



The COVID-19 Crisis in Nepal: Coping Crackdown Challenges

Key Initiatives and Measures to Move Forward

By Dhruba Gautam. PhD*

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Abstract: Following the WHO's declaration that COVID-19 was a pandemic, the government of Nepal made several decisions, including a lockdown, designed to prevent and reduce the impacts of the coronavirus by breaking the chain of infection. The lockdown has caused not only a shortage of essential supplies but also a price hike. In addition, it has put daily wage labourers, squatters, and poor and marginalized sections of the population at risk. This study had four interconnected objectives: (i) to assess existing policy provisions for relief management and distribution, (ii) to identify existing relief distribution mechanisms, (iii) to identify major gaps and challenges, and (iv) explore next steps and make recommendations. For secondary information, the study reviewed published documents, including government policies at the national and global levels, whereas primary information was gathered through virtual interviews and conferences with key informants in all provincial governments and in a few local governments. Among the mechanisms governments use to manage relief distribution are the management of relief funds, the selection of needy families, the development and distribution of relief packages, the adoption of a one-door policy, and the application of existing legal provisions. This study also explored gaps in these mechanisms and challenges faced during the relief management thoroughly. Some issues that raised questions included the criteria for selection and even the use of a targeted approach in principle and challenges included the procurement of relief materials and their quality and quantity as well as data management and monitoring. Once the data was on the table, this study made several key recommendations to each of the three tiers of Nepal's government about how to systematize relief management now as well as how to carry over good practices into the future.

Key words: Nepal, COVID-19, policy, disaster, relief, management, gaps, challenges

I. Context

Following the declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic by the World Health Organization in March 11, 2020, the Government of Nepal made several decisions designed to prevent and reduce the impacts of coronavirus. The number of COVID-19 suspected cases has been increasing exponentially and the complexity of the outbreak has continued to escalate in different societies.

* Senior Research Fellow, National Disaster Risk Reduction Centre Nepal (NDRC Nepal), for correspondence: drngautam@gmail.com

In fact, the pandemic has threatened communal peace and undermined security. As of April 23, the total number of confirmed, death and recovered case is shown in table 1.

The Indo-Nepal and China-Nepal borders were sealed to cut down on people's mobility. As part of lockdown, towns and workplaces are closed, travel is banned, and public transportation, including air transport, halted. The lockdown has caused not only a shortage of essential supplies such as food, cooking gas, drugs and medical supplies, water and so forth but also a price hike. The lockdown has been extended twice in order to break the chain of coronavirus infection. The lockdown has put daily wage labourers, squatters, poor and marginalized sections of the population at risk because they lack food supplies and basic health care facilities. Casual labourers and the informal sector workforce in urban and peri-urban area are largely jobless, some temporarily and others permanently. Their lives are difficult as they are unable to make ends meet with their limited resources. The lockdown has also caused a loss of income for the many people that were dependent on remittances sent home by family members working abroad [1]. People who work in the informal sector often cannot afford to purchase foodstuff and other essentials for more than a week and the lockdown has now lasted three. Many poor people and daily wage earners have been repeatedly missed meals and found their very survival under threat.

Table 1: Confirmed death and recovered cases by district

District	Confirmed	Death	Recovered
Udaypur	28	0	0
Kathmandu	5	0	5
Kailali	4	0	3
Parsa	3	0	0
Baglung	2	0	1
Chitwan	2	0	0
Bhojpur	1	0	0
Dhanusha	1	0	0
Kanchanpur	1	0	1
Rautahat	1	0	0
Total	48	0	10

Source: MoHP SitRep #74, 23/04/2020

Current status (as of April 23, 2020)

Total negative: 5153
 Total positive: 48
 Yet to receive test result: 51
 Today's test: 203
 Today's positive report: 2
 RDT: 34523

In order to reduce people's misery and suffering, each tier of governments (federal, province and local) has started to provide relief packages to aid that quartile of the population consisting of daily wage earners, marginalized and ultra-poor families. They have also started to identify needy families that are at risk and develop relief packages of essentials to address their emergency needs. Local governments have also developed relief distribution mechanisms to serve the neediest families as early as possible. The Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration has issued a circular to all local governments to provide necessary relief materials to families of persons and groups that are in need of special protection, as the country reels under the threat of coronavirus pandemic [2].

The high-level coordination committee on the prevention and control of COVID-19 under the leadership of the honourable deputy prime minister and defence minister has established a COVID-19 crisis management centre to tackle the emergency situation and deliver relief in an organized, effective and coordinated manner. A cabinet meeting on March 30, 2020 decided to manage and distribute relief packages to needy families without delay (see annex-1).

The government also adopted a "one-door policy" for relief distribution to reduce the problem of duplication and to regularize the humanitarian support leaning from 2015 earthquake, 2017 flood, and 2019 tornado. Relief distribution during the crisis is the responsibility of all three tiers of government in coordination with the private sector, civil society and humanitarian agencies. These agencies have collectively started to manage and distribute relief materials to address the urgent need of disadvantaged families.

SITUATION IN NUMBERS

Total (new cases in last 24 hours)

Globally

2 544 792 confirmed (73 657)

175 694 deaths (6689)

European Region

1 251 458 confirmed (31 972)

113 336 deaths (3384)

Region of the Americas

957 402 confirmed (32 111)

47 812 deaths (3038)

Eastern Mediterranean Region

144 450 confirmed (5101)

6469 deaths (143)

Western Pacific Region

137 902 confirmed (1632)

5818 deaths (25)

South-East Asia Region

36 039 confirmed (2127)

1498 deaths (71)

African Region

16 829 confirmed (714)

748 deaths (28)

Source: WHO from national authorities by 10:00 CEST, 23 April 2020

Local governments are stepping up their relief distribution, and the private sector is providing significant support to humanitarian causes and compassionate relief like extensions in the dates utilities and loans need to be paid for [3]. Though the Nepal government announced a relief package to help people deal with the economic fallout of COVID-19, that package is not based on any principle, nor is it clear how it will help those in need. The relief package appears to be the political gimmick of a distributive government. It was said that relief operations were not systematized to save lives and livelihoods and that they don't specify the 'who', 'when', 'how', 'why' and 'under what terms' of the packages [4]. Apparently, the response plan and program operates on an ad hoc basis; it has not adopted a "society-led approach". As a result, relief management and distribution is short-sighted and does not adhere to a long-term strategy.

I.1 Objective

The key objectives of this study were to (i) assess the existing policy provisions for relief management and distribution, (ii) identify the existing relief distribution mechanisms, (iii) identify major gaps and challenges, and (iv) explore next steps and recommendations.

I.2 Study methods

To meet the objectives of the study, the key method and approach of this study was largely qualitative. Both secondary and qualitative information and data were utilized. The study entailed a review of the published documents and policies of government and international agencies on COVID-19 at the national and global level. Secondary information was derived from government websites, daily and weekly newspapers, social media, and online news. Primary information was gathered through virtual interviews and conferences with key informants.

¹ This policy ensures relief materials for disaster affected people/groups to be distributed only through government channel. Donations made by individuals and non-government organizations would have to be deposited at the Prime Minister Disaster Relief Fund for distribution.

Along with discussions with key informants in all the seven provinces, thorough discussions were conducted with several local governments from each province. From Province 1, Itahari Municipality of Sunsari was chosen. Karjana Municipality of Siraha, Madhav-Narayan Municipality and Gadhimai Municipality of Rautahat, and Jaleswor Municipality of Mahottari were selected for Province 2. From Bagmati Province, Bhimeshor Municipality was included. Sitganga Municipality of Arghakhanchi, Geruwa Rural Municipality of Bardiya, Narayainapur rural municipality of Banke and Kapilvastu Municipality of Kapilvastu were selected from Province 5. From Gandaki Province, Triveni Municipality of West Nawalparasi was included. Tikapur Municipality of Kailali was chosen from Sudurpachhim Province, whereas Bheriganga Municipality from Surkhet were selected from Karnali Province.

All the information collected from various sources was then tabulated, synthesized and analysed to arrive at conclusions.

