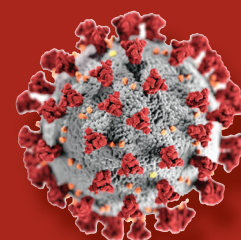




NEFIN

2020



Coping with COVID-19 Anxiety and Challenges

THE CASE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN NEPAL

■ Shree Kumar Maharjan (PhD)



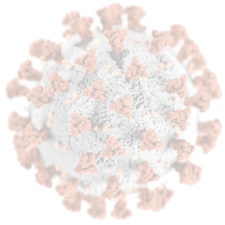
PHOTO: ROSHAN SHRESTHA

1. Indigenous peoples in Nepal

Nepal is known in the world for its diversity in terms of geography, climate, ethnicity, culture, language and biological diversity. As per the Census 2011, there are 126 ethnic groups with their own unique cultures, traditions and languages living in different geographical regions of the country. However, only 59 such groups (18 in mountain, 24 in hill and 17 in Terai and inner Terai regions) have officially been

recognized and enlisted as the indigenous peoples/nationalities by the National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN) Act 2002. The Act defines Indigenous Nationalities (*Adivasi Janajati*) as a tribe or community “*having its own mother language and traditional rites and customs, distinct cultural identity, distinct social structure and written or unwritten history*”¹. Out of the total population of 26.5 million, indigenous peoples’

However, indigenous peoples have claimed that their population accounts for more than 50% of the total population.



They have been subjected to oppression and exploitation politically, economically and culturally throughout history.



population in Nepal is estimated to be around 9.54 million, which is 36% of the total population as per the Census 2011². However, indigenous peoples have claimed that their population accounts for more than 50% of the total population. Despite their sizeable population, indigenous peoples continue to face various forms of discrimination, marginalization and human rights violations on grounds of their ethnicity, race, gender, religion, language, culture and other cross-cutting issues. They have been subjected to oppression and exploitation politically, economically and culturally throughout history. Their voices and concerns have often been sidelined and overlooked by the mainstream communities and in government plans, policies and programmes.

*“Indigenous peoples often face impediments to their access to natural resources, basic services, the formal economy, and justice, as well as their participation in decision making. This legacy of inequality and exclusion has made indigenous communities more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and natural hazards, including the disease outbreaks such as COVID-19. Vulnerabilities to the pandemic are exacerbated with the lack of access to national health systems, food insecurity due to shutting down of markets and mobility restrictions.”*³ This statement actually reflects the issues and challenges faced by the indigenous peoples in Nepal and elsewhere in the world. The COVID-19 pandemic has posed both direct and indirect health and economic threats to the indigenous peoples, although the exact size of the population affected by the pandemic still remains unknown. It has also been confirmed by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations that ethnicity- and indigeneity-wise data on rate of infection have not been presented yet⁴. The impact of the pandemic on the livelihoods of indigenous peoples has yet to be assessed and documented. Without proper assessment of the impact, appropriate action cannot be taken to bring them relief. As of 8 September 2020, the Ministry of Health has announced a total of 47,236 positive cases, 730,327 negative cases, 30,677 cases of recovery and 300 deaths. In addition, 16,259 people have been kept in isolation and 4,739 people quarantined⁵. The first positive case of COVID-19 was reported in Nepal on 13 January 2020⁶. The infected person had returned home from a foreign country. The country saw sharp increase in cases of COVID-19 as people started returning home from the foreign countries, including India. At present, the infection has spread at the community level. As the government has not made disaggregated impact assessment, it is difficult to figure out the number of indigenous peoples who have been infected or have received medical or relief support, or have recovered. This indicates that the government has not prioritized indigenous peoples’ access to economic support, and health and other basic services. Had the government provided information about its healthcare investments transparently, there would have been no public outcry over corruption in the purchase of emergency medical equipment and kits. Given the government’s apathy towards public health amid the COVID-19 pandemic, this paper attempts to review and analyze the anxieties and challenges facing indigenous peoples amid the pandemic in Nepal as very few researchers and organizations have made such an attempt.

