



GENDER EQUALITY

UPDATE 22: COVID-19 AND WOMEN'S GROUPS

31 AUGUST, 2020



OVERVIEW

This Gender Equality Update highlights the COVID-19 response of women's groups that are a part of the Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Task Team chaired by UN Women, in recognition of their valuable efforts to promote and protect the rights of the most excluded and vulnerable groups in Nepal.

SPECIALIZED DISASTER MANAGEMENT SUPPORT

The Women Friendly Disaster Management (WFDM) group has built upon the experiences of their diverse members to address the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The group, through its members, has been independently coordinating and contributing to response efforts through awareness programs, legal help and assistance, psychosocial counseling services, temporary shelters for sexual and gender-based violence survivors, and providing short-term support including daily meals for the vulnerable groups. Together with the Inter-Generational Feminist Thought Leaders Group, Women Humanitarian

and Disaster Risk Reduction Platform and UN Women, WFDM formulated the Charter of Demands (CoD)¹ which was submitted to key policy makers including the National Planning Commission. The CoD aims to ensure that the Government's COVID-19 response does not exacerbate or magnify existing inequalities and vulnerabilities for the most vulnerable and marginalized.

WFDM is a network of women-led organizations established immediately after the 2015 earthquake in Nepal. WFDM was founded with a vision of engendering policies formulated and implemented for disaster risk reduction (DRR), preparedness and response. The WFDM core group is comprised of 11 organizations- Beyond Beijing Committee (BBC), Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO), Forum for Women, Law and Development (FWLD), Home Net South Asia, Jagaran Nepal, Sabah Nepal, Media Advocacy Group (MAG), SAATHI, Women for Human Rights (WHR), Blue Diamond Society (BDS) and Disability Human Rights Promotion Society. The Secretariat for WFDM is hosted by Media Advocacy (MAG). WFDM is supported by the European Union, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Geneva Global, Helvetas, South Asian Women's Fund, UNDP, USAID, UN Women and WWF.



Photo: Chandni Joshi

"As all disasters do, COVID-19 has multiplied inequalities in Nepal. In spite of the disparities, WFDM members have shown tremendous resilience and have made quantum leaps to turn these misfortunes into opportunities - by making masks and protective gear and providing daily meals to thousands in need. We are also providing vital information, legal services, physical spaces for quarantine, and relief materials to hundreds of elderly people."

Chandni Joshi, Chair of Women Friendly Disaster Management Group (WFDM)

¹ <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2020/04/wp-charter-of-demand-gesi-responsiv-eng.pdf?la=en&vs=2744>

This Charter of Demands has been compiled by UN Women on behalf of three women's networks namely Women-Friendly Disaster Management Group, Inter-generational Feminist Group, Women Humanitarian Platform and Disaster Response and Recovery Platform.

ADVOCACY FOR WOMEN DURING DISASTERS

Women Humanitarian and Disaster Risk Reduction Platform (WHDRRP) continues to support the COVID-19 response by raising awareness through social media and providing psychological counselling to women and girls facing trauma. The needs of vulnerable women and girls have been raised through petitions submitted to the government, which have emphasized the needs of pregnant and lactating women, as well as the need to ensure the safe evacuation and registration of women migrants. In addition to these measures, the WHDRRP has also conducted an assessment on the gendered impact of COVID-19 on women humanitarian and disaster risk reduction professionals, which will be finalized in the next two months.

WHDRRP is a network of over 100 women professionals and practitioners working in disaster risk reduction and humanitarian response in Nepal. The platform advocates for the issues of women and girls in disasters for their protection, security and right to humanitarian assistance. The network prioritizes the leadership and representation of women professionals and grassroots women in humanitarian action and disaster risk reduction. It also works for the representation and participation of women in high-level government committees to support disaster risk reduction and management. This platform is hosted by Centre for Disaster Management Studies (CDMS) as its Secretariat. WHDRRP is supported by Care Nepal, Finn Church Aid Nepal, Good Neighbor International, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and Johanniter International.



Photo: Shakti Gurung

“Fostering women’s leadership in humanitarian response and disaster risk reduction is key to ensuring risk-informed development and building a disaster resilient society.”

Shakti Gurung, Executive Director, CDMS (Secretariat, WHDRRP)

SUPPORTING WOMEN SURVIVORS OF CONFLICT

The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the already deteriorating situation for conflict victims, who are in need of food, medicines, psychosocial counseling and employment opportunities. The Conflict Victim Women National Network (CVWN), founded in March 2020, has established a fund financed by members to help conflict victims meet their basic needs and minimize the impact of the current crisis. The group is also advocating for the government to pass the National Action Plan (NAP) Phase-II² on Women, Peace and Security, a plan that will ensure cross-sectoral support and recognition for conflict victims across Nepal.



