



GENDER EQUALITY

UPDATE 19: WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN COVID-19

30 JUNE, 2020



OVERVIEW

In April 2020, while launching a report on the impact of COVID-19 on women, the UN Secretary General stressed that the pandemic could reverse the limited but important progress made on gender equality and women's rights. He highlighted that women's leadership and contributions must be at the heart of COVID-19 resilience and recovery efforts.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further magnified existing gender inequalities in a patriarchal society. For women in leadership; unreasonable expectations, unfair comparison, constant scrutiny, and care burden at home have increased significantly during the lockdowns. Yet, there are several successful examples of how women-led governments have responded to the crisis that should be built on. With women continuingly left out of key decision-making fora, it is time that their leadership is recognized in response efforts to bend the curve on COVID-19.

Nepal's move towards a federal state has created a space for women in leadership. Since the elections held in 2017, the number of women in leadership positions have increased in government institutions at the federal, provincial and local level. 92 per cent of women elected as Deputy Mayors lead judicial committees. As local governments are tasked with the community-level pandemic response, Mayors and Deputy Mayors are key actors in ensuring that all interventions are gender sensitive and inclusive.

UN Women Deputy Executive Director Anita Bhatia



It is striking how many of the key decision-makers in the process of designing and executing the pandemic response are men. This is not surprising given that women still do not enjoy the same degree of participation in major decision-making bodies—governments, parliaments, cabinets or corporations—as men do. Only 25 per cent of parliamentarians worldwide are women, and less than 10 per cent of Heads of State or Government are women. While we have a few shining examples of women Heads of State or Government, women are conspicuous by their absence in decision-making fora in this pandemic.

EMERGING ISSUES FROM WOMEN MAYORS AND DEPUTY MAYORS

The seventh Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Task Team meeting was held on June 4, focusing on women's leadership during the COVID-19 response. One woman Mayor and three Deputy Mayors were present to share updates on ongoing relief and recovery efforts, challenges and gender equality and social inclusion initiatives undertaken by the local governments.

Manju Malasi, Mayor, Dipayal Silgadi Municipality, Doti District, Sudurpashchim Province



Existing quarantine facilities will soon be overwhelmed by the inflow of returning migrants. At this precarious time, we need the support of community members to come together and manage this crisis.

- » **QUARANTINE SITES:** Challenges in accommodating and managing the high number of returning migrants crossing the border from India.
- » **MENTAL HEALTH:** Provision of psychosocial counseling services for affected women in the community has been identified as a priority area for intervention.
- » **INCLUSIVE COVID-19 RESPONSE:** A stakeholder meeting with broad representation was organized and committees which include mother's groups, female health workers and volunteers are established to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.
- » **EMPLOYMENT:** Employment programs for returning youth have been initiated and a strategy on engaging returning migrants in animal husbandry for the fiscal year has been developed.
- » **FISCAL BUDGET:** The upcoming budget will address issues and challenges of women and children through policies and programmes of the municipality. The budget for infrastructure has been decided to be re-purposed to address the COVID-19 response efforts.

Sushila Mishra Bhatta, Deputy Mayor, Dhangadi Sub-Metropolitan City, Kailali District, Sudurpashchim Province



We have established separate quarantine facilities for women to ensure they are comfortable and safe.

- » **DATA COLLECTION:** Approximately 90 mediators spread over the wards of the municipality report to the Deputy Mayor on the situation of women, including those in quarantine centres.
- » **MENTAL HEALTH:** Hospital authorities have been informed of the availability of a roster of counsellors put together by the municipality to facilitate psychosocial counseling to affected women, including those living with disabilities.
- » **SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH:** An ambulance for pregnant women has been made available to address the increase in maternal deaths at home.

- » **GESI ADVOCACY:** Recommendations provided in the Charter of Demands, as prepared by women's groups, will be included in the upcoming budget. Additionally, the municipality is exploring COVID-19 specific programmes for elderly, women, persons with disabilities, victims/survivors of domestic violence and more.
- » **HARMFUL PRACTICES:** There are reports of fewer women and girls practicing chhaupadi during the lockdown.

Anshu Singh, Deputy Mayor, Rajdevi Municipality, Rautahat District, Province 2



The sudden surge in COVID-19 infections have posed huge challenges to our municipality, especially in managing quarantine sites.

- » **QUARANTINE MANAGEMENT:** Limited capacity to manage quarantine sites for the high number of returning migrants.
- » **SOCIAL STIGMA:** Social stigma against returning migrants has impacted social cohesion within the community.
- » **RELIEF DISTRIBUTION:** Relief has been distributed to all sections of society including vulnerable groups, daily wage workers and those without citizenship.
- » **MONSOON PREPAREDNESS:** The lockdown has hampered the planning process and monsoon preparedness.
- » **REMITTANCE:** The lack of remittances continues to affect the already fragile economies of families in the municipality.