2. Challenges for indigenous peoples during COVID-19 pandemic

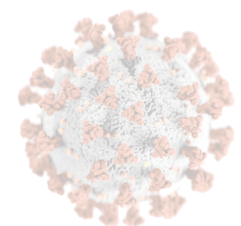
- COVID-19 has had a direct/indirect impact on the socio-economic and cultural environment of the people, particularly the indigenous



PHOTO: ROSHAN SHRESTHA

peoples and other minority groups, including women, Dalits, poor and marginalized groups, persons with disabilities, slum and squatter dwellers, daily wage workers and waste collectors. They have comparatively been hit harder due to lockdowns, shutdowns and movement restrictions imposed in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak as most of them are engaged in low-paying jobs. For some, even eking out a living or fulfilling the most basic requirements of life have become a tall order. They dearly expected relief packages from the government. However, relief distribution has not been efficiently carried out in most of the places. In fact, the government does not even have disaggregated data of infected people at the local and national levels. As a result, the size of the indigenous population infected by the virus, the number of critical cases and recoveries, and the number of people in urgent need of relief and medical support remain unknown. It is also not known if any of them have received medical support or relief.

- Indigenous peoples have enjoyed strong social bonding and cohesion for generations. The social distancing during COVID-19 and the series of lockdowns have highly impacted the social lives of these people as they have not been able to organize many social and cultural events that are vital strands of their lives. For instance, Newar indigenous nationalities of Kathmandu Valley could not observe their important festivals, including *Gai Jatra*, *Rato Machchhindranath Jatra*, *Indra Jatra* etc. These festivals have a significant place in the lives of Newars as they form the basis of social relationships and bonding among the members of family and society at large. Among them, *Gai Jatra* is the festival that commemorates the death of loved ones in the past year.

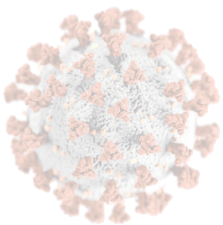


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PHOTO: SATYAN SHRESTHA

During this festival, Newar households which have lost a relative in the past year send children dressed as a cow to parade on the streets, since cow is regarded as the goddess of wealth in Newari culture. This festival symbolizes the sharing and ‘coming out’ of grief which gives the strength to deal with death in the family and move on. It was not possible to observe many of such festivals this year because of COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns, shutdowns and movement restrictions.



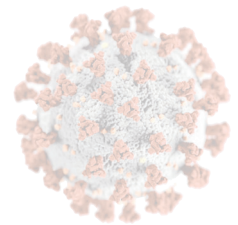
There was confusion among indigenous nationalities on whether to continue their cultural events during COVID-19 lockdowns.

- There was confusion among indigenous nationalities on whether to continue their cultural events during COVID-19 lockdowns. Although they held dialogues with the government requesting it to allow continuation of these festivals, which are intrinsic to their culture, the government failed to show any respect and come up with a specific plan for the preservation of such cultural events. On 3 Sept 2020, the Newar people emerged on the streets to pull the Rato Machchhindranath¹ chariot amid lockdown in Patan. They violated the lockdown as the government and the authorities concerned (Guthi Sansthan, Lalitpur Metropolitan City office) didn’t take any concrete step to organize the festival. This situation caused clash between the police and local Newars. A group of Newar youths were arrested for violating the lockdown. As per news reports, they have been charged under Infectious Diseases Act, 2020 (1964), Local Administration Act, 2028 (1971) and Public Security Act, 2046 (1989). Most of those

1. The Rato Machchhindranath festival is an important festival of Newar indigenous peoples in Kathmandu Valley. During the months-long festival, the chariot of Rato Machchhindranath is pulled from Patan to Bungmati and back from Bungmati to Patan. This festival has a religious significance and symbolizes coexistence of Buddhism and Hinduism in the valley.

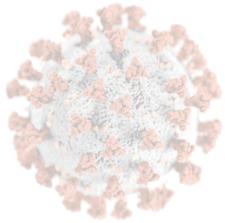
arrested are rights activists, who have been opposing and holding demonstrations against the Guthi bill, and fast-track and Outer Ring Road projects, which the Newars claim are aimed at destroying their cultural heritage. The activists were spotted and arrested without prior notice. This shows that the government intends to repress all forms of dissent. The indigenous rights activists have demanded unconditional and immediate release of those arrested. They have also been supported by some local politicians, media and other groups.

