

Corona Virus Disease (COVID19) Pandemic and Its Impacts on Right to Food of Vulnerable Communities and Groups

CSO FIELD MONITORING REPORT



Report prepared by
FIAN Nepal
3 September 2020

1. Introduction:

Corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19) was first reported in Wuhan province, China at the end of 2019 and then spread rapidly all over the world badly affecting in every sector of human life. Nepal is also not far from it. Hence the Government of Nepal has declared 'Nationwide Lockdown' since 24 March 2020 with aim to control and prevention of COVID-19. Total 40590 numbers of cases reported positive and death counted 239 with 22178 recovery numbers of case in Nepal¹ with direct impact to the every sectors of development in Nepal.

GoN has urged all offices, including government, non-government, banks, cooperatives, microfinance institutions, among others, having direct contact with the people and service seekers to provide services through electronic means. The GoN has also decided to postpone all services that are not possible through online, virtual or electronic services until further notice. Similarly, Kathmandu Valley District Administration Offices (Kathmandu Bhaktapur and Lalitpur) has restricted, vending of vegetables, fruits, and clothes on footpaths. All the religious activities and gatherings are banned, except for daily prayers festivals observed among family members at home. Restrictions are still in place for all schools, colleges, tuition centers, saloon, zoo, theatres, gym, training centers, gatherings, and meetings².

Nepal Government also announced that, the situation of COVID19 infection is being worse day by day and it is being out of control of government in terms of management of health personnel, bed in hospital, management of death body of COVID19 infected person and so on. So, majority of COVID19 infected peoples having death due to lack of general health services. Frustration and mental health problems also increasing in the communities and as a result total of 1,105 people have committed suicide in 100 days, since 24 March to June 2020 and one of them was FIAN Nepal working areas – Chabis Pathivara RM, Bajhang.

2. Objective of CSO Monitoring:

The impact of COVID-19 & 'Long Period Lockdown' has been started to observe in all development sectors as political, social, economic, industrial, market, tourism, hotel, aviation, agriculture etc; and more focusing to the livelihood of most vulnerable people such as marginal farmers, landless people, informal sector labor, returnees/migrant labor population etc including Right to Food Violated Communities being supported by FIAN Nepal under 'Case Work Process' creating hunger and food insecurity. Hence, CSO monitoring has been carried to observe filed situation vulnerable communities, collect filed issues & problems, identify areas of support and recommend to the concerned governments with filed level solution to overcome right to food violation due to COVID-19.

¹ Source: Ministry of Health and Population of Nepal, date 1 September 2020

² UNDSS Report, 15 August 2020

3. Limitation:

Monitoring work has been carried out in collaboration with NHRC, different CSOs, Media people & leaders of the right to food violated communities in FIAN working Palikas (Local Level) and Provinces including at National Level.

4. Initiation of Nepal Government to respond COVID19:

a) Institutional Set-up to tackle with COVID19:

- Sukraraj Infectious & Tropical Disease Hospital (STIDH) has been designated as the 'Primary Hospital' along with Patan Hospital and the Armed Police Forces Hospital in the Kathmandu Valley. Similarly, the Ministry of Health & Population has initiated constructing 25 numbers of 'Hub & Satellite Hospital Networks' across the country for managing the treatment of mass infected people. Also allocating spaces for quarantine purposes throughout the country along the Nepal-India border and some sites are populated including with migrants recently returned from India.
- The Government of Nepal has formed a committee to coordinate the preparedness and response efforts, including the Ministry of Health Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Ministry of Urban Development, Nepal Army, Nepal Police and Armed Police Force. The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) includes the Red Cross Movement, civil society organizations (national and international NGOs).
- The health desk at Tribhuvan International Airport was initially strengthened to screen incoming passengers from affected regions. The ground crossing Points of Entry (PoE) at the Nepal-China border and the Nepal-India border have been similarly strengthened. The Nepal-China official border crossing points have remained closed since 21 Jan 2020.

b) Legal setup to fight against COVID19:

Nepal Government formulated some regulation ³ guideline ⁴ and Plan ⁵ to mobilized medical personnel, establish and operate quarantine and refer positive and critical cases at hospital/isolation. Nepal Government, Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen also formulated 'Quarantine Operational Guideline, 2077' especially focusing on the women migrants workers entering to Nepal with special situation (pregnancy, maternity and other health problems) and her children.

