



Youth Webinar Report

**Issues Faced By the LGBTIQ Community in
the Context of COVID-19**

11 September 2020

**Prepared by:
Electoral Support Project, UNDP**



1. Executive Summary

A sixth youth webinar, which is part of a larger youth webinar series, took place on 11 September 2020 to discuss the issues that gender minorities, including the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer/ Questioning (LGBTIQ) community, are facing in context of COVID-19. Moreover, the webinar also sought to provide recommendations on the ways to address these issues.

The youth webinar was attended by over 195 participants, including youth volunteers, representatives from UNDP, government representatives among others. In the webinar, youth volunteers from all seven provinces in Nepal and 47 districts conducted surveys of the people in their community. A total of 61 youth volunteers surveyed a total of 246 respondents for the survey spread across Nepal.

All of the survey respondents were from the LGBTIQ community. Moreover, an interaction with organizations working for the LGBTIQ community was held in order to finalize the questionnaire for the survey. The support of these organizations was also crucial in reaching respondents from the LGBTIQ community. The volunteers asked the survey respondents questions relating to the availability of food stock, their economic transactions in the context of the pandemic and the associated challenges, health and psycho-social counselling, availability of clean drinking water, issues on gender-based violence and domestic violence, their access to information during the COVID-19 and their opinion on the social accountability and transparency in the relief distribution, along with their access to relief materials that were provided by the government and various other agencies to support the testing times.

The questionnaire included questions covering the personal status, changes in personal income before and during COVID -19, the employment situation, main challenges during COVID-19 for the LGBTIQ community, including on health and socio-economic issues, coping mechanisms and their main needs. The survey was conducted through KOBO tools.

The webinar helped identify some trends that highlighted the problems that the respondents faced. The majority of the respondents were not able to include their preferred gender identity in their citizenship certificates. Moreover, even at the familial level, a lot of the respondents shared that their families had not accepted their gender identities – for some, this was also because they had not come out. The respondents shared that verbal abuse and stigma against them were common, and in the current context, many had to pay hiked prices for their rented accommodation while they were staying away from their families. To add to this, many people were also facing economic hardships, including reduced food security, because of this crisis.

Therefore, the ensuing recommendation was to ensure that the gender minorities are also included in the process of COVID-19 recovery. It was noted that they need to be recognized, more than simply as a homogenous group; given their rights; treated equally not only inside their homes, but also societies. The webinar shone light on the importance of first recognizing this community, ridding the stigma and also of creating alternative source of livelihood. For this, the importance of gathering accurate data and designing accurate policies that would be implemented was stressed, along with a coordinated approach with all stakeholders. The youth volunteers noted that it was important to seek input from the LGBTIQ community on the way forward to ensure that they too were accepted in the community.

2. Introduction

2.1 Background & Rationale

The UNDP Electoral Support Project (ESP) and the Country Office (CO) joined forces in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the webinar is also a part of the UN75 celebrations, and branded under it. For this webinar, UNDP collaborated with the UN Resident Coordinator’s Office as well as the UN Volunteers. A joint analysis from the team concluded that a webinar conducted by and for the youth from across the seven provinces in Nepal would play a key role in informing about the ground realities. These would then also inform the five pillars for socio-economic framework including putting health first, protecting people, economic response and recovery, macro-economic response and multilateral collaboration and social cohesion and community resilience.

The sixth webinar was on issues that the LGBTIQ community is facing in the context of COVID-19. The webinar saw participation from youth volunteers, government, development actors. The event started with the organizing team extending a warm welcome to the participants, who informed that the recommendations and findings of the event will inform the future programming for UNDP’s work.

2.2 Objectives

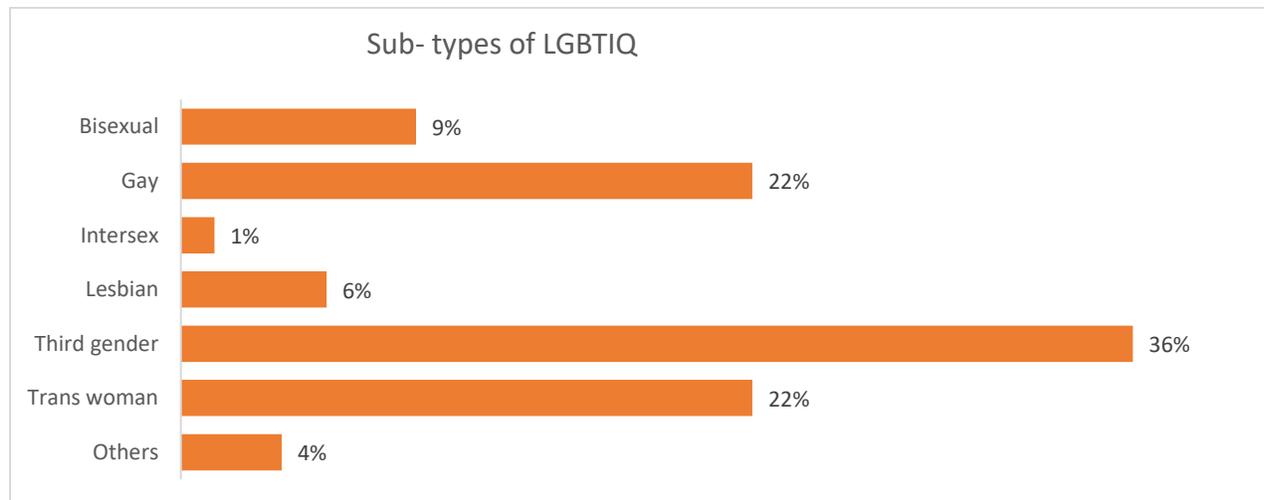
- To bring issues of inclusion to the forefront.
- To engage the youth and capacitate them to get important information in the fight against COVID-19.
- To use the learnings from the youth webinars to inform future UNDP programming.