Bimala Sharma, Deputy Mayor, Dhulikhel Municipality, Kavrepalanchok District, Bagmati Province



As a personal initiative in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, I have made door to door visits and distributed food supplies and clothing to at least 95 pregnant women and new mothers and their children.

- » **MIGRANTS:** As migrants are returning from abroad, there is rising concern over the inadequate infrastructure and equipment available in quarantine sites.
- » **HEALTH:** Medical equipment including masks, hand sanitizers, hand washing supplies and personal protective equipment have been procured and distributed to health centres. Health care workers have been trained and health centres revamped to attend to the emerging crisis.
- » **QUARANTINE SITES:** Gender and disability friendly quarantine centres have been established to address differential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- » **RELIEF DISTRIBUTION:** Relief distribution to approximately 2400 households and 11,600 individuals including daily wage workers from other provinces residing in the municipality has been provided.
- » **GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE:** To address the increase in gender-based violence, the municipality has identified safe houses, health facilities and female police focal points to support victims/survivors of violence. Radio stations and newspapers have generated awareness for reporting gender-based violence cases to the judicial committee.
- » **COVID-19 FUND:** A COVID-19 fund (approx. USD 80,000) has been established by the municipality to buy medicines and implement preventive measures to tackle the pandemic.

INTERACTIONS WITH WOMEN MAYORS AND DEPUTY MAYORS IN THE COVID-19 CONTEXT

Since April 2020, UNDP has undertaken consultations with women Mayors and Deputy Mayors of more than 230 municipalities, focusing on their capacities, needs, responses and challenges to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Presentation by Binda Magar, Gender and Social Inclusion Advisor, UNDP

Some of the findings shared by the UNDP Gender and Social Inclusion Advisor during the meeting include:

1. **Women in leadership positions have increased confidence as a result of the COVID-19 response efforts.**
2. **Limited knowledge of COVID-19 among the general public.**
3. **Increased gender-based violence.**
4. **Better coordination among the concerned stakeholders is crucial to address the impact of COVID-19.**
5. **The challenges related to returnee migrants and their management were also noted during the consultation.**

The full report is being drafted and will be made available by UNDP in July.

UN WOMEN'S SUPPORT TO WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

UN Women is committed to strengthening leadership of women and other excluded groups across governance institutions and processes; both as duty bearers and rights holders. In close consultation with elected women, and in coordination with other government, civil society and international stakeholders, UN Women supports locally elected women representatives to strengthen their skills, knowledge, resources, confidence and alliances so that they can effectively fulfil their roles and contribute to gender responsive and inclusive governance, at the local level.

In six Local Government Units (LGUs) in Sudurpaschim province, UN Women's partner agencies, Justice and Rights Institute (JURI) Nepal and Nepal National Dalit Social Welfare Organization (NNSDWO) are implementing a comprehensive capacity development initiative aimed at supporting locally elected women to become effective and credible feminist leaders. Capacity development initiatives include training on roles and responsibilities, networking and mentorship support as well as interventions to address challenges and barriers faced by elected women representatives. To take forward the GESI agenda, the initiative has a strong focus on gender and disability inclusion in local governance processes.

UN Women is also collaborating with Legal Aid and Consultancy Centre (LACC), to support women leaders (Deputy Mayors) in their role as chairperson of the local judicial committee to facilitate and enable access to gender-responsive

justice for women and excluded groups. The initiative is being rolled out in partnership with three other local organizations - Village Community Development Centre (VCDC), Dalit Women Rights Forum (DWRF) and Equality Development Center (EDC), in ten LGUs in Province 2 and Sudurpaschim province.

Lila Devi Shah, Deputy Mayor, Chandranagar Municipality, Sarlahi District, Province 2



The practical and innovative methods used in the training have enabled us to internalize key content. We were able to engage with the content on delivering gender-responsive justice by applying standard procedures and gender lens. I feel more committed to applying the knowledge and skills I have internalized on gender-responsive justice to strengthen our existing justice mechanisms.

KEY DOCUMENTS AND RESOURCES

1. Policy brief: The impact of COVID-19 on women <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women>
2. Guidance Note for Action: Women as a Force for Accelerated and Inclusive Economic Recovery Post-COVID-19 in Asia-Pacific <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/03/wea-post-covid-19-in-asia-pacific>
3. Put women and girls at the centre of efforts to recover from COVID-19 <https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/put-women-and-girls-centre-efforts-recover-covid-19>
4. Deputy Secretary-General, at High-Level Meeting on Women Leaders Fighting COVID-19, Urges Action to Leverage Power of Female Front-line Workers, Decision Makers <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/dsgsm1418.doc.htm>

This Gender and Equality Update has been consolidated by UN Women on behalf of the Gender in Humanitarian Action Task Team (GIHA TT). The Task Team is chaired by UN Women and organized in close cooperation with the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens (MOWCSC), Development Partners and Civil Society Organizations that includes diverse women and excluded groups and their wider networks.

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