



# **Youth Webinar Report**

**Issues Faced By Workers in the Informal  
Sector in the Context of COVID-19**

**25 September 2020**

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



## **1. Executive Summary**

A seventh youth webinar, which is part of a larger youth webinar series, took place on 25 September 2020 to discuss the issues that workers in the informal sector and those in traditional jobs 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 97 participants, including youth volunteers, representatives from UNDP, government representatives among others. In the webinar, youth volunteers from all seven provinces in Nepal and 64 districts conducted surveys of the people in their community. A total of 102 youth volunteers surveyed a total of 488 respondents for the survey spread across Nepal.

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 works in the information sector and those in traditional jobs, 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 faced difficulties in maintain a stable source of income in these times, and many reported that their income had decreased in the wake of the pandemic. Moreover, people were also facing others hardships, including reduced food security, because of this crisis. To add to this, the returnee migrants who had come back to Nepal were also not finding jobs in their home country and resorting to leave Nepal yet again despite the pandemic.

Therefore, the ensuing recommendation was to ensure that there are targeted programmes for those working in the informal sector. These programmes may come from the local or provincial governments, or civil society bodies. The webinar shone light on the importance of gathering accurate data and designing accurate policies that would be implemented, along with a coordinated approach among all stakeholders to tackle this growing crisis. The youth volunteers noted that the youth could be mobilized in awareness raising campaigns at the local level.

The event also had the provision of a quiz on matters related to elections, to sensitize the youths and the attendees on the importance of exercising their right to vote: the poll inquired if the participants of the webinar were aware of the age to contend for local elections, the age to vote, and whether or not they had registered in the voter roll. It was an effective way to engage the youth volunteers on the matter.

## **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 seventh webinar was on issues that the workers in the informal sector and those in traditional jobs are 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.

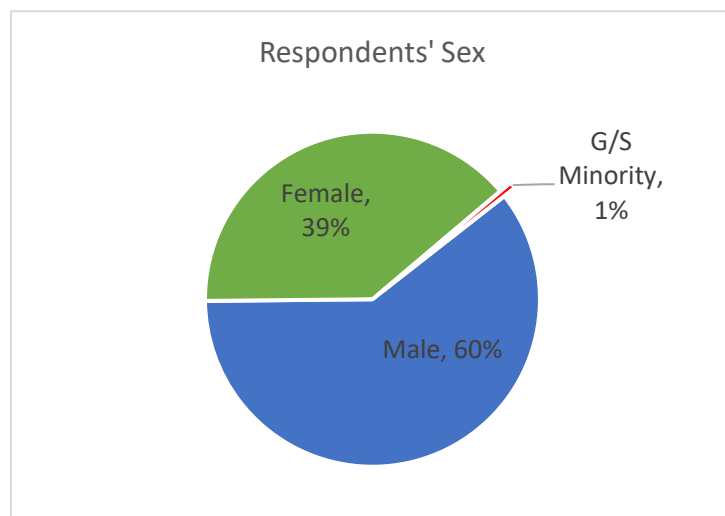
### 2.2 Objectives

- 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

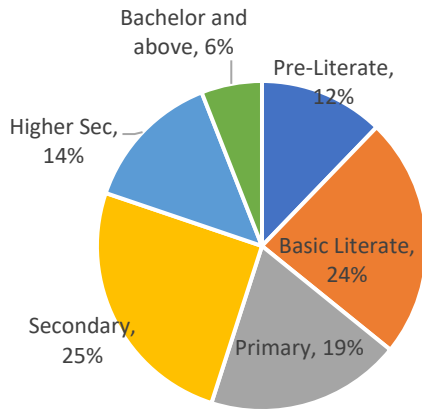
The webinar then included a presentation from Ms. Pushpa Mukhiya Sunuwar, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer with UNDP’s Electoral Support Project. In the presentation, she presented the key findings from the survey conducted across the seven provinces of Nepal, providing a general trend of the responses.

- *Respondents Demography*



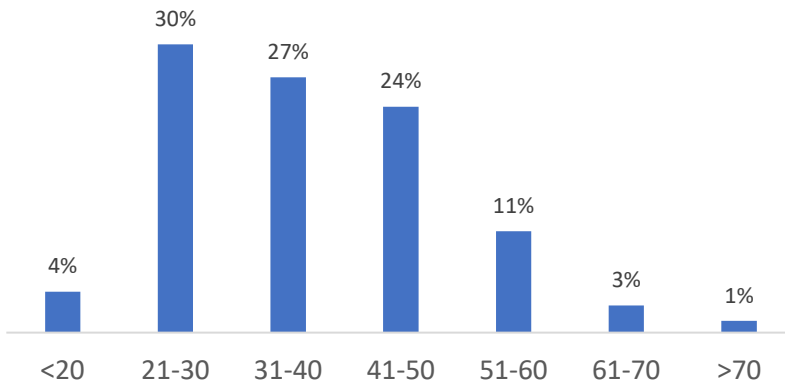
There was a total of 488 respondents for the survey. From among them, 39% identified as woman and 1% as a gender minority. More details of the gender diversity of the participants are presented in the graph.

