



# GENDER EQUALITY

UPDATE 20: COVID-19 INITIATIVES  
BY GIHA MEMBERS

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## INTRODUCTION

During this unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Nepal are closely monitoring and responding to the emerging health and socio-economic needs of communities on the ground. This Gender Equality Update highlights some of the ongoing initiatives designed to address the needs of vulnerable groups and communities.

## USING ONLINE PLATFORMS TO PROMOTE THE STORIES OF PEOPLE AFFECTED BY COVID-19

To document the stories of marginalised and minority communities during the COVID-19 pandemic, The

Story Kitchen (TSK) started a “Katha Corona” (Corona Stories) social media campaign. Katha Corona invites women from different castes, communities, gender and sexual identities, ages, cultures and abilities to share stories of the obstacles and struggles they have experienced and the contributions they have made during the pandemic. As of 14 July 2020, TSK has published 147 stories on Katha Corona’s Facebook and Twitter pages, with the stories reaching an average of 600,000 social media users per month over the last two months.

*TSK was established in 2012 with a vision to amplify women’s voices and stories. TSK is supported by the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, The European Union, UN Women Nepal through the Embassy of Finland, GIZ and the Governance Facility.*



Photo: The Story Kitchen

*“I have a spinal cord injury and I use a wheelchair for getting around. Because of the outbreak of coronavirus, the government imposed a nationwide lockdown and it has been extended. My essential needs are different. I can manage without rice and lentils for five days; however, it is challenging to operate even for a day without diapers, urine bags and gloves. I wish that the government would do something to help people like us living with disabilities during the crisis.”*

- Devi Acharya, Katha Corona, shared on 10 April 2020.

## PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT SERVICES TO WOMEN AND GIRLS

In the context of COVID-19 and the prolonged lockdown, the need to address mental health issues and provide psychosocial support has increased significantly. To address the stress, social isolation, anxiety and depression being faced by women and girls, KOSHISH is operating a transit centre and providing mental and psychosocial support services to women and girls at the community level through a toll-free helpline (166001-22322). The organisation is promoting the issue of mental health through Information Education Communication materials, mass media awareness programmes and referrals to emergency health facilities.

**KOSHISH** is a non-governmental organisation working in the field of mental health and psychosocial disability at the grassroots level in Nepal. KOSHISH is currently funded by Malteser International, DPOD Denmark, FELM Finland, Comic Relief, Himal Partners, Mennonite Central Committee and Canadian High Commission.



Photo: KOSHISH (Providing psychosocial counseling services with social distancing-KOSHISH Intervention)

*“The pandemic has made us more resilient. We will continue to increase our efforts to transform the lives of people in vulnerable conditions.”*

- Mr. Matrika Devkota, Chairperson, KOSHISH

## USER-FRIENDLY HAND WASHING STATIONS

The provision of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities is an important public health measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19. In Nepal, 10.8 million people lack access to improved sanitation and 3.5 million do not have access to basic water services (UNICEF Nepal).

As part of its ongoing efforts to support local authorities and communities on WASH issues, SNV Netherlands Development Organisation Nepal (SNV Nepal) has established hand washing stations in Sarlahi and Dailekh districts. A total of 130 hand washing stations with soap have been installed in strategic locations including healthcare facilities, quarantine centres, helpdesks and community areas. SNV Nepal is targeting disadvantaged and marginalised groups, including Dalit communities and persons with disabilities.

**SNV Nepal** is working to implement impact-oriented programmes in the agriculture, forest, energy and WASH sectors. SNV Nepal is currently funded by the Government of the Netherlands, DFAT and USAID.



Photo: SNV Nepal

## PROTECTING WOMEN MIGRANT WORKERS

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a substantial impact on migrant workers and patterns of foreign labour migration. Undocumented women migrant workers, often employed in domestic work, have lost their jobs and are unable to return to Nepal, with many women denied health care and rounded up for detention and deportation. To address such issues, POURAKHI is providing a range of services to support women migrant workers, including advocacy, helpline services to document complaints, legal support, the distribution of relief packages and the provision of emergency shelter when necessary.

**POURAKHI** (meaning “self-reliant” in Nepali), is a non-governmental organisation of women migrant workers. The organisation works to promote the rights of women migrant workers in the process of foreign labour migration. POURAKHI is currently funded by ILO, International Organisation for Migration, UN Women Nepal through the Embassy of Finland, CARAM Asia, GAATW and AWO International

## COVID-19 AND ITS EFFECT ON THE LGBTIQ+ COMMUNITY

Since the lockdown was announced in March, many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) individuals have been facing multiple challenges including unemployment, stigma,

difficulties in accessing relief services due to lack of identity papers, discrimination in health facilities, and shortage of medical supplies. To address these challenges, Mitini Nepal is advocating for the rights of the lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LBT) community through radio programs and social media. Mitini Nepal have also distributed relief packages to LGBTIQ+ community members in provinces 1, 3, 4 and 5.

**Mitini Nepal** provides psychosocial support, counselling, legal services, and emergency shelter for LBT individuals. Mitini Nepal also advocates with the government on the legalisation of same-sex marriage and the issue of violence against women in the LBT community. Mitini Nepal is currently funded through UNDP, Women Fund Asia, Foundation for a Just Society and the Global Fund for Women.



