



© Sajana Shrestha

Impact of Covid-19 Measures on Vulnerable Communities in Earthquake-Affected Areas Need Assessment Report

People in Need, Nepal

July 2020



m e m b e r o f

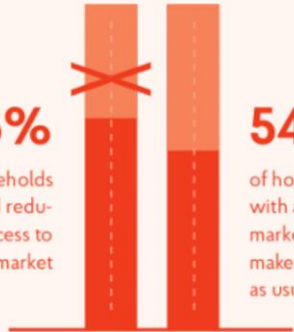
Alliance 2015

towards the eradication of poverty



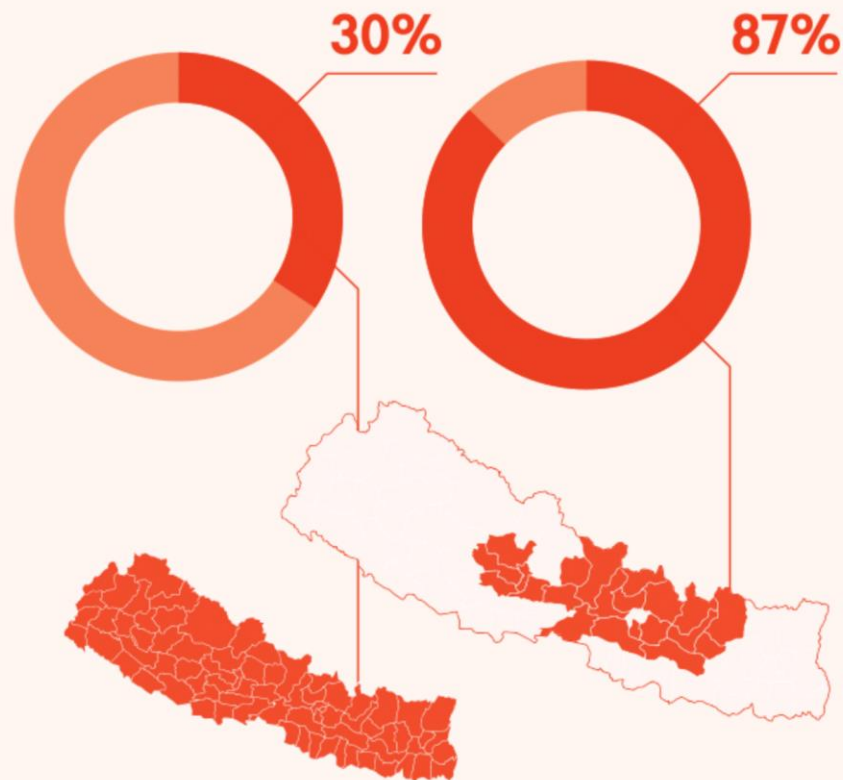
65%

of households reported reduced access to market



54%

of households with access to market could not make purchases as usual



The overall average in Nepal for loss of income due to COVID-19 restrictions is 30%. However, in earthquake-affected areas, this number jumps to 87%



61%

rely on skilled or unskilled daily wage work as their main source of income

11%

Reported reducing their meal consumption to once a day



Impact of COVID-19 Measures on Vulnerable Communities in Earthquake-Affected Areas

Need Assessment Report
People in Need, Nepal

65% 
Faced food shortages

among which

51%

had food supplies sufficient for 2.5 weeks or less



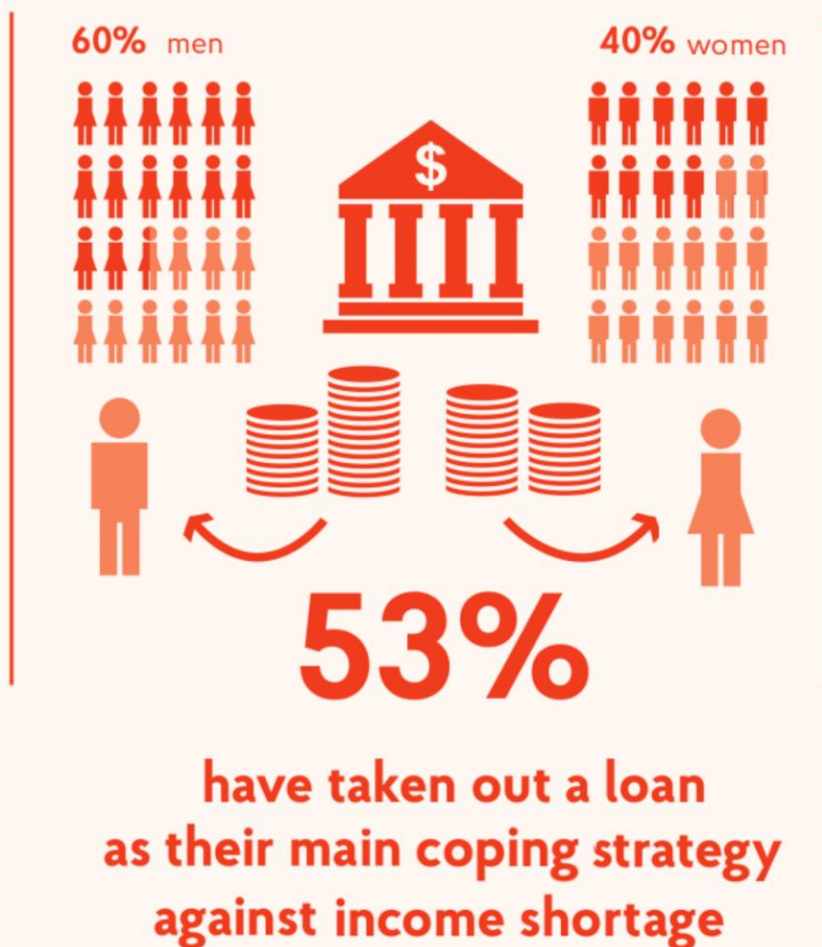
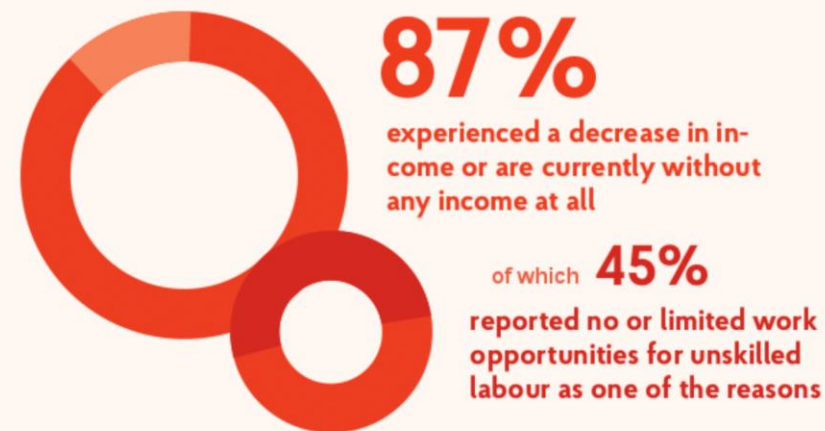
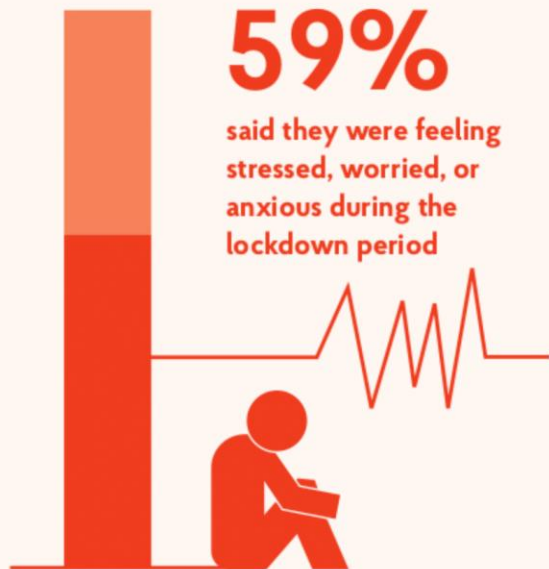