Respondents' educational background



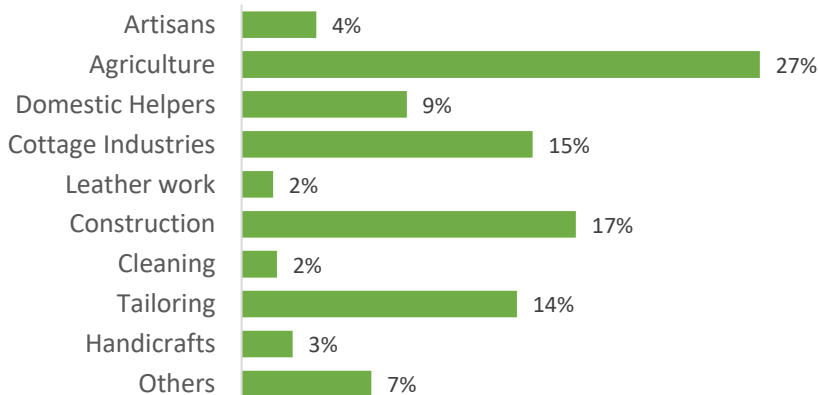
The educational background of the respondents of the survey varied. Overall, the majority of the respondents had received secondary school education, which was 25%. This was followed by 24% who were literate. From among the participants, 12% were not literate. The details in terms of educational background is presented in the adjacent graph.

Respondents' age group



In terms of age, 30% of the respondents, representing the highest number, were between 21-30 years followed by 27% who were between 31-40 years of age. Moreover, 1% were above 70 years of age. More details on the age of the respondents are presented in the graph.

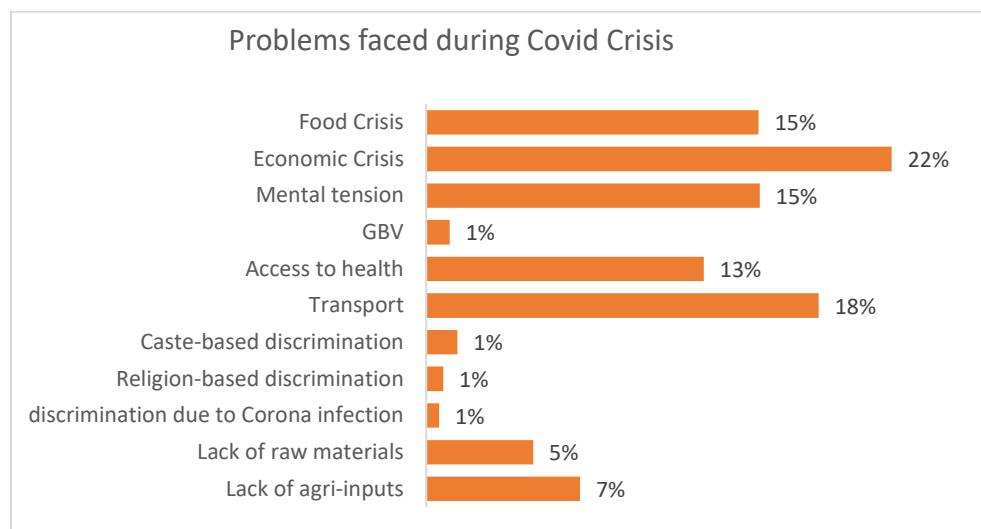
Sector of informal/traditional skill works



The respondents were asked which sector they were employed in. Majority of them, 27% said they were engaged in agriculture. Other notable sectors included construction (17%), small and cottage industries (15%). Moreover, 2% were engaged as cleaners and others were engaged in beauty parlours, as black smiths, carpenters. Among the respondents, 79% were not engaged in any unions in their

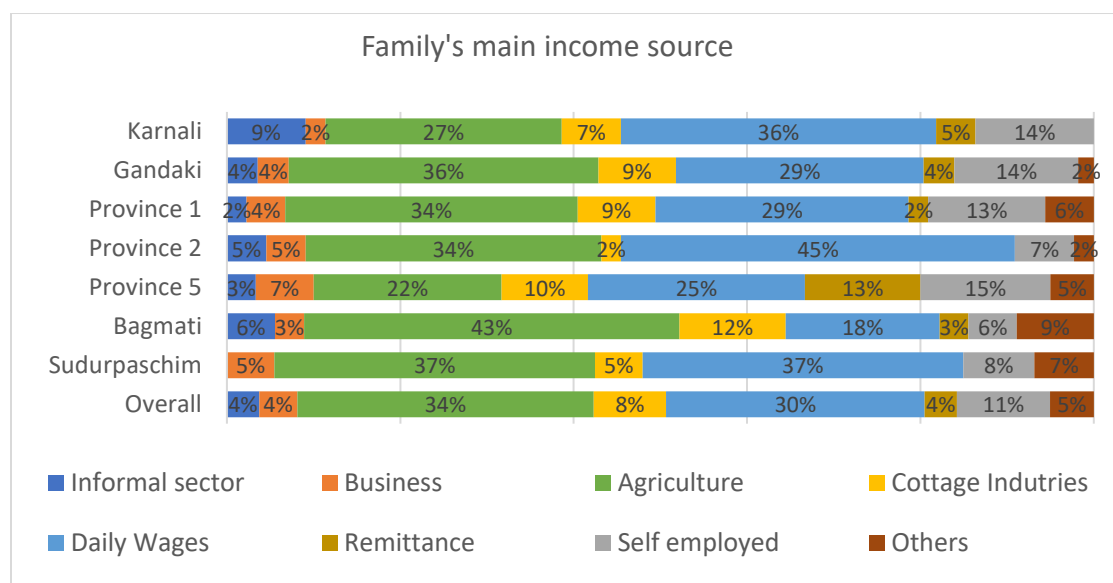
sectors. Only 21% reported to be affiliated to any organizations of the respective sectors.

