

Summary Report on the Research: Impact of COVID-19 on Dalit Community of Nepal

Samata Foundation has completed comprehensive research titled: Impact of COVID-19 on Dalit Community of Nepal. The study encompasses 753 *palikas* from all 77 districts of Nepal. The researchers audited situations covering a broader spectrum of geographical and biographical dimensions concerning Dalits. The study's purpose was to dig out the nuances of discrimination and exclusion Dalits are at risk of during the pandemic and generate specific policy recommendations for the three-tier government responsive to the Dalit community, particularly in times of crises and disasters.

The general public from the Dalit community is the subject (1500 respondents) for the survey interviews. The respondents are from all seven provinces covering 751 *Palikas* in all 77 districts. The survey includes in-depth interviews with 35 individuals, including elected representatives, Province Assembly members, members of the house of representatives, and civil society actors. Several case studies are developed based on their individual experience during the pandemic. In response to the lockdown and travel restriction, the research used telephone interviews to gather data. The collected data were recorded in a questionnaire developed in Google forms and analyzed using the SPSS software. The research applied a mixed-method with the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, and recommendations for various stakeholders are generated categorically.

The entire research and publication work started in May 2020 and was completed at the end of December 2020. Based on the research, a book: "*COVID-19 le Dalit Samudayama Pareko Prabhav*" has been published by Samata Books in the Nepali language. The book authored by three researchers is peer-reviewed by five scholars. The book has credited the contribution of the Christian Aid Nepal for its financial and technical supports.

On 11 January 2021, a team from the Samata Foundation met Mr. Hridayesh Tripathi, Minister of Health and Population, and Mr. Gauri Shankar Chaudhary, Minister of Labor, Employment, and Social Security, and handed over the research report after a brief discussion on the situation of Dalits and the impact of the pandemic on them.

On 14 January 2021, the Foundation held a book launch event jointly with the Kriyashil Dalit Patrakaar Sangh. The book was launched by Mr. Parbat Gurung, Minister of Communication and Information Technology. The books were distributed to the participants during the event, majorly attended by various journalists.

Major Finding Highlights

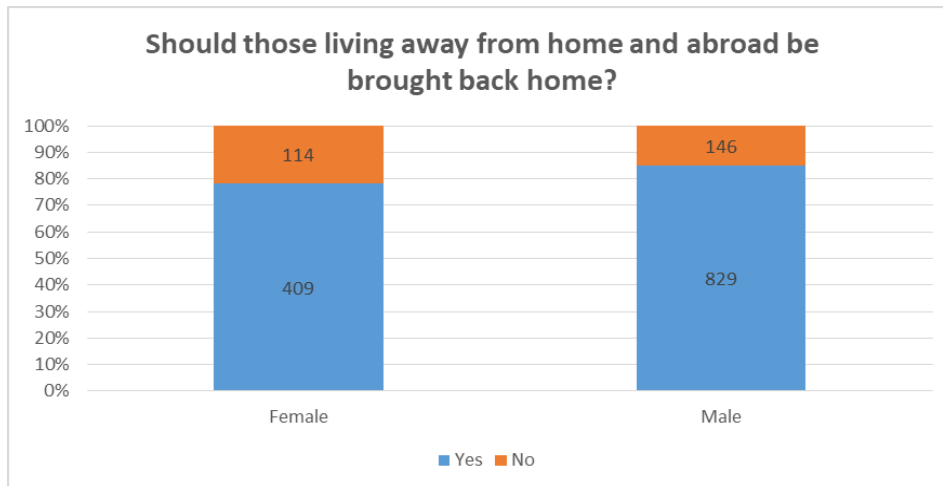
Sources of Information

The data below shows the radio as the most used means of information dissemination, and the mobile phone is the least used.

Source of information on COVID-19			
	Total number of responses	Percentage of responses	Percentage of respondents
Radio	1187	21.2	79.1
TV	1094	19.5	72.9
Newspapers	435	7.8	29.0
Social media	1010	18.0	67.3
Local government	686	12.3	45.7
Friends-relatives	791	14.1	52.7
Community leaders	389	6.9	25.9
Mobile Phone	8	0.1	0.5
Total	5600	100.0	373.3