Table of Contents

1.....	Introduction & Assessment Objectives	1
2.....	Methodology	1
3.....	Demographics	2
4.....	Limitations	3
5.....	Main Findings	3
5.1.....	Access to Services and COVID-19 Information	3
5.2.....	Market Access & Food Security	4
5.3.....	Livelihoods	5
5.4.....	WASH	7
5.5.....	Education	8
5.6.....	Emotional Well-being	8
5.7.....	Protection	9
5.8.....	Shelter, Relocation & Reconstruction	10
5.9.....	Government's COVID-19 Relief Program	10
6.....	Pre-Existing Vulnerabilities & Impact of COVID-19 Measures	11
7.....	Conclusion	13
Table 1. Disaggregated Findings		15

Acronyms

CSRC – Community Self Reliance Centre
DAO – District Administration Office
DCC – District Coordination Committee
DFID – Department for International Development
DLPIU – District Level Project Implementation Unit
DLRF – District Land Rights Forum
EQ – Earthquake
IDP – Internally Displaced People
FCHV – Female Community Health Volunteers
GMALI – Grant Management and Local Infrastructure
GP – Gaunpalika (Rural Municipality)
NP – Nagarpalika (Urban Municipality)
NRA – National Reconstruction Authority
PIN – People in Need
PLWD – People Living with Disability

1. Introduction & Assessment Objectives

In response to COVID-19 measures, including the nationwide lockdown imposed by the Government of Nepal (GoN) in late March, PIN and its partner CSRC conducted a remote needs assessment to ascertain the impact of these unprecedented measures on the most vulnerable households affected by 2015 earthquake.

The assessment's **main objectives** were to:

- **Understand** the degree to which COVID-19 measures had affected the most vulnerable communities two months into the lockdown
- **Identify** the needs and capacities of these communities to cope with the unprecedented situation; and
- **Share** findings with the wider development community and key stakeholders to inform potential response and long-term support

This survey reached out to two main groups. The first group included **vulnerable households from predominantly marginalized and underprivileged backgrounds** from Chitwan and Dhading districts that PIN has supported as part of its technical assistance for shelter reconstruction. The second group included **EQ-affected former IDPs enrolled in the NRA's [Durable Solutions](#) program** that opted for voluntary resettlement to areas safe from geo-hazards. The latter group has been supported by PIN and CSRC since early 2017.

2. Methodology

The survey combined quantitative and qualitative techniques, and primarily used **key informant interviews (KII) with pre-identified focal persons** including:

1. Community representatives (Teachers, Female Community Health Volunteers, Community Female Groups, etc.)
2. Local authorities (Nagarpalika Mayors, Gaupalika Chairpersons, Ward Chairpersons, Ward Members, etc.)
3. Government authorities relevant to relocation and reconstruction (GMALI, DLPIU, DCC, DAO, etc.)

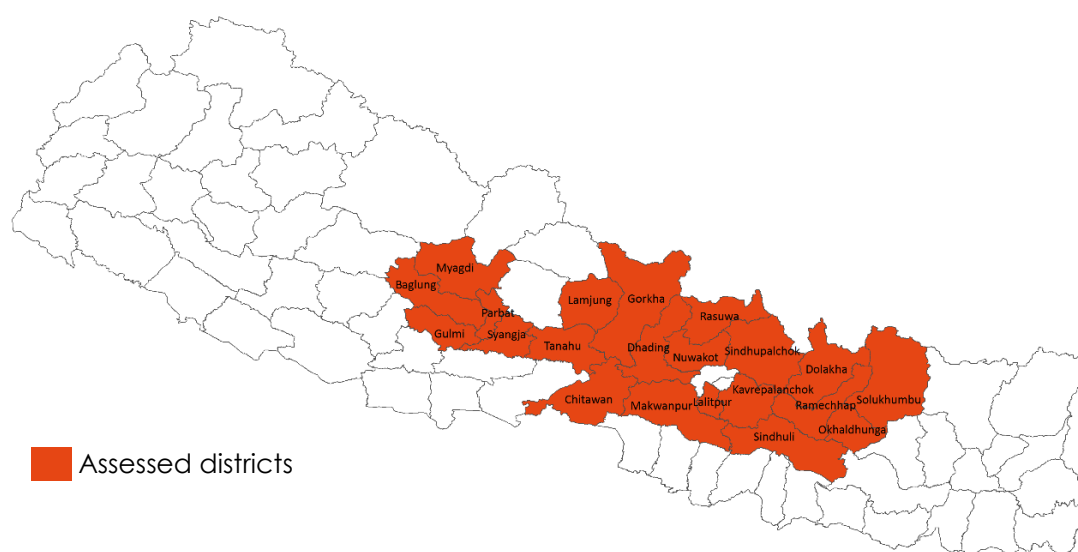
Survey teams carried out **135 KIIs** with community representatives and government officials (68 and 67 respectively). While KIIs with community members focused on understanding community needs and capacities, those with government officials discussed the current situation and response programs available in target areas.

The survey was designed to identify the needs and capacities of communities through multi-sectoral lens, including questions on **WASH, livelihoods, shelter, access to services or protection, and emotional well-being**. The remaining questions covered general knowledge and awareness of beneficiaries of the COVID-19 outbreak.

The overall sample size was derived from a sampling method of 95% confidence level and 3.89% margin of error, with 17,200 as the total population. Hence, **613 structured interviews** with randomly selected project beneficiaries were administered between 8-18 May 2020.

In light of COVID-19 precautions and lockdown restrictions, all interviews were conducted through mobile phone and stored in an online app called “Kobo collect”. Government officials and communities were duly asked for consent before conducting interviews. PIN’s MEAL department oriented the program’s experienced enumeration team on both tools before rolling out the assessment. All interviews were conducted from Kathmandu. Data collected from both tools were consolidated and analyzed to complement findings.

Districts from four provinces were covered by the assessment viz. Okhaldhunga, Solukhumbu (Province 1); Chitwan, Dhading, Dolakha, Kavrepalanchok, Lalitpur, Makwanpur, Nuwakot, Ramechhap, Rasuwa, Sindhuli, Sindhupalchok (Province 3); Baglung, Gorkha, Lamjung, Myagdi, Parbat, Syangja, Tanahu (Province 4); and Gulmi (Province 5).