- Indigenous peoples have their own mother tongue and 90% of them speak and understand their own language and not Nepali language, which is spoken by 44.6% of the population as mother tongue. However, most of the information related to COVID-19 is provided in Nepali language only. Since most of the indigenous peoples are illiterate and do not speak and understand Nepali language, there is a language barrier for indigenous peoples to get COVID-19-related information. Many of the indigenous peoples do not understand the COVID-19 associated terminologies such as lockdown, pandemic, shutdown, social distancing, quarantine and self-isolation. Initially, people understood lockdown as curfew. Even after several months of lockdowns and shutdowns, people still do not know how the virus is transmitted and how one can remain safe. Since indigenous peoples do not have proper knowledge about the disease, their entire population is at the risk of exposure to the virus. This, in a way, is a violation of their right to information⁷. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of United Nations emphasized on providing services and facilities in indigenous languages and as appropriate to the specific situation of indigenous peoples⁸.
- The government announced the first phase of lockdown without any prior notice. This prevented the people from making necessary preparations, which eventually hit the livelihoods of people. Some indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities faced severe shortages of food and other basic necessities. Moreover, the pandemic has affected the job market within the country and abroad. This has dealt a severe blow to the livelihoods of indigenous peoples.
- Many of the government's plans and policies fail to adopt specific and intersectional approaches to indigenous peoples and other marginalized groups in Nepal, which is also the case during the COVID-19 pandemic. The government has adopted blanket – one fits all – approach in the distribution of relief packages, which should not have been the case. Relief and safety kits provided to COVID-19 victims were reportedly ineffective and inefficient. Some people received relief multiple times, whereas innocent indigenous peoples did not get any relief at all. The local government at the municipality and rural municipality levels has full authority to effectively distribute relief packages and safety kits. However, the 'one size fits all' approach did not work well.
- Violations of indigenous peoples' human rights have been continuously reported in the periphery of national parks of Nepal. Indigenous peoples, particularly Tharu, Bote, Majhi, Darai, Kumal and Chepang have been living in areas adjacent to Chitwan National Park for generations. They have been facing multiple issues of discrimination,



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Some of the indigenous peoples from the hills of western Nepal migrate to India and other foreign countries in search of economic opportunities.



forced eviction, torture, human rights violation, arson and killings in the name of conservation for many years. Such violent incidents continued even during the COVID-19 pandemic. One such example is the burning and destruction of Chepang houses and the torture and killing of Raj Kumar Chepang, a 24-year youth, by army personnel in Kusum Khola area of Madi Municipality – 9, Chitwan^{9,10}. These Chepang families were rendered homeless and their food grains, clothes, household utilities and important documents were destroyed during the nationwide COVID-19 lockdown even as they were already bearing the brunt of monsoon fury. As COVID-19 rages, fear and anxiety has gripped the entire country and people are in dire need of relief. However, even in these trying times Chepang people were subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

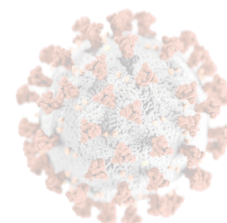
- Some of the indigenous peoples from the hills of western Nepal migrate to India and other foreign countries in search of economic opportunities. Because of increased COVID-19 infection rates in employment destinations, they have been forced to return home. This has triggered a massive spike in unemployment. The situation has further worsened due to closure of local businesses, which has brought economic activities to a standstill. These parts of the country have also witnessed spurt in suicide cases, particularly because of increased violence and discrimination¹¹.
- Indigenous peoples are disproportionately marginalized. They lack access to health services even in normal circumstances as most of them live in geographically remote places. Apart from the few living in cities and urban places, they fare worse during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of geographical barriers, it is difficult to assess their situation and the need to provide medical and relief assistance.
- Some of the indigenous peoples are facing food insecurity due to food shortage, loss of traditional lands and territories, lack of timely availability of agricultural inputs for farming and inefficient distribution of relief packages during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns.
- There is an increased risk of COVID-19 in the pre-existing societal structures in which children, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and other minorities are discriminated¹².

3. COVID-19 propaganda and controversies

- Various controversies and propaganda regarding COVID-19 have been spread due to conflicting facts and information provided by political leaders, experts and institutions. Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli was caught up in a controversy when he publicly said that the COVID-19 disease was nothing more than a ‘flu’ which could be cured by drinking warm water mixed with turmeric¹³. He further went on to add that the Indian coronavirus was more lethal than Chinese. He even made unscientific predictions on coronavirus. His statements which were published in print media and aired on television not only misguided the people but also created confusion among indigenous peoples. Some media outlets and experts spread propaganda regarding COVID-19,

which led the general public, including the indigenous nationalities, to take to the streets and protest against the government's poor handling of the COVID-19 crisis. Some, especially youths in Kathmandu, held demonstrations over the government's incompetence and corruption in the purchase of medical equipment and kits.

