandu)

“[This support is] good for [the child’s] studies. It will be good if it continues” (Mother, Sindhupalchowk)

Reintegration in the longer term

What was most notable about the children when they were interviewed six months after returning home was how much more ‘free’ and ‘alive’ they seemed; they were, in general, more fluent, articulate and open in their responses and they seemed less fearful. It was as if when they had been interviewed shortly after returning home they were still suffering the effects of having been a domestic worker and were processing the transition and getting used to their new life at home. Consequently many were quite reserved or simply had not had sufficient time to know how they felt. They now had more perspective, and were more aware of and clearer about both the pros and cons of their previous and current lives. The change in tone could also be a sign that they were beginning to be able to flourish in a way that they could not when they were working and away from their families.

Their happiness at being home had increased over time – as had the happiness of their parents

at having their children home – following a period of adjustment:

“Initially the child felt shy to speak and communicate with friends. Now her communication skills are improving and so are her studies.” (Community focus group discussion, Sindhupalchowk)

“I can observe how [name of reintegrated child] has changed. He used to speak less in the previous days but he is more open these days. He is friendly and also studies well.” (Teacher, Sindhupalchowk)

“She has become a different person now. Immediately after coming back she did not concentrate on her studies... She was very reserved... she used to keep staring. Now she has become clever and open. After coming back she has learned how to deal with and behave with different people.” (Elder sister, Kavre)

The children had now found their place in the family, become more settled in school,²⁵ got on well with their communities,²⁶ and talked a lot more about how happy they were to have friends. In addition, many of the girls mentioned not having plans to marry soon as a big positive and a fear about returning home that had not materialised.²⁷ The communities also seemed to have accepted the children home – what was notable was that there did not appear to be any stigma attached to the reintegrated children or their families by the communities; indeed, community members interviewed for this study were all very sympathetic to the challenges faced by families and showed real compassion towards them.

²⁵ Although the children all talked positively about school, some parents complained about their child’s reluctance to go to school or study and this was beginning to concern them.

²⁶ Although as before, some children felt that the drunken behaviour of some community members was detrimental to them.

²⁷ Although this was not true for all of the girls who returned home, as is discussed in ‘when reintegration does not work out’ below.

Box 5: Feelings about being home

"I am very happy here with my family. I have no problems now I am at home. I go to school regularly and my study is good. My relationship with my friends is good. I am not planning to marry soon." (Girl, Kavre)

"She is happy to be home with us. After coming back she felt free, everybody loved her. She has the opportunity to study. She is getting proper care from her family." (Elder sister, Kavre)

"I have many friends at school. We play together. They are very helpful. I can share my problems with them." (Girl, Kavre)

"After returning home, they get love and gratitude and are not deprived of love; they no longer have feelings of inferiority and loneliness." (Teacher, Kathmandu)

Box 6: Thoughts on returning to domestic work

"My [employer] loved me very much, she provided me with clothes and all the things I needed. She was very helpful and friendly. [But] I like to stay in my village [home] because I have family and friends here. I won't go back to my employer's house again. I have everybody here, parents, sisters and friends. Though my parents also scold me sometimes, it is different from my employer's scoldings. You can feel it. Because CWISH has been helping me with my education, I am able to study now." (Girl, Sindhupalchowk)

"I recall those scoldings given to me. But, I remember [my employers] when the food in our house is not tasty. I am free and happy with my life as I am able to be with my parents. But while I was in town I could learn new ideas and different habits and behaviours. No, I won't go back [to being a child domestic worker] if somebody offers me a job because people think negatively about the workers who work as domestic workers. My community is better as we all know each other and they help me when I need them." (Girl, Sindhupalchowk)

"The present community loves me, the previous one used to hate me and treat me as the worker... my employer used to beat me but [his wife] used to love me. Comparing these two lives, now I am free. As a domestic worker, I had to stay inside the house and was not allowed to visit places; they did not used to give me what I like to eat; I had to obey them. Now I am allowed to visit some places." (Boy, Sindhupalchowk)

Yet, whilst children seemed happier than in the previous phase, at the same time, more children (a third) and parents (a quarter) mentioned parents' drinking (or in a few instances drug taking) habits, always as something that was either actively causing or could potentially cause problems. In addition, there was also one girl whose family and community were concerned that she had fallen in with 'bad influences' at school and was at risk of being trafficked.²⁸

When reflecting on their lives as domestic workers, all but one child (who said she would go back if she had someone to play with and a good education) seemed much more adamant than before that they did not want to return, yet at the same time, they were also more able than before to recognise that there had been some aspects of their lives as child domestic workers that were good and/or that they preferred to home life, with one-third saying they felt loved by their employer's family and/or missed friends and one-third saying they had better facilities, food and clothes in the city.

