



# UN Women Nepal COVID-19 Response Strategy

Blazing Trails in the Humanitarian-Development Continuum

October 2020

Supported by:

The Government of Finland

UK Aid

Fondation Chanel



# INTRODUCTION

The corona virus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic swept the world with an unprecedented humanitarian challenge that no country could ever anticipate. When disaster strikes, people are normally presented with an option to grab everything and run away from the epicenter of risk. In this pandemic, however, there is nowhere to run and the only option is to self-protect, learn, embrace resilience and deal with it.

UN Women Nepal had faced many disasters during the past five years. Although it went through a moment of shock and confusion over the enormity of the COVID-19 crisis, UN Women immediately jumped into action - scanned the situation, heeded all precautionary measures from the World Health Organization and the Government of Nepal, and, through joint United Nations (UN) missions, reached out to hear the experiences and

Increasing incidents of maternal deaths, precipitated by lack of, or delayed access to services, rising care burden for women and girls, and swelling statistics on gender-based violence (GBV), including violence against LGBTIQ+ people, can rapidly erode the significant gains made on gender equality and women's empowerment in Nepal.

analysis of the very people who were caught at the maelstrom of the crisis. Backed by over five years of experience in leading the mainstreaming of gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) in all phases of disaster risk reduction, prevention and response, and in collaboration with government, civil society, UN agencies and development partners, UN Women put together its own COVID-19 Response Strategy for Nepal.



The year 2020, marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, was intended to be ground-breaking for gender equality. Instead, with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, even the limited gains made in the past decades are at risk of being rolled back. The pandemic is deepening pre-existing inequalities, and exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems, which are in turn amplifying the impacts of the pandemic.

[UN Secretary-General's Policy Brief](#)

**Impact of COVID-19 on Women**

## CONTINUUM OF CONTEXTUAL COMPLEXITIES

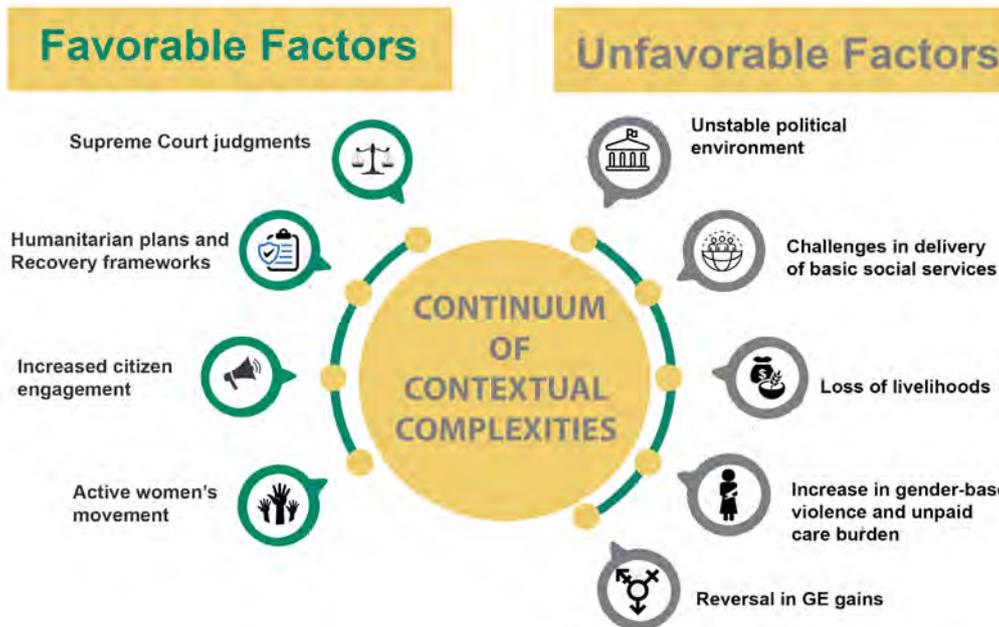
Nepal's fight against COVID-19 rests in a continuum of complexities. It has been made more difficult by a political environment where tension within the party in government persists. Dissonance between and among the three tiers of government also hinders delivery of services. Alleged corruption in the health sector may impact resource mobilization for the pandemic and loss of livelihood and drop in remittances may also upset social cohesion and community harmony.