2. Policy provisions for relief distribution

The inadequate harmonization of different emergency laws and the lack of uniform local government policies have undermined the effective regulation of the relief work in an effective manner. Following section gives a general overview of the Infectious Disease Act, 1964 (modified January 24, 2010) and the Relief Standards developed at the federal and provincial government levels.

a. Infectious Disease Act, 1964 (modified January 24, 2010)

This act largely lays out provisions related to powers and the punishment, as are explicated below.

Powers to make special provisions

- Where any infectious disease develops or spreads or is likely to spread throughout Nepal or any part thereof, the Nepal government may take necessary action to root out or prevent that disease and may issue necessary orders applicable to the general public or a group of any persons.
- The Nepal government may designate any official and confer necessary powers to that official to make necessary arrangements in order to root out or prevent any infectious disease that has developed or spread or is likely to spread.
- The Nepal government may issue necessary orders for the purpose of conducting examinations of any animals or birds being transported on foot or by any other means of conveyance or of any passengers. Any passenger may be detained by the official designated for examination in quarantine in hospitals or other places whenever that official suspects that he or she has developed any infectious disease. Transportation and movement by any means can also be inspected or controlled.

Provisions related to punishment

- A person who violates this act or disregards any order issued under this act shall be liable to punishment constituting imprisonment for a term not exceeding one month or a fine not exceeding NPR 100 or both.
- A person who obstructs a person authorized under this act in the performance of his or her duties shall be liable to punishment constituting imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or a fine not exceeding NPR 600 or both.

b. Relief Standards (2076, draft), developed at the federal level

Provisions related to Relief Standards (2076, draft) are summarized below.

- Prepare a plan and program related to relief distribution by all three tiers of government (federal, provincial and local).
- Stockpile sufficient materials at each government level within their jurisdiction considering the past trend of disaster events.
- Develop memoranda of agreement with private sectors and potential vendors as per district rates and provide for storage in an effective manner.
- Develop and regularly update rosters of trained people for the purpose of emergency deployment.
- Develop preparedness plans which allocate roles and responsibilities.
- Prepare temporary shelter and manage all facilities, including nutritious food, water, basic toilets, clothes, security and protection, and lights.
- Store relief materials like food, emergency medicine safely. Store food and non-food items separately.
- Mobilize security officials, medical personnel, paramedics, and volunteers.
- Form and build the capacity of rapid response teams.
- Set up a relief fund at National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Authority and allocate some money to provincial and local level funds too.
- Apply relief standards and allocate (i) NPR 100,000 to each family in case of a death, (ii) NPR 100,000 to each family in case of a missing member, (iii) NPR 10,000 to each family in case of property damage, and (iv) provide free treatment at local hospitals to save lives.

c. Relief standards at the province level

Province 2

In order to regulate the fund for managing relief items during the emergency, relief standards, Province 2 developed "Relief Distribution (Standards and Monitoring) Guidelines for COVID-19-Affected Daily Wage Labourers, Poor and Deprived Sections, 2076 BS". This guideline is based on Article 14 of the "COVID-19 Prevention, Control and Treatment Fund (Establishment and Operation) Regulation, 2076 BS". Both pieces of legislation were finalized after receiving input from local governments and representatives of political parties and humanitarian organizations. Some of the key provisions set forth in those guidelines are listed below:

- Provide relief packages only to families affected by the lockdown (the poor and daily wage workers; those with no jobs are simply unemployed and thereby not entitled). Government officials and any salaried employees (those who run a business or receive salary or pensions from the government or non-government organizations) are not eligible to receive relief.
- Mobilize monitoring committees as spelled out in the guidelines. Provincial assembly members should be engaged in the on-site monitoring of relief distribution in their respective constituencies.
- Identify the neediest people and families due to the ongoing lockdown in close coordination with political parties, security agencies (the Nepal Army, the Armed Police Force, and the Nepal Police), the ward secretary and chairperson, and the principals of local schools.

- Share the list of needy families with the local media, the District Coordination Committee and the secretariat of the COVID-19 Prevention, Control and Treatment Fund for accountability and transparency.
- Include both food and cash as relief materials as decided by local committees.
- Prepare two types of packages—one for families with up to four members and the other for families having more than four members.
- Adhere to safety precautions: keep at least three feet of physical distance between the distributor and a recipient of relief while distributing relief materials.
- Arrange soap, water and sanitizer at each relief distribution site so recipients can wash their hands before and after receiving relief packages.
- Provide relief packages to needy families as per relief distribution plans in coordination with local governments.

Gandaki Province

Gandaki Province has set a rule that hospitals or responsible persons who act irresponsibly during the preparation and distribution of relief packages will be punished under Nepal's Infectious Disease Act, 1964 (modified January 24, 2010) and other prevailing laws.

Though there are adequate provisions related to relief standards, they are not put into practice as called for. Some of the reasons for the discrepancy were that (i) earlier policies and provisions were not reviewed while setting new standards, (ii) the existing policies are not referred to, (iii) and new standards were set up to make things easy. In addition, the relief standards set by federal, provincial and local governments respectively do not correlate, thereby creating confusion and dispute over emergency management practices.

3. Mechanism of relief distribution

Governments have taken several initiatives and adopted several mechanisms to systematize relief distribution. These included establishing funds at each tier of government to fight against the coronavirus, setting up grain banks², establish a selection procedure for identifying needy families, distributing relief packages using a "one-door policy", maintaining the privacy of COVID-19 suspected and infected people and drafting legal provisions to serve affected people.

a. Established a fund to fight against the coronavirus

COVID-19 fund at federal level

The federal government has set up a COVID-19 fund to muster and distribute relief to needy families. The fund is expected to help to combat the spread of the corona virus and manage the unfavourable environment resulting from the pandemic. At the federal level, as of March 2020, NPR 1.98 billion had been collected in this fund. The majority of the contributions were from government agencies, but insurance companies and telecommunication firms also contributed. Instead of depositing cash in this fund, some corporate houses and private-sector firms have provided medical equipment and personal protective equipment to the government directly. Not all corporate houses are willing to extend financial support wholeheartedly because they have reservations about the accountability and transparency of the operation of this fund based on learning from the 2015 earthquake, 2017 floods and 2019 tornado.

² People usually collect rice and lentil in the grain bank to help disaster survivors. It is a community led approach.

Furthermore, some members of the private sector would like to see the benefits of their charity accrue to their own brand and business than to contribute toward fulfilling humanitarian imperatives and corporate philanthropy during this national and international crisis induced by COVID-19.

COVID-19 fund at province level

Province 1

- Announced a NPR 5 million COVID-19 fund as part of compensation to the families of frontline workers who die on duty while fighting COVID-19.
- Agreed to provide "encouragement allowance" from this fund to health workers, security personnel, ambulance drivers, employees of local units and other individuals deployed to fight COVID-19.

Province 2

- Established a Coronavirus Infection Prevention, Control and Treatment Fund, allocating NPR 250 million to control the impacts of the pandemic.
- Each provincial minister contributed one month's salary to this fund to mitigate the risk and to provide relief to those affected by the pandemic.
- Nepali Congress Bara District Chapter contributed NPR 4.75 million to this fund. It had collected the money last year for the distribution of relief to tornado-affected families.
- Provided NPR 2.5 million to each metropolitan city, while sub-metropolitan cities, municipalities and rural municipalities received NPR 2 million, NPR 1.5 million and NPR 1 million respectively for COVID-19 response.

Bagmati Province

- Established a NPR 500 million COVID-19 Control Fund.
- Formulated working guidelines on how to control the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Provided needed support to the disaster management committees of each local government to mobilize them in the prevention of and response to COVID-19.
- Provided NPR 2 million to each metropolitan city, while sub-metropolitan cities, municipalities and rural municipalities received NPR 1.5 million, NPR 1.2 million and NPR 1 million respectively for the prevention of and response to COVID-19.

Sudurpachhim Province

- Allocated NPR 160 million to a fund for the distribution of relief packages to needy families.
- Provided relief packages worth NPR 3,000 to each needy family.
- Agreed to provide an incentive allowance to all health workers at nine government hospitals.
- Initiated a life insurance program for medical personnel, security personnel and media persons working on the frontline against coronavirus by allocating insurance coverage worth NPR 1.5 million.