- *General Findings*

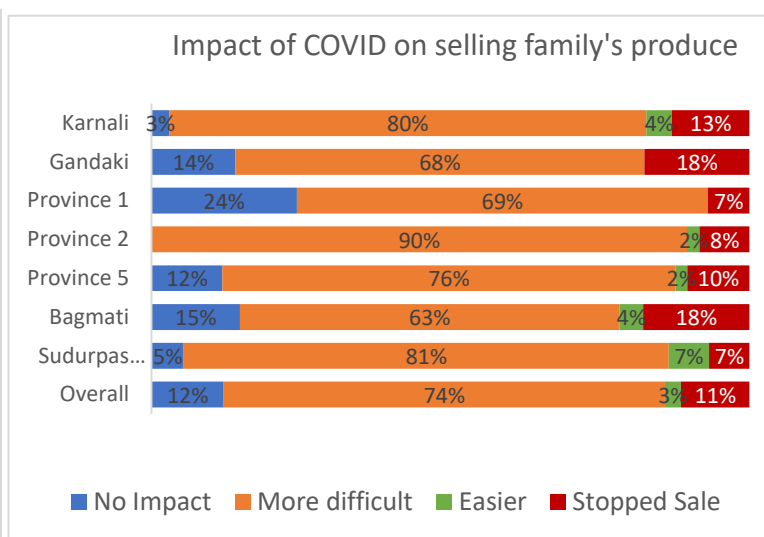
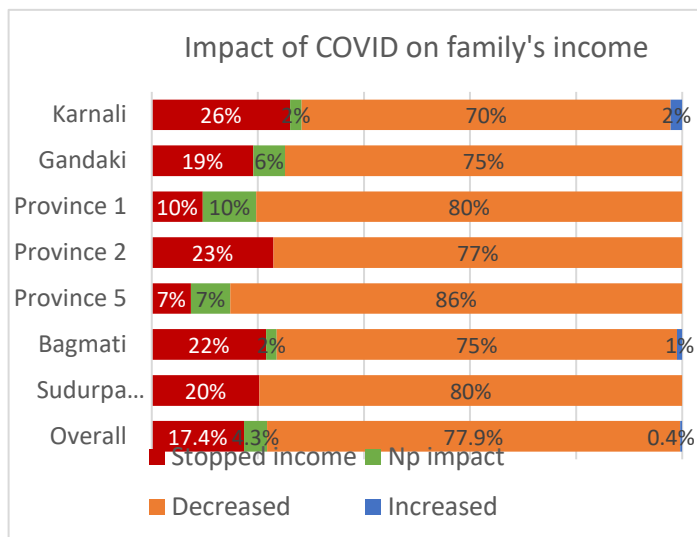


The respondents were asked what kinds of problems they encountered in the current context. From their responses, majority of them faced economic problems, at 22%. This was followed by problems in commuting, at 18%. 15% also reported mental stress and tension.

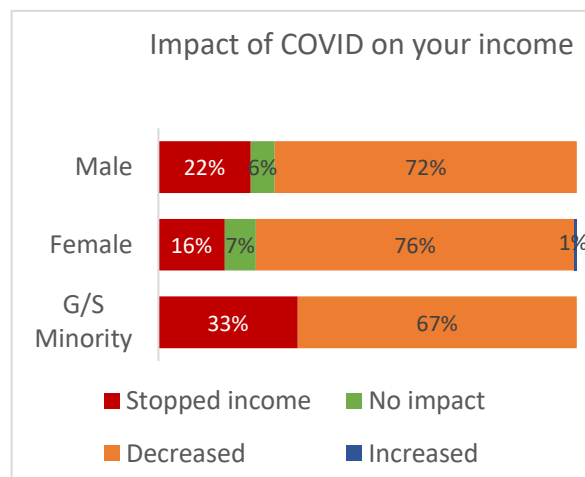
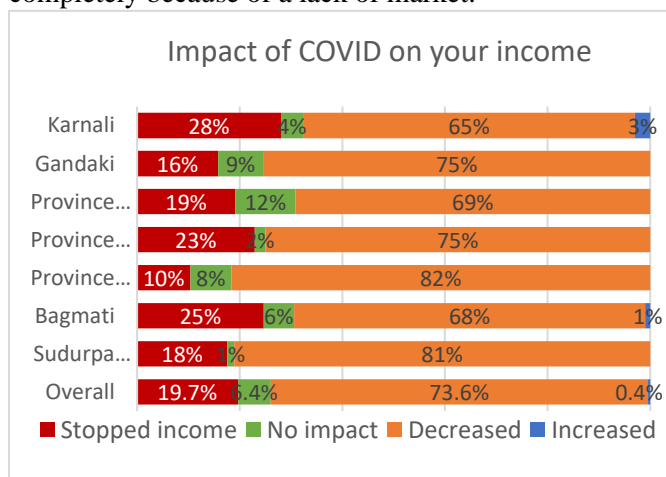
*Economic Activities*



The main income source of the families of the respondents was agriculture, at 34%. Many also relied on daily wages (30%). Most of the respondents were carrying out their economic transactions via cash, at 38%. Only 3% were using mobile phones for their economic transactions.