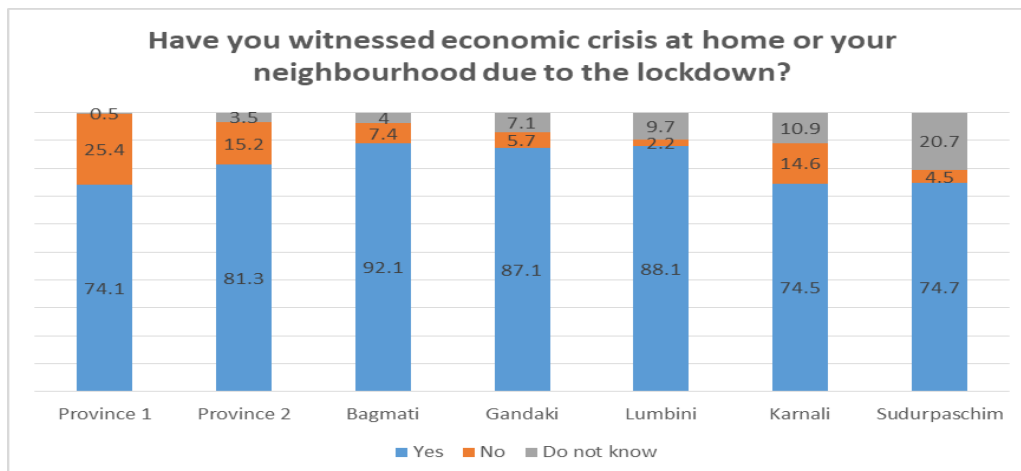
Respondents on the migrant workers

Eighty-five percent of male and 78 percent of female respondents wanted migrant workers to be repatriated to Nepal. 17.8 percent of the respondents said that initiatives should be taken to keep them safe abroad rather than bringing them to Nepal.



Financial crises due to the imposed lockdown

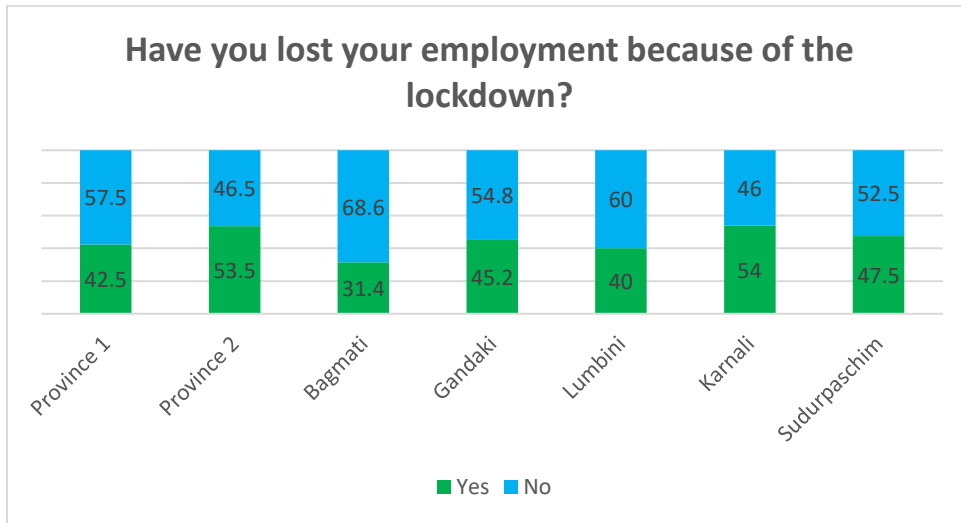
On average, eighty-two percent of the respondents reported financial difficulty, and 11 percent did not face any financial crisis. About 7 percent said that they did not have an answer for it. Ninety-two percent of respondents in Bagmati province reported a financial crisis. Bagmati province has the highest percentage of respondents facing a crisis, whereas Province 1 has the lowest (74.1%).



Status of employment during the pandemic

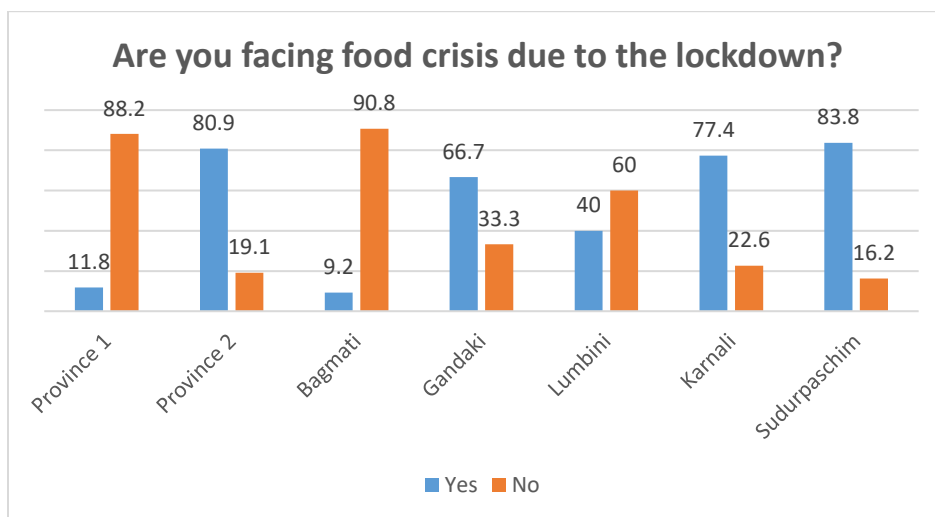
According to the survey, 45 % of the respondents reported losing their job during the pandemic. The Dalits of Karnali reported the highest job loss rate, 54 percent. The job loss rate at Province 2, Province 1, and the Gandaki Province was 53.5%, 42.5%, and 45.2%.