3. Demographics

Demographics can be divided into three parts viz. government officials, community representatives (qualitative), and households (quantitative).

i. KII Respondent – Government Officials & Community Representatives

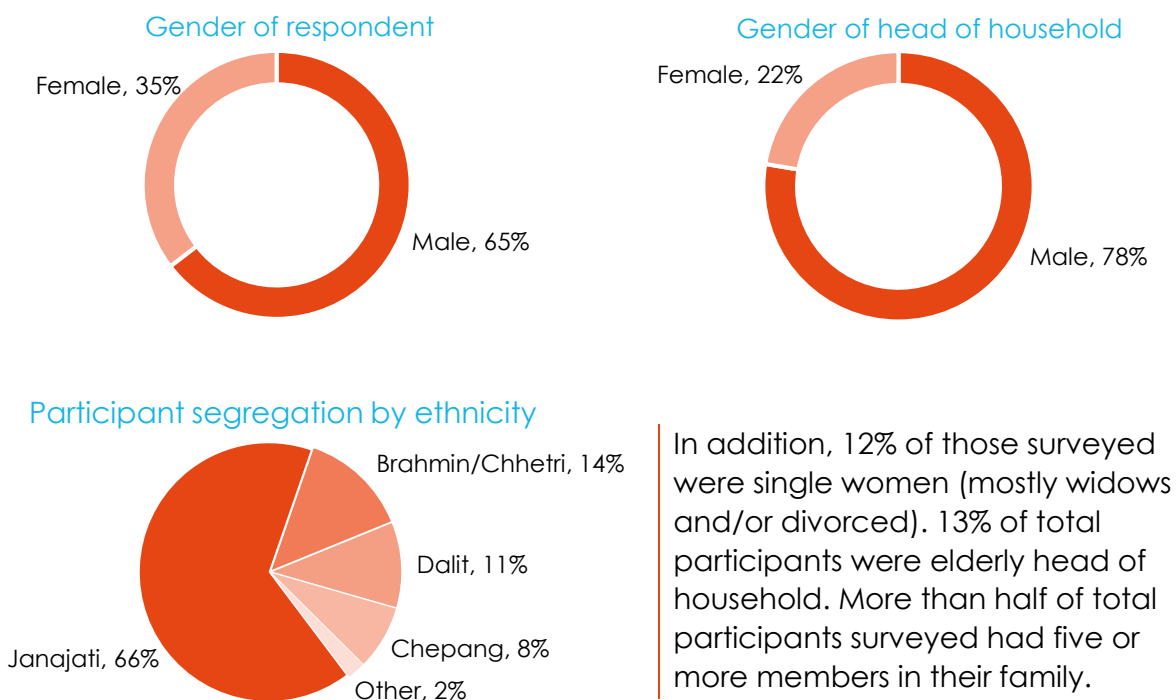
Of the total 67 government officials interviewed, 81% were male and 29% female. This is because government offices related to relocation and reconstruction are predominantly occupied by males. Among the 67 officials, 54% were GP/Ward chairpersons, 34% were DLPIU and GMALI staff, and 12% were DCC or DAO staff.

In total, 68 community representatives participated in the survey, out of which 54% were female and 46% were male. Participants included teachers, FCHVs, social workers and DLRf members.

ii. Household Survey

Of the 613 interviews administered in total, 65% were male and 35% were female. Of the households surveyed, 78% were headed by male and 22% by female. In terms of

ethnicity, 66% of households were Janajati, 14% Brahmin/Chhetri, 11% Dalit, 8% Chepang, and 2% other.



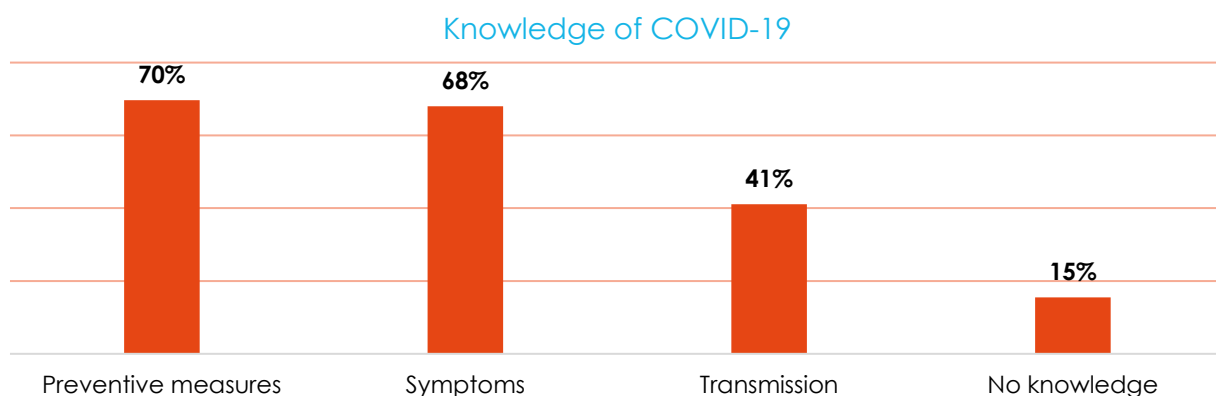
4. Limitations

1. Conducting interviews over phone necessitated a short questionnaire, which in turn limited the possibility of covering all necessary information.
2. Language barrier issues increased in comparison to person-to-person interviews. However, whenever available, an individual nearby (family member or neighbor) was approached to act as a translator on the phone.
3. Distant interviews on the phone may not provide extensive opportunity to ascertain data validation as compared to person-to-person interviews.

5. Main Findings

5.1. Access to Services and COVID-19 Information

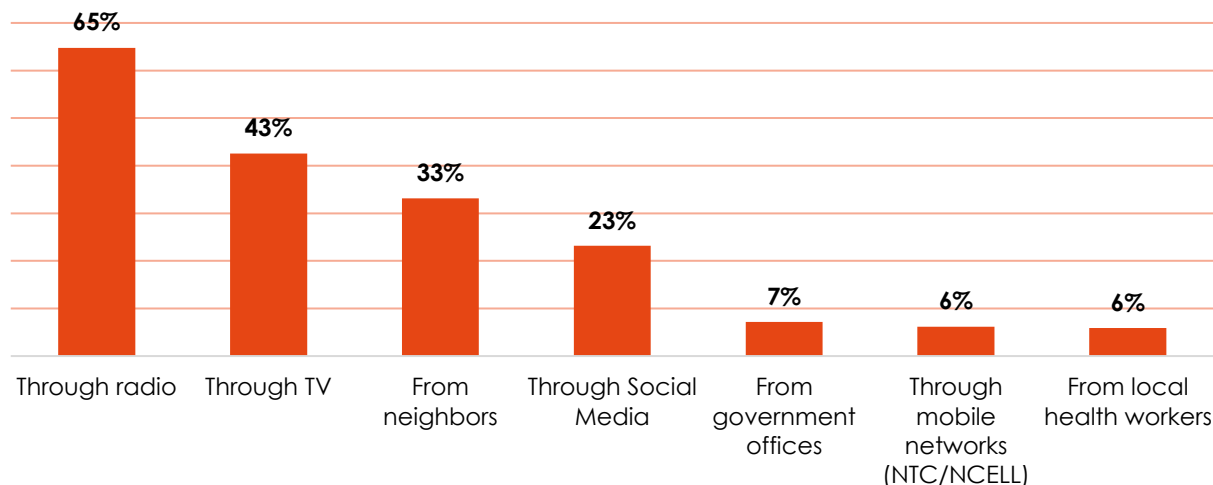
About **85% had some knowledge of COVID-19**. 70% of total participants had knowledge about preventive measures, while 68% knew about COVID-19 symptoms. **15% of households did not know anything about COVID-19.**



Participants mentioned fever and dry cough as the main symptoms they were aware of, while washing hands with soap and water, maintaining proper distance from each other, and staying home were the most cited preventive measures.

