**Response of Government of Nepal (GoN)**

**On**

**Impact of the COVID-19 on the right to food**

1. **At what points over the past two years, and how, was the food system in our country impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Nepal went into a complete lockdown at the end of March 2020, which lasted for about 120 days followed by a partial lockdown until September 2020. COVID-19 pandemic affected the overall economic growth rate, falling to negative (2.12%) in FY 2019/20 and the growth of agricultural sector remained at 2.6 percent. With some of the other services and manufacturing sector, it profoundly disrupted the agricultural activities and livelihoods of those who are dependent heavily on agriculture. Initially, it affected the production system, particularly the agricultural operations due to restrictions. The agricultural extension services were affected, especially the advisory services, pest and disease surveillance and management, operation of agricultural machineries due to shortage of skilled machine operators (which used to come from India). These services gradually resumed in the later phase of pandemic.

The tourism industry including catering business, restaurants, and homestays remained closed. Disruption in movement of general public due to travel and transport restrictions directly halted supply chain in agriculture production and distribution system leading to losses in farm and off-farm income.

There was imbalanced and inconsistent supply and demand of production inputs and agricultural products. Perishable products like fruits, vegetables, floriculture, fish, poultry, and dairy products were the hardest hit subsectors.

Disruption in fertilizer supply, all imported, due to quarantine, restrictions and movement and partly also due to export policies of fertilizer producing countries, was quite evident. Supply of production input such as fertilizer, seeds (many of which are imported) and breeds, pesticides and agricultural implements is affected; value chains of food grains, fresh vegetables, and fruits and diary were affected which resulted in increase in the prices. It resulted into uneven food prices, changes in productivity and also altered food environments, the consumer price index for food and beverages increased from 129. 49 in 2019/20 to 146.15 in March 2021. The percent change was 3.09 between 2017/2018 and 2018/19 while it was 8.16 between 2018/2019 and 2019/20. Furthermore, the supply of feeds, veterinary drugs, and vaccines required for the livestock, poultry and fisheries have been badly affected. Market system remained less functional during these time. While price of the commodities were high for the consumers, it was difficult for farmers to access the market.

The complex situation led by COVID-19, and increased economic inequalities have posed serious threat to meet the daily food and nutrition requirements for most vulnerable population across the world, including Nepal. The COVID 19 pandemic has not only affected agriculture and food system but also trade and tourism, aviation, hospitality, health and other sectors and interruption of social protection schemes has caused obstruction to income generation, impacting investment on food and nutrients. A significant number of people are forced into the state of food insecurity, especially those who were already vulnerable and not captured by social safety nets. The surge in commodity price, loss of income and employment and depletion of food stock during pandemic still have impact in normal social and economic sector of the nation.

1. **Which segments of the population-for example, migrants, agriculture workers, Indigenous peoples- have been more vulnerable and constrained in accessing adequate food throughout the different phases of the pandemic crisis? Which new risks and vulnerabilities in food access have you observed to emerge during the pandemic?**

The effect has unequal impacts on various sections of the communities. Migrants, agricultural workers and indigenous people, and the poor are affected as a result of the disruption in the production, access and consumption chains of the food products. Supply of inputs for agricultural production process and the sale of the ‘ready for market’ produces were disturbed. Most of the laborers lost their jobs and income on one hand while on the other the farm faced labor scarcity.

The production system was affected at large. Food and nutrition security were also compromised. It was evident that the vulnerable section of the population, who were already in food crisis, had difficulty accessing the food, despite relief supply from the government. Some of the studies showed the food consumption score and food diversity scores were found low during the pandemic and it varied across different provinces. While there was inflation in food prices, it was not even in the region. The inflation was higher for the urban population in Kathmandu valley followed by hills. Although the food relief packages were announced by various tier of the government, it was difficult to identify the vulnerable groups for its proper distribution. Those food reliefs could not address the special nutritional requirements of pregnant women, lactating mothers and children.

The continuation of disruption of supply chain may affect the household production. The households previously being food secured may fall down to different degree of food insecure households. If the pandemic continues, it can exacerbate socio-economic penury thereby widening income inequality, gender gaps, injustices, food insecurity, and conflicts. This may lead to under-nutrition in children, new born, pregnant women and daily wage laborers.