- Some news portals spread false information regarding COVID-19. This created confusion among the general public, particularly the indigenous and ethnic minorities, as most of them are illiterate and semi-literate, and lack access to reliable sources of information.
- Many people, including medical practitioners, Ayurvedic experts, academia and traditional healers have raised questions over the effectiveness of lockdowns and movement restrictions in controlling the spread of coronavirus. Some have even questioned the reliability of RDT and PCR tests. Others have accused the World Health Organization and the Ministry of Health of spreading false information and misusing financial resources. The interviews of Dr. BP Timilsina broadcast on the AP News Yatra and education expert Karna Bahadur Shahi shared on social media shed light on the COVID-19 propaganda in Nepal. Social media have also been used to spread such propaganda. Some research papers show high false negative rates of the PCR test, influenced by multiple factors, including low sample volume, quality of sample, low viral load, sampling location (upper and lower respiratory tract, deterioration of sample while storage and transport, timing of sampling among others¹⁴.
- Moreover, there is debate over selection of people for PCR tests due to lack of enough testing equipment and kits. The government has prioritized mainly the people returning home from foreign countries via land or air and persons exposed to COVID-19 infected patients. The government didn't have proper plan for either RDT and/or



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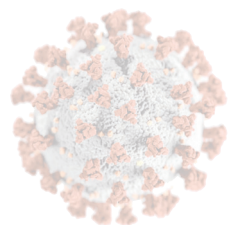
PHOTO: ROSHAN SHRESTHA

PCR testing, isolation and quarantine. There was no mechanism for monitoring people in isolation/quarantine. The government itself was not clear regarding home isolation requirements. Those who opted for home isolation and self-quarantine complained that the authorities concerned did not provide them proper counseling. After 312,402 RDTs (as per the live updates), it was declared that RDT was not reliable in the diagnosis of Novel coronavirus.

- Furthermore, the cost of PCR testing varies between public and private hospitals. Recently, people have expressed concern over the high cost of isolation in private hospitals as government-run hospitals are packed with COVID-19 patients.
- Health workers have also expressed concern over their own safety, and lack of risk incentive and insurance cover. They have been saying that it would be difficult for them to provide their services effectively in absence of any safety guarantee from the government.

4. Initiatives by governments and civil society to control COVID-19 spread

- The government issued prohibitory orders, imposed lockdowns, closure of businesses and services, and placed restrictions on movement to control and minimize the spread of COVID-19 infection. However, these measures directly impacted indigenous peoples and other minority groups. These lockdowns were announced without proper planning. The government had enough time to build isolation and quarantine centres in the first phase of lockdown, but it did nothing in that regard.
- Although the government established COVID-19 care and isolation centres after much damage was done, these centres mostly have been relying on Sukraraj Tropical & Infectious Diseases Hospital (STIDH) for swab tests and reports. The management of isolation centres has been continuously questioned for poor hygiene and lack of basic facilities.
- To some extent, the government has attempted to provide coronavirus-related information to the public with support of relevant stakeholders. However, information is not provided in local languages understood by the indigenous nationalities. Hence, people still do not have adequate information about COVID-19 and safety measures other than putting on masks, keeping physical distance and washing hands. The government has developed Nepal Preparedness and Response Plan (NPRP) to address COVID-19 impacts through preparedness actions (with a budget requirement of USD 10.04 million equivalent to NRs. 1,178,519,296) and key responses (with the budget requirement of USD 28.23 million, equivalent to NRs 3,313,705,152). This plan has specifically identified the vulnerable population, including indigenous peoples, women, children, youth, people with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, elderly people, refugees, internally displaced people and migrants on the basis of agenda 2030¹⁵.
- The government formed a preparedness and response committee with members from the health ministry, the home ministry, the foreign



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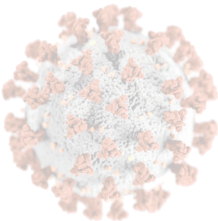


affairs ministry, the finance ministry, the culture, tourism and civil aviation ministry, the urban development ministry, the Nepal Army, the Nepal Police, the Armed Police Force and the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) with members from Red Cross Movement and Civil Society Organizations (*ibid*).