Increasing incidents of maternal deaths, precipitated by lack of, or delayed access to services, rising care burden for women and girls, and swelling statistics on gender-based violence (GBV), including violence against LGBTIQ+ people, can rapidly erode



Due to increased food insecurity, UN Women's targeted interventions focused on providing relief packages in June 2020.

Photo: UN Women



the significant gains made on gender equality and women’s empowerment in Nepal. Whether the ensuing reverse migration could address the labor and care deficit in Nepal remains uncertain.

Women remain largely invisible in the humanitarian sector’s decision-making fora. The absorptive capacities of partners, including on humanitarian work, continue to be limited, and fatigue and exhaustion have been evident. All of these may have adverse implications to the pace, timeliness, and expanse of UN Women’s implementation of its COVID-19 responses.

Behind this generally bleak prospect, developments in various fronts have been encouraging. Recently, the [Supreme Court](#) ruled out the requirement for citizenship certificate in accessing relief and instructed the Government to repatriate migrant

workers stranded abroad. More importantly, the Court stressed the need to ensure that women’s human rights remain at the center of COVID-19 response. In addition, humanitarian plans have prioritized GESI and ensured that GESI checklists, developed with technical support of UN Women Nepal, remain as integral components of the response plans. The women’s movement in Nepal continues to be at the forefront of responding to the pandemic, with UN Women supporting the build-up of linkages among them and with government. These organisations will require sustained funding to be able to continue to advance gender equality in the pandemic and early recovery stages. Moreover, strong citizen engagement in demanding accountability has been evident in the recent wide scale protest against corruption.

## IMPACTS OF THE PANDEMIC IN NEPAL

People’s lives in Nepal have been drastically worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. UN Women’s participation in a series of joint UN missions to assess the impacts of COVID-19 in the provinces unraveled a highly distressing humanitarian situation, with more severe consequences being borne by women, vulnerable, and excluded groups.

Issues about housing, an imperative for human survival, have erupted in various manifestations, partly spurred by the massive return of migrant workers. Slum dwellers were unable to practice physical distancing in cramped abodes with no electricity and digital means to access life-saving information and support. Returned women



With COVID-19 and all of us at home, we spend more than six hours in the kitchen. The children expect us to give them more food than before. As daughters-in-law, we also feel obliged to do most of the work and we don’t ask for help from anybody. There is nothing being done to change our culture.

**Key Informant Interview, Rapid Gender Analysis (RGA), Kathmandu.**

migrants had to stay in women’s shelters as stigma and discrimination stifle their attempts to rent a domicile. Sex workers faced eviction due to unpaid dwelling rents and women with disability had been mercilessly abandoned in the streets.

Psychological stress was pervasive. Violence linked to caste, religion, race and gender have been reportedly on the rise. Meanwhile, food security started to be imperiled by inability of farmers to procure seeds, fertilizers or animal feed and market their livestock and crops profitably.

## UN WOMEN’S RESPONSE

As a development agency, UN Women has not been traditionally-recognized as a humanitarian player, globally. In Nepal, however, UN Women has not only been a player, but a leader in fostering focus on GESI in humanitarian interventions. Since the April 2015 earthquake, and the ensuing multitude of emergencies caused by recurrent landslides and floods, UN Women has served as catalyst and substantive leader in mainstreaming GESI in all phases of disaster risk reduction, prevention and response. It is not surprising, therefore, that UN Women has accumulated technical skills and resources, alliances, and institutional resilience to function with agility in humanitarian emergencies. It is with these attributes, combined with unfaltering

UN Women takes a development lens to the COVID-19 crisis by focusing on immediate needs, on one hand, and on the other, keeping a long-term view to achieve a transformative shift toward gender equality.

commitment to learning and innovation, that UN Women navigated the nexus of humanitarian and development in Nepal’s COVID-19 context.