Photo: CVWN

CVWN is a non-governmental group organized to demand justice for conflict-affected women who endured serious human rights violations during the 10-year armed conflict in Nepal.

RELIEF AND RESPONSE PROGRAMME

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all sections of society, however it has been marginalized groups that have suffered the most. For the Dalit community, the current crisis has catalyzed extreme poverty, illiteracy, landlessness, restricted livelihood options, and lack of access to resources and decision-making processes. With the aim of addressing the most urgent needs of the Dalit communities and marginalized groups, Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO)

² The Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) has received final feedback on NAP Phase-II from the Cabinet of Ministers, and the inputs are currently being incorporated. Once the NAP Phase-II has been endorsed by the Cabinet of Ministers, it will be sent to MoHA for implementation.

implemented a relief and response programme in a number of districts across the country by distributing relief materials, including sanitary pads and medical kits. They have staged demonstrations to draw attention to the increasing violence and discrimination against Dalits and worked with the government to raise awareness on the need to reduce the suffering caused by the current situation. A rapid assessment survey to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the Dalit community and Dalit women in particular has also been carried out. Major findings included Dalit women being unable to maintain personal hygiene increasing their risk to local transmission. Discriminatory practices are impacting their access to resources and services. Further, the survey highlights the need to enhance awareness raising on preventive measures among Dalit women.

FEDO was founded to address caste and gender-based discrimination against Dalit women in Nepal. As one of the first national Dalit women organizations, it works at both the national and district level to improve access to resources, social justice, and equity for women belonging to the Dalit community. FEDO is supported by Bread for the World (BftW), Dan Church Aid, Global Fund for Women, Karuna Germany, KIOS Foundation, The Development Fund Norway, The Foundation of a Just Society and Womankind Worldwide.



Photo: FEDO

COMPREHENSIVE RESPONSE IN PROVINCE 2

Mandwi provided personal protective equipment, disinfectant spray machines, masks, thermal guns and sanitizers in Gaur, Rautahat and Sindhuli districts. Response efforts have also included a disaster information desk, food relief distribution, water, sanitation and hygiene support and 20 beds for a quarantine centre. Information sharing and awareness programmes on preventive

measures to contain the pandemic as well as tube wells to ensure access to water, local level dispute resolution through community mediators and psychosocial counseling to COVID-19 survivors have also been provided by Mandwi to address the current crisis. These efforts by Mandwi during the COVID-19 pandemic have largely catered to local authorities and prioritized poor vulnerable families including rural women farmers.

Mandwi is a non-profit, non-governmental and non-partisan organization dedicated to the overall development of disadvantaged groups, with a special focus on women, girls and persons with disabilities. Mandwi is currently funded by DFID, Helvetas, Human Society International, Penny Appeal, The Asia Foundation, UN Women and the Government of Nepal.



Photo: Mandwi

ADVOCACY FOR WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

The lockdown has added to the anguish of women with disabilities. Shortages of medicine, irregular transportation, and lack of employment opportunities are some of the major challenges. Nepal Disabled Women Association (NDWA) has responded to this situation by advocating with the Ministry of Health and Population and Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen to include essential items for women with disabilities under the list of essential services, and for disability-friendly quarantine centres.

During the lockdown, NDWA has collected data on women with disabilities via the telephone for targeted relief distribution by the government. In addition to this, they have organized online trainings for members of their network to identify issues of women with disabilities and advocate for them. Daily essentials have also been distributed through funds secured from various donors.

NDWA works to promote and protect the rights of women with disabilities, with the main objective of creating an inclusive, equitable and just society for women with disabilities. NDWA is currently funded by CBM Nepal, Global Fund for Women, Open Society Foundation, Womankind Worldwide, International Foundation for Electoral Systems, United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and the Government of Nepal.



Photo: NDWA

COUNSELING SERVICES FOR SEX WORKERS

Mental stress and anxiety have plagued sex workers since the lockdown was announced in March. Sex workers have not been able to work to secure their livelihood and have not been included in the relief distribution and essential services provided by the government.



Photo: SWASA Nepal

They are struggling to pay rent due to lack of income. Social Work Allies for Sustainable Approaches (SWASA) Nepal advocates for the rights of sex workers to be recognized. SWASA has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by establishing a relief fund to support female sex workers across Nepal. Additionally, counseling services including telephone referral services for abortion have been provided to address both mental and physical health needs.

SWASA Nepal is part of Sex Workers and Allies South Asia regional network, is a health and human-rights focused non-governmental organization established to address social inequality and to promote justice amongst female sex workers. It focuses on building solidarity amongst the diverse and marginalized female sex workers using a rights-based approach to self-determination. SWASA is currently funded by Foundation for a Just Society/Women's Fund Asia.

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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