COVID-19 funds at the local level

Some local governments have responded aggressively to the impacts of COVID-19. They established funds and developed relief standards and protocols. For instance, Baglung Municipality of Gandaki Province established a Corona Virus Prevention and Management Fund and purchased essential medical kits, medicine, and food items using it. Likewise, local governments like Suklagandaki Municipality of Tanahun (Gandaki Province) established a Corona Virus Emergency Relief Fund and started to buy agricultural products from farmers

and distribute them to needy families. Its relief packages included rice, vegetables, bars of soap, and hand-washing liquids. Moreover, the local governments of Jhapa District, Province 1, established what they called a "separate fund" for the management and distribution of relief materials to combat the coronavirus pandemic. They prepared relief packages to meet household requirements for between one week and one month on the basis of family size and available resources. The majority of local governments in Province 5 have set up relief funds and begun managing and distributing relief. For instance, Gadawa Rural Municipality of Dang, following the relief distribution guideline of the provincial government, set up a relief fund of NPR 5 million. Airawati Rural Municipality of Pyuthan District donated one month's allowance to the fund and provided relief materials.

Kathmandu Metropolitan City promulgated "Coronavirus Relief Distribution Standards, 2076 BS", allocating NPR 100 million for the prevention and control of COVID-19. It has released NPR 10.4 million to ward councils to run relief programs. The amount of money provided was based on the area of the wards: NPR 4 million was given to large wards, NPR 3 million to medium-sized wards, and NPR 2 million to small wards. An inter-municipal forum (a coordination and cooperation mechanism) was set up in Kathmandu valley to extend local governments' support for and resource mobilization towards combating the COVID crisis. It covers both the core cities and the peri-urban areas within the valley.

In general, the establishment of COVID-19 funds and resource management at the federal, province and local government levels has been satisfactory, but the management and distribution of relief to needy families has been dilatory. Indeed, many needy families have still not received even the first round of relief from local governments.

b. Establishment of grain banks

Rice, lentils, and cooking oil are among the fundamental needs of daily wage labourers and poor and marginalized families. With this fact in mind, some local governments, like Tulsipur Municipality of Dang, have started setting up grain banks to collect grain (mostly rice) for needy families and distribute it through one-door policy. It requested all individuals and agencies as well as the private corporate sector to contribute. The rice collected was distributed to needy families based on lists prepared by ward offices. Other local governments have also set up grain banks, following the example of Tulsipur Municipality.

c. Put in place a process for selecting needy families

Governments have set selection criteria to choose needy families (see Box 1). The fact that selection criteria vary slightly from local government to local government indicates that each government drew upon a location-specific context. In the beginning, a preliminary list of families needing assistance was prepared under the leadership of ward councils. Later, that list was verified and finalized by local government councils. It was decided that it was better to act on moderately reliable information and analysis immediately than to delay in the name of more accurate information. Experience has shown that late analysis, no matter how good, is of little use in designing immediate life-saving humanitarian assistance [5].

Box-1: selection criteria to choose needy families

The Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens wrote a letter to Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration on April 5, 2020 to request local governments to select needy families on the basis of the "social protection principle." In general, local governments identified the following categories of families as eligible to receive relief packages.

- Daily wage workers: auto rickshaw drivers and labourers working at brick factories and in other industries.

- Families with senior citizens, women and children, single women, and sufferers of chronic illnesses among their members.
- Special categories of people: orphans, persons with disabilities, survivors of gender-based violence, Dalits, sexual minorities, persons with HIV and AIDS, human trafficking victims, etc.
- Poor and deprived communities, including the *Badi*³ and *Musahar*⁴ and former bonded labourers⁵ and *haliyas*⁶.
- Semi-nomadic people, including the *Raute*⁷ and "groups of people" that prepare hand-operated stone grinder (*jhato*, *khal* and *silauto*) for sale.
- Other ethnic minorities.

d. Distributed relief packages

Believing that a delayed response is as good as no response, local governments delivered relief packages (see Box 2 for types of relief items) as early as possible. The majority of local governments used quick, reliable processes to get relief materials to the doorsteps of needy people and families.

Box 2: Types of relief items

Governments have provided both food and non-food items. Food items include rice, pulses, salt, cooking oil, and sugar. The quantity of relief materials varies from one local government to another. In general, needy families received a relief package of 30 kg of rice, 3 kg of pulses, 2 kg of salt, 2 L of cooking oil, and 2 kg of sugar. In Jhapa, the relief package included rice, pulses, edible oil, iodized salt, hand-washing soap, and beaten rice. Here, each family got 4-50 kilos of rice depending on the number of family members.

Tilottama Municipality in Rupandehi distributed 10 kg of rice, 2 kg of lentils and 1 kg of salt to needy families. In Palpa, the DCC has also asked shops to arrange for a spot for customers and shopkeepers to wash their hands and to wear masks as part of basic precautions. Tulsipur Sub-Metropolis of Dang was more generous in relief distribution, providing 25 kg of rice, two kg of lentil, one kg of cooking oil, one pack of salt and two bars of soap and 2,500 masks. Chandragiri Municipality of Kathmandu provided 5 kg of rice, 1 kg of lentils, 1 L of edible oil, and 1 kg of salt among other items. An additional 5 kg of rice was provided to each family with more than five members. Other municipalities had other systems, but the ones itemized give a flavour of the nature of the relief packages.

Non-food items have also been distributed to needy families and health institutions. They included ordinary masks, mosquito nets, gloves, and sanitizers. Thermal guns, tents and blankets were provided to quarantine facilities, whereas digital thermometers and gloves were given to health posts.

The Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens also decided that if senior citizens and differently-abled persons had to be kept in quarantine or isolation, the local level governments concerned would have to make special arrangements and that local level governments needed to ensure that women with severe disabilities get minimum basic materials, including sanitary pads, in quarantine or isolation [6]. In line with such provisions, many humanitarian organizations have provided food and non-food items to local governments. Non-food items also included soaps, buckets and jugs,

³ Badi are a kind of hill Dalit community in Nepal. The 1854 Nepalese Muluki Ain (Legal Code) categorized Badi as "impure and untouchable category. They are considered untouchables among the untouchables. They have for decades been doomed to supporting their impoverished families through daily wages, fishing, woodcutting, making musical instruments and prostitution.

⁴ Musahar are aboriginal Dalit communities found in the eastern Terai. Their name literally means 'rat-eater' due to their main former occupation of catching rats, and there are many who are still forced to do this work due to destitution and poverty. Their main occupations are agricultural laborers, daily wage labor, and rickshaw puller.

⁵ Kamaiya is the oldest living traditional system of bonded labor in southern Nepal. Naturally resistant to Malaria, the Tharus lived undisturbed for generations in the swampy marshlands of western Nepal. The hill tribes moved to the fertile marshlands and displaced the Tharus, taking their land.

⁶ Haliya Pratha is an exploitative system of agrarian bonded labor practiced in the far and mid-western regions of Nepal in particular. Haliya are those who served as agricultural bonded laborers for landlords to till the land and undertake heavy manual labor.

⁷ Raute are a nomadic indigenous ethnic group. They are known for subsistence hunting of langur and macaque monkeys. They gather wild forest tubers, fruits, and greens on a regular basis. To obtain grain (rice), iron, cloth, and jewelry, they carve wooden bowls and boxes to trade for goods from local farmers.

hygiene kits and soap along with materials to erect hand-washing corners. They also managed material promoting menstrual hygiene, including sanitary pads and soaps.

By narrowing down the criteria of selection process, many local governments were able to provide relief instantly. The selection process occurred at the most sensitive stage of relief management, when the probability of social tension was greatest [7], but no significant problems were encountered. In many wards, local people helped identify the neediest families even though all people are affected by the lockdown.

e. Adopted a "one-door policy"

District administrative offices and local governments have tried to systematize the collection and distribution of relief materials to needy families. For instance, Dang District administrative office banned individuals and private organizations from collecting and distributing relief materials as doing so created crowds and resulted in duplication. Furthermore, some agencies were found collecting and distributing relief not for humanitarian purposes but only for publicity and visibility. Dang District administrative office also ruled that without coordinating with local governments, no agency could either collect or distribute relief. The one-door policy says "relief distribution can only be conducted in coordination with local governments."

f. Maintained the privacy of COVID-19 suspected and infected people

The Nepal government has maintained the privacy of corona suspected and infected people, keeping in mind their fundamental right to confidentiality as specified in Nepal's Constitution of 2015. As of April 23, 2020, the status of people in different quarantine and isolation beds are as follows in table 2.