## A Comprehensive Human Rights-based Approach

To complement broader efforts by the Government of Nepal, UN Women put forward a comprehensive package of cash transfers and in-kind support for women from excluded groups, covering access to food, clean energy, essential supplies, information, health care, and financial and digital services. UN Women takes a development lens to the COVID-19 crisis by focusing on immediate needs,



on one hand, and on the other, keeping a long-term view to achieve a transformative shift toward gender equality. Its interventions are designed to address immediate humanitarian exigencies of the most vulnerable and excluded women while addressing gender issues, such as discriminatory social norms, harmful practices and GBV. UN Women's objective is to be relevant to the needs and aspirations of the most vulnerable and excluded, while modelling in real time how a comprehensive and inclusive approach looks like. As the Government of Nepal indicated, the call of the time is not to advise or recommend, but to demonstrate 'how things should be done'.

The approach aims to address gaps in the humanitarian intervention system to prevent groups of people from being left behind. It envisions to ensure coherence, avoid duplication, and make UN Women a reliable partner. The approach focuses on four technical components: (a) targeted interventions; (b) gender mainstreaming in humanitarian coordination; (c) capacity development; (d) and strengthening the evidence-base for responses to the pandemic. Supporting these components is an inward-looking package of 'best possible care and support' to the

personnel of UN Women and their families, as well as consultants and partners.

## Component 1: Targeted Interventions

UN Women's engagement in humanitarian work taught an important insight – that responding to immediate survival needs of the victims helps restore a sense of normalcy, which boosts their ability to access support and manage their own recovery. It also opens up entry points for UN Women to gain deeper insights on the crisis and determine the most strategic response to be taken.

From May to August 2020, UN Women delivered a combination of targeted interventions that took into consideration the most critical needs of women from vulnerable and excluded groups.

### Cash support to female-headed households

A total of 600 women heads of households from Provinces 2 and 7 received cash support from UN Women in coordination with the World Food



UN Women partnered with Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC) to provide cash-based support to around 600 female-headed households in three districts of Provinces 2 and 7 in June 2020. Photo: WOREC

Programme. The support aims to enable most vulnerable and excluded households to cope with immediate survival needs, achieve financial autonomy while physical distancing and mobility restrictions impair their income generating ability, and respond to the specific needs of women and excluded groups, especially persons with disabilities. In determining the amount of financial support to be provided to the women, UN Women factored four additional cash components to the multi-purpose cash assistance value established by the Cash Coordination Group. The additional amount covered cash support for child care, pregnancy, breastfeeding, and disability.

### **In-kind support to women from excluded groups**

More than 1,600 women from excluded groups, including returnee migrant workers, received personal protective equipment and hygiene and food supplies from UN Women. The items included mobile phone and data cards; seeds, fertilizers and poultry feed; information on key

services (including health, psychosocial and services related to gender-based violence); food items; induction stoves and cooking gas; and health and hygiene supplies, such as face masks, sanitary napkins and sanitizers.

### **Access to information**

Around 8.7 million individuals received timely and clear information about the pandemic and available services, including responses to gender-based violence and mental health issues through public service announcements (PSAs). UN Women developed and broadcasted radio programs and PSAs through 506 radio stations throughout the country in partnership with the Association of Community Broadcasters, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen (MoWCSC). Information, education and communication materials were also produced and disseminated. The setting up of a virtual, interactive information desk has been initiated, which will serve as an information platform for the



I live on a daily wage, but due to the pandemic, I lost my daily work. It saddened me as I have to feed my child as well. I am now so grateful that Maiti Nepal and UN Women provided us with healthy and nutritious food. During this tough time, there was no one who took care of us but them. The food was fresh. We received rice, lentils, curry, lettuces, pickle, sweets and fruits.

**Tili Damai (Nepalgunj, Ward No. 19)**



Group counseling conducted by WOREC, UN Women’s partner, in a quarantine site in Kailali, Province 7, June 2020. Photo: WOREC

public and a training ground for women's engagement in digital advocacy. The initiative aims to support marginalized communities to take precautionary measures against the risks of COVID-19. It will also widely communicate key messages on norm change, such as the importance of redistributing domestic responsibilities among family members.