1. **What local and national measures (law, policies or social security/ social safety nets) have been deployed as a rapid response, and how were they effective in ensuring access to adequate food and nutrition? What were the challenges in overcoming reduced access to adequate food and nutrition and interrelated impacts on other human rights during the crisis? What was the role of workers, small-scale food producers, and the agri-food industry in the development and implementation of these measure?**

Various responses were made during the national lockdown period and by the governments at federal, province and local level. The federal government in close coordination with other various line ministries and provincial ministries expedited responses during Covid 19 lockdown period. The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development (MoALD) made deliberate effort for the unrestricted movements of agricultural inputs and products in coordination with various agencies. Efforts were also made for the mobility of agricultural machineries and farmers for agricultural operations in the field and also the agricultural experts for advisory services. Rapid response team was formed for immediate response for various issues pertaining to agriculture sector due to pandemic.

Immediate food relief packages were channeled through the local levels in close coordination with province and federal governments and other non-government actors. Various innovative responses were made by province and local governments. Few examples: Including local production into food relief packages as a support to producers; minimum support price initiated and deficit payment were made to the farmers; agricultural ambulances to rescue the agricultural products from farm to market; incentives to cultivate abandoned farm land among others.

Since Covid affected the manufacturing and tourism sectors, which affected the employment of workers (many lost jobs or were partially paid), government announced various stimulus packages to revive these sectors. Some of the measures adopted were: relaxation on bank’s loan loss provisioning, bank guarantee extension facilities, refinancing facilities provided by Nepal Rastra Bank for the loans provided by the banks (although mostly for construction), subsidized agricultural loans, subsidized loan for payment of salaries to the employees etc. Most vulnerable household, informal and daily wage laborers were also supported with cash amount. Some provinces established Enterprise Survival Funds and initiated skill development trainings. Realizing the need for infrastructure, budget has been allocated for the construction of cold stores/cold rooms; food godowns etc. Special programs were also announced to attract the returnee migrants into agriculture.

Despite the government’s good intervention, several gaps still prevailed. Assured uninterrupted agricultural extension and input services need to be placed in priority. Establishment of additional cold chambers and food storages can prevent spoilage and waste of perishable commodities. Provincial and respective local government's response and recovery plans should be made more efficient and effective to address crisis like COVID pandemic.

Adequate food buffer stock management for basic food items and the physical infrastructure like warehouse, road network, communication network, along with the input supply like seed, animal feeds, fertilizers, pesticides and chemicals etc were experienced as an important areas which needs to be managed in emergency crisis like COVID- 19 pandemic.

1. **What kind of food price variation, trade restrictions, and supply chain disruptions have had the most impact on main foodstuffs, nationally and locally?**

The most noticed phenomenon was the supply chain variation rather than the price variation.

Strict movement restrictions of people resulted in unfair distribution of agricultural laborers with ample availability in some parts of the country while shortfall in rest of the other parts. Loss of income especially for those working in informal sectors chose to migrate from cities to rural Nepal has several direct consequences both in the cities and rural communities. Exodus of people from the big cities caused sharp consumption reduction and availability of excessive fresh vegetables, poultry products, dairy products, meat, fish and others. Whereas sudden arrival of large numbers of young people in rural communities put stress on natural resources including agriculture and food stuffs. Smooth flow of agriculture produce from farmer's field to their usual destination market got interrupted. Perishable commodities like fresh vegetables and fresh milk shortly caused market shock rising producers' uncertainty. Likewise, live chicken, eggs and live animals for meat purposes were obstructed to reach their usual sales markets in big cities like Kathmandu. Feed supply disruption affected poultry growers and commercial livestock raising farmers.

A striking point was fear in some people to consume egg, meat, fruits and milk as a source of virus transmission. This misconception persisted in the beginning resulted in a sharp drop in demand for these high-priced but nutrient-rich commodities; a decline in desired and nutritious food consumption negatively hit the food and nutrition security.

When some countries restricted the export of commodities such as wheat and maize, it resulted in increased prices of these products in the global market. This affected our poultry industry as it depends upon corn as the major raw material of the poultry feed, making it dearer.