Table 2: status of people in different quarantine and isolation beds

Province	Total number of quarantine bed	Total number of people in quarantine	Total number of isolation bed number	Total number of patients in the isolation number	Total RDT test (up to Baisakh 10)
Province 1	4359	1183	449	34	3592
Province 2	3836	1132	227	11	4529
Bagmati Province	4565	169	898	5	6155
Gandaki Province	3833	146	283	2	4555
Province 5	10332	5167	534	16	2756
Karnali Province	4199	1162	466	8	4735
Sudurpachhim Province	5521	1574	274	6	8201
Total	36645	10573	3131	82	34523

Source: SitRep#74, MoHP, 23/04/2020

In contrast, the Rajasthan and Karnataka state governments of India publicized the names and addresses of people suspected and infected by COVID-19, putting them at further risk of assault, stigma and discrimination. In Delhi, Chandigarh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh, officials marked the homes where people were under quarantine, in some cases displaying their names [8], all actions which violated the fundamental rights of these people.

g. Drafted legal provisions to serve affected people

The Supreme Court of Nepal has issued an interim order to the Nepal government to manage food and life-saving essentials wherever needy people or families are living. It also told the government to make proper arrangements for the food, shelter and treatment of needy families. The Nepal government has also stipulated that "if a worker with valid permit dies abroad due to any reason, his/her family is eligible for compensation". This provision applies to those who die of COVID-19 as well. Compensation would be arranged through the Migrant Workers' Welfare Fund managed by the board [9]. These provisions have collectively secured the fundamental human right of affected people and families to live with dignity.

4. Major gaps and challenges

a. Unfair selection of needy families for relief distribution

Selecting needy families fairly during the emergency is challenging. To do so, local governments have set a number of provisions, including (i) food should be provided by local-level authorities, (ii) local governments should collect data on those who work in the informal sector, (iii) families wanting to receive relief should register their names with the concerned ward office, (iv) the local government should provide enough relief during the lockdown period to meet the daily food needs, (v) local governments should take special care of vulnerable groups—pregnant women, people with disabilities, people with long-term illness and orphans, and (vi) local and provincial governments should make arrangements to cover the expenses for food and group quarantine facilities [10]. The implementation of those provisions, however, was limited. In order to select families, many local governments practice rapid needs assessment, made door-to-door visits, and enlisted the help of social leaders like *Badghar* in Tharu communities and *Mukhiya* in Magar communities. Despite these provisions, the selection of needy families has been controversial and disputed.

Though Kathmandu Metropolitan City formulated effective provisions, it did not properly follow those provisions. It stipulated that only people without guardianship; without income sources, land, house, or other property; dependent on others; living in orphanages, old age home, care homes, temples, monasteries, and mosques; without a regular source of income and eke out a living from day to day; and who perform daily wage labour (labourers who work in the informal sector, transport, and porters) are eligible for the relief package. Kathmandu Metropolitan City also decided that each ward could modify these criteria based on the local context in order to reach relief material to unreached sections. Below, various officials explain their procedures for selection.

"...in our municipality, we used rapid needs assessment to select families. It was not possible to use a thorough assessment given the current state of fear, confusion, anxiety, rumours, and misperceptions among the people and council members of the local government. Because assessment was rapid, we did not collect detailed data about families by age, gender, ability, wellbeing and occupation. Instead, we identified those families that are landless and consist of daily wage labourers. As the process was quick, some needy families were initially left out. In some wards, we were not able to endorse the lists of needy families because there were many more families than we had anticipated. Because we faced challenges finalizing the list, relief distribution was delayed. Many better-off families are also claiming relief. Some have the mind-set that relief materials are "free goods from the government" and that it is the right of all people affected by the ongoing lockdown irrespective of their wellbeing and coping capacities to access them...."

-Mr Birendra Yadav, Mayor, Madhav-Narayan Municipality, Rautahat

".....the selection of needy families was a challenging task. Before selecting needy families, we systematized the market by closing non-essential shops, managing vegetable sales only by carts or bicycle and making door-to-door visits to assess the situation of poor and marginalized families. Then, a list of needy families was made based on the outcome of those visits and a decision was made following all-party meetings. In order to cut disputes at their source, all the agreed-upon decisions were carefully recorded in the minutes of the register and signed by all party representatives. Those decisions were then copies and disseminated to the people. Though we have not included cash in our relief package, in coordination with wards, we have simultaneously managed to pay senior citizens their social security allowances without creating crowds. There are no extant disputes over the selection of families and relief distribution because our process was transparent..."

--Mr. Shankar Mishra, Jaleshwor Municipality, Mahottari District

".....as we are selected needy families under the leadership of Badghars in coordination with local police, school teachers and Red Cross volunteers, there was not a single dispute over selection or relief distribution. Badghars are highly respected in society. Their key roles are managing irrigation and sorting out of conflicts and disputes at the local level. We are trying to increase our resources to serve needy families. For the next round of relief distribution, too, we will follow the same approach to selecting needy families. We know that adding more families will create definitely new challenges for us. but we will make the selection process as participatory as possible to reduce the number of disputes..."

--Mr. Alok Chaudhary, Ward Chair, Geruwa Rural Municipality-2, Bardiya

"...needy families were selected based on consensus at an all-party meeting. Later, a few names on the list were modified without the consent of all the members. This adjustment created a problem. Once relief distribution started, many additional families started to claim relief though their names were not included on the very first list. After a few of those families petitioning for help were added unofficially without considering the criteria set, many other families followed suit and disturbed the relief distribution process. It was hard to convince people and reach a consensus-based decision because there was no scope for holding a real meeting given fears of crowds and contamination. In some cases, the selection of needy families was even influenced by politics. Those near and dear to political leaders were included on the list though they did not meet the criteria. The fact that the quantity and type of relief differs across municipalities also created disputes among the people..."

--Mr. Krishna C. Maurya, Ward Chair, Narayanina Rural Municipality-2, Banke

b. Not adequately focused on a targeted approach

Using a targeted approach can not only fulfil the rights of highly vulnerable needy families but also promote understanding about how important the role of non-beneficiaries is in mitigating the risk and reducing the extent of vulnerabilities among targeted beneficiaries. In addition, a targeted approach helps to get relief materials to previously unreached segments of society. Societal bonds and values need to be further enlarged to implement this approach effectively.

In order to effectively implement a targeted approach, local governments properly communicate the rationale behind the approach before they begin as doing so helps to reduce disputes over the selection of needy families and distribution of relief items. If the nature of relief packages differs for different target groups, the packages will better address their needs. For example, persons with disabilities, single women, women-headed households, lactating mothers, pregnant women, and daily wage labourer would all benefit from receiving materials tailored to their specific needs. It is because calorie need pregnant women and lactating mother are different. Women, for example, need sanitary pads and dignity kits.

c. Delays in the procurement and management of relief materials

Timely procurement would ensure that relief could be distributed on time. There were several reasons for the delays in the procuring of relief materials. First, the procurement

process was slow because local governments do not have robust procurement systems and long and tedious internal processes also delayed procurement. Second, the inability of staff to clearly articulate the exact specifications of the goods and the quantity required led to further delays. Several days passed between the date the request order was made and the date the purchase order was made. Third, delays were also as a result of external issues like supply shortages in the market due to high demand from multiple agencies. Therefore, it was often difficult to find suppliers that could issue enough material to fill the purchase orders. Fourth, memorandum of understandings between big stores and suppliers and local governments were not in place and local governments lacked comprehensive procurement plans. Local governments had even thought of stocking relief in its own warehouse as part of a contingency plan. Fifth, in the majority of local governments emergency work is being carried out by existing staff, whose number is not sufficient to deal with the load efficiently and who are not trained in how to manage emergencies. Deploying part-time emergency staff, managing internal rosters more proactively and activating staff for emergency management could reduce the current gaps in procurement capacity, but such steps were not taken. There is a need to upgrade the skills of staff in emergency logistics management, procurement and supply chain management through training needs assessments. Inadequate human, technical, material and financial capacities further undermined the robustness of procurement management.