What was striking was that children were happy to be home even though in most cases their families were clearly struggling; many families seemed to be living on the edge in terms of resources and resilience and the help they received from CWISH²⁹ kept them afloat and enabled the child to stay at home and in education. *"Till now I have received some stationery and my school fees from CWISH. CWISH helps me to stay with my parents by giving me support for my education. We are very poor, but now I get some support from CWISH, things are well. Let this help never stop."* (Girl, Sindhupalchowk).

Since there is so little slack in the household economy, any additional challenge – such as a family member becoming ill or the house burning down – brings with it the very real risk of the child being sent away again or at least being

taken out of education. Some families therefore find themselves facing some very stark choices. This might also explain why, even though parents were happy to have their children home, saying it was better that they were all together again, and they all said they would not send their children away again, when pushed, some (although a minority) became more ambivalent.

"I think she used to get everything she wanted in town. Here we have not been able to provide her with everything she has wanted. The only thing is that we have got an opportunity to live together. ... Maybe they did not always give her enough to eat but she used to get delicious food at her workplace. Here at home she can fill her stomach but we are not able to give her delicious food. I used to visit the place where she worked. The family was like a relative. They treated [my daughter] very well; lately they were considering enrolling her in private school." (Mother, Kavre)

"I already sent her away once, but not again, because it is not good for her to be out of my care. If we face any problems then we will try to solve them ourselves. [Long pause] Would I send her away again? Maybe. Because we are poor, if there is a good opportunity for her to study I will send her." (Father, Kavre)

Parents were, unsurprisingly, much more aware of their precarious financial existence than children, but they also seemed unaware of organisations other than CWISH that might offer support.³⁰ When asked, they said they wanted more support, with about half of parents asking for economic or livelihood support and about half for support with educational costs.

"I expect a little more help from any organisation so that I can run a small business or invest in farming. I have a miserable economic condition and is hard to run my family." (Father, Sindhupalchowk)

²⁸ In such instances, where CWISH is able to they will contact local NGOs to provide additional support to such children.

²⁹ All but one child and two-thirds of parents said they received support from CWISH for school materials and a quarter of children also mentioned their school fees being paid; however, a quarter of parents said they had not received any support to date even though they had been promised it.

³⁰ Apart from two families who mentioned receiving livelihood support from another NGO. Talk of government support was notable by its absence.

“I want someone to support my children in their education and to expand our business.” (Mother, Sindhupalchowk)

Why reintegration does not always work out

Eleven children did not return, or stay, at home.

- Two girls and two boys remained with their employer who was a blood relative. In all these instances, children gave the ability to finish their studies as a key reason for staying with the employer. However, in at least three of these cases there was a strong undercurrent suggesting that in fact the parents were too poor to be able to take the child home and that employers had played a key role in convincing both parties that the child should stay, and these were the really critical factors in the child not returning home.
- Two girls were reintegrated briefly but were then married and no longer live with their families. Since it was not possible to interview these girls, it is not known how or why their marriages came about, but it appeared that the fears of early marriage expressed by some girls pre-reintegration had indeed come true.
- One girl was hospitalised because of an accident in the employer’s home and was not well enough to be interviewed; she was being cared for by another NGO.
- Four girls could not be traced; they had left their employer’s house with a family member or representative of the family, but the employer could not provide contact details for them. It is feared that one of these children may have been trafficked, since her parents have complained to CWISH that they cannot contact her, yet she was supposedly married to a man who now denies any marriage and is refusing contact.

What might help the reintegration process?

As this study has shown, there are multiple, complex and often interrelated factors that result in, and maintain, children in domestic work. There can also be great ethical dilemmas to consider when reintegration does not go according to plan. In addition, child domestic work needs to be put into the broader context in which economic migration (of families as a whole or parents on their own³² as well as of children by themselves) is fairly common, as is child labour. Taking all of this into account, it is hardly surprising that the task of successful reintegration in the short and long term is a hugely challenging one.