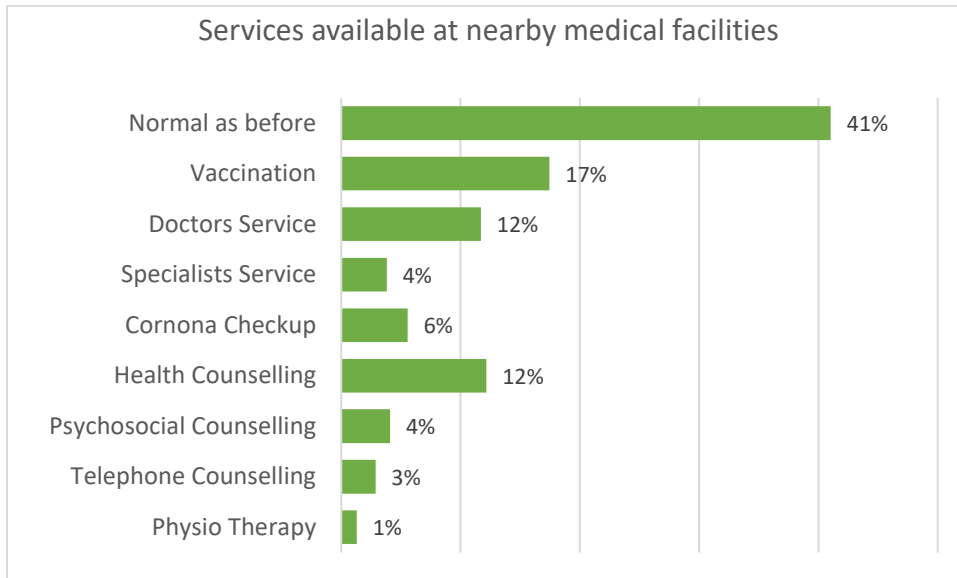


When the respondents were asked about the impact of COVID-19 on their family's income source, more than half of them stated that their family's income had decreased (77.9%). Whereas, 17.4% reported that the source of their family's income had stopped. Moreover, 37% of the respondents said that someone in their family lost their job because of the pandemic. For 74% of the respondents and their families, finding a market for their produce was also difficult in the current context. 11% reported that sales had stopped completely because of a lack of market.



They were also asked about the impact of the pandemic on their own income: 73.6% said that the income had decreased, and 0.4% said it had increased as compared to before.

- *Health Facilities and Sanitation*

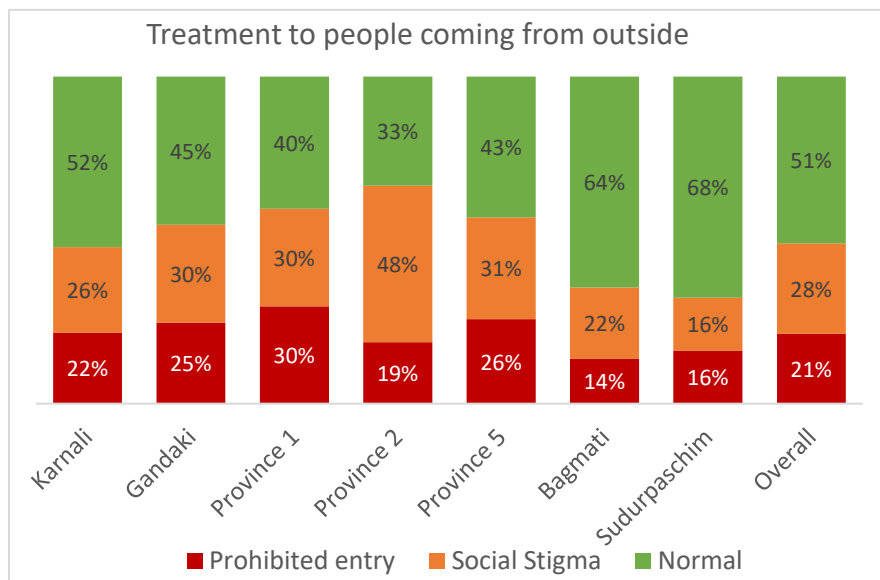


The respondents were asked about the kind of facilities that were available at the nearest health post. They were asked if the services were available as before, and if they had vaccination services, doctor services, specialist services, COVID-19 testing, health, psycho-social and telephone counselling, therapy were available. From the respondents, 41% said the general services were available as before. However, the services such as psycho-social and telephone counselling, therapy and specialist services were limitedly available.