Legal setup

1. Interim Regulation for Service Delivery to COVID and other Health Services, 2076
2. Public Health Guideline for COVID19 Pandemic lockdown management, 2077
3. Health Sector Emergency Response Plan, May 2020
4. Quarantine Operational Guideline, 2077'

³ Interim Regulation for Service Delivery to COVID and other Health Services, 2076

⁴ Public Health Guideline for COVID19 Pandemic and Well Managed Lockdown, 2077 (approved date 2077/02/30)

⁵ Nepal Government, Ministry of Health and Population Health Sector Emergency Response Plan, May 2020

5. Impact of COVID-19 on the RtFN of small-scale food producers, (migrant) food workers, urban poor etc:

CSO observed the adverse impact of COVID19 to the all sectors including more on small holder food producer/farmers, women farmers, migrant returnee, daily wage labours, trade & tourism and so on as below:

- **Agriculture:** Agricultural areas such as cooperative shops that sell agro-products at reasonable prices, agro-vet suppliers, agricultural markets, dairies, and vegetable markets are opening only infrequently⁶. Farmers feel distressed as they are unable to harvest the mature crop especially wheat, potato barley. Poultry products, along with fruit and vegetables are badly hit hard by the pandemic. One of the major effects of lockdown is visible among the farmers growing highly consumable products due to constrained transportation and market unavailability. Standing crops like banana and maize have been severely affected farmers loss worth 10 million Nepali Rupees during this period (until 3rd week of April). The self-reliant poultry farming has been hit hard and chickens are being disposed due to scarcity of feed⁷. Farmers destroyed eggs on the road due to lack of a market. The collapse of this enterprise would brutally affect agricultural gross domestic production (AGDP) along with the employment of tens of thousands of local labour. Small holder farmers, landless farmers and women farmers who has been engaging in to substance agricultures for their livelihood has been affecting badly and facing food insecurity from the pandemic.
- **Economy:** Nepal is starting to suffer the most rushed and widespread termination of economic activity due to outbreak of this virus. As per the analysis by the Asian Development Bank, the outbreak of this deadly disease will hit almost every sector of the Nepali economy, shaving up to 0.13 per cent off the gross domestic product and rendering up to 15,880 people jobless⁸.
- **Trade and tourism:** The impact has already started to surface in number of sectors like tourism, trade and production linkages, supply and health. Especially the entire service industries: tourism, aviation and hospitality sector have been hit badly by the outbreak. With the launch of visit Nepal 2020 campaign in January, the country was in hope to attract two million visitors, but due the corona pandemic the campaign got cancelled which has horrified the hospitality and tourism related business. With this the tourist arrival rate has declined to below 10 percent from 70 percent before the Covid-19 outbreak. Tourism sector, being one of the largest industry has been contributing 8 percent to Nepal's economy. Likewise, cancellation of all spring mountaineering expeditions, including Everest ascents,

⁶ <https://www.aesanetwork.org/> Mr Ram Hari Timilsina Assistant Professor at Agriculture and Forestry University, Nepal and Prof Surya Kant Ghimire, PhD, founding Registrar of Agriculture and Forestry University, Nepal

⁷ <https://www.aesanetwork.org/> Mr Ram Hari Timilsina Assistant Professor at Agriculture and Forestry University, Nepal and Prof Surya Kant Ghimire, PhD, founding Registrar of Agriculture and Forestry University, Nepal

⁸ https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/covid19_e/sawdf_nepal_e.pdf

has resulted job loss of around 13,000 tour, trekking and mountain guides. The outbreak has affected people's lives as well as private and public sectors. Banks are suffering in loss of their investments in hospitality and aviation due to the corona virus tourist slump. Not only this, the impact has been also visible in the manufacturing industries. As most raw materials including pharmaceutical chemicals come from China and supply of these raw materials has decreased drastically⁹.

- **Food Security:** Food security and malnutrition will be an issue in coming days with national-scale hoarding, which would be detrimental to low-income, food deficit countries like Nepal but also because of millions of Nepali migrants returning home from abroad could add to the problem by raising domestic demand for food¹⁰.
- **Employment:** In Nepal, nearly 3.7 million workers earning their livelihoods in the sectors deemed most at risk to experience a significant (medium to high) reduction in economic output as a result of the Covid-19 crisis. Nearly four in every five workers most vulnerable to disruption are in the construction, manufacturing and trade sectors. Between 1.6 and 2.0 million jobs are likely to be disrupted in Nepal in the current crisis, with either complete job loss or reduced working hours and wages. Approximately 5.7 million or 80.8 per cent of workers in Nepal have informal jobs. Another category of precarious workers is home-based workers. There are approximately 1.4 million home based workers in Nepal – nearly all women – producing goods for export and because of the complete lockdown the whole supply chain and demand has been disrupted affecting these workers at large¹¹.
- **COVID-19 impact to women:** as a whole, social and gender discriminatory norms within households impact women's health and well-being negatively in rural Nepal. Eating last in the family and dropping first from education falls on women and girls during emergencies. Ensuring water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) is traditionally women's responsibility. Gender based violence also foster in the disaster/pandemic, so, 200 percent maternal mortality rate increased worldwide during lockdown and increased case of domestic violence too. Likewise, in any pandemic or major socio-economic crisis, health and food security of marginalized group like women will be affected the most¹².
- **COVID-19 impact to Women Farmers:** the most marginalized farmers have limited access to health care facilities, quick financial support, food and relief measures during COVID -19. For households where every day needs for food are covered through daily wage labor or remittances from out-migrated family members, a pandemic such as COVID-19 can have not only direct consequences