Most participants learned about COVID-19 from radio (65%) and television (43%).

Source of COVID-19 information



66% reported that they did not know whether there had been any response program implemented or planned by the government. 84% of those who knew said it was food distribution program.

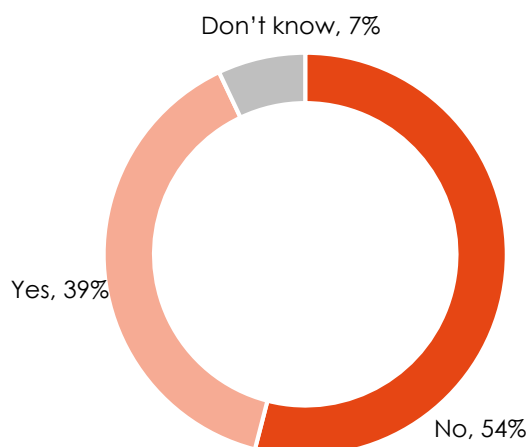
5.2. Market Access & Food Security

65% reported less access to local markets compared to pre-lockdown and, of these households, 66% stated that they were unable to buy items as usual.

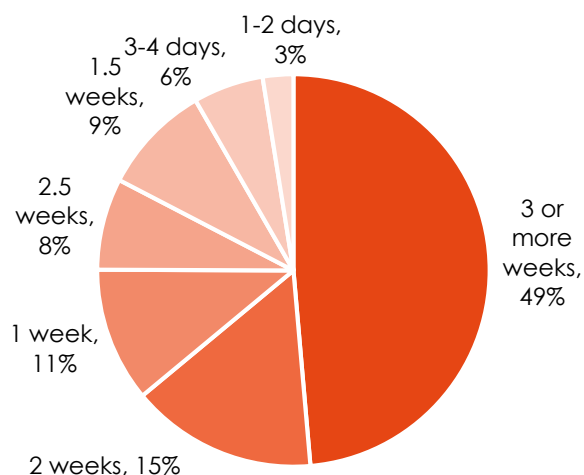
65% reported that they have been able to access the market at least one day in the past seven days to buy food items. However, **only 35% reported that they could make purchases as usual.**

65% reported having food. Of those who had stored food, **49% said their supply would be sufficient for three weeks or more.**

Households able to make same amount of purchase as before



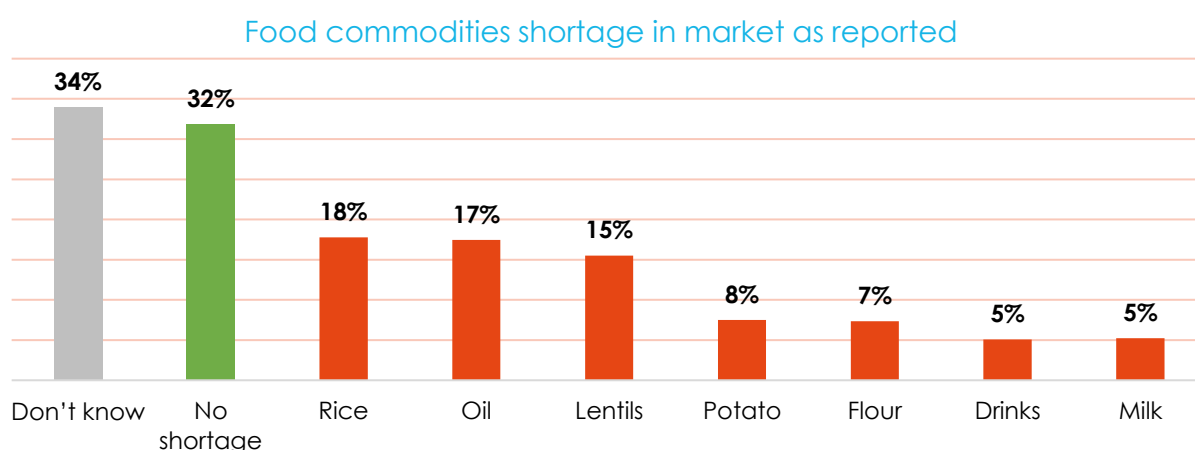
Food supply would be sufficient for



85% said they purchased their food stock from a local shop (i.e. small shops in the village or settlement rather than main market). 65% also said their food stock also consisted of homegrown agriculture.

“Stored foods and soaps are about to finish. Police don't let us get through the road, the shopkeeper denies us credit. Things are getting difficult for us.”
EQ-affected 67-year old male beneficiary

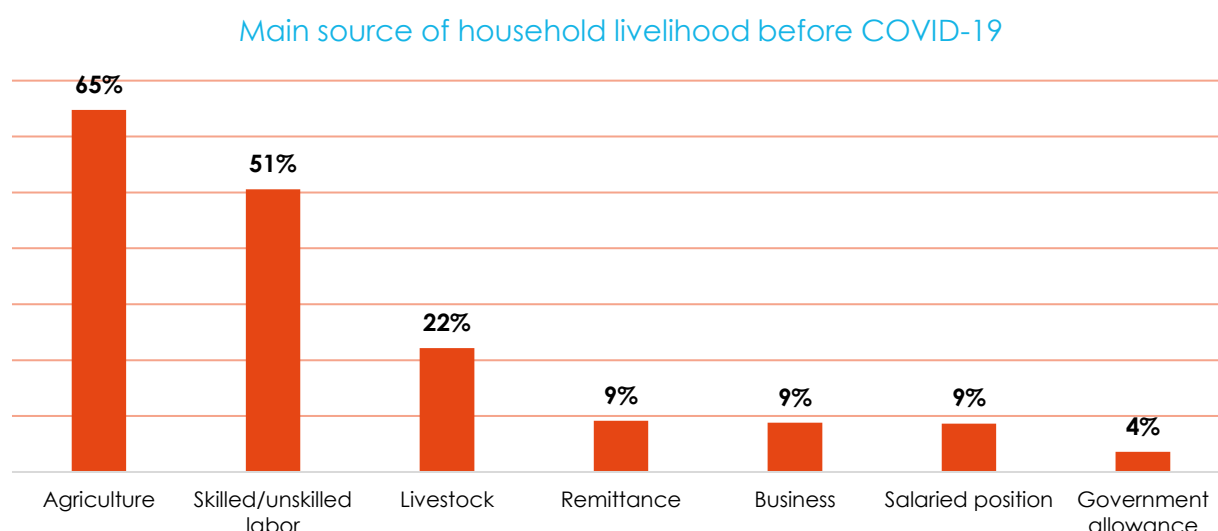
When asked “what food items are in shortage in the market?” 32% responded there was no food shortage. On other hand, 35% said they did not know whether there was a shortage.