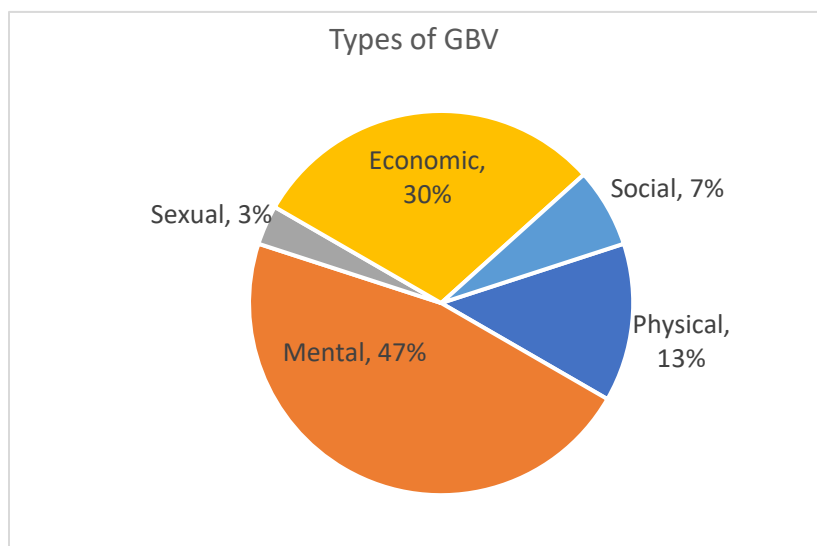
The respondents were asked if the essential medical supplies were easily available in the nearest health post. 53% said that essential medicines were available as before, 43% reported not having easy access to them at the nearest health post and 4% reported that they were more easily available in the current context.

The respondents said that 41% of them drank boiled water, 25% filtered water and 28% did not use any of the precautionary measures.

- *Social Protection*



When asked if there were how the returnees were being treated, 51% reported that they were being treated as before while 28% reported the existence of some form of social stigma at the community level.

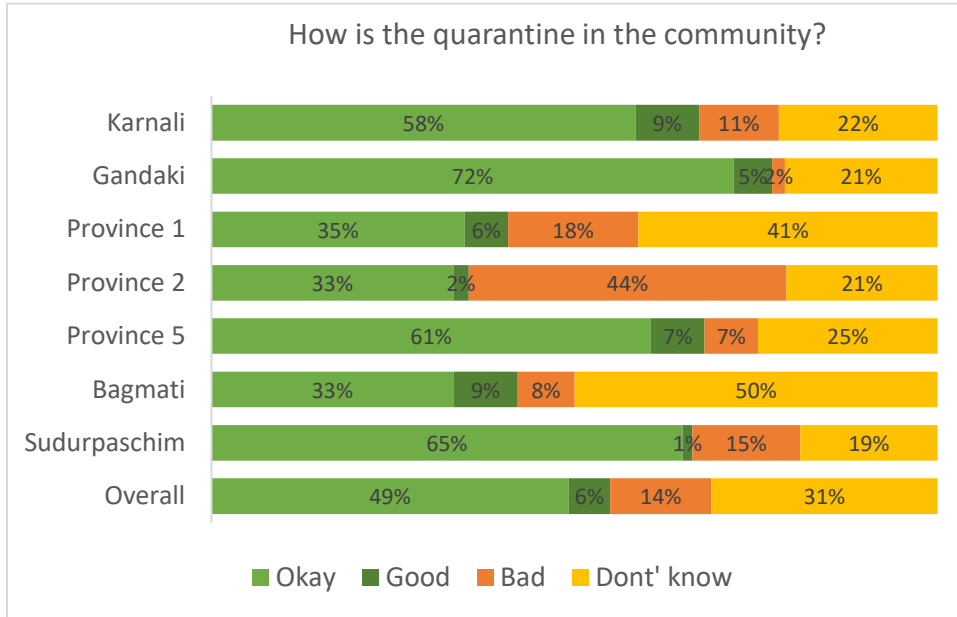


The respondents were asked if they faced any domestic or gender-based violence in the current context: 95% reported not facing any such violence, whereas 5% reported to facing such forms of violence. The types of violence they faced are represented in the graph. Moreover, 38% were unaware where to report cases of violence. From the respondents, 42% reported that there's no access to community police, court and free legal aid at the moment.

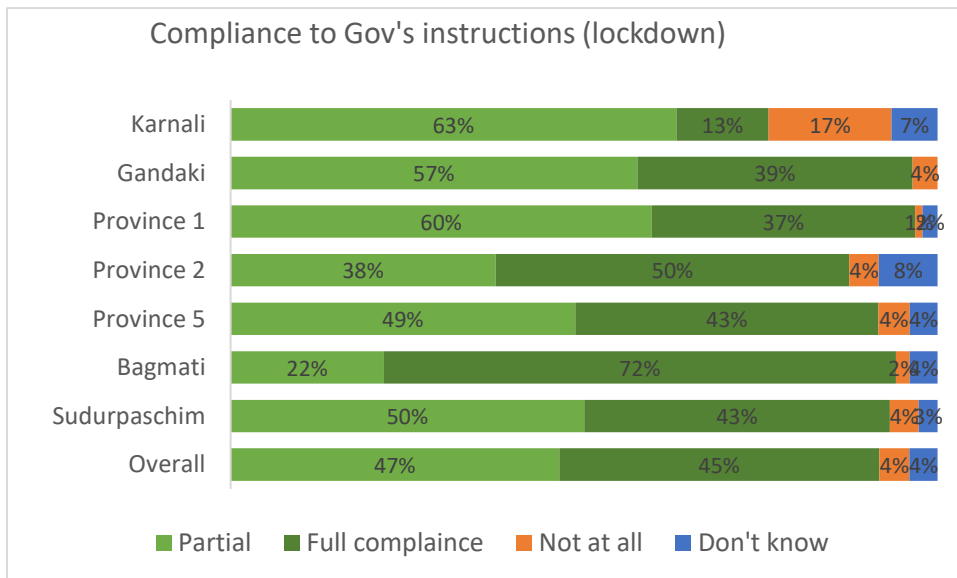
- **Relief Distribution**

The respondents were asked if relief material was distributed in their communities: 77% noted that it was. They were asked if the local government had conducted any welfare activities for those engaged in the information sector. To this, 92% reported that they had not. For the 8% who reported affirmatively, 35% notes support through opportunity for labour work, 25% through relief and 21% noted support through seed capital. 27% also noted the effective role of the government, including the local level, in providing services.