## Psychosocial support

To help women and excluded groups maintain robust mental and emotional well-being, UN Women provided two civil society partners (KOSHISH and Youth Thinkers Society) with substantive inputs to design and conduct family counseling and collect information on the quality of responses to the pandemic. UN Women is currently piloting a podcast series to provide online counseling through social media platforms. A dedicated intervention to deliver psychosocial support to persons with disabilities is also being implemented.

## Livelihood support

During the pandemic, 350 home-based workers were supported in producing and distributing protective supplies, such as soaps, sanitizers and face masks. To expand the market for the products, UN Women linked the women with demands from UN agencies, a result of which was a bulk order of 40,000 facemasks from the UNDP. New income-earning opportunities were also created for women who were engaged in running six community kitchens in three provinces. Over 75 women are now using digital marketing through a mobile app *Mero Pasal* (my shop) to directly sell their products. UN Women and its partner, SABAH Nepal, provided women entrepreneurs with business development and start-up support by accessing e-commerce platforms.



Through six community kitchens, 84,597 meals were served to communities of Provinces 3, 5 and 7 in May 2020.  
Photo: Nagarik Aawaz

## Community kitchens and meal distribution at the community level

Through UN Women's support, 84,597 meals were served. In addition, 25,827 individuals from marginalized groups were able to access food and nutrition from six women-managed community kitchens established by UN Women in Provinces 3, 5 and 7. The kitchens managed by Women's Human Rights, Maiti Nepal and Nagarik Aawaz provided income to women who managed the cooking and distribution of food, fostered trust-building in the community, and helped alleviate women's domestic care burden.



Shrawan and Bhadra (July-August) are usually the months where there is a shortage of food for poor people like us. We are thankful that we received healthy and nutritious food at this time. The women and children of the community do not have to sleep with an empty stomach.

**Gyana Khatik (Kohalpur Municipality, Ward No. 14)**



UN Women staff collecting information on quarantine facilities, during the field mission to Province 7 in June 2020. Photo: UNDP

## TARGETED INTERVENTIONS SNAPSHOT OF RESULTS 2020



**Provinces 2, 3 and 7**  
In-kind support  
to **1,600** women  
from excluded groups



**Provinces 2 and 7**  
Cash support to **600**  
female-headed  
households



**Provinces 3, 5 and 7**  
**84,597**  
meals served at  
the community level

### May-August

**National**  
**8.7 Million**  
Outreach through PSAs



### August-September

**Provinces 3 and 7**  
Reskilling of  
**350** women  
home-based workers



**Provinces 3, 5 and 7**  
**25,827** people  
reached through  
community kitchens





UN joint mission to Province 3 for the assessment of quarantine sites in May 2020.  
Photo: UN Women.

## Component 2: Gender Mainstreaming in Humanitarian Coordination

UN Women optimizes its coordination mandate to achieve coherence of approaches and synergy of results among numerous players in the humanitarian field. It exercises substantive leadership as chair of the Gender in Humanitarian Action Task Team (GiHA-TT), co-chair of four working groups of the United Nations Country Team, and as active contributor to the work of all cluster and inter-cluster initiatives of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT). By providing substantive leadership and bringing together multiple initiatives, UN Women helps catalyze collaborative actions to leave no one behind in the responses to the pandemic.

### Integration of GESI in Humanitarian Clusters and in Nepal Preparedness and Response Plan

Within the first 10 days of the pandemic, UN Women drafted [a set of advocacy messages](#) for inclusion of GESI in the COVID-19 response,

which was adopted by the HCT. The need for strong focus on GESI was also recognized across the seven activated clusters of the HCT. The HCT also developed a '[COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan](#)' and a '[Monsoon Emergency Preparedness Plan](#)' with strong focus on GESI. These would help strengthen the access to timely information, services, resources and opportunities by vulnerable women and girls.

### GESI profile and checklist for emergency preparedness in the COVID-19 context

In support of the HCT's campaign to ensure that the concerns of women, vulnerable and excluded groups are prioritized in the responses to the pandemic, the '[Nepal GESI Profile](#)' and '[GESI checklist in Disaster/Emergency Preparedness in the COVID-19 Context](#)' were developed and published at the UN Nepal's website. The GESI Profile provides critical information on the most pressing GESI issues in Nepal that must be addressed in responding to the pandemic.