Nonetheless, by taking into account the experience of domestic work and of the reintegration process from the point of view of a variety of stakeholders, this study points to what might help the reintegration process run more smoothly and be more likely to lead to success in the long term. Below is an outline of work that could be done with different stakeholders which aims to address the reasons why children enter domestic work, as well as identifying aspects of the reintegration process that need particular consideration that will decrease the risk of future separation. As such, many of these recommendations would apply to work aimed at preventing separation in the first place, as well as to ensuring the success of the reintegration process. Many of these recommendations have already been instigated by CWISH in their reintegration efforts. It is acknowledged that some of the suggestions are easier to achieve than others, some are shorter and some are longer term; this is also not work that requires inputs from multiple stakeholders. In addition, there is one area that is not discussed below since it goes beyond the scope of this study – namely sexual abuse and exploitation in domestic work. However, any reintegration process needs to address the causes and

³² Note that just within the course of this study, 10 per cent of parents and/or families under study migrated for economic reasons.

consequences of this in both the short and long term.

Employers

Employers play a crucial role in the reintegration of child domestic workers as well as in the prevention of child domestic work and family separation. Work to prevent the worst forms of child domestic labour and ultimately to stop the practice of employing children entirely could include the following.

- Making employers aware that employing children as domestic workers is illegal and that they could face prosecution.
- Making employers aware of alternatives to child domestic work such as the use of technologies and/or adult domestic workers.
- Educating employers about the cost-benefit of employing an adult instead of a child, explaining the possible risk factors and associated costs of having children in domestic work.
- Together with the government, developing and applying a standard measurement and monitoring system of labour conditions, including working hours, working conditions and facilities. This would also enable children who are victims of the worst forms of child labour to be removed from their employer immediately.
- Where required, taking legal action against the employer.
- Providing fora for 'decent' or 'good' employers to share their perspectives and approaches with other employers in order to encourage the recruitment of adult domestic workers to replace children, and to encourage ownership over the reintegration of child domestic workers.

Parents

The majority of children became domestic workers at the instigation of their parents, who, facing difficult economic circumstances whilst desiring a good education for their child (and in some instances, wanting to remove them from

violence at home or in the community), may not have felt much choice in the matter themselves. Myths about the realities of city life, domestic work and the opportunities they may bring also played a role as did pressure from employers themselves. With this in mind, work with parents could include the following:

- Raising awareness of the reality of child domestic work (as well as its illegality) and of life in the city, whilst showing parents the value or cost-benefit of having the child at home.
- Greater dialogue between parents, children and the body responsible for reintegration to better understand what support would be needed in order for the child to return and stay at home, whilst not raising false expectations in families about what support would actually be available. Whilst in theory care plans were drawn up for each child, these were not mentioned by any family member.

Ideally a needs assessment would take place before the child returns home and would cover, at a minimum, the following:

- Livelihood support needs. It was notable that only a couple of parents had received support from organisations other than CWISH and that none had received support from the state. Parents could be informed about their state entitlements and be linked up with relevant potential opportunities provided by the government or NGOs, such as poverty reduction programmes,³³ child welfare support,³⁴ adult skills training programmes (that can lead to alternative livelihoods), or income generation programmes. They could also be helped with the process of applying for support.
- Material needs. Whilst these may be addressed in the longer term through livelihood interventions, in the short term basic needs such as shelter, food, clothing, and heating need to be met alongside school materials.
- Psychological or emotional capacity: this could include looking at parenting skills and the desire to have the child home.

³³ The government's development budget is rarely fully spent.

³⁴ The child welfare system is currently being reformed which provides an opportunity to ensure it adequately covers the needs of children being reintegrated from domestic work.

- Potential threats to the safety of the child such as alcohol/substance abuse, domestic violence, sexual abuse, early marriage, or trafficking. Whilst these may come from within the family they may also come from the community, so the assessment needs to cover both the likelihood of the child being at risk from his or her family members and the capacity of the family to protect the child from potential risks in the community.³⁵
- Based on this assessment, ensuring parents understand what support they will receive, who will provide it and when they will receive it. Ideally parents should be actively involved in all of these decisions.
- Ongoing monitoring of the families to check on their support requirements and to detect any potential problems, allowing for early intervention where necessary.

It should be noted that the implication of some of the above is that more work may be needed to be done with parents (and the families to which the child will reintegrate more broadly) before the family is ready to receive the child home than is currently allowed for in the reintegration process. For example, if it is found that there is no real desire to have the child home, if there are violence or substance abuse problems, or if the family is facing severe financial difficulties, these may need to be addressed before the child returns home to prevent the risk of harm to the child and/or of further separation.

This, in turn, has implications for the child domestic worker, and once again highlights the complexity of reintegration and some of the dilemmas faced by those working in this area. Children who are in situations of extreme risk as a consequence of their work cannot remain in these situations whilst solutions are sought to often deep-rooted problems in families and communities. Possible solutions may be to place the child into transitory alternative care, such as kinship or foster care, or small group residential care. This care must be of good quality and

carefully monitored to avoid the child being placed at further risk.