30% of those who did/could not access the market in recent days said low purchasing power due to a decrease of income was one of the reasons behind their inability to access the market. 33% reported feeling unsafe due to COVID-19. Since the lockdown, **11% reported reducing their meal consumption to once a day.**

5.3. Livelihoods

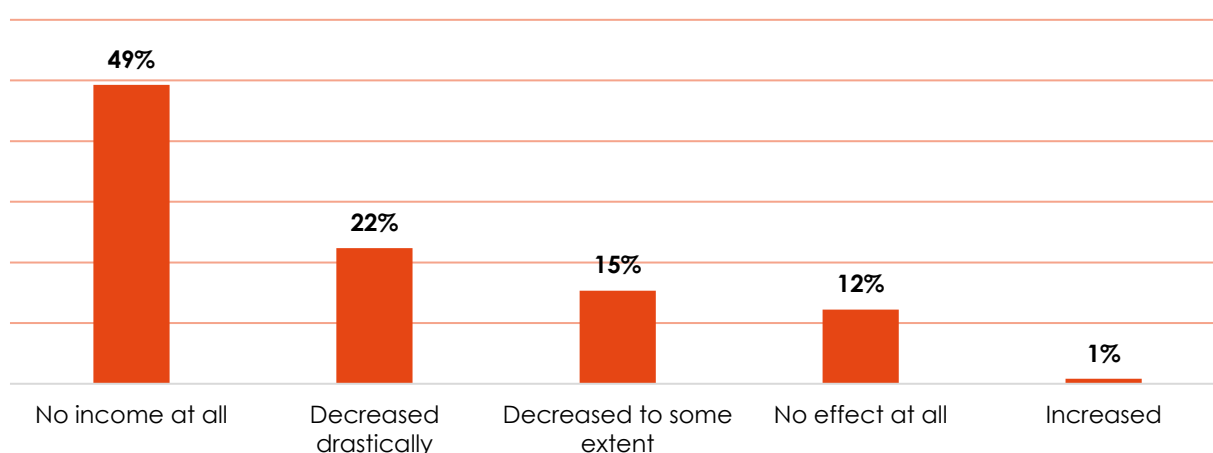
Agriculture (65%), skilled/unskilled labor (51%), and livestock (22%) were reported as the main sources of household livelihood.



87% reported a drop in income and many reported not having any income at all due to COVID-19 and the lockdown. Many families are also dependent on remittances, which equally decreased due to a shortage of jobs abroad and service closures.

When compared with a recent study carried out jointly by Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development and WFP¹, the **impact on the income of households interviewed as part of this assessment has been almost three times higher than the nationwide average of 30%** (Gandaki Province 22%, Bagmati 28%).

How has COVID-19 and lockdown affected income?

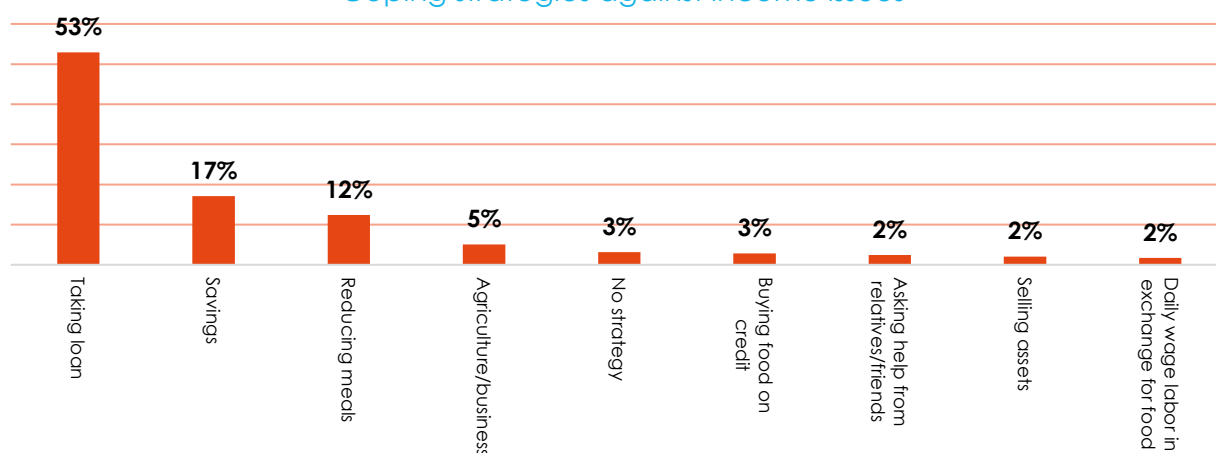


Of those who reported a negative impact on income due to COVID-19 measures (87%), 56% were previously engaged in skilled or unskilled labor work. 45% reckoned that limited or no job opportunities for unskilled labor in their area was one of the main reasons for decreased income, and 44% cited government restrictions as another reason. Closure of relevant shops or market places were mentioned by 32% participants.

While communities are facing challenges due to decreased income, very few options for coping with the situation remain available. Of those who had seen drop in income, **53% reported taking a loan to cope with the economic pressures (40% female, 60% male)**. In addition, few also reported buying food on credit from local shops.

¹ Ibid.

Coping strategies against income issues

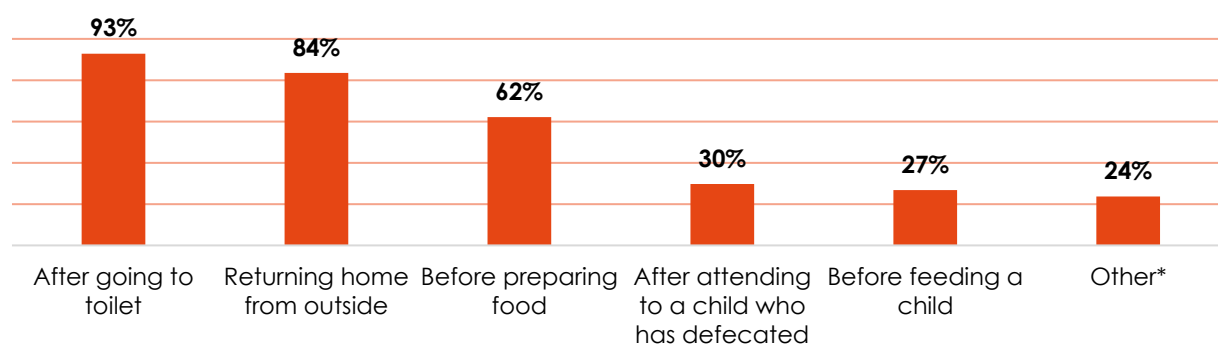


"My sons used to work as a daily wage laborer, and one used to work as a public bus conductor. After lockdown all of them have stayed home and we don't have any income. To this day, we have been taking goods on credit, but if the lockdown continues, we won't be able to survive as my family is very big and we need more food." EQ-affected 42-year old female beneficiary

5.4. WASH

In general, communities said that they were practicing good hygiene. 93% said they washed their hands after returning home from outside.

In the past two days, when did you wash your hands?

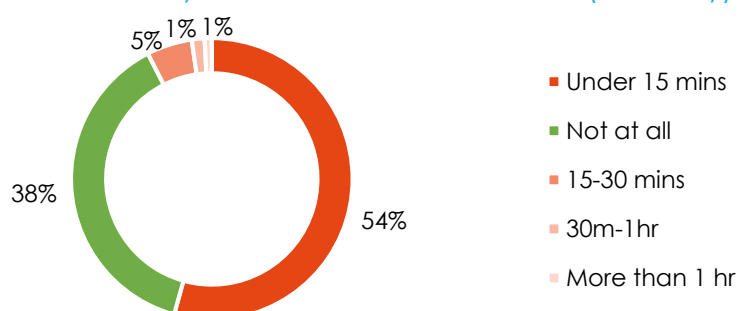


*Other: returning from field, after contact with animals, before having meal.

95% of participants reported that they washed their hands using soap and water. On the other hand, 85% reported having sufficient water supply for the household.

38% reported they do not need to travel at all to access water as they have a tap installed in their households. Others reported water source at near proximity.

How far do you need to travel for water (one way)?