Photo: Mitini Nepal



Photo: POURAKHI

*“The Government of Nepal has failed to deliver effective protection to women migrant workers who are currently stranded in transit or in countries of destination. The government should come up with adequate plans and programs for managing these workers without delay.”*

- Manju Gurung, Chairperson, POURAKHI

## SUPPORT FOR HOME-BASED WORKERS

Home-based women workers in the informal sector have been one of the most affected groups during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nepal. SABAH Nepal acted swiftly to focus its attention on saving the livelihoods of its members, whose job orders were cancelled and payments stalled. The sudden lockdown, scarcity of raw materials and restricted mobility hampered the ongoing operations of the members of the SABAH. However, SABAH was able to alleviate some of the direct impact by engaging its members in productive work through the provision of alternative livelihood opportunities for women home-based workers. Women from member organisations have been engaged in the production of COVID-19 related protective supplies, essential hygiene products and semi-processed food products.

The organisation has also provided psychosocial counselling, food and other essential household items to address the immediate needs of its members.

**SABAH Nepal** is a social business organisation that works towards strengthening the livelihoods of financially deprived and marginalised women home-based workers in Nepal. SABAH Nepal is funded by UN Habitat, UN Women Nepal through Embassy of Finland, UNFPA, International Union for Conservation of Nature, Home Net South Asia and ICIMOD.



Photo: UN Women (Home-based workers sharing how they have been diversifying their business post lockdown.)

## SHELTER SUPPORT

Maiti Nepal is providing shelter to women and girls who have been subjected to various forms of violence, including human trafficking, during the lockdown. The organisation provides immediate temporary shelter and protection, counselling services, health care, life skills orientations, and information about human trafficking. The shelter also coordinates with the government and other organisations to rehabilitate the children and women who have been intercepted or rescued and reintegrate them with their parents and families.



Photo: UN Women (daily wage workers sharing their concerns with the joint UN and Government of Nepal Mission team at Maiti Nepal)

**Maiti Nepal** works to protect Nepali girls and women from domestic violence, trafficking, child prostitution, child labour and various forms of exploitation and torture. Maiti Nepal is currently funded through Ayuda en Accion, Foundation Heres, Profelia, Sonja Kill Foundation, Bono Direct Aid Association Germany, Chance Swiss, Free a Girl (Netherlands), Christliche Ostrmission, USAID, Australian Embassy, Minderoo Foundation, ZIJN Netherlands, UN Women Nepal through Embassy of Finland.

## QUARANTINE CENTER FOR RETURNING MIGRANT WOMEN

Women for Human Rights (WHR) established its first ever women-led and managed quarantine/holding centre for returnee women migrant workers and helped to reintegrate the women into their families. Almost 70 women from various age groups, pregnant women, mothers of new-borns and elderly

women have benefited from the services provided in close collaboration with the government. WHR are now providing safe quarantine and isolation spaces in their Chhahari shelter homes in 10 districts, with the support of the Government of Nepal. The Chhahari shelter homes have the capacity to support 365 people. WHR is continuing its advocacy and humanitarian support for vulnerable minority groups by mobilising its staff, networks and cluster groups at central and provincial levels. WHR also launched a women-led community kitchen to distribute meals to people struggling to feed themselves during the COVID-19 pandemic, in close collaboration with the local government.

***WHR** is a non-governmental organisation established to fight for the socio-cultural, economic and political rights of single women in Nepal. WHR Nepal is currently funded through Kurve Wustrow, Australian Embassy, Oxfam, Foundation for a Just Society, ADRA, Womankind, UNFPA Nepal, UN Women Nepal through Embassy of Finland, ADICE and Urgent Action Fund.*



*Photo: UN Women (Returnee Women Migrant Workers from Kuwait in all-women managed quarantine centers at Women for Human Rights)*

## SAFE HOUSES FOR VICTIMS/SURVIVORS OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC) is responding to emerging needs in the COVID-19

context by providing support to survivors of gender-based violence, pregnant and lactating women, women with disabilities and elderly single women. WOREC is operating safe houses in Kathmandu, Dhanusha, Morang, Udayapur, Dang and Kailali districts. The safe houses are providing psychosocial counselling, medical and legal assistance services.

## COMPREHENSIVE RELIEF PACKAGE

WOREC Nepal is also implementing a comprehensive relief package to address the socio-economic needs of vulnerable women, especially female-headed households, in Province 2 (Dhanusha and Sarlahi districts) and Sudurpaschim Province (Kailali district). The comprehensive relief package provides relief support, access to essential health services including psychosocial counselling, access to energy (induction cook stoves), seeds and fertilizers to rural women, water pumps to rural women's community groups, monitoring of quarantine centres using a gender lens and technical support for local governments to incorporate gender dimensions in COVID-19 response plans and programmes at the local level.

***WOREC Nepal** is a non-governmental organisation founded on the premise that women's rights and social justice are a prerequisite for peace, social justice and sustainable development. WOREC is funded through AEIN Luxembourg, Foundation for A Just Society, MISEREOR Germany/AEI Luxembourg, ILO, Global Fund for Women, UN Women Nepal through Embassy of Finland, UNFPA, PLAN International, the Lutheran World Federation Nepal, Ford Foundation and International Women's Rights Action Watch.*

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

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