## Virtual dialogues of women, vulnerable and excluded groups with GiHA-TT members

The GiHA-TT is a multi-stakeholder dialogue platform comprised of government, civil society and development partners. It has served as a constructive virtual dialogue platform, honoring diversity of voices, demonstrating thought leadership and enabling greater coherence for coordination of efforts around GESI. Through 13 online meetings facilitated by UN Women, over 1,000 representatives of government, civil society organizations, development partners, and UN agencies listened to the emerging concerns of women and excluded groups, including LGBTIQ+ people, to inform their respective responses to the pandemic.

## Joint UN missions to assess the quality of services in quarantine sites and holding centres

UN Women actively engaged in four joint UN fact-finding missions in Provinces 1, 2, 3 and 7 during the lockdown to assess the realities and conditions in the points of entry, quarantine sites, and transition centres to improve service delivery. The findings were used to inform UN agencies' programming, coordination and advocacy to ensure the incorporation of GESI in the government's responses to the pandemic.

## Localization of UN Socio Economic Response (SER)

UN Women led the 4<sup>th</sup> pillar of the SER, on social cohesion and community resilience. Interventions under this pillar have been designed to address loss of livelihoods, loss of trust and increase in discrimination and inequalities as drivers of conflict.

A number of consultations with representatives of women and various vulnerable and excluded groups, including LGBTIQ+ people, were conducted to help identify their emergent concerns in the COVID-19 pandemic, along with recommendations on how those concerns could be addressed. The SER will serve as the guiding strategic document for all UN agencies in Nepal for the next 18 months.

## Gender Equality Updates

UN Women also developed and published nine [Gender Equality Updates](#) on the UN Nepal and UN Women's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP) websites, highlighting the emerging issues raised by women and excluded groups in the GiHA - TT meetings and the actions expected from duty bearers to ensure that Nepal's response and recovery interventions are inclusive and gender responsive.



UN Team before boarding the flight for a mission to Province 2 in July 2020. Photo: UNFPA

## Component 3: Capacity Development

UN Women advances incremental build-up of capacity among its partners. It enables women, vulnerable and excluded groups to raise their voice, lead in response initiatives, and hold duty bearers accountable for the delivery of GESI oriented response to the pandemic. It also calls upon government decision makers to create formal spaces for women's participation and leadership in the national coordination and response mechanisms and supports the development of shared advocacy agenda for women's networks.

### Storytelling: Innovative and co-creation method of building evidence base

UN Women believes in the power of storytelling to uncover hidden information about people's experiences that other research methods could not capture. Its participatory and reflective approach enables storytellers to articulate and process complex realities in their life and share a vision of their desired change. It captures intersectionality of identities, conveys the cultural context of the storyteller, and leaves them more 'resourced' rather than diminished.

Its empowering potential is strong and so is its power to facilitate norm change. The conversion of story narratives into quantitative data will allow

UN Women and its partners to discern patterns of scale, showing insights that could illuminate efforts to bring about positive change on gender relations and transform the lives of women, girls and the vulnerable and excluded people of Nepal.

Thus, UN Women works to strengthen the capacity of women and women's groups for reflective articulation and documentation of their ideas, experiences, insights and recommendations to achieve norm change. In collaboration with the Embassy of Finland and Gender@Work, a methodology for storytelling is being piloted. A virtual training of trainers was conducted in September this year. It has been piloted in Province 3 while plans for piloting the training in Province 7 is work in progress.

### Charter of Demands by networks of women, vulnerable and excluded groups

Within the first month of the pandemic, UN Women assisted three leading women's networks (Women Friendly Disaster Management, Women Humanitarian and Disaster Risk Reduction Platform and Inter-generational Feminist Group) to develop a common [charter of demands](#), which articulates the most pressing needs of their constituents. It now serves as an advocacy piece of women, vulnerable and excluded groups on GESI responses to the pandemic, including at the local level. Among other demands, the advocates called for safer critical infrastructures and urged authorities to move from 'building back better' to 'building back differently'. The charter of demands was submitted to chief executives of seven municipalities, four provinces, and eight national government entities.