⁹ https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/covid19_e/sawdf_nepal_e.pdf

¹⁰ <https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/coronavirus-severs-nepals-economic-lifeline/>

¹¹ COVID-19 labor market impact in Nepal - [https://www.ilo.org/kathmandu/whatwedo/publications/WCMS_745439/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/kathmandu/whatwedo/publications/WCMS_745439/lang-en/index.htm)

¹² <https://www.sias-southasia.org/blog/covid-19-gender-and-small-scale-farming-in-nepal/>

for health, but also for short and long-term food security because of the immediate cut of income and restricted mobility and disruption of food production and supply chains. Female smallholder vegetable farmers have been the hardest hit since they would carry and sell the vegetables door to door, so many lost the main source of their income.¹³

6. Response of Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development to farmers

The government of Nepal introduced emergency relief packages for farmers. However, voices from the field shared exclusionary consequences of such packages as the relief package demands certain criteria to be eligible as the beneficiaries of the relief package such as land entitlement and land size. The central government has announced a relief package of 750 Nepali rupees (6.20 USD) per kattha (338m²) of land. In Province 2, the government has recently announced a new relief package for farmers who own 10 kattha (3380m²) of land and cultivate themselves will receive 10,000 NPR cash in their account¹⁴. Smallholders, tenant farmers, share croppers and daily agriculture wage labours of which majority are women are excluded from this relief packages. This has huge implications on women's well-being and family food security. While men equally suffer psychological stress due to the loss of income, that in situation of emergencies, women are the ones to sell their assets first causing increased incidences of poverty among women and women headed households¹⁵.

Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development declared five notable policies to combat the adversities brought about by COVID-19 and these include:

1. Equal distribution of relief packages for production
2. Easy loan for farmers
3. Agriculture Extension Advisory Services for farmers
4. Government support on insurance of crops and livestock and
5. Minimum support prices for agricultural products.

However, distribution of relief packages is not going as expected, thereby raising another critical issue for the needy. The imposed lockdown has caused a severe setback in the daily life of the vulnerable that already have a hand-to-mouth existence. The relief package, on the other hand, is misused by those who are faking their need. So, these strategies are not enough to minimize the risks brought about by the pandemic.

13 <https://www.sias-southasia.org/blog/covid-19-gender-and-small-scale-farming-in-nepal/>

14 <http://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/>

15 www.iied.org/creating-impact-covid-19-nepals-small-scale-farmers-seizing-opportunities-for-food-system-reform

7. Brief analysis of the government response from the RtFN perspective:

Foods are available in the market but marginalized and food vulnerable groups are not able to make their access due to the lack of income. There are no any food management by government focusing to daily wage labour, food vulnerable communities and small holder farmers. As per the FIAN Nepal monitoring, some local government distributed food grain (sack of rice, pouch of oil, salt and lintel), which is not enough and did not get by all the needy peoples. Price of vegetable also increased 278% during 2 weeks (1st Week to 2nd week of August). Besides, most of the vulnerable communities are deprived of access to food due to restriction on movement for the daily wage labor as well as to get to the market. Several Act and operational guideline related to emergency relief has been formulated but problem of 'lacking of the proper implementation' of all the guidelines are same as previous.

8. Responses, initiatives or efforts by movements and CSOs to bring the RTFN and related struggles (e.g. right to land) as an agenda at various levels:

- National Human Rights Commission has formed a 'Joint Committee' including representatives from Nepal Bar Association, NGO Federation (CSO) and Federation of Journalist to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on the livelihood of vulnerable individual, groups and communities of Provinces 3, 5, 6 & 7. FIAN Nepal, as one of the lead member of this committees, has been actively engaged and facilitate this committee to monitor the Impact of 'Long-term Lockdown' (due to COVID-19) on the Right to Food/Food Security (Livelihood) situation of vulnerable groups & communities of FIAN working Palikas, Districts & Provinces of 3, 5, 6 & 7. In this connection, Joint Committee observed the filed situation being faced by the vulnerable groups and communities, collected filed issues/problems, identified filed solutions and handed over 'CSO Recommendations' to the concerned Local & Provincial Level governments demanding to overcome right to food violation due to COVID-19. Similarly, conducted awareness actions such as expressing written security message for all about COVID19, developing/producing and broadcasting public service messages (PSA) through FM radio, media dialogue and interactions through local/national media (FM Radio, Television, Newspapers, online portal etc.).

9. Joint recommendations as the Asia Chapter of the GNRTFN

- Assist to conduct impact assessment of COVID-19 on the right to food and nutrition of the vulnerable persons, groups and communities of Asia Region and submit recommendation to the concerned governments of respective countries to address the RtF and nutrition violation.
- Support and facilitate to strengthening the technical capacity of the members of GNRTFN in terms of conducting, assessing & analyzing the impact of COVID-19 from right to food and nutrition perspective.