More broadly, a study that identifies the factors that make some poor or vulnerable families less likely to send children into domestic work (or other forms of hazardous labour) than others might help us better understand what work could be done to both prevent separation in the first place and to make reintegration more likely to succeed.

Child domestic workers

Work to better support children through the process of reintegration could include the following:

- Developing a care plan with them that covers the support they will need.
 - Help for moving from their employer's house to their parents/caregivers home. This might include, for example, transport home and someone to accompany them, preparing psychologically to be with their family once more, how to deal with the employer, and so on.
 - Support once they are home. Apart from their (and their family's) financial and material needs this should cover psychological support needs to help them through trauma they may have experienced as a result of their separation and their treatment whilst working
- Making sure they fully understand each step of the reintegration process, including:
 - when and how reintegration will take place
 - what support (financial, material, psychological) they will receive, from whom, when and for how long
 - what preparations their family is going through to receive them.
- Linking them with former child domestic workers to provide a supportive environment once they are home.
- Ongoing monitoring of their well-being post reintegration in order to intervene rapidly if things are not going well.
- Ensure that all withdrawals of children from the

³⁵ Whilst the best interests of the child need to be paramount in decisions about reintegration, there is a difficult balance to be struck here; the adequacy of the protection measures in place at home needs to be weighed against the risks to safety faced by the child remaining in employment. The weighing of these factors is what informs the kinds of decisions that parents are making all the time when they decide that their child should go to work as a child domestic worker.

workplace are handled carefully, with proper consideration of the impacts on the child, and their relationships with families and NGOs.

In addition to work with actual child domestic workers, work with children who are vulnerable to becoming domestic workers could include helping them understand the realities of domestic work, exploding myths surrounding urban life and education, helping them assess their current situation and explore the positives of their current lives, helping them to understand their rights and helping them find alternative opportunities. Ex-child domestic workers could play a critical role in this.

The Department of Education and local schools

- Ensuring the quality of education in rural areas matches that of urban areas and is sufficient to satisfy parents. CWISH is working with School Management Committees, Parent Teachers Associations and with Child Clubs to promote participation and mainstreaming of reintegrated children into schools.
- Allowing children to enter school at any point during the school year (and not just at the beginning of the year) and providing the necessary support for the child to integrate and catch up if necessary. CWISH is conducting catch-up classes for children who have weak performance in education. It is also mainstreaming children who have been out of the school system through temporary non-formal education.
- Making education free at the point of access up to tertiary level
- Creating a protective environment. Schools could potentially act as a source of protection from separation through, for example: spotting children at risk of being sent away as domestic workers (as well as those at risk of trafficking and of early marriage) and alerting relevant government authorities or NGOs; working with parents to convince them not to send

children away; and educating children about their (legal) rights. They could also act as a source of support post reintegration, including identifying children who may be at risk of further separation.³⁶

Other state agencies

The role of the state was rarely mentioned by any stakeholder. However, they could be playing a much greater role both in the prevention of child domestic work and in the reintegration of child domestic workers as well as in documentation and ongoing monitoring. As one Child Rights Officer from a District Welfare Board put it: *“To be very frank, it is mostly NGOs and INGOs that are involved in this [reintegration] process. So government authorities like us are only supporting that process. The government does not have ownership of that process. And if a state is detached from a crucial agenda, it does not send out a good message.”* In order for them to take a more proactive role, alongside seeing it as their responsibility,³⁷ the state could also take the following steps.

- Support and fund the NGO sector, who have been building a body of experience and knowledge in this area, to continue and expand their work and to share their experiences.
- Build their capacity to work in this area. Ideally, reintegration would fall under the remit of the social care system and of social workers, and this may be something to aim for in the longer term. However, in the short term a system akin to that of ‘community health workers’³⁸ may be more practical, with, for example, ‘community child protection workers’ trained and employed to assess and follow up on reintegrated children and their families. They could also play a preventative role through identifying children at risk.
- Develop a clearer legal framework that explicitly incorporates the informal child labour sector, and support community police, local police booths and child protection committees,

³⁶ It is recognised in asking schools to take on this role that this is a huge undertaking in and of itself.

³⁷ Getting the state to take reintegration (and the prevention of child domestic work) seriously may prove challenging as presumably many of those in power will have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo if they themselves employ child domestic workers or know people who do.