Similarly, 47.5% in Far-Western Province, 40% in Lumbini, and 31.4% in Bagmati province lost their jobs during the COVID-19 lockdown. If the unemployment rate continues similarly, the Dalit community in Nepal is likely to face a huge problem earning a livelihood.



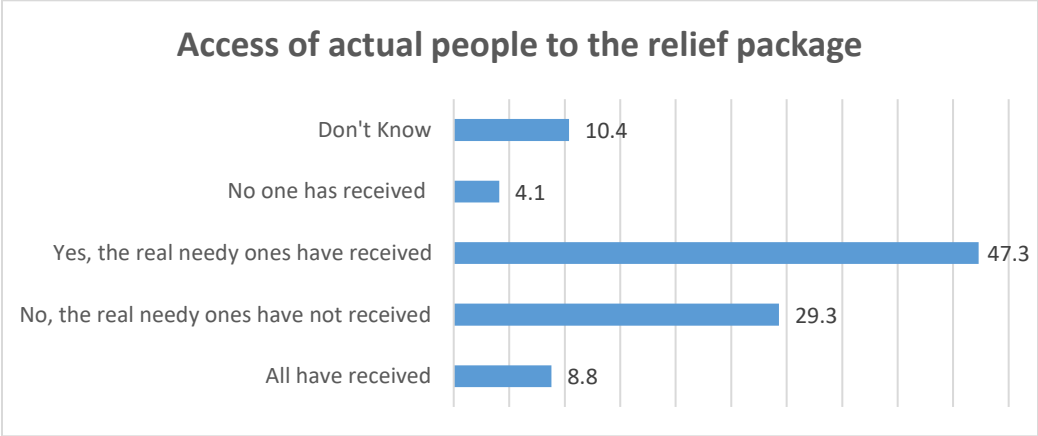
Food crisis during the lockdown

Fifty-two percent of the respondents said that there was a crisis in daily necessities. The rest of the 48 percent of respondents said that they did not experience a food crisis. Respondents from Province 1 and Bagmati Province reported less food crisis. In these provinces, only 11.8 and 9.2 percent of the total population faced food crisis, whereas 80.9 % food crisis was found in Lumbini province, 40 % in Karnali, 66.7% in Gandaki province, and 83.8 % in Far Western province.



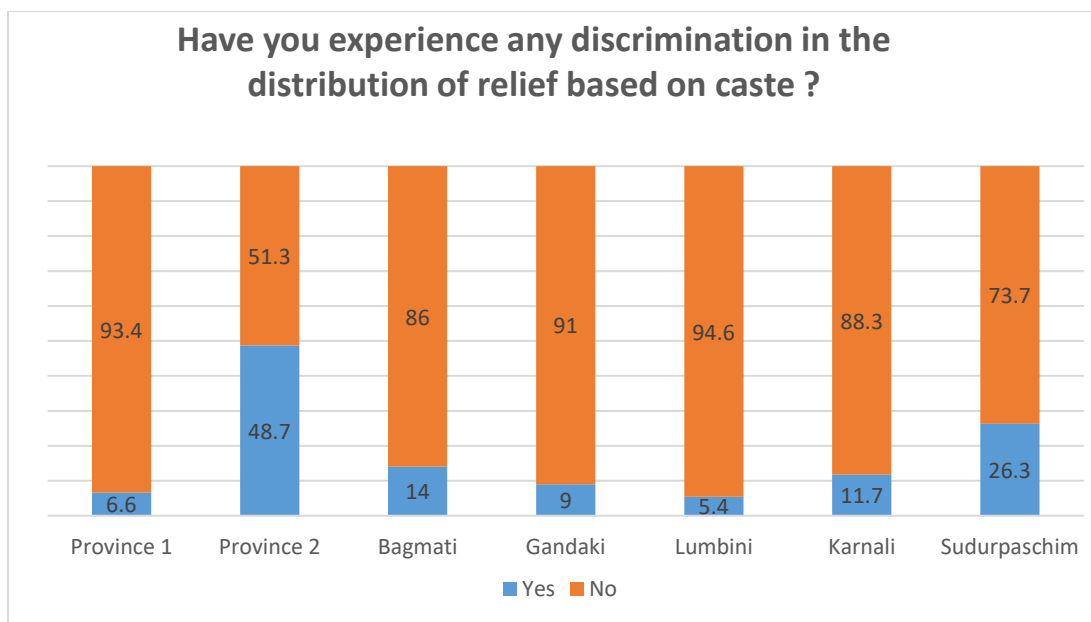
Access of actual victims to the relief package

About 44 percent of the total respondents said that the actual victims received the relief packages. However, 29.3 % feel that the actual victims who did not receive the relief packages. This figure is relatively high and points out that the local government did not distribute relief packages as per the regulations issued by the federal government.