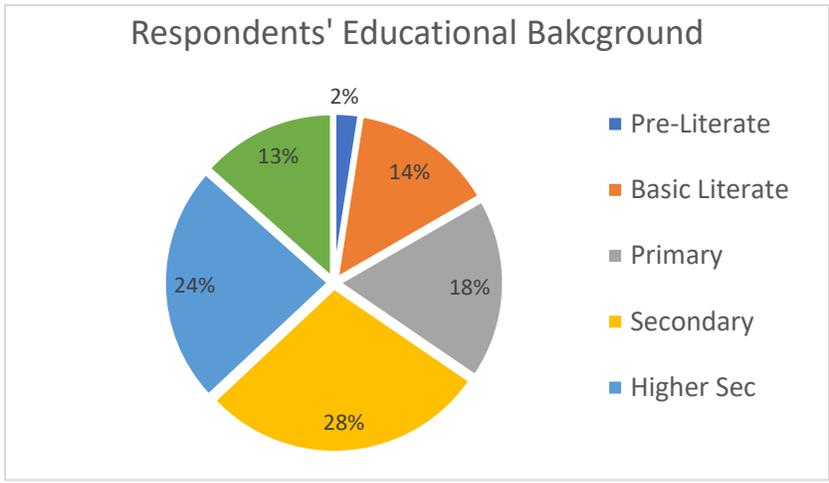
3. Key Findings

The webinar then included a presentation from Ms. Pushpa Mukhiya Sunuwar, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer with UNDP’s Electoral Support Project. In the presentation, she presented the key findings from the survey conducted across the seven provinces of Nepal, providing a general trend of the responses.

- *Respondents Demography*

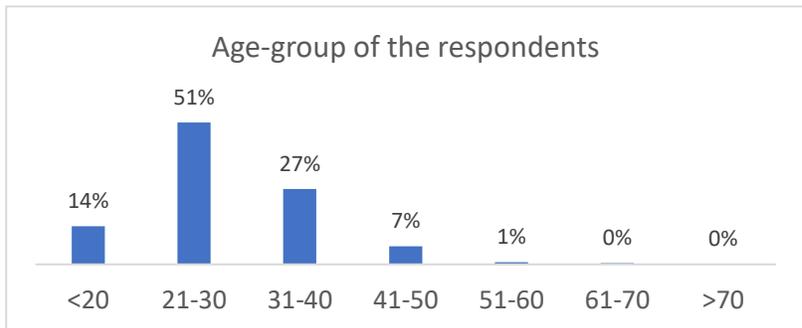
There was a total of 246 respondents for the survey. From among them, 36% identified as third gender, 22% as gay, and 22% as transwoman. 4% who said others mentioned that they haven’t disclosed their identity to their family members. More details of the gender diversity of the participants are presented in the graph.



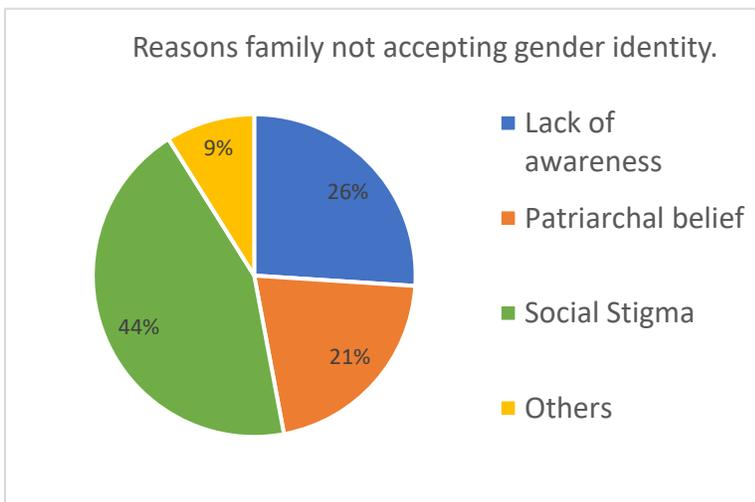


The educational background of the respondents of the survey varied. Overall, the majority of the respondents had received secondary school education, which was 28%. This was followed by 24% who had received a higher secondary education. From among the participants, 2% were not literate. The details in terms of educational background is presented in the adjacent graph.

In terms of age, 51% of the respondents, representing the highest number, were between 21-30 years followed by 27% who were between 31-40 years of age. None of the respondents were over 60 years of age. More details on the age of the respondents are presented in the graph.