The role of the private sector is crucial for efficient procurement and management. In the Nepali context, the private sector is not adequately responsive in the field of emergency management based on the humanitarian spirit. Though an association of small and medium enterprises and Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Industries district chapters actively work in all districts, they were not properly mobilized during the emergency. In coordination with the private sector, the government would be able to manage and regularize the existing market system. For instance, despite many decisions and orders by the government to run markets (shops and roadside vegetable sales) without crowding, progress has been minimal. Local governments are not able to monitor markets due to the travel restrictions associated with lockdown. On procurement, one of the officials expressed:

"...in the majority of cases, procurement was delayed because meetings were held late and decisions postponed. Other reasons were the lack of staff capacity for large-scale procurement, memorandum of understandings with potential vendors, and an up-to-date market assessment. It was also difficult to procure large amounts of goods and materials from limited vendors. In order to reduce these risks, there is a need of procuring rice and lentils locally, too, so that local governments could supply those things in conjunction with the municipality. If this were the case, the procurement process would be more transparent and rice and lentils could be purchased at the genuine market price, too. It is not always wise to depend only on large vendors..."

--Mr. Busun Dayal Yadav, Advisor, Gadhimai Municipality, Rautahat

d. Relief packages comprised materials, not cash

The majority of local governments included food and non-food items in their relief packages, but food dominated packages. It is good to include food items considering that during the lockdown period shops are not generally open and food stuffs is not readily available in local markets. Considering the nature of COVID-19, there is a need of considering mask, soap, sanitizer and medicine in non-food items. Few local governments hardly distribute cash as relief. People said that distributing cash would help people in general and senior citizen in particular to meet their urgent needs. Earlier responses, during the 2015 earthquake, 2017 flood, and 2019 tornado revealed that cash support helped people living with risk and experiencing different forms of poverty and marginalization to meet their end needs. There

is a crucial need of providing cash transfer/voucher system to needy families. Distributing cash by visiting needy families at their homes reduces crowds and maintains physical distancing and thereby reduces the chance of COVID-19 transmission. Robust transparency and accountability mechanisms are required to distribute cash.

e. Distribution of relief packages without inadequate notice

Providing the date, time and location of relief distribution efforts would increase the effectiveness of relief distribution. Needy families living along the bank of the Bagmati River said it was difficult to receive relief packages because the dates, times and locations varied and there was no prior notification by the ward. They said it would be good if they received information 2-3 days ahead of time either through megaphone, FM radio, or local TV. In Kathmandu Valley, it was reported that some person with disabilities were deprived of relief packages as their disability identity cards were from other districts. Local government officials were unaware of "core humanitarian standards" and "Sphere minimum standards"⁸ for disaster response," the universally recognized tools for emergency relief distribution and management.

f. Paid limited attentions to labourers coming from other districts

Despite many efforts, not all local governments were able to manage and distribute relief materials to daily wage labourers from other districts. A few local governments asked labourers to submit copies of their citizenship certificates in order to be eligible for the relief package. As a result, they were prevented from receiving relief. Many local governments, considering daily wage labourers from other districts as "unwanted guests," indirectly pushed them out. Outsider wage labourers were also labelled as "virus agents/transmitters". As there was much discrimination in terms of receiving relief and many social insults, thousands of daily wage workers making their way across that nation on foot to reach their hometowns. Company owners eschewed the responsibility of assisting them during the lockdown and local government did not strictly urge companies to assume it. Though the Supreme Court issued an interim order directing the government to rescue migrant workers stranded in vulnerable conditions and to ensure WHO-standard health services, progress was minimal.

g. Inadequate quantity of relief materials and bias during distribution

In many locations of Central and Western Terai, people have shown dissatisfaction over the types and quantity of relief materials because those materials did not meet their needs. For instance, in Banke, students and daily wage-earning labourers were dissatisfied over the types and quantity of goods distributed by Nepalgunj Municipality. It distributed relief materials that included five kg of rice and 1 kg of lentil to students staying in rented rooms but did not include either cooking oil or salt. Students opined that the relief materials were low quantity and that the distribution process was not transparent. They attributed the shortcomings to the fact that not all local governments had developed standards for relief management.

Issues of bias were also recorded while distributing relief material. For instance, in Kohalpur Municipality-14 of Banke, needy families said that local government officials distributed relief materials to their dearest and nearest ones without maintaining transparency. They did not uphold the principle of impartiality during the selection of needy families or during relief distribution. In Lamjung District, local governments did not properly follow the terms and conditions of the guidelines developed by the provincial government and the discrepancies impeded the distribution process. Pokhara Municipality-17 Dharikulo complained that they

⁸ The standards provide guidance on the rights of people, information sharing and community engagement, (i) information, (ii) dignity, (iii) community engagement, and (iv) remember other's needs

received limited quantities of relief, an act which they labelled as "being insulted by political brokers". As a result of political bias and a desire to please voters, needy families were left out. One of the chairs of Toile Development Committee said:

"...this lockdown has created many problems for families of squatters living along the Bagmati, Bishnumati and Manahara river banks as the majority of them are daily wage labourers. The Marwadi community and toile development committees helped them for a few days. Wards of Kathmandu Metropolitan City also distributed 2 kg of rice and half a litre of cooking oil, but many of the food items mentioned on the relief list, like pulses, beaten rice, salt and potatoes, were not distributed. Based on Kathmandu Metropolitan City's guidelines, each family should have received rice, pulses, cooking oil, beaten rice, salt and potatoes. The discrepancy shows that the provisions in the relief standards have not been fully translated to the level of practice. Ward councils should be very tactful in providing the right relief to the right families at the right time. Delayed and inadequate response looks like no response..."

--Mr. Sudershan Gautam, Chair, Balbhadra Toile Bikas Samiti, Baneshwor

h. Distribution of substandard relief materials

Though local governments have tried their best to purchase and distribute good-quality relief materials, in a few places, there were some issues related to substandard relief materials (see Box 3).

Box 3: Cases of substandard relief materials

- In West Nawalparasi, there was a dispute between needy families and Ramgram Municipality as the distributed relief items were low-quality. Materials valued at NPR 1 million were procured from Rajesh Rice Shop in Parasi. The municipality had planned to distribute 10 kg of rice, 1 kg of lentils, 0.5 L of cooking oil, 0.5 kg of soya chunks and two bars of soaps to each of 2,300 families but this plan was disrupted when locals said that quality of rice and soya chunks was even not fit to feed their livestock. The district administration office has formed a committee to investigate this case.
- In Bara, Kalaiya Sub-Metropolitan experienced a similar problem when 9,500 kg of poor-quality lentils were distributed to needy families. Now the grocery store has been sealed by the local government and six people arrested for further investigations.
- These two are representative cases. Several other cases of the distribution of sub-standard materials were reported.

The quality of rice, lentils, and oil was low-grade and date-expired. As the procurement process was not very transparent and the quality of relief materials was substandard, local stakeholders are suspected of mishandling funds. One of the Ward chairs expressed on quality of relief materials as:

"...procurement and relief management is not an easy task. COVID-19 gave us additional responsibilities regarding the service of needy families. In the very beginning, instead of waiting for relief from municipality, we collected relief locally and distributed it to needy families. Then the municipality stepped in to help. We agreed to procuring Sona Mansuli brand rice during the meeting but when relief reached the ward level, we discovered that the quality of rice was of a lower grade. A few wards have already distributed that quality of rice but we are holding a consultative process and dialoguing with the municipality and local vendors. One of the reasons for the poor quality of the rice was that it was procured from many different vendors as the few agreed vendors were unable to provide large quantities of rice. Rice mills, too, were unable to provide rice in large quantities. It has been difficult to monitor the market for quality assurance because of the ongoing lockdown. During negotiations, vendors generally show good samples but then deliver low-quality materials. This is a general trend, but we are trying to correct this practice now and for future responses..."