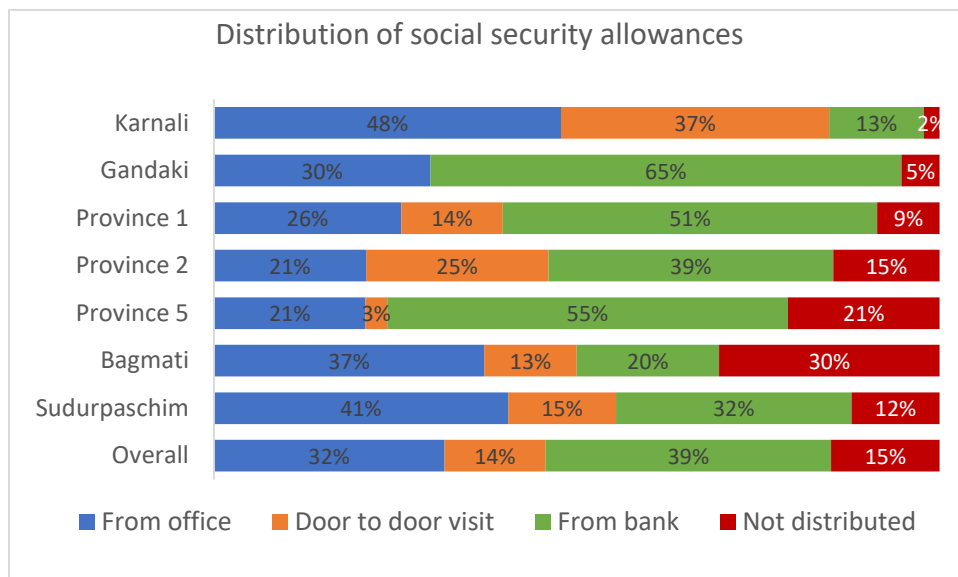




The respondents were asked how the situation of the quarantine centres in their communities were: 49% reported that the situation of the quarantine was okay/average. However, 31% also reported that they did not know.



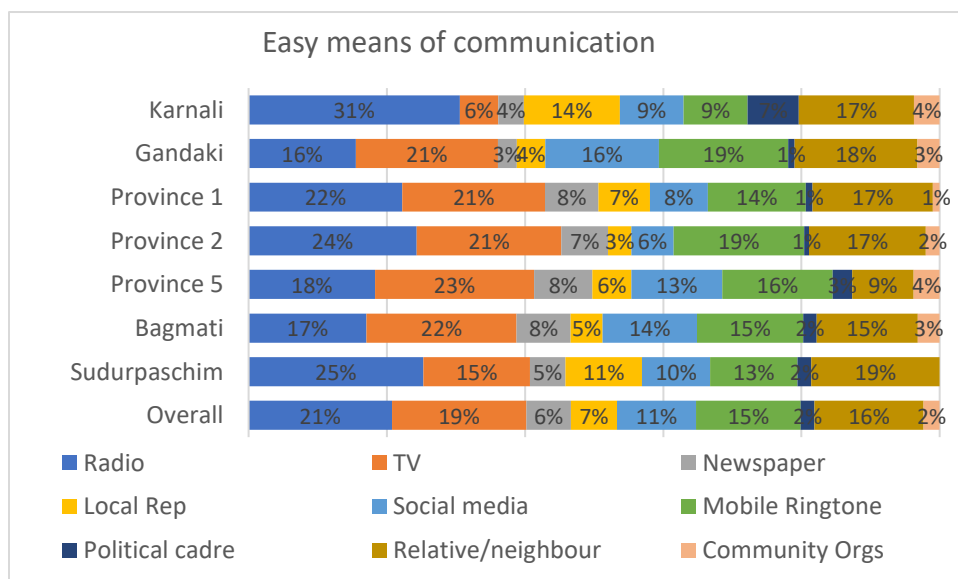
In terms of their own compliance of the government-imposed lockdown and other related decisions, only 45% reported full compliance. They were also asked how easy it was for them to maintain social/physical distancing – 56% said it was not easy for them.