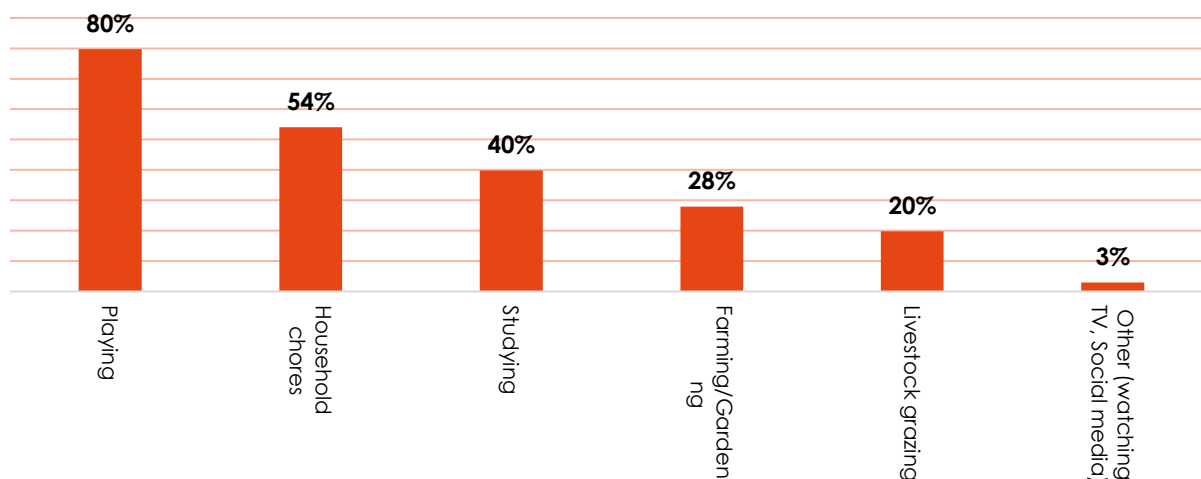


About 66% reported that an adult woman from the household normally goes to fetch water, whereas 8% reported elderly men/women also fetch water. **13% reported they do not feel safe while going to fetch water.**

5.5. Education

About 72% of households had school-aged children. As all schools are closed due to lockdown measures, children are reported to be mostly playing around the house. **56% reported a halt in their children's education as one of the main challenges during lockdown.** Access to online learning has been largely non-existent for these communities, adding to the worries of parents for the future of their children's education. 62% of women said that the halt in education was a major issue, compared to 52% of male respondents.

How children spend time at home

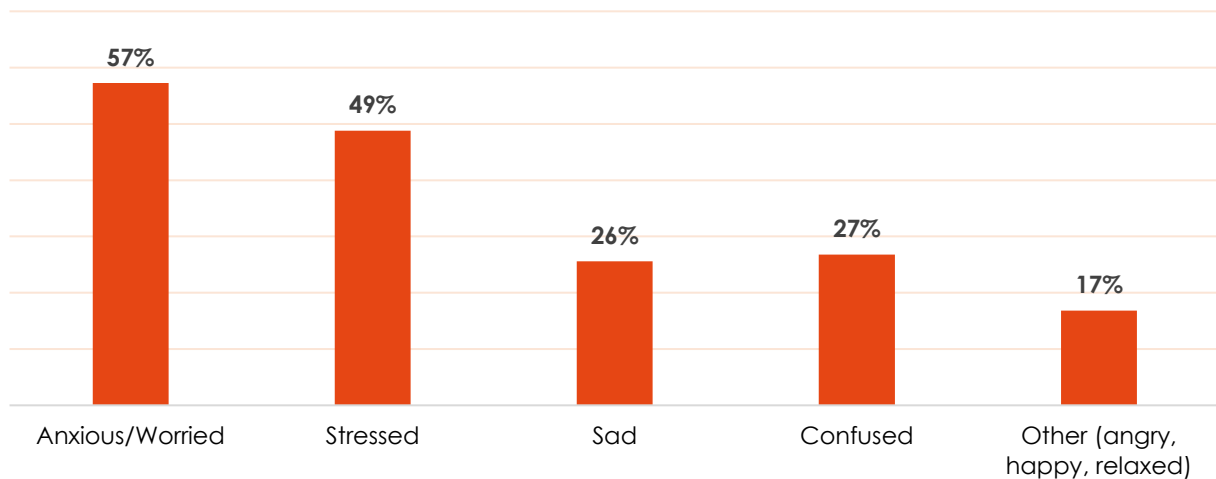


5.6. Emotional Well-being

A majority of participants were found spending time with family during the lockdown. Only 3% reported not being able to do so, because family members were not in the village, or single men and women were unable to go back home due to lockdown. 84% reported that they were spending time together by doing household chores, talking with family members (72%), watching TV (29%), playing (13%), and working in fields together.

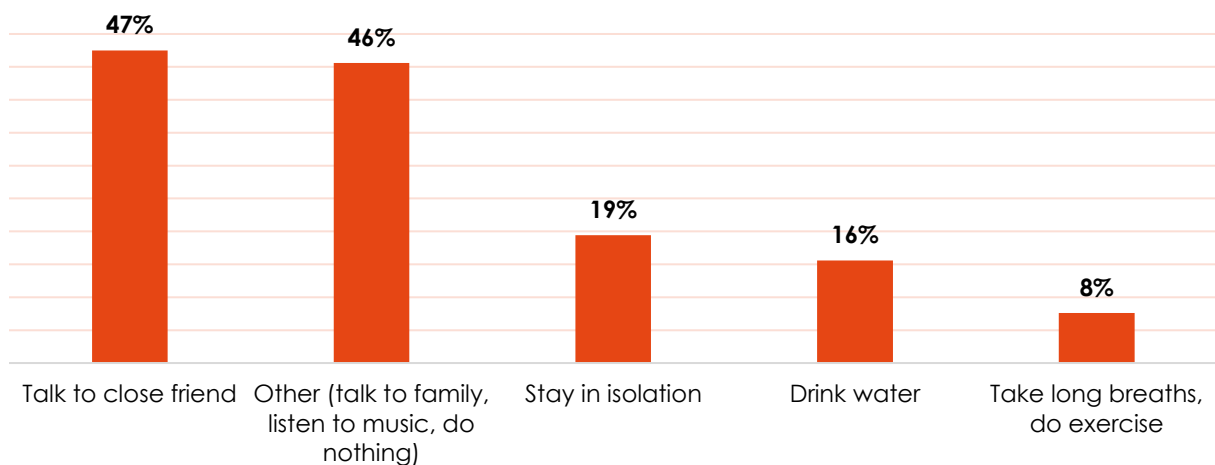
57% of people felt anxious and worried because of insufficient health supplies, lack of income and food, or fear of transmission.

How are you feeling during the lockdown?



While many feel stressed, anxious, and worried, some people said they are actively trying to reduce stress. For example, 47% said they would talk to a close friend when stressed, or to family members at home about how they feel.