--Mr. Ganesh Prasad Adhikari, Ward Chair, Karjana Municipality-2, Siraha

i. Difficult to maintain physical distance during distribution

Local government are facing challenges maintaining appropriate physical distance during the procurement, storage, management and distribution of relief materials to needy families. The problem of crowding during relief distribution was common everywhere. To avoid crowds, local governments have requested ward offices to distribute relief at the *tole* level. Because agencies were not able to manage crowds, the relief distribution process was often delayed, thereby compounding the frustration of needy families. Some local governments, like Phidim municipality and Yaangwarak rural municipality of Panchthar District, banned the distribution of relief with banners (as it invites crowds) and urged people not to post photographs of relief distribution on social media because some humanitarian agencies were trying to boost their visibility without showing concern about crowds. Though local governments have continuously advocated following "one door" policies and maintaining physical distancing while distributing relief, the distribution work has not been properly organized. About relief distribution with maintaining physical distancing, one of the social leaders reflected:

"...we initially decided to leave relief materials at people's doorsteps but doing so was not possible later. We tried, but it was difficult. Thus, we ended up distributing materials in the presence of security personnel and political leaders. Despite many efforts to maintain physical distance, we almost always fail to do so because many families continuously claim relief materials. There is a need to teach people about why physical distance is necessary during relief distribution, possibly through FM radios. Once relief distribution was initiated, comparatively better off people rain to claim relief packages. As a result, disputes between the "haves" and the "have-nots" broke out. People forget the risk of contamination associated with large crowds. Though people understood the rationale behind giving relief packages to needy families, they act as if they are ignorant. With this mindset, comparatively better off families appear in the queue to get relief. They forget that if they receive relief, they will deprive some very needy families. People utterly forgotten the societal norms, values and ethics..."

--Mr Ram Prasad Panthi, Social leader, Sitganga Municipality-13, Arghakhanchi

j. Data management system is still ad hoc

Some local governments are using a paper-based record keeping systems because they do not have a 'disaster management information system'. Relief distribution is always controversial if there is no proper database system. Officials at Gadhimai Municipality of Rautahat opined that in the absence of proper software and a strong database system at the ward and local government levels, it is always a challenge to maintain records of "who received what quantity of relief and when". This gap adds to the challenges local governments face in regularizing the relief and avoiding duplication. Nepal does not have adequate early warning and surveillance systems for many disasters, including disease outbreaks, nor does it have adequate communication tools and techniques for rapid assessment, proper data management, and verification.

In the absence of rapid need assessment, there has been delaying in response, and challenging for regularizing the relief distribution. The analysis of socio-economic and health related data collected during the peace time could be used while selecting the needy families and rapid need assessment could be used to fill the gaps. In many a times, stakeholders are running after exploring new data without utilizing already available data, which is the wastage of time and scarce resources. Even in Kathmandu, where there are trained human resources and financial resources, Kathmandu Metropolitan City took a lot of time to complete the selection and distribution of relief package to needy families. Lack of quality data has been hindering the quality of relief distribution. Though Kathmandu Metropolitan City established a toll-free

number (1180) to regularize relief distribution, its effectiveness is yet to be seen. On data management, one of the social leaders expressed:

".... gathering data in urban and peri-urban areas is always a tough task because of poor social interaction, inadequate institutional memory, disputes between local governments and informal settlements, and fluid and mobile populations. As a result of population fluidity, it is difficult to collect and verify the actual data of needy families. In some toles, the list of needy families was more than the total number of families within the tole. Once people found out that the local government was distributing relief materials, many families tried to claim relief materials by faking neediness. To tackle similar problem, Bihar's government announced the use of direct cash transfers and deposited funds in the bank accounts of ration card holders. In Nepal, however, we don't have ration cards to use to systematize relief. In order to get true information about needy families, local government should collect data during peacetime with the use of participatory tools and techniques..."

--Mr. Yadav Pokharel, Social Leader, Kapilvastu Municipality, Kapilvastu

k. Role of social organizations is inadequate

Civil societies claim that the government is undermining the power of social organizations in responding to emergency management. They could select needy families, collect relief materials locally and distribute relief before the local governments stepped in. The emergency could be managed by activating traditional systems like *paicho*, *musti dan*, and "a fistful of rice" campaigns. It was said that societal norms and values are being eroded because the government does not adequately recognize social and indigenous organizations.

Nepali society is now becoming more materialistic as social values, norms and wisdom slowly decline. In the past, there was a tradition and practice of supporting people who are in dire need on humanitarian grounds. Now, however, the scenario is different and everything is judged in terms of money. The corona virus has contributed to the degradation of societal values as it is every family out for itself. People do not trust each other and every newcomer or returnee in the village is suspected of being a "virus-transmitting agent". There is a growing tendency of socially boycotting to returnees from India, the Middle East and other foreign destinations.

l. Relief packages did not accommodate issues related to women's dignity

Experience has shown that issues related to women's dignity are often overlooked during emergency management. Except for a few menstrual hygiene kits, non-food items kits had no gender-sensitive items. Non-food items like hygiene and dignity kits, and contraceptives could help meet the basic needs of women and adolescent girls during emergencies but such items are rarely included in relief packages. Though the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration urged local governments to regularize ambulance services with special priority for pregnant and lactating women in order to promote safe motherhood but pregnant women have been affected as many hospitals are not providing health facilities to them due to the fear of corona virus.

m. Inadequate monitoring from the local government

Local governments have involved stakeholders and humanitarian agencies in monitoring the relief assistance. With the help of monitoring committees (formed under the chairpersonship of ward chairperson), local governments determined whether or not relief was provided to unreached sections of society and whether improvements were needed to ensure timely and appropriate delivery. Involving local stakeholders in monitoring helped to foster transparency, increase accountability and build trust. The movement of monitoring committee has been

restricted by the ongoing lockdown, thereby limiting the effectiveness of the monitoring of relief distribution. As a result, in many places, controversies have arisen over the quality and quantity of the relief materials. Because of the poor monitoring, there was an unequal distribution of relief materials: there has been relief gap in geographically remote area and overlap in comparatively accessible area. On monitoring, one of the ward chairs expressed:

"....in our local government, relief was distributed by selecting 100 needy families from each ward, which created a lot of problem as the number of families and the wellbeing of those families varies from one ward to other. This way of distributing relief materials using "the equality approach" violated the fundamental rights of needy and deprived families. This problem arose as a result of inadequate monitoring from the local government. As the process of selecting needy families was on ad hoc, more than 40% of families that received relief materials were not needy. Some criteria for the selection of needy families, like landholding size, also did not make much sense. Along the Rapti River bank, the land of many families has turned sandy due to the deposition of silt and thereby been rendered unfit for cultivation. Many families were denied relief packages because they have land ownership certificates without taking into consideration that their land is not arable or that they lost it when it was inundated as the river changed its course. The provincial government has not assumed a great enough role in monitoring and dispute management. Unless there is strong and adequate monitoring from the local government, we cannot correct these problems..."