1. **What longer-term measures, if any, have been considered, nationally and locally, to address harmful impacts of the continued pandemic, as well to transform your food system? In which way should the food system of your country be reformed in order to ensure better access to adequate food to everyone?**

The four pillars of food security measures: availability, access, utilization, and continuity are accounted for the long term measures to address the harmful impacts of the pandemic like COVID 19 and the programs, plans and policies to support those pillars help to ensure better access to adequate food to everyone. Some of the key policies, programs and activities towards adequate food for all in long term could be the following;

* Effective implementation of food safety policy, Food Act and regulation and coordination and facilitation on Rights to Food and Food Sovereignty Act, 2018
* Establishment and functioning of Food Security Council at the federal and provincial level.
* Food buffer stock in each municipality and effective implementation of Minimum Support Price. Food storage/reserves, food banks and stocking of food including supplementary/therapeutic food for emergency, strengthen food distribution system.
* Harmonization of the food trade and distribution system and tracking and tracing system.
* Increased access and timely supply of production inputs to all small farmers and enhanced access to markets for agricultural products.
* Adoption of Climate Resilient agricultural system.
* Establishment and strengthening community seed banks and cooperatives for locally adapted seeds, input supply and product marketing.
* Revitalization of local indigenous food system and social system utilizing traditional wisdom and culture, food security and climate change adaptation
* Food and nutrition security recovery programs through improved production, post-harvest and marketing, climate smart technologies and practices.
* Food security monitoring system reoriented both in national and sub-national levels for vulnerability and mapping of affected people.
* Joint multi-stakeholders (including private sectors, consumer groups) monitoring of resilience building programs including identification of vulnerable groups from the perspective of long term food security.
* Expanding agricultural insurance programs and products for easy accessibility for the farmers so that their vulnerability is reduced and they can absorb some of these external shocks.
* Emphasizing more on digital marketing of agricultural products and food business, as it emerged as coping mechanism for market during the pandemic. Policy reform for facilitation of digital market platform for input supply, products and food business is way to go in the long run.
* Improving the capacity of agricultural cooperatives and engaging them into market aggregation and quality assurance.
* Strong linkages and coordination among 3 tiers of government and private sectors
* Formulation of umbrella policy and action plans in building resilience against vulnerability, shocks and stress for increased food system from the federal; and support and implementation by all tier of governments
* Public-private partnership to increase investment to improve food security and resilience.
1. **What multilateral support and resources are needed to transform food systems in your country? What actions could be taken, regionally or globally, to strengthen and coordinate multilateral policy to address the COVID-19 impact on food security?**

The following multilateral support and resources are needed to transform the food systems in the country:

* Support for the Establishing and Strengthening Food security monitoring system at provincial and local level (With country’s transformation into federal structures, NekSAP – Nepal food monitoring system couldn’t be mainstreamed, Resource and Support needed for its internalization by the governments),
* National capacity building of stakeholders in disaster risks reduction, adaptation and building resilience ,
* Allowing diverse national and international agencies and other private actors working collectively with 3 tiers of government in field of preparedness, risk reduction and distribution of relief package,
* Establishment of functional Regional Food Banks, Regional Seed Banks,
* Collaborative research and technology development, Sharing of the technologies, learnings and human resources for capacity buildings,
* Strengthening Food system and safety traceability system,
* Resources for implementation of food security enhancement projects, and
* Food assistance programs in collaboration with international agencies and private sectors.
1. **Which initiatives have been autonomously implemented by small-scale food producers, food workers, women, youth, indigenous peoples, and social groups? What support have been provided to these initiatives, and which of them do you consider having longer-term positive impact?**

The following Initiatives might be autonomously implemented by small scale food workers, women, youth and social groups and all will have the longer term positive impact for improved food system.

* Small scale food production and processing,
* River bank farming,
* Community and cooperative farming,
* Small scale ruminant, beekeeping, and poultry farming,
* Local and indigenous crop growing,
* Women empowerment at the local level for increasing food diversity and childcare,
* Awareness campaign against the production, promotion and consumption of unhealthy commercial foods.

For making actionable the aforementioned initiatives; support in the policy and program formulation and its implementation is required. The government policy needs to be supported with high priority with budget and action. The other stakeholders should be supportive to initiatives of the government. The collective efforts of all these initiatives will definitely have longer term positive impact.