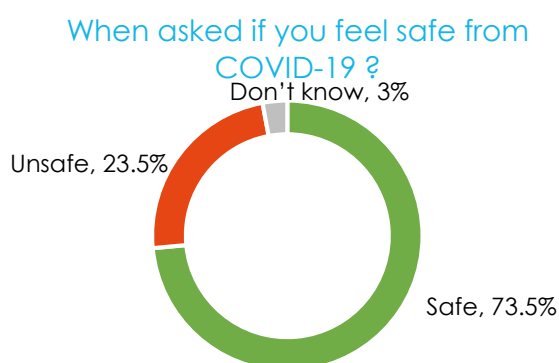
Techniques used to reduce tension or stress



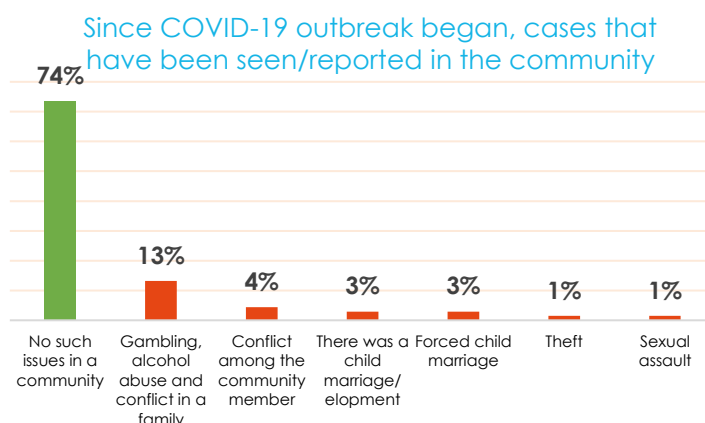
5.7. Protection

In regards to protection and safety, 74% reported no particular concerns. However, **13% participants reported increased gambling and alcohol abuse in their community.** There were also a few cases of elopement resulting in child marriage.

A majority of participants said they felt safe from COVID-19. They added that government restrictions, reduced movement of people, and knowledge about personal hygiene and sanitation are the main reasons why they feel safe. However, **24% felt unsafe due to the unavailability of sufficient health materials and the increased movement of people.**



About 45% reported that due to a lack of health facilities, lack of food and livelihood, they are feeling scared, stressed and confused. Furthermore, 18% reported feeling scared due to the possibility of COVID-19 transmission. A few participants also reported that a halt in the relocation and reconstruction process also made them feel sad.



While most participants said the fear of the virus will fade away with time, few were concerned that even after the pandemic is over, the fear of possible transmission will still remain for some time.

"I feel that hunger may kill more than disease. At the same time, I am afraid of being infected by Corona through various means. There are not enough health facilities. They far from my community."
40-year old mother's group member

5.8. Shelter, Relocation & Reconstruction

Nearly all participants reported that relocation and reconstruction process has completely halted due to lockdown. A few reasons behind the suspension of works included the closure of government offices, unavailability of construction materials, unavailability of skilled/unskilled labor, unavailability of technical personnel in the area, and delay in tranche disbursements.

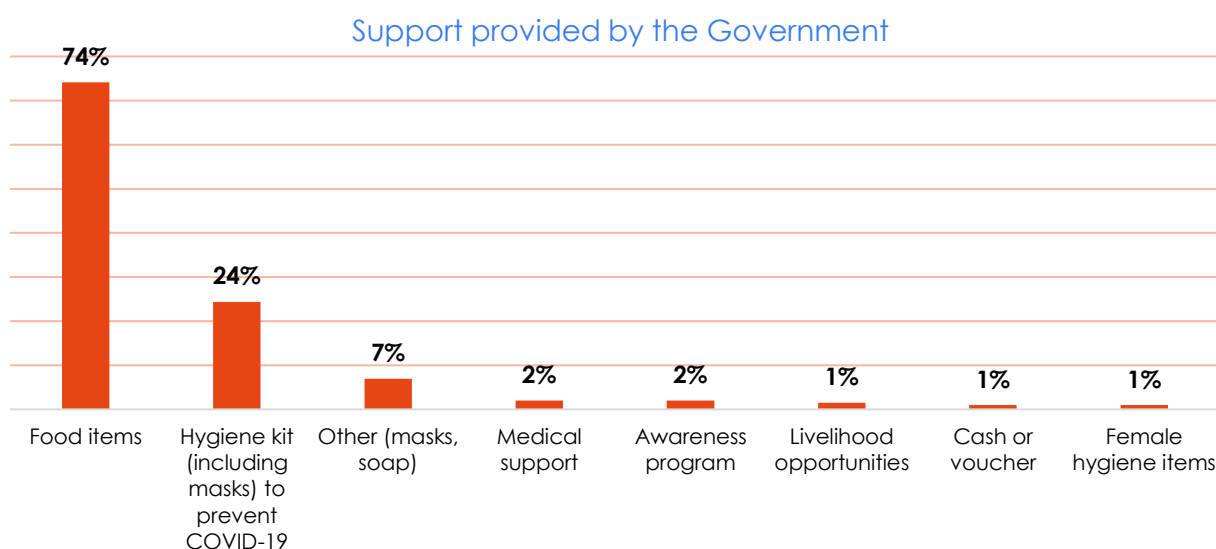
Only very few homeowners said they were able to continue reconstruction because they had already purchased some construction materials before the lockdown and some were borrowing from neighbors. The halt in the overall process has left households with no choice but to remain in their old shelter (temporary or EQ-damaged shelter) or their place of origin with risk of landslide.

"Relocation is halted. Have not received tranche from GMaLI. Market is closed and there is no transportation available to bring goods to." – **Female social worker, Ramechhap**

5.9. Government's COVID-19 Relief Program

Only **33% of families mentioned they had received any kind of support**, 93% of which was from the government. 80% mentioned food items as their main need for the upcoming months.

Government relief programs have largely focused on food and hygiene kit (masks and soap) distributions. Most programs have been led and funded by municipalities whereas wards are responsible for compiling lists of vulnerable groups to be prioritized. Although distributions had taken place, many complained about insufficient quantities, especially for larger families. Few reported that they had not received any relief items despite distributions happening in their area. Graph below shows type of support provided.



“GP distributed food items to the economically poor family, but I didn't receive any. My condition is too miserable and I have been relying on other families nearby to get food.”
EQ-affected 71-year old male beneficiary

6. Pre-Existing Vulnerabilities & Impact of COVID-19 Measures

All families interviewed in this assessment saw their livelihoods significantly affected by the 2015 earthquake and even now, five years after, have been struggling to fully recover. All of them have been enrolled in the NRA's reconstruction grant program of NPR 300,000 per household for shelter reconstruction. Additionally, 478 interviewed families have been enlisted on the [NRA's voluntary resettlement program](#) receiving grants of NPR 200,000 per household for displaced communities to relocate to safer areas free of landslide risk. Before the lockdown, these households had faced a specific set of challenges and their ability to cope with the sudden economic shutdown was going to be limited at best.

Reliance on Agriculture, Livestock and Daily Labor

The majority of households mentioned agriculture (66%), skilled and unskilled labor (51%) and livestock (22%) as the primary sources of income. This largely corresponds to the nationwide make-up of Nepali labor force with 66% of people directly engaged in farming and livestock (FAO 2020).

As this economic activity is almost exclusively subsistence-based and, in the case of daily labor, **heavily reliant on the access to and functionality of local markets and informal economy**, many families had been ill-prepared to resiliently cope with any

disruptions to the local market ecosystem. As a result, **87% reported loss of income and 49% lost all income.**

Earthquake-affected Communities Struggling to Reconstruct

As of 29 June 2020, more than 300,000 earthquake-affected households had yet to rebuild their shelters. Many of the families interviewed in this survey belong to the most vulnerable strata of Nepali society that face a number of structural barriers shaping their ability to reconstruct adequate and compliant shelters.