### GESI Checklist for Monitoring of Facilities Responding to COVID-19

A [checklist](#), which sets the gold standards for establishing, operating and providing GESI-responsive quarantine services to persons under monitoring/investigation for COVID-19 infection, was developed and disseminated by the MoWCSC with support from UN Women. Incorporating specific considerations to meet the particular needs of women, girls, children, LGBTIQ+ people, elderly and people living with disabilities in times of disaster, the checklist helps stakeholders monitor and evaluate



Community members participating in a focus group discussion during the joint storytelling mission in Province 7 in 2019. Photo: UN Women

the quality of facilities and services provided in the centres. The checklist has been used by the National Women's Commission in its provincial monitoring of COVID-19 response facilities.

## Feminist GBV and psychological support model

A long-term intervention on psychosocial support is being designed in collaboration with the MoWCSC. Partnership will be established with a civil society organization to pilot its use and demonstrate what a feminist model to psychosocial and mental well-being could look like.

## Component 4: Strengthening the Evidence-base for Responses to the Pandemic

Effective programming in the rapidly-changing context of the pandemic has been increasingly dependent on real-time organic data, where intelligent analysis of issues and solutions are drawn from the very people who directly experience the crisis. To build its resources as a reliable partner, UN Women focuses on engaging a multitude of stakeholders to generate meaningful evidence to illuminate decision making and planning to address the crisis.

### Rapid gender analysis (RGA)

The [RGA](#) identified the impacts of COVID-19 on

diverse gender and social groups and generated evidence to support government, UN and development partners in developing GESI measures to address the pandemic. It was completed with funding support of Multi-partner Trust Fund – Department for International Development (MPTF-DFID) and in collaboration with the MoWCSC, CARE and Save the Children.

The RGA revealed increased violence against women and girls, trapping them with their perpetrators during the lockdown and increasing mental health issues for women and men, including suicide. Women from marginalized groups are most affected and response mechanisms appear inadequate. Misinformation and stigmatization of health workers are common. Ownership of assets remains unchanged and women are losing control over savings. There has been no significant change in gender roles, and the lack of access to services by marginalized communities has worsened. The RGA recommended that response packages focus on the most vulnerable, norm change, women's participation and leadership, data systems, reduction of work burdens of women and girls, access to information and psychosocial services, especially for intersectional groups, and GESI awareness for response and security personnel.

### Nationwide digital survey

Evidence to support policy and programming for the pandemic were collected from 8,204 respondents nationwide. In collaboration with MoWCSC, NCell, a leading mobile service provider in Nepal, and ROAP, a [nationwide digital survey](#) was conducted, which resulted in important analyses of gender - related challenges, including women's unpaid care burden and lack of access to information.

The survey found out that since the spread of COVID-19, (a) only about 63 per cent of the population received helpful information; (b) the pandemic is disproportionately affecting women's mental and emotional health; (c) women are experiencing more difficulties in accessing medical supplies, hygiene products and food; (d) informal workers are losing work and formal workers are working less hours; (e) the lockdown has multiplied the work at home and women are carrying the heaviest burden; and (f) COVID-19 has prompted everyone to help more at home, but women and girls still help the most.



## Rapid Gender Analysis Report on COVID-19 Nepal, 2020



A quarantine assessment being conducted by women from marginalized groups in Kailali, Province 7 in June 2020. Photo: WOREC

## Assessment of situation of rural women farmers

Funded by the MPTF-Norway and Sweden, and in collaboration with Equal Access International, a micro assessment of the challenges faced by rural women farmers was conducted in two districts. The result presented an analysis of the specific needs of rural women farmers, such as losses incurred from fissures in the food supply chain and impacts of reverse migration, including on family members.