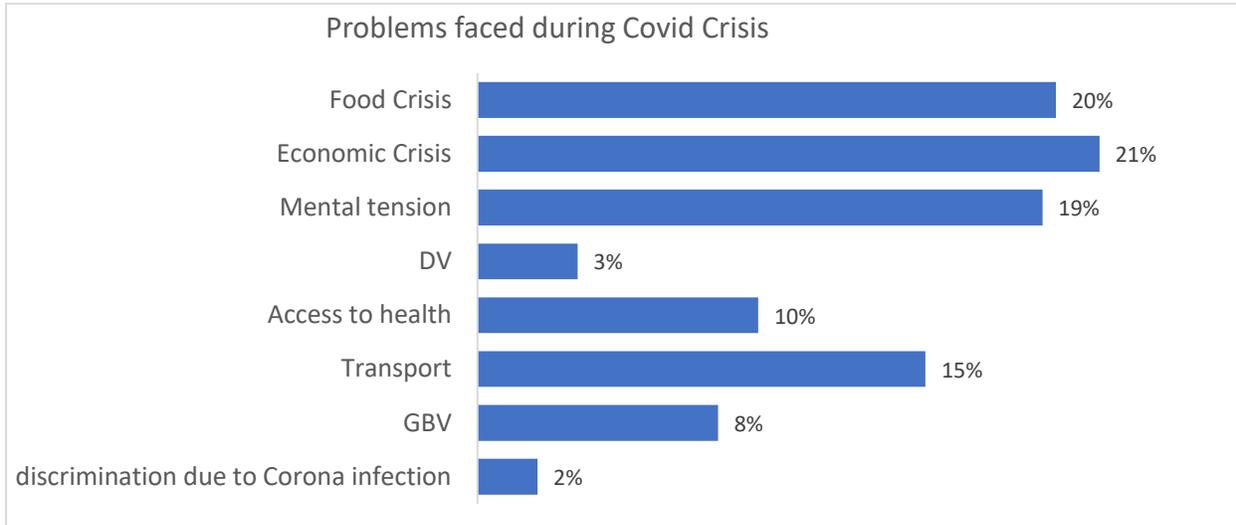


The survey from the respondents also showed that 78% of the respondents had received citizenship. However, 76% from among them noted that they were not able to disclose their true preferred gender identity in the document.



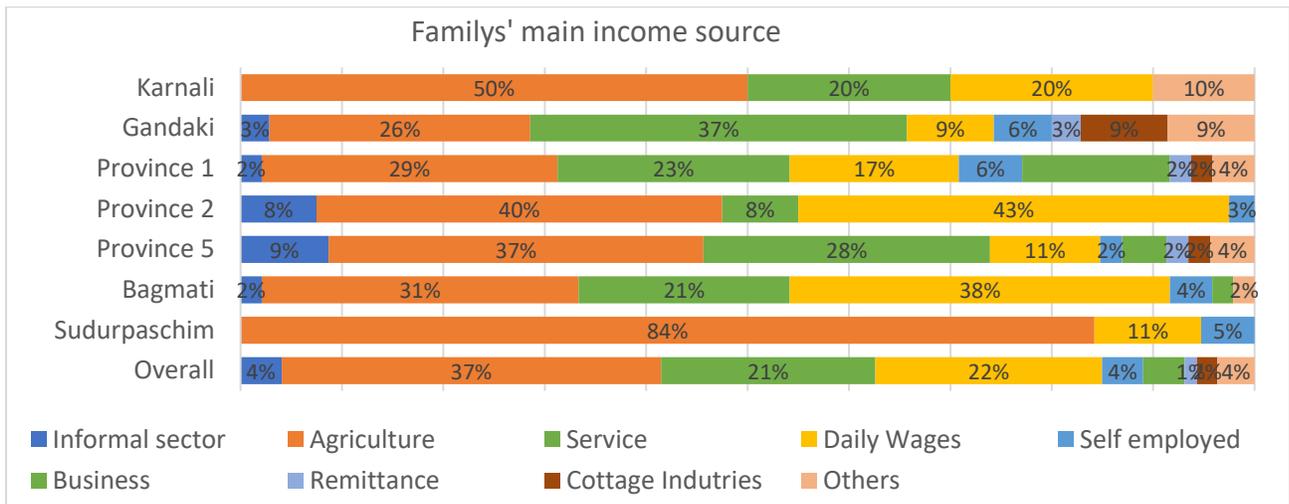
The respondents were also asked if their families accepted their gender identities. To this, 48% reported that their families did not accept their gender identities, whereas half of them (52%) reported that their families did. To the respondents who said their families did not accept their gender identities, they were further probed on the reasons for this: 44% said it was because of stigma and 9% respondents identified other reasons such as not having come out. More details are presented in the graph.

- *General Findings*

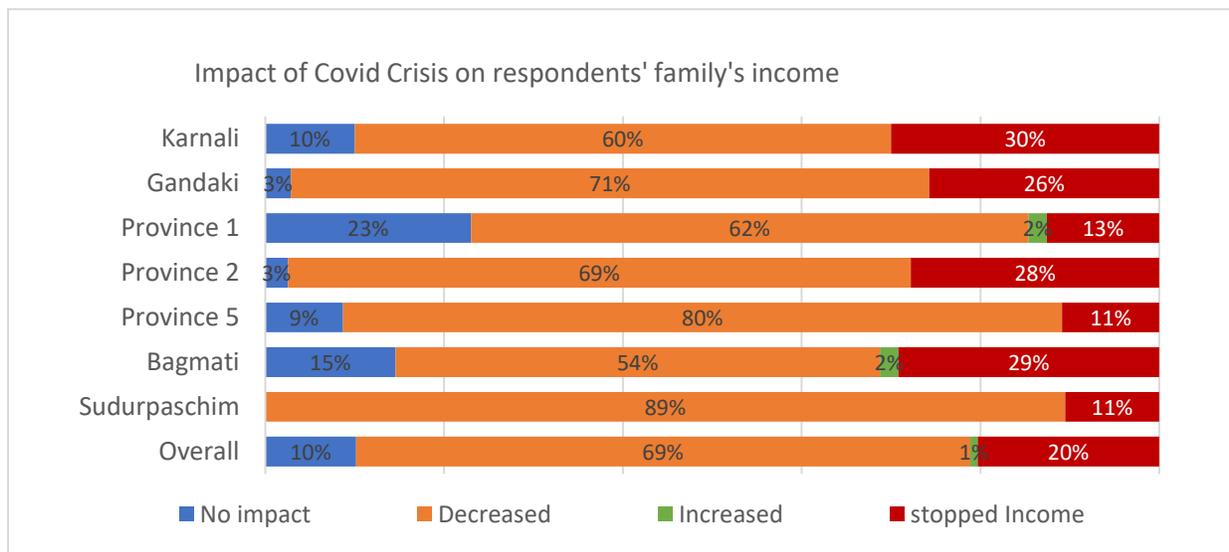


The respondents were asked what kinds of problems they encountered in the current context. From their responses, majority of them faced economic problems, at 21%. This was followed by food security, at 20% and mental tension, at 19%.