Many lack the **physical abilities to reconstruct**. These are households led by elderly, single/female headed households, families with a large number of dependents, or family members with disabilities. These homeowners are reliant on external support and have continued to live in damaged homes or temporary shelters.

Many others have faced significant **economic barriers** as the government's housing support has not covered all costs. 90% of respondents said they would need additional funds to complete their shelters, 48% of which opt to take loans, mostly from local lenders or neighbors due to a general lack of collateral. Some people reported that the government reconstruction tranches are sometimes used to cover costs of food and other essential items deemed more important at the moment. Another concern has been the potential compromising of building codes and non-compliant completion ahead of the monsoon season.

"Currently, the reconstruction process is fully halted. People are more focused on fulfilling other needs - food and safety. Secondly, many have not received tranches, the market is closed, transportation is closed." *Ward Chairperson, Male, Chitwan*

Households are also exposed to a number of underlying **social vulnerabilities** that often cut access to opportunities and services, and lead to social exclusion. Poor access to resources or local networks, low education levels, and gendered social hierarchies or harmful social norms (i.e. child marriage as a tolerated coping strategy at times of distress) have made it structurally more difficult for many of the interviewed households to reconstruct.

Communities at Risk of Landslides

For many households who have not yet been able to physically resettle due to various reasons (unfinished shelter construction instead of relocation, land disputes, pending paperwork, etc.) at the time when COVID-19 measures were introduced, **the risks of landslides will remain a serious concern** in the 2020 monsoon season. Many families are forced to stay in their original locations as the extent of restrictions put an end to the resettlement facilitation work for the spring season. Some families also mentioned they prefer not to relocate yet due to fears of COVID-19 transmission.

Vulnerable Community Members

Community representatives stated certain groups of people will be at higher risk compared to others. These mainly include elderly headed households and single elderly men/women, mostly with low economic capacity and PLWDs.

From the assessment, it is clear that these groups of people are at higher risk than others. For instance, 29% of households headed by people 65 years or older reported that they did not know anything about COVID-19 and only 26% said they know about how the virus is transmitted. 32% of single women responded that they did not know anything about the outbreak.

In addition, these elderly headed families said income loss and shortage of commodity items are the biggest issues they are currently facing. Similar experiences have been shared by households with single women. Income loss is the biggest issue for them and only 37% of those said they received support from the government.

Disadvantaged and Marginalized communities (Dalits, Chepangs, and hill janajati)

Indigenous Chepang, janajati, and Dalit communities have been at a comparatively higher risk given their lower socioeconomic background, historical marginalization, and social and systemic exclusion.

66% of Dalits interviewed (10% more than overall) reported a halt in their children's education as another major issue. Moreover, 67% (highest of all communities) of Chepang families reported that they did not have food storages and about 43% reported a shortage of commodity items as the biggest issue they are facing. On average, Dalits and Chepang communities have a higher household size, adding to greater and more immediate impact compared to other communities.

“Biggest impacts of COVID-19 and lockdown on the communities are loss of jobs - people who were working as migrant workers in Gulf countries are facing problems and they are likely to return home jobless; daily workers/labors who used to earn their meal doing daily work; small business owners and shortage of food in remote villages in near future. Yes, there are Chepangs, Dalits and relocated people, who are going to be affected more.” *DCC Representative, Male, Dhading*

94% of Chepang respondents reported a decrease in income as their biggest challenge for the months to come. As a main coping mechanism, 52% of Dalit communities opted to take loans whereas 20% (highest percentage of all communities) of Chepang families reduced their daily meal portions.

Like other communities, Dalits and Chepangs also mentioned food items and livelihood opportunities as their current primary need. However, only 8% and 12% of Chepang families (lowest of all communities) stated that they needed an awareness program and hygiene items for general prevention. This group also reported the lowest knowledge about COVID-19 transmission of all surveyed groups.

Detailed disaggregated findings can be found in Table 1 in later part of this report.

7. Conclusion

For the most vulnerable communities who continue to grapple with the lingering effects of the earthquake, the current COVID-19 crisis in Nepal is a serious threat that could uproot the lives of the many unable to cope with the disruptions caused by the disease and the response to controlling the disease.

Based on the evidence from this survey, the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences are amplifying the vulnerabilities of social groups that already face exclusion and structural discrimination, and thus possess limited capacities to find viable coping strategies.

Aside from immediate relief support prioritizing the most vulnerable members of these community in concert with local governments, there is a broader need to strengthen existing social security systems at all levels and to ensure inclusive access. This includes continued support to the housing reconstruction and voluntary resettlement of families at risk of landslides, a process that has stagnated since March 2020, but will be vital to

carry on once restrictions are eased, monsoon season is over, and the country begins to recover.

Table 1. Disaggregated Findings

Issue/Challenge		Disaggregated findings ²										
		Male	Female	Male headed HH	Female headed HH	Elderly headed HH	Non-elderly headed HH	Single Women	Chepang	Janajati	Dalit	Overall
Don't know anything about COVID-19		12%	21%	14%	20%	29%	13%	32%	20%	17%	14%	15%
Low purchasing power due to decreased income		65%	64%	66%	61%	60%	66%	30%	56%	68%	66%	65%
Decrease in income		87%	87%	89%	81%	77%	88%	78%	94%	89%	83%	87%
Taking loan as coping strategy		49%	60%	52%	56%	41%	54%	45%	28%	56%	52%	53%
Feeling unsafe when fetching water		9%	18%	12%	14%	6%	13%	9%	17%	10%	13%	12%
Feeling during lockdown	Stressed	48%	51%	48%	51%	34%	51%	45%	49%	49%	35%	49%
	Anxious/worried	57%	59%	59%	53%	51%	58%	46%	59%	55%	58%	57%
	Confused	22%	35%	25%	34%	28%	27%	34%	27%	26%	26%	27%
	Sad	27%	23%	26%	23%	20%	26%	23%	29%	23%	34%	26%
Biggest issues due to COVID-19	Income loss or decreased	81%	81%	82%	76%	70%	82%	66%	82%	83%	80%	81%
	Halt in children education	52%	63%	57%	53%	40%	58%	47%	47%	56%	66%	56%
	No or limited access to services	41%	31%	40%	26%	40%	37%	34%	35%	37%	34%	37%
	Shortage of commodity items	35%	31%	34%	33%	35%	33%	38%	43%	37%	36%	34%
	Shortage of health and hygiene kits	17%	16%	17%	15%	18%	16%	14%	4%	16%	23%	17%
Received no support		68%	66%	68%	65%	63%	68%	65%	22%	73%	58%	67%
Support they need	Food items	87%	88%	87%	88%	87%	88%	91%	94%	89%	89%	88%
	Livelihood opportunities	32%	32%	32%	34%	27%	33%	27%	33%	30%	38%	32%
	Cash or voucher	24%	31%	26%	28%	30%	26%	32%	29%	23%	43%	27%
	Hygiene kit to prevent COVID-19	17%	23%	18%	22%	18%	19%	20%	12%	15%	28%	19%

² Findings are disaggregated according to the category represented (e.g. out of 100% of Male Respondents, 12% doesn't know anything about COVID-19).

Medical support	15%	18%	14%	23%	23%	15%	31%	12%	14%	26%	16%
Awareness program	15%	15%	16%	12%	13%	16%	12%	8%	12%	25%	15%

People in Need

K.M.C. - 3, 279 Ranibari,

Kathmandu, Nepal

Phone : +977 01 4002100

Email : nepal.info@peopleinneed.cz

Website: www.peopleinneed.org.np