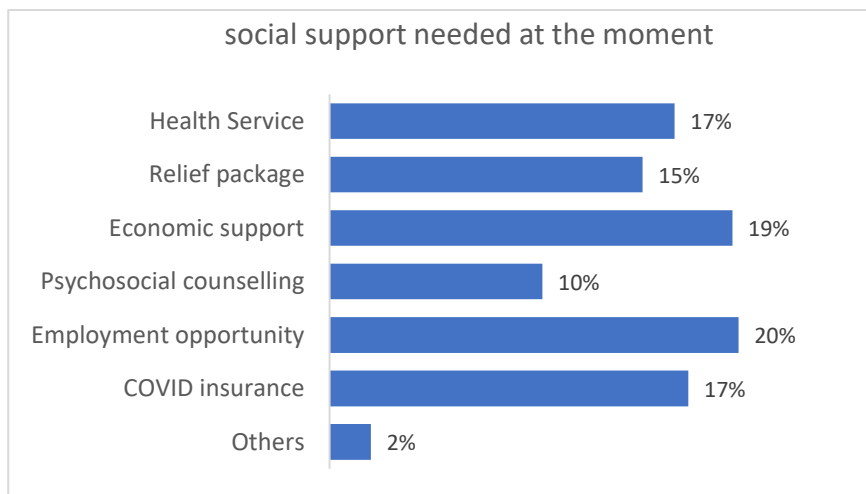
Moreover, 39% reported that the welfare was being distributed through the banks, 32% through offices, 14% noted that it was being delivered in their homes whereas 15% reported that it was not being distributed.

- *Access to information*

The respondents were also asked what an easy means for them to receive COVID-19 messages were. To this, the majority (21%) said the radio. Other popular choices included the television (19%), social media (11%). More details are presented on the graph in below. 52% 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 the radio (21%), television (20%), social media (12%).



The respondents were also inquired about the role of the media in disseminating correct information. To this, 56% reported that their role was satisfactory.



From the respondents, 20% reported needed opportunities for labour work, 19% reported needing economic support, health services (17%) and psycho-social counselling (10%). Some respondents also reported the need for modern agricultural tools and equipment, access to raw materials and market as well as seeds and fertilizers.

#### 4. *Observations from the field*

- The informal sector needs to be documented as a crucial first step to bring it under the purview of the government.
- The local level and other organizations need to introduce targeted programmes for those in the informal sector.
- The supply chain and market management are two areas that need more attention from the government – this way, many people would be able to keep their livelihood.
- Those working in the informal sector should also be prioritized in relief distribution. Moreover, opportunities for them to engage in work should be generated.
- The coordination and cooperation between all tiers of the government should be enhanced to ensure smooth distribution of social security allowances. The local level should play a particularly active role to ensure its implementation.
- A basic level of awareness on health and sanitation is missing at the community level. For example, many have not taken any measures to purify drinking water. As such, awareness programmes on drinking water and sanitation should be conducted, bearing in mind the pressing concerns of COVID-19.
- There is a need for proper quarantine and isolation centres coupled with social awareness programmes and psychosocial counselling to promote social tolerance and harmony.
- The government must take the leadership role in ensuring access to accurate information through accurate channels so that everyone, including those in the informal sector, can take informed decisions.

## 5. Best Practices/Lessons Learned

### Province 1:

- There aren't enough programmes from the government or the civil society bodies for those in the informal sector. And in cases where there are targeted programmes, they have not been able to achieve great results.
- The limited programmes that do exist for the informal workers in Province 1 revolves around agriculture. Even in such cases, the programmes are only limited to trainings. The people feel that tangible forms of support, in the form of distribution of high-quality seeds for example, would be more beneficial. Moreover, such sort of programmes should also be tailored to an illiterate audience so that they are not left behind in the development process.
- Most of those in the informal sector and from marginalized communities making them susceptible to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.
- There are unlimited opportunities to engage in Province 1, including providing self-defence classes to empower women, as well as provide seed money to the community at large to empower them. Furthermore, courses on practicalities like registering a business would also serve to empower the community a great deal.
- The people can also be trained on the occupational safety and health standards and measures to ensure their safety and protection.
- There can be provisions for quotas for the marginalized, or persons with disabilities or single women to support their growth.

### Province 2:

- To facilitate market linkages and market access for all, the government should be aware of the real implications of the pandemic on the informal sector, and particularly those in agriculture.
- At the community level, collection centres should be created between every two to three villages so that farmers have a place to sell their produce. This also introduces the additional benefit of cutting the middle-men/agents so that the price of the produce remains in check.
- In Province 2, the market is unregulated because of the presence of these middle-men/agents. In order to minimize and combat this, legal provisions needs to be introduced so that they can be punishable by law. Moreover, a proper monitoring mechanism on the grounds, from the local government, is necessary to regulate the prices.
- To facilitate proper market linkages, it is imperative that those in the informal sector, and agriculture in particular, have access to transportation facilities. If we can connect markets with smooth transport, it will help cut food losses.
- The local government in Province 2 is aiding this to some degree by facilitating local farmers groups, distributing fertilizers, seeds, and sharing techniques for modernizing agriculture. The provincial government has also ensured providing grants for loans that farmers have taken. But despite this, because there is a limited communication and awareness channel, the people are missing out on these opportunities. There is therefore a need to bridge this gap.

### Bagmati Province:

- Those in the informal sector were not able to access the relief materials in this province because they were not in the priority list; moreover, the response to COVID-19 was noted as being not too

effective.

- There aren't any programmes for those in the informal sector. One way to ensure that there are targeted programmes for those in the informal sector is by having a dedicated budget that strives to build opportunities at the local level.