- Civil society groups, including the UN offices in Nepal, have also been contributing to production and distribution of multi-lingual information, education and communications (IEC) materials related to COVID-19. They have also provided relief and medical support, including food, sanitizers, masks etc. to the indigenous peoples, ethnic minority groups, Dalits and people with disabilities, particularly in their working areas and districts. Some of them have also worked on capacity building of indigenous and local communities for production of homemade masks and sanitizers, and dissemination of information.

5. Initiatives taken by indigenous peoples to deal with COVID-19

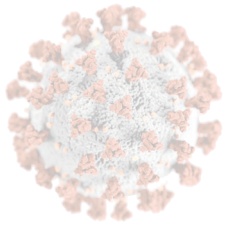
- Indigenous peoples are known for their own initiative, creativity and resilience in dealing with extreme situations on the basis of their traditional knowledge, skills and practices. There are a number of such examples. For instance, Tharu indigenous peoples survived the malaria outbreak in the Tarai. Likewise, Sherpa peoples’ resilience helps them survive in harsh climatic conditions in the high mountains. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the indigenous peoples have been attempting to deal with the crisis employing their own traditional knowledge and skills. Some of them live in the remote areas. This means they do not usually come into close physical contact with outsiders. It is comparatively easier to seal indigenous settlements for isolation as indigenous peoples follow their leaders’ instructions. Information related to COVID-19 received by the leaders is effectively disseminated to indigenous peoples through their own mechanism and



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PHOTO: ROSHAN SHRESTHA



Even as scientists scramble to discover remedy or vaccine against the deadly coronavirus, uncertainty continues to permeate most aspects of our life.



mother tongue. Thus, it is necessary to provide reliable and updated COVID-19-related information in a culturally appropriate way and in the language understood by the indigenous peoples. More importantly, some indigenous peoples are struggling and fighting for their rights and identity even during the pandemic.

- Traditional healers, including the Baidhyas and Amchis² have been experimenting and providing different herbal remedies to the indigenous peoples and local communities to boost immunity.
- Many indigenous peoples’ organizations and groups at the national and local levels have actively been providing relief and medical assistance to specific indigenous peoples.
- Furthermore, some indigenous peoples’ organizations with other stakeholders have jointly produced educational and communication materials in languages understood by them. Additionally, a few of them have initiated research and documentation, particularly focusing on the impact of COVID-19 on indigenous peoples and other minority groups. Interviews of some indigenous peoples and their leaders have been posted on different forums and webpages.
- Indigenous right activists have staged protests and demonstrations against human rights violations and discrimination against indigenous peoples, especially the Newars and the Chepangs, by the government during the coronavirus pandemic.

6. Effectiveness of the initiatives

Even as scientists scramble to discover remedy or vaccine against the deadly coronavirus, uncertainty continues to permeate most aspects of our life. However, the government, civil society groups, indigenous peoples and minority groups have stepped in with whatever capacities, skills, information and resources they have, to reduce the impacts of the pandemic. It’s crucial to analyze the effectiveness of these interventions and initiatives of the government, civil society groups and indigenous/ethnic minorities. Training, and manufacturing hand sanitizers and homemade masks engaged the indigenous peoples, minority groups, women, Dalits and people with disabilities in economic activity during the lockdowns. The production and distribution of IEC materials in multiple languages helped disseminate reliable information to the public, including indigenous peoples, and different minority groups in an efficient manner. Furthermore, online sessions and webinars organized by the government and non-government organizations, including indigenous peoples’ organizations, helped create understanding and minimized confusion and controversies related to COVID-19. Likewise, research and documentation work carried out at the local level specific to certain provinces have assessed and analyzed the impacts of COVID-19 on indigenous and other minority groups.