³⁸ These are local people who often have only a low level of education who are trained, certified and employed by the District Health Office to provide primary and mainly maternal health care to their local population. They are seen as successful and have been promoted by the government.

as well as the community more broadly to monitor and report violations of labour standards. The state could also train NGOs in how to use the law to prosecute offenders. CWISH has made an agreement with Department of Labour to provide technical and financial support for drafting procedural law on regulating child labour, both in the formal and informal sectors and drafting of the law has already progressed.

- Providing alternatives to parental care for those instances where home is not safe. Ideally this would be extended family or community-based care, but could include small group residential care where this is in children's best interests. CWISH has placed currently 32 children in kinship care for whom reintegration back to parents was not in their best interest.
- Developing shared goals, along with good coordination, cooperation, information and resource sharing between all relevant parts of the state system (such as the judicial system, police, relevant state departments including social welfare, education, health, labour and children's departments) and between and across local, district and national levels of these agencies,³⁹ as well as between state agencies and other stakeholders involved in reintegration, such as NGOs. Some work has already been done towards this ends, with coordination between NGOs and government, and a loose coalition of NGOs working on child protection issue established.
- Clearer guidelines and policy provisions that define the role of NGOs and state agencies on operating for reintegration and prevention, including specific guidelines on how NGO and state agencies can handle reintegration together. CWISH has started advocacy in this area, with some success.

The media

The media could play a very positive role in raising awareness about and changing societal attitudes towards child domestic work. To prevent the media from focusing on negative

stories about failed reintegration (which they have tended to do to date), they need to be shown more success stories, but they also need to be educated about the realities of child domestic work and the complexity of reintegration so that this is reflected in their reporting. Providing fora for 'good' media practitioners to share their perspectives and experiences with others may also result in more realistic and positive reporting. In addition, the media can play a role in demystifying urban myths and projecting more positive news on rural life. CWISH is organising media orientation programs to raise awareness amongst journalists on the importance of reporting child protection stories. It has established endowment fund to award journalists for their reports on child rights. Urban and rural communities

Communities both from the child's place of work and from their place of origin can play an important role in supporting and sustaining reintegration. Work with them could include several areas.

- Learning about existing positive community and cultural practices in relation to child protection and promoting these within and across communities.
- Creating neighbourly peer pressure to not accept children as domestic workers and to promote the safe return home of children who are currently domestic workers. For example, CWISH is launching the 'green flag green movement' to award a home without child labour with green flag.
- Promoting neighbourhood cooperation to support vulnerable families so that they do not reach a point where they need to send their child(ren) away or so that they can cope once the child has returned home
- Promoting and supporting community members to act as mentors to children who have been reintegrated, helping the children to engage in community activities as well as to access services available to them,

³⁹ The current process of decentralising government provides a potential opportunity: it may be easier for government to take on the responsibility for reintegrated children and their families at a more local (rather than central) level, but this would need to be built into the system from the outset, by for example, making explicit the roles and responsibilities at the different levels as well as how central and local government will work together and how different local governments will work together since it is likely that in the process of reintegration children will move between areas that fall under the authority of different local governments.

such as healthcare, education or children's groups. CWISH is working to mobilise child protection committees to monitor the situation of reintegrated children and to make referrals if there concerns about their well-being.

The general public

Raising awareness of the realities of child domestic work, its illegality, and of children's rights might make child domestic work less socially acceptable and create public pressure to stop the practice. Promoting more positive socio-cultural conceptions of childhood and challenging and trying to change those that perpetuate an enabling environment for child domestic work (and child labour more generally) is also something to aim for in the longer term; this would include changing attitudes towards girls in particular and their role in society, as well as towards caste.⁴⁰

Whilst addressing the issues outlined above would no doubt improve the reintegration process (and help prevent separation in the first place), it should also be remembered that from the cases studied here it is clear that there is no one size fits all solution to reintegration; rather, each case needs to be taken on its own merits. Whilst most children were able to return home and have stayed there and are happy (despite the financial difficulties families face), this was not true for all of the children (for example, those who remained with their employer, those who had been left without parental care and were living with a sibling, those who were married soon after returning home, and those who were at risk of or who had been trafficked). Some cases are simply more complex than others and will therefore require more complex and/or intense support and follow-up. This requires a certain level of flexibility within the system to allocate resources appropriately.

⁴⁰ Although the role of caste was not mentioned explicitly by any stakeholder, it was occasionally alluded to, such as in this example: *"The socio-political structure of the community hinders the increment of literacy level for certain groups."* (focus group discussion with community members, Sindhupalchowk). Here, it is implicitly recognised that lower castes are less likely to benefit from a good education and hence will have fewer livelihood opportunities, increasing the chances of poverty which can lead to children being sent to work.

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