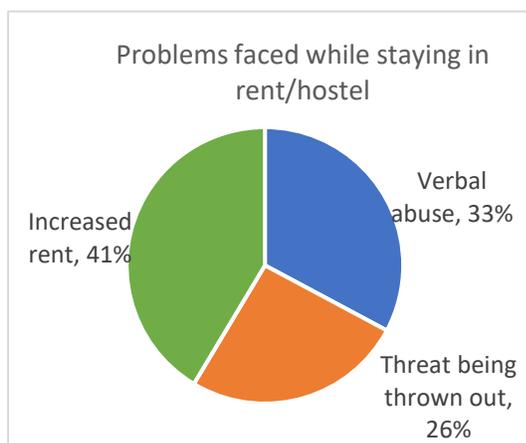
Economic Activities



The main income source of the families of the respondents was agriculture, at 37%. Many also relied on daily wages (22%), and the service sector (21%). 10% reported that they didn't have food stock at their homes and among them most coped by borrowing from friends/relatives.

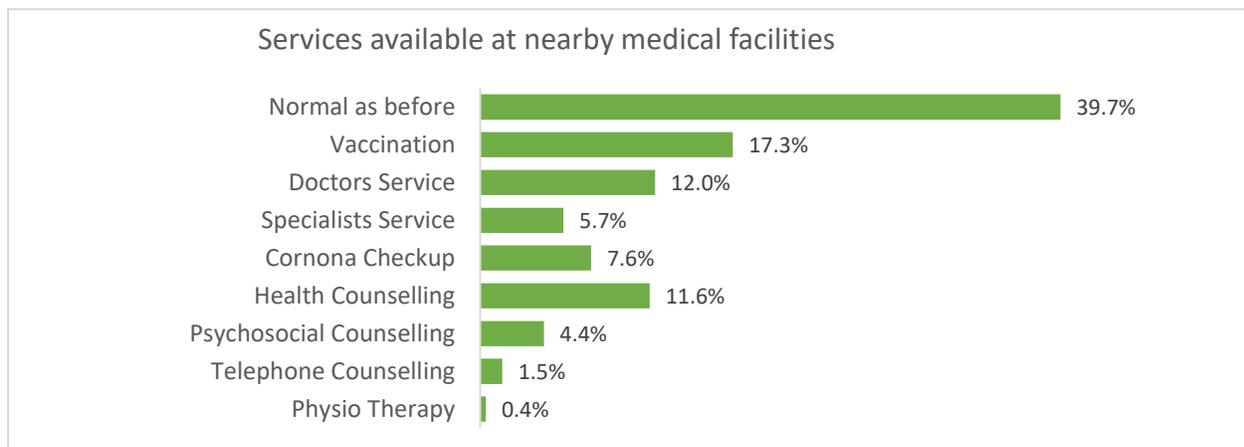


When the respondents were asked about the impact of COVID-19 on their family's income source, more than half of them stated that their family's income had decreased (69%). Whereas, 20% reported that the source of their family's income had stopped. Moreover, 39% of the respondents said that someone in their family lost their job because of the pandemic.



The respondents were also asked about whether they lived in rented accommodation. For the respondents (47%) who were living in rented spaces, 41% reported having to pay increased in, 33% reported facing verbal abuse and 26% reported being threatened of being thrown out.

- *Health Facilities and Sanitation*

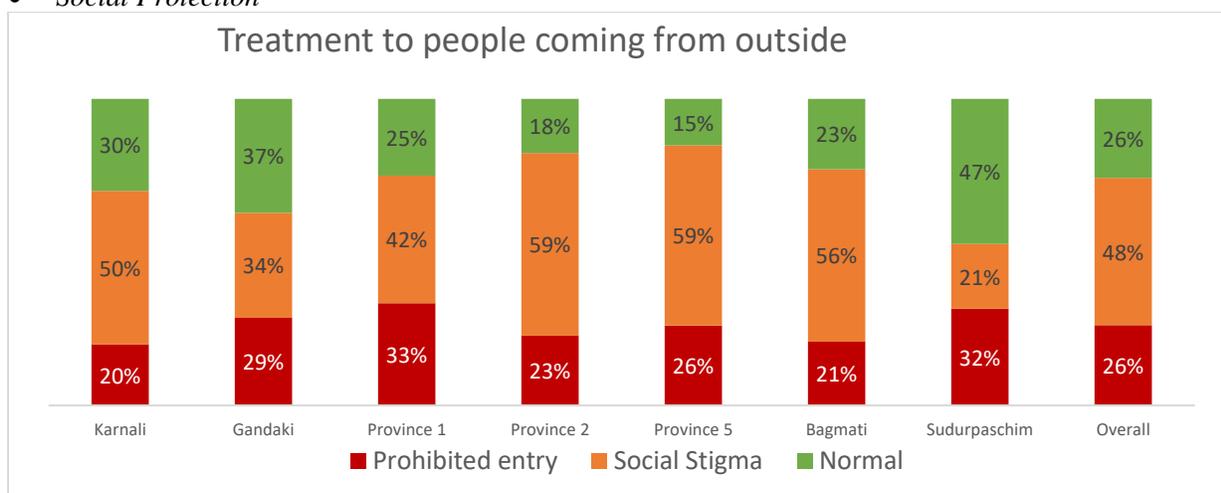


The respondents were also asked about the kind of facilities that were available at the nearest health post. They were asked if the services were available as before, and if they had vaccination services, doctor services, specialist services, COVID-19 testing, health, psycho-social and telephone counselling, physiotherapy were available. From the respondents, 39.7% said the services were as before. However, the services such as psycho-social and telephone counselling, physiotherapy were limitedly available.