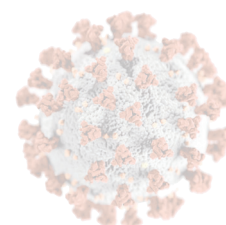
7. Potential opportunities

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced a large number of indigenous youths

2. Baidhyas and Amchis are traditional healers in Nepal. Amchis are mainly found in the high hills and mountainous areas, whereas Baidhyas have been practicing traditional medicine in the mid-hills.

to return home, which might have positive implications for society if managed properly. Indigenous youths, who have recently graduated from foreign universities and are jobless now, are willing to return home and contribute to the development of the country. The economic survey (2018/19) revealed that around 4.4 million youths are currently working in foreign countries. It is also estimated that about 500,000 people enter the job market every year and most of them go to foreign countries for employment¹⁶. It is estimated that 127,000 foreign employment returnees (excluding returnees from India) are willing to return home due to unemployment and health concerns¹⁷. The majority of migrant workers belong to indigenous and ethnic minority groups and most of them rely on agriculture for their livelihood. One potential positive impact of their return to homeland is likely to be seen in the agriculture sector.

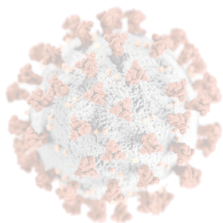
- **Positive indications in agricultural sector:** News reports that many youths who have returned to their hometowns during lockdowns have taken up agriculture, animal husbandry, forest restoration and associated local businesses, which is a positive indication for agricultural and rural development. Barren lands in rural areas have been cultivated this year. The government, especially the local government, should ensure favorable environment and investment climate for the returnees.
- **Return to traditional occupation:** Some Ayurvedic experts, traditional healers and Amchis have claimed that traditional healing methods and herbal remedies are effective in boosting immunity and curing patients infected with the coronavirus. WHO has also supported the use of traditional medicines and herbs, including the new therapies which have been scientifically proven as potential treatment for COVID-19¹⁸. It was reported that some Amchis have been using herbs and traditional healing techniques to minimize COVID-19 infection and its spread in the high mountains of Nepal. However, they have been facing multiple issues such as lack of successor, reduction in the availability of medicinal herbs, lack of technologies for herbs processing, among others. The most prominent issue is lack of recognition by the government of their healing practices, which they have been practicing for generations.
- **Revival of traditional arts and crafts:** Many indigenous peoples, particularly youths, are engaged in traditional art and craft work such as knitting, pot manufacturing, sculpting, painting etc. specifically during the lockdowns. This sort of engagement in the traditional art and craft work has helped them remain productive during the pandemic. This has also contributed to their mental wellbeing and motivated them to revive their own traditional arts and crafts for livelihood. Some have utilized traditionally woven clothes for making masks. News reports have highlighted global boom in arts and crafts during lockdowns since everyone, including indigenous peoples, were confined to their homes to control the spread of COVID-19.¹⁹
- **Re-engage in self-sustaining economy based on locally available resources and skill:** The coronavirus pandemic, border blockade and the earthquakes have taught us an important lesson. We should gradually aim for creating a self-sustaining and independent economy



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both at the local and national levels. The economic situation varies among indigenous peoples who have adopted one or a combination of different livelihood options such as foraging, agriculture, horticulture, pastoralism and fishing. Despite the government’s increased control over their ancestral lands since the 1960s and the following decades, these traditional livelihood practices have helped indigenous peoples remain self-reliant through sustainable use of locally available resources²⁰. These crises and the current pandemic situation further underscore the importance of such independent and self-sustaining practices. Many of the indigenous peoples have returned to their ancestral lands and given continuity to their traditional agricultural practices by adopting scientific techniques such as organic farming, rooftop gardening, aquaponics and hydroponics utilizing the locally available resources.



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8. Conclusion

COVID-19 infections have entered the community transmission phase in Nepal. Rapid increase in infection rates poses grave danger in the Nepalese context, especially for the indigenous peoples, since they enjoy strong social attachment and cohesion. However, it is comparatively easier to control infections among indigenous peoples if information is disseminated in local and indigenous languages. Reliable information could be disseminated via indigenous leaders as indigenous peoples pay heed to indigenous leaders. Moreover, indigenous peoples’ lifestyle and use of medicinal herbs in their food, independent economy based on local resources in the lands and territories are some of the favorable conditions in their fight against COVID-19. It is comparatively easier to isolate indigenous communities in their lands and territories to control the spread of COVID-19 infections.