--Mr. Krishna Chandra Maurya, Ward Chair, Narayaninapur-2, Banke

n. Undervaluing of existing institutions and mechanism

The government has been creating new institutions one after another without acknowledging the role of already established institutions and mechanisms. For example, the National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Authority could play a crucial role if it were given the full mandate and authority to handle the COVID-19 response. This authority does have a mandate but has not acted with forcefulness. As institutions with a mandate have failed to take control of emergency management, a kind of egoism to do the most has arisen among ministries and institutions and the end result has been poor coordination. There is limited coordination between and within ministries and between and within the three tiers of government regarding emergency management. There is inadequate coordination among Council, Executive Committee, National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Authority and clusters. Though we have National Disaster Management Council, Disaster Management Executive Committee, and National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Authority. National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Authority is a permanent authority for disaster management and secretariat of council and committee as well. Along with these institutional arrangements, Emergency operation centres from district to province and federal level under Ministry of Home Affairs and health Emergency operation centres from province the federal levels are working for information management and coordination. Prime Minister Relief fund is in place. Instead of mobilizing already functional institutional arrangements, government is creating new institutions and formed new COVID-19 relief fund. Such ad-hoc mechanism will never institutionalize the existing institutional mechanism. As provincial and local governments are autonomous, the federal government cannot impose any regulations or standards on them for relief management and distribution. Not all province and local government have prepared relief standards. Some local governments do have relief standards, but they are not consistent with the standards of adjoining local governments and the differences have created conflicts among beneficiaries over the types and quantities of relief materials distributed. District Disaster Management Committees at the district level currently play a very minimal role in disaster and relief management but they are now not directly accountable to either provincial or local governments. Instead, they are only accountable to district administrative offices

under the Ministry of Home Affairs. Also, because of the protocol issue, officials at the local government level are not obliged to participate in District Disaster Management Committee's meetings, a fact that creates poor coordination among them. Such issues had a negative impact on the selection of needy families and on relief management and distribution.

o. Many standards, many confusions

The government has many standards developed for different purposes. For example, it prepared (i) Standard about Rescue and Relief for Disaster Affected People (Sixth amendment, 2074 BS), (ii) Identification of Cold Wave Affected Deprived People and Relief Distribution Standard (2069 BS), (iii) Cabinet Decision to Relief Distribution for Disaster Affected People (2075/1/26), and (iv) Relief Standard for the Labours working in Informal Sectors (2076 BS). As different standards are developed for the different purpose, it is quite challenging to harmonize the among the standards which created the conflicts among the needy families. Absence of common national standard and guideline for disaster relief posing the continuous threats. Normally, federal government has been providing relief to disaster survivors through the separate depository and decision for each disaster event. Some local governments have prepared their own relief standard without considering provincial and federal standards. Though government has developed relief standard but those standards were neither distributed nor used at the time of crisis.

p. Poor documentation of the relief distribution process for future learning

For learning purposes, the systematic documentation of relief distribution, people's feedback and suggestions is instrumental. No governments have systematically documented the relief distribution process for the purpose of knowledge management. As the majority of local governments did not include a relief distribution program in their response plans, the task of relief management and distribution has been largely ad hoc. As a result, people's needs will not be adequately reflected in recovery plans in the future.

5. Next steps

Based on the overall analysis of the previous sections, the following steps are recommended to each of the three tiers of government so that they can systematize relief management now and carry over good practices into the future.

5.1 Local government

Following tasks of local government would further systematize the relief management.

i. Data management

Effective data management includes collecting, processing, verifying, and analysing sex- and age- disaggregated data and information, and disseminating relevant information to government and humanitarian agencies. Using uniform formats and tools will not only save time and resources but also help streamline data. Some measures to take follow.

- Revise and modify existing standard data collection formats and checklists along with database tools that can also be used now and in future emergencies in coordination with specialists in this sector.
- Use existing data as far as possible, identify gaps in that data, and collect real-time disaster data and fit it into the provincial and federal level picture.

- Prepare a software and computer-based database system to store data and avoid the problem of duplication with the help of qualified information technology experts.
- Develop and update information management systems with building the capacity of relevant staffs.
- Use peacetime for the collection, refinement, validation and cleaning socio-economic data so that those data could be immediately utilized selection of needy families during the emergency.

ii. Consider social protection issues

Getting relief materials to the unreached section is challenging. Protection issues are crucial during the selection of needy families, and relief must be selected in order to help all exercise their fundamental rights and maintain their dignity. To achieve this end, the following steps should be taken:

- Develop relief packages to address the needs of especially vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, lactating and pregnant women, the elderly, the children, sick people, senior citizens, people with chronic diseases, and women with small babies, in coordination with humanitarian agencies.
- Develop and agree upon a protocol that these groups of people should not have to stand in a queue in order to get relief packages.
- Design and distribute dignity kits to increase the confidence of women/ adolescent girls.
- Develop a mechanism so that citizenship certificates and disability identity cards are not required to receive relief.

iii. Develop appropriate relief packages

Since no one size fits all, flexibility in the design of relief packages, approaches and processes is crucial. Such flexibility would foster community engagement and empower local governments. The prioritized needs, requirements, and aspirations of needy families differ from one community to the next because the context, social set-up, and community bonds differ everywhere. These aspects should be considered while developing relief package and the following measures taken:

- In coordination with the private sector and civil society, develop target people-specific relief package to address emerging needs and reduce the extent of their marginalization by reviewing learning from earlier major responses of Nepal and global level.
- Include cash along with food and non-food items in relief packages in consultation with humanitarian agencies and civil society.
- Develop a cash transfer mechanism and set up necessary preparedness measures by reviewing learning from the 2015 earthquake.
- Discuss and establish types and quantities of relief materials before distribution in coordination with local disaster management committees and develop distribution mechanisms and channels by mobilizing formal and informal agencies to get relief to people's doorsteps.
- Adhere relief distribution by door to door visit to reduce the crowd and possible contamination.

vi. Manage stockpiles

Stockpiling food and non-food items in strategic locations in advance helps to meet the needs of vulnerable people during an emergency. To this end, governments should do the following:

- Identify possible local vendors, periodically assess their capacity and develop a brief note based on market assessment.

- Develop memorandum of understandings with identified vendors for the quick procurements of goods following an assessment of the rates per unit and total price.

v. Build capacity

Local governments have inadequate knowledge about how to respond to COVID-19 as the virus is highly contagious and invisible. The ability of local governments to respond in the immediate aftermath of COVID-19 will depend on their level of operational readiness and capacity. There is a need to foster operational preparedness through capacity-building initiatives. The following measures are key:

- Impart live or virtual trainings or orientations to local government officials and staff at humanitarian agencies on "Sphere minimum standards", "Humanitarian Accountability Partnership" and inter-agency minimum standards to guarantee protection to all. In coordination with provincial and federal government, develop a relief standard (considering the minimum calories a person needs per day) at the local government level targeting specific groups of the needy, like women and children.
- Organize live or virtual trainings or orientations on data management through management information system.
- Run live or virtual trainings or orientations on large scale procurement to staff.
- Develop and update the roster of possible human resources that could be contacted and deployed immediately for emergency management.
- Develop the capacity of small and medium enterprises and Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry district chapters during peacetime and activate them during emergencies.
- Facilitate local governments to prepare contingency plans by addressing preparedness gaps and test those plans before finalizing them.
- Initiate community resilience management and psycho-social counselling support to the affected population and medical staff, security force and volunteers engaged in relief management.

vi. Use social media for effective communication and knowledge management

Social media could play a vital role in bolstering preparedness for emergency response by spreading awareness about COVID-19 prevention. For this, there is a need to:

- Organize induction and sensitization sessions for local journalists and FM radio and TV stations managers to disseminate communications and learning on COVID-19 prevention.
- Develop SMS-based COVID-19 information in local languages and disseminate widely.
- Develop flyers, posters and pamphlets in local languages to communicate the rationale of physical distancing, the concept of a targeted approach, types and quantity of relief items, and other matters.
- Run a series of media campaigns through FM radio and TV about why a "targeted approach" is required.
- Carry out real-time reviews, evaluations and "satisfaction surveys" to gauge the effectiveness of relief and identify area for improvements.
- Use social media like Facebook, Google, Viber and WhatsApp to share updated information on relief management.
- Ensure relief transparency and complain handling/response mechanism at different level by adopting and encouraging the whistle-blowing.

vii. Develop and strengthen monitoring systems

Monitoring systems are important to measure who receives relief (disaggregated by sex and age), what relief is delivered to them, and what impacts are achieved. In order to strengthen the monitoring system, there is a need to do the following:

- Mobilize monitoring committees and social and religious leaders to strengthen surveillance, find associated risks, and identify the emerging needs of needy families.
- Develop a surveillance system for the prompt monitoring of relief management with technical support from expert groups.
- Mobilize human rights organizations to monitor relief distribution independently and provide feedback to governments for immediate correction, if needed.

viii. Develop a suitable mechanism to respond to other diseases too

With the focus on the COVID-19 response, the general health care system of Nepal has been disrupted and people are deprived of general and specific check-ups to address diseases and other health problems. Because of the disruption of public health facilities, women have been forced to give birth at home, sometimes resulting in the deaths of infants, mothers, or both. Pregnant women have died either on the way to the hospital or because they had to resort to unsafe delivery methods. Institutional delivery, antenatal and postnatal care, and immunization are among the many health issues that have been seriously affected by the emergence of COVID-19. Additional risks will be incurred soon as dengue, typhoid, seasonal influenza, malaria and cholera tend to rise during the pre-monsoon season. The government should not neglect the general health care system in the name of combating the coronavirus pandemic. Three key steps are crucial:

- Assign some hospitals to treat only COVID-19 and others to provide general health care but only in coordination with the Nepal Medical Council and such decision should be strictly followed.
- Organize situation-assessment meetings in every week to determine progress and challenges in the general health care system and to discuss how to tackle challenges on immediate- and long-term basis.
- Build the capacity of hospital ready for other secondary and creeping disasters and mass causality response.