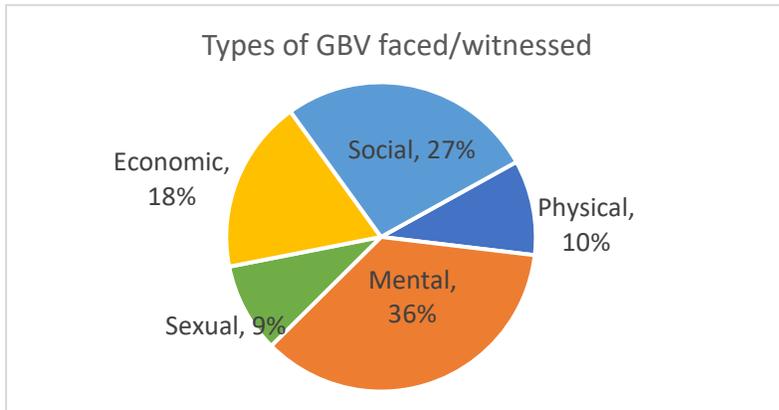
The respondents were also asked if the essential medical supplies and sanitary pads were easily available in the nearest health post. 57% said that essential medicines were available as before, and of the respondents who reported needing sanitary pads (45%), 30% reported not having easy access to them at the nearest health post.

The respondents said that 36% of them drank boiled water, 26% filtered water and 32% did not use any of the precautionary measures.

- *Social Protection*



When asked if there were how the returnees were being treated, 48% reported the existence of some form of social stigma at the community level.

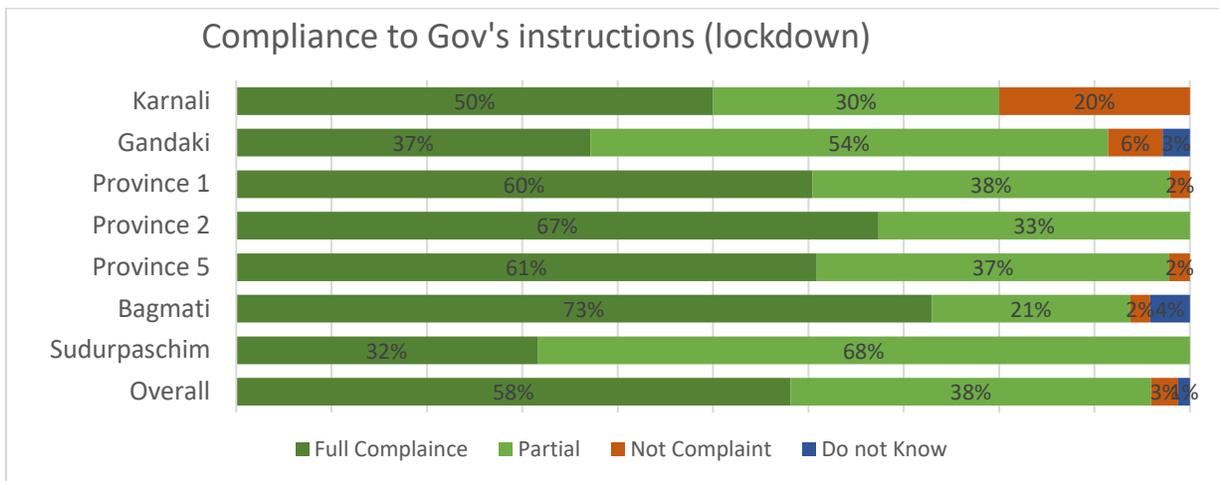


The respondents were asked if they faced any gender-based violence in the current context: 69% reported not facing any such violence, whereas 31% reported to facing such forms of violence. The types of gender based violence they faced are represented in the graph.

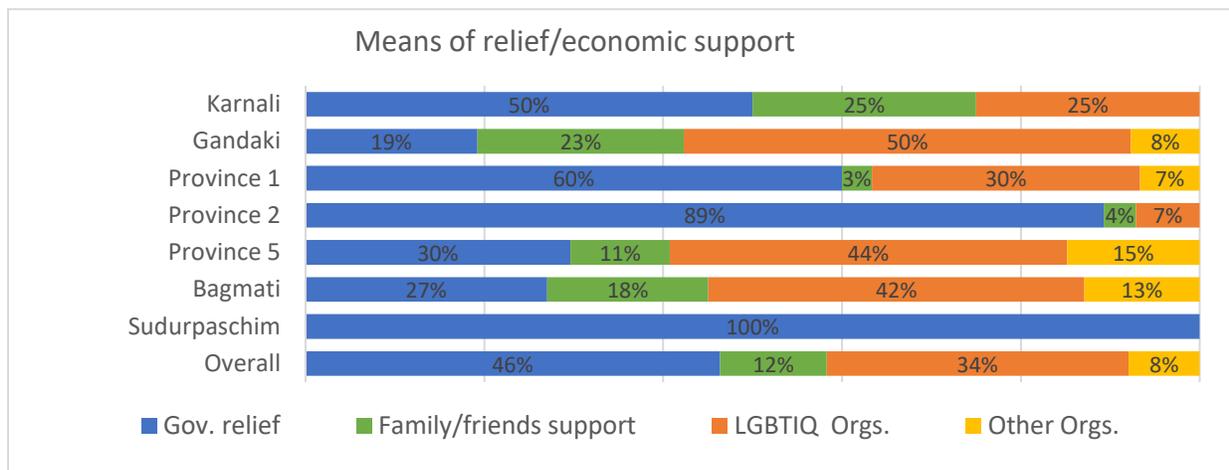
Moreover, although 72% had not experienced such a thing, 28% reported having faced cyber violence in this period. Moreover, 65% were aware of where and how to report any cases of violence. In contrary, 40% said that community police, court, free legal services are not available at the moment.