Caste-based discrimination and untouchability during the relief distribution process

The report shows that the respondents of Province 2 suffered the most from caste-based discrimination. The study shows that 48.7 percent of the total respondents in the province reported caste-based discrimination. Similarly, 26.3 percent of respondents in the Sudurpaschim Province and 5.4 percent of the respondents in Lumbini Province reported caste-based discrimination.



Major Highlight: Province-wise Recommendations

Recommendations for Province 1

The federal government must act fairly irrespective of political differences. The ruling government should hear the Voice of elected representatives of opposition parties. The government should promote the participation of the elected representatives and members of the Province Assembly from the Dalit community in the policymaking process.

Recommendations for Province 2

The guidelines on Quarantine Management and Prevention, Control and Treatment Fund (establishment and operation) regulation 2076 should be followed strictly to improve the condition of the quarantine centers. Special attention to be given to border areas; free movements should be controlled. Security forces and local governments need to be more cautious with their actions.

Recommendation for Bagmati Province

The local governments need to do the correct mapping of the citizens. Local governments should collect data on those who work in the informal sector. The concerned ward offices should register the names of needy families in need of the relief package. The local governments should take

special care of Dalits and vulnerable groups—senior citizens, pregnant women, people with disabilities, people with any long-term illness, and orphans.

Recommendation for Gandaki Province

The guidelines on Quarantine Management and Prevention, Control and Treatment Fund (establishment and operation) regulation 2076 should be followed strictly to improve the condition of the quarantine centers. There are reports of caste-based discrimination inside the quarantine facilities; hence, law enforcement agencies need to be more alert. The government needs to increase the supply of PPEs, such as masks, sanitizers, hand wash, and relief materials.

Recommendations for Province 5

The guidelines and standards concerning COVID-19 need to be responsive to Dalits and marginalized communities. Supports need to be proportionate to neediness in terms of vulnerability and marginalization. The province government and local government need to include Dalit-elected representatives in decision-making and control actions. The distribution of relief package needs to be transparent and rational based on the condition of the recipients.

Recommendation for Karnali Province

Massive awareness programs should be launched in remote parts of the province. The government should look into such cases, identify the people involved in such discriminatory activities, and address the cases under the CBDU Act. The guidelines prepared for mitigating pandemic needs to be reviewed and made marginalize, and vulnerable groups focused.

Recommendation for Sudurpaschim Province

The government should increase information dissemination through local radios, television, and relevant IEC materials. The government should also adequately mobilize medical personnel and motivate them to serve in risk zones.

Security forces need to strictly regulate the border areas and allow people and vehicles' movement after following the strict guidelines/protocols. More resources should be arranged for procuring testing kits and PPEs.

Recommendations for CSOs

CSOs need to collaborate with the government respecting the one-door policy work. CSOs need to fully get convinced about the one-door policy and demand clarity with the government.

The CSOs should join hands with the government to provide the awareness program where the province or local government cannot reach. The CSOs working for marginalized and vulnerable groups should collaborate with local government and provide technical support for developing the policy guidelines. The government should encourage CSOs for it.

Overall Recommendations for Federal, Provincial and Local Government

- Local governments need to conduct a rapid needs assessment, make door-to-door visits, and keep accurate records of infected people. The numbers and locations of the most marginalized and vulnerable groups should be identified and officially recorded by each ward offices in all provinces. Special support such as medical facilities, the supply of basic foods should be made available for the needy people in case of emergencies like lockdown or shut-down situations
- Governments need to enlist credible CSOs and work jointly for relief activities. The government should be able to assure transparency and prejudice free relief activities.
- The federal government should develop a broad central policy guideline on pandemic control. Provinces and local governments need to formulate their guidelines on pandemic control based on their contextual realities. The relief standards set by federal, provincial and local governments need to correlate, thereby avoiding confusion and dispute over emergency management practices making coordination among the CSOs, Government agencies easier.
- Keep the vulnerable citizens prepared. Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) policies, tools, and techniques need to be developed and disseminated exclusively for the calamities like COVID-19, earthquakes, floods, etc.
- Annual budgets should be planned for future emergencies, awareness, and resilience-building programs. The support and relief materials should commensurate with the extent of marginalization and vulnerability of the individuals.

- The laws should be strictly implemented against the violation of the human rights of marginalized and vulnerable communities. More penalties should be imposed on those who practice discrimination and exclusions during crisis periods.