

Kathmandu, 2 July 2011 (IRIN) - Efforts to free thousands of enslaved girls in Nepal and get them into school need more funding and less government bureaucracy, activists say.

Since the year 2000, more than 11,000 [Kamlaris](#), girls committed to indentured servitude by their parents, have been rescued. But without financial support, those freed remain impoverished and some say they are forced to consider returning to work as Kamlaris.

"Many of my friends are now planning to resume their life as Kamlaris and this really worries me," 20-year-old Urmila Chaudhary, an ex-Kamlari, told IRIN.

She was barely six when her parents sold her to work in a rich household in Kathmandu. In 2007, after 12 years of servitude, the [Nepalese Youth Foundation \(NYOF\)](#) rescued her.

Though the government has a budget of nearly US\$2.3 million for the education and vocational training of freed Kamlari girls in 2011, most of the funds remain unspent, activists say.

The budget allocation was a political move and a form of window-dressing, said NYOF's Som Paneru said. He explained that the money is tied up in red tape, with officials often blaming each other for inaction over the former Kamlaris.

In 2009, the government had a budget of nearly \$1.6 million for 7,000 girls but not even \$150,000 was spent. The rest of the money was frozen by the end of fiscal year 2010, according to NYOF. The NGO fears the same will happen in 2011.

Government to blame?

"It is a big failure of our system and the government remains irresponsible," said Paneru.

There is concern that many of the formerly indentured girls are already dropping out of school because they cannot afford the fees. In Dang District, western Nepal, about 400km south of Kathmandu, more than 200 former Kamlaris have already dropped out of school this year, according to NGO the Society Welfare Action Nepal (SWAN).

Of the 11,000 girls rescued, 6,500 are now aged 6-19 and were supposed to receive a monthly government grant of \$20 for school fees.

Ex-Kamlari Urmila Chaudhary, an activist with NGO Common Forum for Kamlari Freedom, started by ex-Kamlari girls in Dang District, said the group routinely approaches the government for answers and help - only to be told funds have been sent to district offices.

"But the girls have never seen the funds. The cash is usually sent to the school administration which charges for school registration, monthly fees and other things," said Bhagiram Chaudhary, executive director of SWAN.

All Kamlaris, and many activists, are from the Thauru ethnic group and have the same surname - Chaudhary.

The Ministry of Education, which is responsible for helping to fund the girls' education, said financial assistance had already reached the Kamlari students.

"We will verify this information because our ministry has already disbursed the funds," Janardhan Nepal, joint secretary of the ministry, told IRIN, pointing out that the money was used to cover school fees and administrative costs, but also acknowledging that the funds were insufficient and the girls still vulnerable.

Source: [IRIN](#)