- *Relief Distribution*

The respondents were asked if they were aware of the quarantine centres in their communities: 92% were. From among them, 68% reported that the situation of the quarantine was okay/average. However, 86% also reported that the quarantine facilities were not LGBTIQ community friendly.



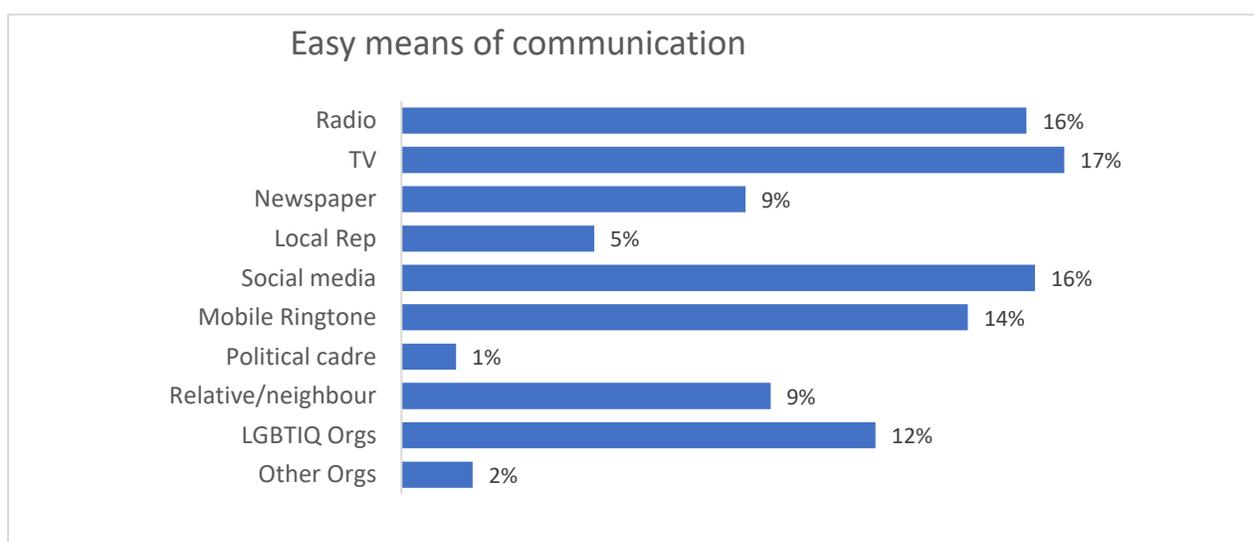
In terms of their own compliance of the government-imposed lockdown and other related decisions, only 58% reported full compliance.

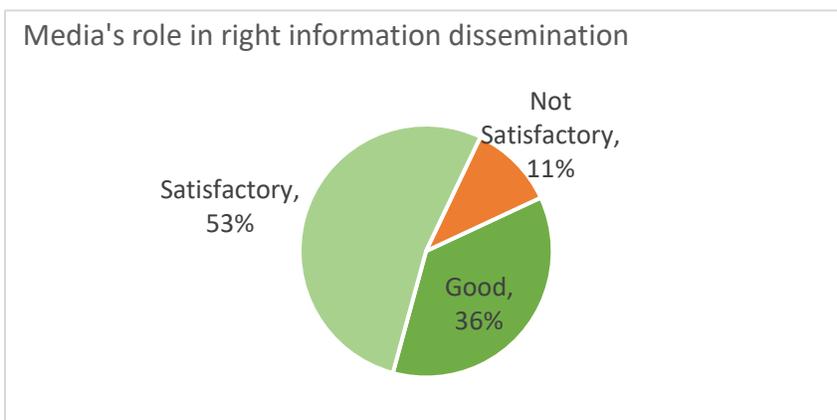


From the respondents, 70% reported that relief materials were distributed in their community: 46% reported receiving government support, and 34% reported receiving support form organizations working for the welfare of the LGBTIQ communities.

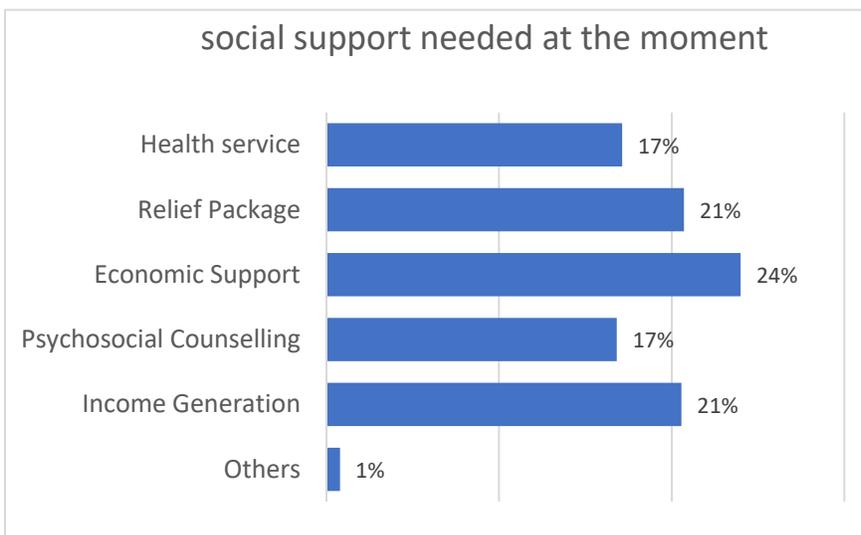
- *Access to information*

The respondents were also asked what an easy means for them to receive COVID-19 messages were. To this, the majority (17%) said the television. Other popular choices included the radio (16%), social media (16%). More details are presented on the graph in below. 36% of the respondents do not know how to access basic facilities in the wake of Corona virus. Those who were receiving information on this reported knowing through television (17%), social media (16%), organizations working for the welfare of the LGBTIQ community (13%).