## Component 5: Looking inward – to be able to look outward

UN Women recognizes that the best service to the people of Nepal could only be delivered if its personnel and staff enjoy the highest state of well-being. Thus, UN Women's response to the pandemic is anchored upon an inward-looking approach to support its staff and personnel in working and operating in a different, unusual and difficult situation. This approach entails:

- (a) placing care for the staff and personnel at the center of UN Women's concerns;
- (b) managing the impact of COVID-19 on staff/personnel and their families; and
- (c) ensuring business continuity and strong contributions to respond to COVID-19 in Nepal.

The circle of support has been expanded to cover UN Women's consultants and key partners.

## Cognitive coaching and reading circle

UN Women's cognitive coaching initiative prompts deep reflection and fosters cognitive capacity to manage stress and improve focus, especially during a pandemic. The coaching sessions foster sustained well-being and enhance coping skills of UN Women's personnel and staff through individual and group cognitive exercises. In addition, UN Women staff and personnel regularly come together online to engage in thought-provoking discussions on selected readings. Key learnings from the discussions are synthesized as part of its knowledge base and applied in programme implementation and policy advocacy, especially in light of the pandemic.

## Individual consultations

Confidential individual consultations with a designated counsellor have been made available to all staff and personnel whenever they need it. This intervention serves as an assurance that no one would be left alone to manage the stress of operating in a highly challenging context. The consultations help foster positivity, ensure business continuity, and keep the staff grounded on commitments and principles that support high-level of performance by the office and its individual staff/personnel.

# STORIES FROM THE FIELD:

## Helping Women Rise Above the Pandemic

In the midst of hopelessness, two of the women supported by UN Women through SABAH Nepal found a stronger sense of purpose and self-worth. Parbati Oad and Deepa Bohara Bhattarai of Kailali, were successfully engaged in their respective livelihoods and earning stable income before the pandemic. Oad ran a tailoring training center for women, while Bhattarai had a hosiery shop. Both of their businesses ceased to be profitable under a drastically changed context.

Oad and Bhattarai were participants of UN Women’s support to women’s economic empowerment. During the pandemic, they were both stricken by severe anxiety over the collapse of their business and the prospect of their respective families sliding into poverty. Their situation was turned around when SABAH Nepal introduced them to skills in the production of personal protective gears and equipment, hospital aprons and face masks.

Adhering to the protective health policies mandated by the government, they both bounced back to business. Oad produced 4,000 face masks and several operation aprons for doctors. She earned NPR 12,000 (approx. USD 102) from April to June and continues to receive orders from local vendors and Seti Provincial Hospital. According to her, “this is something new for me. It has been a good experience. Economic independence matters, but it feels very good to support people during this pandemic.” She uses a mobile app for marketing and her firm has acquired recognition as a legal entity.

Bhattarai connected with local organizations and suppliers to generate orders. She has sold around 7,000 face masks and continues to produce school bags, dresses and sweaters, from which she has earned around NPR 20,000 (approx. USD 171). She said that the business made her more financially stable and credits her success to the support of UN Women and her family. She also uses phone app for marketing and has been advertising to the local government. She distributed masks and soap to 140-150 households of Dhanchauri Village.



This business has made me more stable financially. I hope to continue working in this sector/trade and expand my operation. My family members have been extremely supportive.

**Deepa Bohara Bhattarai, Kailali, Province 7**



Varieties of masks prepared by Parbati during COVID-19, Kailali district, June 2020.  
Photo: Dal Bahadur Oli

## REFLECTION

UN Women proceeds from a philosophy that the current crisis could be converted into an opportunity to address structural barriers to gender equality through innovative solutions. The comprehensive package of support, which includes cash and in-kind support, re-skilling, psychosocial and leadership components, is an example of how it could be done. Using storytelling as an innovative method in generating data from the most marginalized is another example of how to get deeper insight on how change takes place, to better position UN Women in designing GESI interventions while going forward. The lack of clarity across government on key issues, like cash support, has been delaying the response. Even during the lockdown context, the government was still debating about 'cash for work' when repeatedly, women and excluded groups have pressed for basic income and the distribution of cash support.