In the initial phase of COVID-19 outbreak, indigenous peoples and minority groups were highly anxious, but the rate of infection among

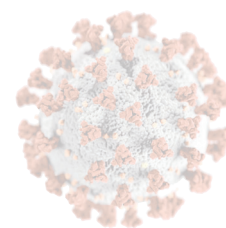


PHOTO: ROSHAN SHRESTHA

them is comparatively lower. Over the past several months, COVID-19 cases have increased alarmingly. However, people did not seem much worried because the lockdowns imposed by the government helped check the spread of the virus to some extent. In addition, now people know a lot more about coronavirus than they did when the disease broke out. At the same time, the government is faced with mounting challenges due to shortage of testing equipment, isolation centres and hospital beds for critically ill patients. Increase in the number of COVID-19 patients has also increased confusion and fuelled controversies. Some experts and general public have blamed the government and also the WHO for spreading false information regarding COVID-19. Some indigenous communities have adopted their own measures to reduce the spread of coronavirus. As noted earlier, it is easier to disseminate information among indigenous peoples through their leaders in local languages. However, information related to COVID-19 is disseminated mostly in the Nepali language. Some indigenous peoples' organizations and UN agencies have attempted to produce IEC materials in multiple languages.

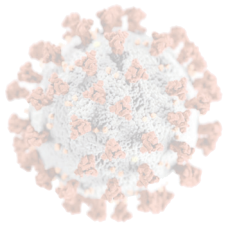
9. Recommendations and policy interventions

- The government and other civil society groups, including international and national development agencies, should specifically prioritize basic and specific needs of indigenous peoples and distribute relief to them accordingly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic at the national and local levels. No indigenous peoples, indigenous women, minority groups and people with disabilities should be deprived of medical and relief support.
- The governments should come up with disaggregated data of indigenous peoples, indigenous women and other minority groups in relation to infections, recovery, and medical and relief support.
- The government should be transparent and accountable with regards to financial resources and expenditure related to COVID-19.
- The government should ensure culturally appropriate emergency responses to indigenous peoples/ ethnic minority groups, indigenous persons and women with disabilities (IPWDs and IWWDs).
- The government and civil society groups should provide correct and reliable information in the forms understandable to the indigenous peoples, indigenous women and people with disabilities by translating such information into local languages. Especially, the government should prioritize production, distribution and dissemination of IEC materials in indigenous peoples' languages.
- The government should provide reliable information related to the COVID-19 and ensure proper monitoring of information being disseminated via media platforms, including social media. False information being disseminated through such media is creating confusion and fuelling controversies regarding COVID-19.
- The government should provide appropriate employment opportunities to returnees from abroad and people migrating internally due to the impact of COVID-19 infections.



However, people did not seem much worried because the lockdowns imposed by the government helped check the spread of the virus to some extent.





Moreover, the traditional knowledge, skills and practices have to be documented and transferred to the younger generation via formal and informal education system.



- The government must officially recognize and promote traditional healing practices and support traditional healers with appropriate technologies and incentives. Moreover, the traditional knowledge, skills and practices have to be documented and transferred to the younger generation via formal and informal education system. These knowledge and skills should be protected under intellectual property rights and patents.
- The government should motivate and provide incentives to the traditional healers and institutions to carry out research in traditional healing techniques.
- The government, including civil society groups, should ensure favorable environment and opportunities for the indigenous peoples, indigenous women and youths to promote their arts and crafts during the COVID-19 pandemic and also during normal situations.
- The governments should allow economic freedom and support indigenous peoples to continue their traditional occupations within self-governing mechanisms during the COVID-19 pandemic and afterwards.
- The government should prioritize research and documentation, particularly focusing on COVID-19, jointly with UN agencies, civil society groups, research and academic institutions and indigenous peoples' organizations.
- The media should be responsible in disseminating reliable and appropriate information related to COVID-19 to indigenous peoples, other minorities and general public.
- The local governments should develop mechanisms to properly monitor COVID-19 infections, isolation and quarantine centres in the local level and develop appropriate plans, responses and actions.
- The local and national governments should build self-sustaining economies by promoting local production and consumption in line with indigenous peoples' sustainable resource management practices.

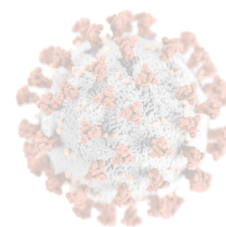
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Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN)
Climate Change Partnership Program

Maharajgunj, Kathmandu, Nepal, Phone : 977-1-4415376

E-mail: info@nefinclimatechange.org

Website: www.nefinclimatechange.org

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