The respondents were also inquired about the role of the media in disseminating correct information. To this, 53% reported that their role was satisfactory. They were also asked if the information was LGBTIQ community friendly – 52% said it was not. The reasons they reported so was because of a lack of a representative from the LGBTIQ community in every level of decision making.



From the respondents, 24% reported needing economic support, followed by the need for income generating activities (21%), health services (17%) and psycho-social counselling (17%). Some respondents also reported the need for sharing information about the LGBTIQ community at the community level so that the environment is conducive for them. Some also reported the need for employment and income generating activities.

4. Observations from the field

- The survey showed that 78% of the respondents had received citizenship. However, 76% from among them noted that they were not able to disclose their true gender identity in the document.
- It was also a learning that many of the respondents shared that their families had not accepted their gendered identity. Some also expressed that they had not been able to come out among their family and friends. Interestingly, not all the respondents reported being treated equally by their family and society – at 58%.
- The respondents who were living independently also reported facing more verbal abuse and stigma from the society, and reported facing hiked rent in the current context.
- Many of the respondents shared that they also lacked essential medical supplies during the lockdown; however, many did have access to the nearest health post.
- Some of the respondents also shared that the information disseminated on COVID-19 were not friendly for the gender minority community. Not only information, but even the quarantine centres

that had been allocated were reported to not be LGBTIQ-friendly.

- Youth and civil society should advocate for LGBTIQ rights and advocate for their identity. Government should support to bring about behavioural change programmes and encourage acceptance of their community in the society.

5. Best Practices/Lessons Learned

Province 1:

- In order to ensure that the LGBTIQ community are socially accepted, it is important to design all information, particularly those relating to COVID-19, in an LGBTIQ community friendly manner.
- It is important to recognize that there are several categories with LGBTIQ, and an umbrella term “umbrella” does not do the diversity justice. This needs to be legally recognized.
- The people from the LGBTIQ community are still not accepted at the familial nor the societal level.
- In cases where people choose to identify as from the LGBTIQ community, the local government and ward offices hesitate to include their request. This makes it difficult for this community to accurately represent themselves in government and official documents.
- Youth and civil society should advocate for LGBTIQ rights and advocate for their identity. Government should support to bring about behavioural change programmes and encourage acceptance of their community in the society.
- There needs to be an understanding of gender diversity from the school level itself.

Province 2:

- Many people from the LGBTIQ community have not been accepted by their families. This has compelled them to leave their homes to seek out rented accommodation. Despite this, the people in their vicinity also have not accepted them. There is therefore a need for a lot of awareness raising on the acceptance of this community.
- Social media is a very powerful platform to spread messages that encourage a positive social norm change and facilitate the acceptance of the LGBTIQ community. The reach of social media is also far and wide.
- The medical stores do not provide sanitary pads easily to this group. There is scope to train youth volunteers on pad making, who can then dispatch it to this community.
- There is a need to alternate job creation for people from this community. As many relied on marriages and such ceremonies for their living, which has been impacted by COVID-19, the government needs to focus on providing job creating opportunities.
- The school educational curricula should also include a course on the issues of the LGBTIQ community, just like the rights of persons with disabilities. This will contribute to them being accepted in the society.

Bagmati Province:

- The society is still not accepting of the LGBTIQ community. Most of them live in rented accommodations, and face verbal abuse frequently. There is therefore a need for targeted orientation and sensitization.
- The State law should protect them, and laws should be formulated for the rights of the people from

the LGBTIQ communities. This will also motivate the family to accept them, and encourage the society to accept them.

- The media should play a proactive role in highlighting the successes of people from gender minorities, including through social media. The local government should also be well-informed about the various rights of the LGBTIQ community, and should coordinate with them to ensure the latter's access to their rights.

Gandaki Province:

- The quarantines in this province are not LGBTIQ friendly. The government should make policies and laws that take into account the rights of people from the LGBTIQ community. The security officers at the quarantine centres should also be oriented on LGBTIQ issues so that they can treat them fairly.
- The media should play a positive role and support LGBTIQ rights.
- Separate toilets and rooms should be allocated for people from the LGBTIQ communities at the quarantine sites to avoid any sort of gender-based violence against them. Local governments, organisations, human rights groups, should talk about LGBTIQ groups more frequently and should spread positive messages about them.
- The government should facilitate accessible and affordable PCR tests, so that LGBTIQ community, who may not always be able for afford them, can.
- A case study of a person from the LGBTIQ community in Palpa was shared. The person was betrayed by their step mother, became jobless during this COVID-19 pandemic, and also thrown out of the rented home. The person attempted suicide; however, was lucky enough to be saved by others. The BDS organization of Gandaki Province supported their treatment and the person is now taking shelter in their organisation. During this pandemic 11 people from the LGBTIQ community committed suicide, and 6 more attempted it. The number of suicides will increase if they do not get timely support.

Province 5:

- The participants noted that with increasing use of social media, the rate of cybercrime/ exploitation is also increasing. And the people from the LGBTIQ community are particularly targeted in such crimes. For example, when someone from the LGBTIQ community made various *tiktok* videos relating to familial affairs, a man attacked these videos in a violent way. Because of this, it added to the LGBTIQ members psychological pressure and mental stress. Some even succumbed to suicide because of this. There should, therefore, be a strict monitoring mechanism to check such activities. The youth who are very much engaged in social media should support the LGBTIQ community and raise their voice for them.
- Each member of the society should be sensitized on this, and advocate for the rights. Similarly, donor organizations should bring programmes that address these issues.

Karnali Province:

- LGBTIQ communities should be provided with their own income generating opportunities. The State, province and local government should develop and engage them in sustainable income generating work, such as agricultural production of cash crops and small-scale industries. They can also be engaged in national infrastructure projects.
- There is need for proper coordination at each tier of the government and non-government bodies in

order to materialize this.