#### Gandaki Province:

- In Gandaki province, the returnee migrants are viewed with a certain stigma – this is mainly because of the perceived dangers associated with the pandemic. One way to mitigate the stigma is by spreading awareness on the virus itself, on the ways it spreads, and on the prevention measures.
- An important precautionary step is to collect the data of the people who have entered the local level in the recent days. This should be coupled with separate quarantine and isolation facilities. And in cases where this cannot be managed, provisions for home quarantine should be arranged and overlooked by the local government.
- The youth network can and should be mobilized for such types of campaigns to raise awareness at the community level.

#### Province 5:

- A lot of people in Province 5 have lost their income sources after the onset of the pandemic. It is necessary to document this and provide financial and technical support to these people, particularly those who are the most hard-hit.
- The option of availing grants for loan should also be arranged. This is in addition to creating alternate opportunities such as home-based employment, establishing proper collection centres to facilitate proper market for the producers and consumers.
- For those involved in agriculture, ways to utilize the by-products from agriculture should also be taught. The emphasis should be placed on honing the skills of the people and also providing employment opportunities for them.
- There is a need for targeted programmes from the local and provincial government for those in the informal sector and associated with traditional jobs.

#### Karnali Province:

- Many people in the Karnali province are not complying with the government-imposed restrictions. Although there are committees created to tackle the effects of the virus, they have not been very effective in disseminating information, especially to the vulnerable groups.
- The returnees who came from India were not properly informed about COVID-19, and directly sent to quarantine centres. Because of this people did not take the consequences of this pandemic seriously.
- The youth can be mobilized to spread awareness on this at the community level in a respectful manner.
- For example, in Dailekh, a person had returned from foreign employment in India to Nepal during this pandemic. He had lost his job in India. However, upon his return in Nepal, he was still unable to find a job in his country and how has been compelled to go back to India despite the dangers of the pandemic. He is just one among many such people. To mitigate such cases, the government should introduce provisions where at least one person from each household will be granted employment opportunities.
- There is also scope to encourage the youth to be engaged in agriculture. In Karnali province alone,

there is scope to produce wine from apples; ayurvedic medicines from the myriad of herbs; encourage tourism. This can provide jobs to many people at the local level.

#### Sudurpaschim Province:

- Agriculture is a main source of income in Sudurpaschim province, but post-COVID-19, the income source has decreased. From the survey, 81% respondents stated that their income had decreased. Many people in the province also do not know how to access basic facilities in their own communities. To add to this, there are a lot of returnees who have not found jobs in the country.
- It is important to focus on agriculture and facilitating market for the produce. One way to do this is by distributing high quality fertilizers and seeds for the farmers.
- There is also the need to link skills with opportunities for employment at the community level.

### 6. Recommendations:

- There must be targeted programmes for the welfare of those in the informal sector. There is a need for cross-sectoral collaboration to ensure that there such sort of programmes, especially for workers in the informal sector.
- Opportunities for employment should be created at the local and provincial level so that people do not have to leave their homes in search of employment.
- Skills development training should be provided for unemployed youth so that they can enjoy the option of staying in Nepal and thereby generate job for themselves and others in their communities.
- The government should also provide interest free loan and tax waiver to youths who wish to engage in agriculture as this would incentivise them. Moreover, there needs to be proper monitoring mechanisms at the grassroots to ensure that cooperatives are not over charging interest rates.
- The local government should establish an information centre that disseminates factual information at the community level. This way, all the people in the community are aware of the current happenings, necessary precautionary measures, and alternate ways to sustain their livelihood.
- There needs to be some sort of documentation of those in the informal sector. This will be the first step to bring the sector under the purview of the government.
- The youth can be mobilized who can act as watchdogs to ensure that even those in the informal sector receive access to information, relief distribution, health care – especially in the context of COVID-19.
- Social protection is vital for workers in the informal sector. Additionally, they should be oriented on occupational safety and health standards and measures.

### 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 informal sector need to be accounted for. 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 rights of the marginalized and advocate for proper market linkages.

## ANNEX

### Annex 1: List of Experts and Presenters

Experts: The following expert provided his input in the webinar:

- Harihar Thapa, Vice Chairperson of FNCSI and Chairperson of Gandaki Province of FNCSI

The expert noted the timeliness of the webinar and congratulated all the volunteers for their endeavour. He noted that the plight of those in the informal sector have been aggravated after the crisis. He shared that the survey results from the webinar still paints a positive picture of the current scenario, and that there is more information to delve into. A major suggestion he offered was for having some sort of documentation of those in the informal sector – because the informal economy is not documented, it is very difficult to address it. This would be a crucial step in getting the government’s attention to drive their action. Noting of some of the organizations his organization has been engaged with, he shared that the FNCSI has lobbied with the government and banks to provide relief on loans, to ensure availability of loans. Moreover, he also noted the need to regulated cooperatives who often charge an insurmountable amount of interest to the loans. He also recommended using this report and the survey as an evidence basis.

The following volunteers presented the major issues from their provinces:

Province	District	Name of the volunteers
<b>1</b>	Sunsari	Richa Mandal Dhanuk
<b>2</b>	Dhanusha	Laxmi Shah
<b>Bagmati</b>	Kavre	Punam Shrestha
<b>Gandaki</b>	Baglung	Jhalak Paudel
<b>Province 5</b>	Parasi	Anup Neupane
<b>Karnali</b>	Dailekh	Hari Bahadur Khatri
<b>Sudurpashchim</b>	Kanchanpur	Tikeshwari Bhandari