

## **Famine in Nepal during the Lockdown due to Covid-19**

Despite being known as an agricultural country, Nepal's performance in food production has not been able to reach its mark on self-sufficiency. Although about two-thirds of the population engaged in agriculture, this sector's contribution to the GDP has been only around 27 percent.

In the fiscal year 2018/2019, Nepal imported agricultural and livestock products worth Rs 224 billion. Heavy reliance on import, even for basic food stuffs for two meals a day, has posed a threat of food scarcity to the government. As the rest of the world is also enforcing lockdown to contain the virus, the strategy of the government to maintain the food supply is challenging. The food imports are sure to shrink as the supply chain is disconnected.

Social distancing and lockdown have left the country with fewer laborers in the field to grow, harvest and process the crops. As a consequence, the crops are rotting in the field. Further, the seeds pesticides and fertilizers are not easily accessible to the farmers, adding more problems to the crop sowing in the upcoming season. The disturbances in the movement of food containers and trucks and extending boarder restriction have also resulted in the spoilage of perishable products. The limited supply of goods has already led to an increase in the cost of that stuff, while the purchasing power of general people is decreasing, which might further worsen the situation. The poor are the ones affected by the virus, they are going hungry and facing the fear of starvation. In Nepal, there are millions of people whose life was already hanging in the thread even before the start of the pandemic.

The condition of many daily wage workers and labourers who have difficulty feeding their families even once a day cannot be explained in words. They have battled not only against the deadly virus but also against hunger every moment of every day, respecting laws of the government. How long are the poor supposed to endure the pain and suffering when, the only policy the government is undertaking to tackle corona virus is the extension of the lockdown?

Many marginalised communities of rural areas of Gorkha survive on daily wages. Now it's members are at a high risk of famine due to lockdown restrictions. Many mothers are going to bed hungry or half fed every night. Many pregnant women are likely to give birth to underfed babies and many people are living with multidimensional poverty.

There is an immediate need of relief in almost all of these communities. A few packages of food materials distributed by the local government have not reached the impoverished settlements. Pregnant woman needing nutritious food have not been able to eat normal food supplements.

The ongoing lockdown in Nepal has left the wage earners and the extremely poor in a state of famine. Pregnant women, newly mothers and children under the age of five are at a

high risk of malnutrition. Lockdown adopted to avoid one pandemic has increased the risk of other epidemics such as hunger, famine and malnutrition.

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