Sudurpaschim Province:

- Agricultural production has decreased recently. The farmers should be given required fertilizers. Markets should be opened with proper management taking into account the current context. The stadiums and covered halls, playgrounds can be converted into market place with maintaining health protocol and safety measures so that economic activities can resume and people, including the LGBTIQ community, can earn their livelihood.
- LGBTIQ community can be mobilized to help facilitate this – this way, they can earn their livelihood, as well as support in their social acceptance.

6. Recommendations:

- A long-term behavioural change approach, adopting a social norm change, at the familial and societal level is necessary so that the environment is more conducive for the LGBTIQ community.
- There needs to be advocacy efforts to include the different identities from the LGBTIQ community in government issued identity cards.
- Enhance LGBTIQ participation at the decision-making levels at each tier to ensure LGBTIQ friendly information dissemination.
- Support the management for LGBTIQ friendly quarantine centres and other infrastructure. To facilitate this, the security forces and the administrative officers should be trained about LGBTIQ rights and issues so that they understand what an LGBTIQ friendly quarantine and isolation centre entails. In this process, the organizations working for the welfare of the LGBTIQ community, together with other human rights organisations, civil society organizations and development agencies should prepare checklists and orientations for the local government and administrative staff.
- There is also a need for the government and civil society bodies to consider and generate income regeneration activities and explore alternate employment opportunities for people in the LGBTIQ community who have lost their jobs, especially for those in the informal sectors.
- Reform /review the existing discriminatory policies targeted at the LGBTIQ community, including issues like citizenship, self- respect and dignity, identity and social justice.
- Launch massive awareness programmes and campaigns from the federal to the local level, led by the government and stakeholders, to mainstream issues of the LGBTIQ community, their meaningful participation in decision making and supporting them to generate alternative livelihood.
- Sanitary pad making trainings can also support those who are denied pads from the LGBTIQ community from the medical stores.
- There is a need for strong advocacy to ensure that the LGBTIQ community are socially accepted.
- The school curricula should include the issues of the gender minorities so that they are better accepted at the societal level.
- Social media needs to be carefully monitored to ensure that no one is being harassed or threatened through it. Such kind of action should also be legally punishable. Traditional media as well as social media should cover issues relating to the LGBTIQ community more, and the success stories related to them should be disseminated more widely and more frequently to support advocacy endeavours around it.
- Youth and civil society should advocate for LGBTIQ rights and advocate for their identity to be accepted. Government should support to bring about behavioural change programmes and

encourage acceptance of their community in the society. For this, it is important to capture their data especially in the national census. The youth, organisations working for the LGBTIQ community, CSOs, local governments, census enumerators should be well trained about the rights of LGBTIQ community and the media should also play a supporting role by disseminating awareness programmes around this issue.

- There must be targeted programmes for the welfare of the LGBTIQ community: considering that 32% did not take any precautionary measures for purifying their drinking water, the concerned agencies must provide them with awareness on the importance of such issues.
- Given that many reported facing cyber violence, an avenue could be to coordinate with the Nepal Police and other policy implementing agencies to create advocacy and awareness on this issue.

7. Conclusion

The event was filled with enriching insights from the presenters of the seven provinces as well as the experts for the webinar. All those present lauded the effort of the volunteers who led the webinar. The experts also shared how they were working to address the myriad issues caused by the pandemic. The presentations underscored that the voices from the people in the LGBTIQ community need to be accounted for. There is also a need to end stigmatization, ensure their gender identities are properly documented and reflected, that they have access to infrastructures and information. The youth can play an important role to support this. For example: the youth can work on awareness raising in the communities, and combined with the civil society, they can advocate for LGBTIQ rights and advocate for their identity. The government should also support to bring about behavioural change programmes and encourage acceptance of their community in the society.

ANNEX

Annex 1: List of Experts and Presenters

Experts: The following experts provide their input in the webinar:

- Bharat Sharma, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens

The Joint Secretary highlighted the government initiatives towards the LGBTIQ community. He shared how the government, through the Ministry, has been monitoring the issues of LGBTIQ closely for the past 3-4 years. He also shared that the government prioritizes income-generating for the gender minorities, even at the policy level. He also expressed appreciation to be able to hear from the people of this community. Moreover, he added that the government has recognized the identity of the LGBTIQ community since the 14th National Plan of the government, and prioritized them. The 15th National Plan also focuses on various income generating activities for LGBTIQ community. Furthermore, he shared that there is scope to implement the existing policies more effectively. He noted that it is essential to have accurate data on them to be able to respond to their needs at a policy level, and also took the opportunity to inform them that this is why it is important to record their data in the upcoming national census.

- Pinky Gurung, President, Blue Diamond Society

In this current context of the pandemic, it is important to question not only what the Blue Diamond Society did for the gender and sexual minorities, but also to question what the others did. The Society has been working on LGBTI issues for the past 20 years, even at the grassroots. But this is not enough. The expert

recommended that the online survey that has been done may not be representative, as not everyone has access to Internet and the technology. The LGBTIQ community, which was already marginalized, became further marginalized in the current context. This affected their livelihood and income generation. In such a case, our Society conducted a relief distribution programme, also conducted psycho-social counselling. However, there is more to do. We can coordinate with donor agencies to bring attention and advocacy to these issues.

The following volunteers presented the major issues from their provinces:

| Province | District | Name of the volunteers | Remarks |
|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Sunsari | Sushil Rajbhar | Madhesi |
| 2 | Bara | Om Prakash Giri | Indigenous |
| Bagmati | Makwanpur | Bina Devkota | |
| Gandaki | Kaski | Bindiya Gautam | Transwoman |
| Province 5 | Rupandehi | Aanik Rana Magar | Trans woman |
| Karnali | Kalikot | Prem Singh | |
| Sudurpashchim | Kanchanpur | Sandesh Bhatt | |