6.2 Province governments

The following actions could help systematize relief management at the province level:

- Facilitate the establishment of disaster preparedness, prevention and mitigation tasks on a priority basis and mainstream these activities into development strategies.
- Facilitate local governments in engaging needy families and returnees by exploring local employment opportunities through infrastructure development schemes.
- Develop a system to monitor relief management in order to provide quality assurance in coordination with local and federal government.
- Facilitate the development of relief standards at the local governmental level by building the capacity of local governments.
- Reduce the gaps in supply and logistics to expedite relief management and still maintain quality.

6.3 Federal government

The following is a list of actions the federal level should take to improve relief management:

i. For immediate response and mitigation

- Activate a federal-level monitoring mechanism for relief management.
- Provide an adequate working environment to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority so it can lead the standardization of various legal and other tools for the capacity-building of the three tiers of government.
- Modify existing relief standards and fill the gaps, if any and develop common standard. Facilitate the management of relief materials that are not easily available at province and local government level.
- Adhere 'core humanitarian standards on quality and accountabilities' during the COVID-19 response design and delivery.
- Mobilize all clusters, not just the health cluster, in relief management and distribution as per their respective roles in coordination with development partners, humanitarian agencies and UN system.

ii. For early recovery

- Develop and execute businesses continuity plans with small and medium enterprises and Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Industries to promote economic recovery after COVID-19.
- Explore different employment opportunities in large-scale infrastructure development projects to accommodate returnees from India and the Middle East and elsewhere.
- Develop the modality for 'food for work' and 'cash for work' for strengthening the livelihood of poor and marginalized families.

iii. For long term socio-economic development with build back better perspective

- Introduce shock-responsive social protection to safeguard needy families and poor and vulnerable people from a long-term livelihood perspective.
- Manage the production of real-time disaster information data and link it to provincial and local government to input periodic updates.

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Annex-I

The government has set following decisions as part of relief for its citizens (Nepal COVID-19 relief package, March 30, 2020)

Use of electricity

- Provide discount in the package includes a 25% on electricity for consumers who use more than 150 units every month
- Provision for no penalty if utility bills and tax payments are not cleared till mid-April.
- Provide 25 percent discount in electricity up to 150 units.

Extend the deadline for bill payment

- Extend the deadline to pay for electricity, drinking water, telephone and internet and charge no extra fines for the delay in payment till May 13

Use of internet

- Ask Internet Service Providers to extend a 25% discount to customers on data and voice call packages.
- Provide 25 percent discount in internet and data users with necessary arrangements for discount from private telecom companies.

Use of social welfare funds

- Ask companies, especially those in the tourism sector to pay salaries for March-April to employees from "social welfare funds" until business returns to normal
- Provide the salaries for March-April to workers in the organised sector who are registered with the Social Security Fund.

Use of social security fund to pay of salaries

- Pay salaries to employers (industrialists and businessperson) in the formal sector to their workers even during the lockdown.
- Make payment to employers that can access the organisation-level welfare funds to their employees until the resumption of businesses.
- Pay to daily or monthly wages by tourism based agencies until Chaitra.
- Deposit the amount contributed by workers and employers of organisations affiliated to the "social security fund" for the month of Chaitra by Nepal government.

Generate local employment targeted to returnee

- Generate data on migrant workers who returned from abroad and who could not go for work abroad despite securing work permit due to COVID-19 and provide employment through the local level.
- List down the total workers at the local level-based "employment service center" and create employment opportunities through the "Prime Minister Employment Programme".

Waiver of one month's house rent

- Request house-owners of those working in various unorganised sectors to exempt one month's rent.
- Waive the tax on the exempted amount, if house owner is agreed to waive rent.

Free insurance for medical personnel

- Allocate NPR 2.5 million as free insurance for medical personnel, including doctors, nurses, health technicians, health volunteers, cleaners, ambulance drivers, directly-involved security personnel, who are involved in the treatment and control of Covid-19 (until July 15).
- Provide all equipment needed for the treatment of Covid-19 for free.
- Provide all private medical facilities to continue their services and make arrangements to provide discount in the bill amount (until April 12).
- No customs duty for any government, private and community sector importing medical equipment

Exempt private schools must exempt all fees

- Exempt private schools must exempt all fees up to secondary level except boarding for a month.

Deadline extension for tax payment

- Organisations and businesses affected by Covid-19 can pay the income tax and monthly, bimonthly or trimonthly VAT until May 7.
- Documents to be submitted to the Company Registrar's Office and renewal of private firms can be done until May 13.
- Sugar mill owners must make complete payment to sugarcane farmers by May 13.

Ban on imports of certain goods

- Only 10kg of gold can be imported.
- Ban on import of vehicles worth over Rs 6 million.
- Ban on import of betel nut, black-pepper, peas, dates among other items.
- Provide minimum currency exchange facility so that Nepali students pursuing studies abroad won't lack expense amount.

Extend vehicle registration renewal deadline

- Deadline for renewal of driver's license, vehicle registration, pollution test and route have been extended until May 13. No additional fines will be charged.

One-month extension on procurement agreement

- Extend one month for procurement agreements done prior to the Covid-19 outbreak
- Banks must extend the bank guarantee time that ends on April 12, for a month without additional fees

Budget allocation and source management of international aid

- The government will allocate funds from the annual budget to be used in the control of the spread of Covid-19.
- Funds collected at the local, province and federal level, National Disaster Fund, Prime Minister Natural Disaster Fund and financial assistance by international organisations will be used in the control and treatment Covid-19.
- The government has decided to hold talks and finalise agreements to accept Rs 3.48 billion concessional loan provided by the World Bank through Emergency Medical Services Project, Rs13.9 billion no-interest loan provided by International Monetary Fund and \$50 million financial aid being provided by Asian Development Bank.
- The government will also identify possible development partners and manage sources
- The daily wage workers' families are in dire need of food, and the hospitals are running out of the medicine for people with chronic disease.

NDRC Nepal

Established in 2007, with the vision of "building a resilient society", National Disaster Risk Reduction Centre (NDRC Nepal) has been working closely on disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, natural resource management and contemporary socio-economic issues. It works on research, evaluation, project implementation and knowledge management and reaches up to 70 districts out of 77 in Nepal. It works with governments, bilateral, UN agencies, networks, and civil society organizations. It has well-established networks with government and strong partnerships with national and regional organizations.

With its novel works, it has received (i) International Prize (Judges' Choice) for Solution Search: Farming for Biodiversity (Reward on Innovative Biodiversity Conservation) in 2017 and (ii) Adaptation at Scale Prize: Reward on Innovative Climate Change Adaptation in Nepal in 2016.

Currently, the author is associated with NDRC Nepal as an Advisor/Senior Research Fellow. He was founder Chairperson and immediate past Executive Director of NDRC Nepal.



National Disaster Risk Reduction Centre Nepal (NDRC Nepal)

Radhamohan Marg- 162, New Baneshwor, Kathmandu
Phone: +977-1-4482738
Email: ndrcnepal2007@gmail.com
URL: www.ndrcnepal.org

For more information about this paper, please contact

Dhruba Gautam, PhD
Senior Research Fellow
NDRC Nepal

Phone: +977-9851095808

Email: drngautam@gmail.com

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/dhruba-gautam-phd-81177178/>