Hopefully, the recent [Supreme Court judgment](#) will address the invisibility of women in high-level decision making. The reference to several GiHA documents and GESI checklists in the ruling of the Supreme Court is indicative of the growing recognition of UN Women's contributions to policy making in the humanitarian sector. Piloting of interventions would receive added momentum in 2021. Remaining relevant requires risk taking. Basic income support combined with other social protection measures is an idea whose time has come. With this, UN Women hopes to meet the expectation of the Nepal Government to shift from providing advice and recommendations to 'demonstrating how things should be done'.

More importantly, UN Women has been blessed with a strong relationship with funding partners, like the Government of Finland and Fondation Chanel, who were receptive to repurposing and demonstrated flexibility. The Government of Finland and UK Aid were also very open to the comprehensive package of support approach, which enabled the immediate distribution of cash, combined with in-kind and reskilling for sustainable livelihoods. This nimbleness has enabled UN Women to innovate, be relevant and take risks with the cash-based interventions.

## MOVING FORWARD

Moving forward, UN Women will continue to blaze pathways in the humanitarian-development continuum to confront the challenges spurred by COVID-19 in Nepal. The traditional divide between humanitarian and development fields has been bridged in the Istanbul World Humanitarian Summit of 2016. Paragraphs 39 to 41 of the Outcome of the Summit, articulate a commitment to transcend the humanitarian-development divide, including through collective outcomes and joined-up programming based on comparative advantages of actors in the given crises. The UN Secretary General urged *"all Member States to recognize the transformative impact that transcending the humanitarian-development divide can have on ensuring more resilient and inclusive communities and to lend their support to achieving it."*

UN Women will continue to assert the agenda of gender equality, women's empowerment and social inclusion in this continuum, bearing in mind paragraph 8 of the Summit Report, which states that: *"The women and women's groups expect to be more empowered and better resourced in order to participate and lead in building community resilience, humanitarian response and peacebuilding, and to have their specific needs and rights met in crises. As a result, children, young people, persons with disabilities, older people and other groups that are uniquely vulnerable in crises will be included to a greater degree in decision-making and will benefit from more targeted financing."*

The vulnerable and excluded groups comprise over half of Nepal's population. Since the resilience principle of humanitarian approach relies heavily on people's resources to address emergencies and bring back normalcy, the imperatives of GESI could never be overemphasized in this evolving context of the pandemic.

## References

- CARE, Save the Children and UN Women (2020). Major findings and recommendations. Report Summary, Rapid Gender Analysis on COVID-19. Nepal. June.
- Maiti Nepal (2020). Activities carried out during the reporting period and Human-interest stories. A Progress Report on Support to Vulnerable Women Group Addressing Immediate Short-term Need Including Supporting the Women-led Community Kitchen. Nepal. August.
- SAARC Business Association of Home-based Workers Nepal (2020). Case study 2 and 3. Third Progress Report on the Provision of Comprehensive Services for the Economic Empowerment of Women under the Leveraging Women's Leadership and Empowerment in Value Chains". Nepal. June.
- United Nations, General Assembly (2016). Report of the Secretary General, Outcome of the World Humanitarian Summit, Seventy-first session Item 70 (a) of the provisional agenda: Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations. 23 August. A/71/353.
- United Nations Nepal Country Team, Nepal (2020). The COVID-19 crisis. UN Framework for Responding to the Socio-economic Impacts of COVID-19 in Nepal, Final Draft. Nepal. 31 August.
- United Nations, Secretary General (2020). Policy brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women. 20 April.
- UN Women, Women Count (2020). RGA surveys, key findings. Making Every Woman and Girl Count: Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Nepal in Partnership with the Private Sector, a presentation by Cecilia Tinonin and Sara Valero. Nepal.
- UN Women Nepal Country Office (2020). UN Women's COVID-19 response in Nepal. Partnership with Embassy of Finland on Gender Equality, a presentation by UN Women Nepal Country Office. Nepal. September.
- UN Women Nepal Country Office (2020). Storytelling for measuring change. Capturing Transformative Change Through Storytelling, a presentation by UN Women Nepal Country Office. Nepal.
- Women for Human Rights – Single Women Group (2020). Implementation of the project and human-interest stories. Progress Report for UN Women on Community Kitchen Program. Nepal. 2 September.