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Jenna Mae Biedscheid

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Non-state Actors' COVID-19 Response in Nepal

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Abstract

This research explores the ways in which non-state actors have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in Nepal and the needs present in the months before drastic increases in cases began on May 11th¹. In doing so, it describes how social and political inequality within Nepal has caused people experiencing the most need to be left out of early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic relief effort. This research includes a literature review which situates Nepal amidst the global pandemic as well as interviews with non-state actors currently responding in Nepal. It finds that migrant workers, daily wage earners, Dalits, Janajati/Adivasi peoples, and stateless people are experiencing the most need. The greatest need experienced due to the government lockdowns has been for food security. With this, it was found that non-state actors currently responding are challenged by a lack of communication with the Government of Nepal and a lack of population data available.

Keywords: COVID-19, coronavirus, pandemic, social work, global disaster, disaster relief, inequality, caste system, citizenship, Janajati/Adivasi

¹ (Worldometers, 2020)

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has shaken the global community. The virus itself holds the same novelty as the situation it has put the world in. Never before has something threatened all nations with equal lethal potency at once. Nations across the world are bracing for potentially catastrophic case levels, juggling between protecting people from infection and protecting people from the crumbling global economy. As nations work to contain the virus threat and save their economies, decisions must be made on whether to open the economy or remain in lockdown until vaccines are made available. These decisions cannot be made in everyone's best interest; and they are rarely made in the best interest of the most marginalized. This is visible in Nepal, where cases are just beginning to rise (Worldometers, 2020). While Nepal has so far avoided a major outbreak, the continuous lockdown is taking a toll on the country's tourism- and remittance²-reliant economy that many people already living in poverty depend on (Sunam & Adhikari, 2016).

Without any protocols or policies prepared for an event such as this, there is no best-practice model for any country to follow. Each attempts its own unique approach, while the world can only wait and see which attempt will save the most lives. This paper explores the current COVID-19 response efforts of non-state actors in Nepal. The research presented asks and answers:

What needs has COVID-19 created in Nepal?

Who is experiencing the most need?

How are non-state actors in Nepal responding to meet needs present?

² Remittances are moneys sent from the country in which a migrant worker resides, which is sent back to their home country, usually to their family.

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First, the paper will discuss existing literature on the COVID-19 pandemic both globally and within the Nepal context, the 2015 Earthquake response, and Nepal's current political situation which largely effects the ability of non-state actors to respond. Looking into the 2015 Earthquake response in Nepal provides insight into how non-state actors in Nepal typically respond to disasters. After this, methodology will be explained, followed by a presentation of the results, their analysis, and opportunities and implications for further research.

This topic is of interest to the researcher due to her belief that everyone's needs should be met equitably, especially in a time of crisis. After studying in Nepal for two months and abruptly repatriating to the United States due to the pandemic, she found it useful to explore how life continues in Nepal as the pandemic progresses with a focus on how people outside of the government are coming together to meet the nation's needs. By looking at non-state actors' response, both the effectiveness of relief distribution and needs that are still left unmet are clearer.

Previous research suggests an interesting correlation between the Government of Nepal and non-state actors in disaster response. This dynamic, along with the current novelty of the pandemic, leads into the importance of this research. Lack of coordination between the Government of Nepal and non-state actors during the 2015 Earthquake disaster relief caused misdistribution of aid in a time that was dire for Nepalis. The novelty of this global event sheds light on the importance of tracking how different countries have been responding to the pandemic. New research on current responses may provide guidance in shaping a new and more resilient global structure with improved protocols.

Literature Review

COVID-19

The COVID-19 outbreak began in December of 2019 in Wuhan city, Hubei province in China (Sohrabi et. al., 2020). On January 7th, 2020, the disease was identified by the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CCDC) as a novel coronavirus, which was then named COVID-19 by the World Health Organization (WHO) (Sohrabi et. al., 2020). WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on January 30th, 2020 (Sohrabi et. al., 2020). Nepal's first positive case of COVID-19, reported on January 13th, was a 32-year-old Nepalese student who had returned to Nepal from Wuhan University of Technology (Asim et. al., 2020). The second case did not occur for over two months, on March 23rd, and cases stayed below 10 through the end of March (Asim et. al., 2020). During the month of April, reported positive cases increased to 41 (Worldometers, 2020). As of May 17th, 2020, the cases have reached only 295 while the global number of cases is nearing 5 million (Worldometers, 2020).

Nepal's current COVID-19 response consists of social assistance and travel restrictions (Gentilini, 2020). The Government of Nepal first issued a lockdown on March 24th, 2020, which has so far been extended to May 18th (Sajid, 2020). Under the lockdown, there is no permitted travel or movement on roads by vehicle or foot except for "very limited life safety exceptions" (U.S. Embassy Nepal, 2020). Health desks are in place in Tribhuvan National Airport and at the border checkpoints with India and China (Asim et. al., 2020). As of March 20th, 2020, all international flights have been suspended (Nepal Department of Immigration, 2020). The tourist campaign "Visit Nepal 2020" and all other promotional campaigns have been cancelled (Asim et. al., 2020). The Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital is currently handling and

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treating cases, while testing is being done at the Nepal Public Health Laboratory in Kathmandu (Asim et. al., 2020). Not all Nepalis have access to health services such as these, though, due to inequality within the country (Gurung, 2020).

COVID-19 and Inequalities in Nepal

The World Health Organization defines disaster as “an occurrence disrupting the normal conditions of existence and causing a level of suffering that exceeds the capacity of adjustment of the affected community” (World Health Organization, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has completely transformed the normal conditions of existence by changing the very way humans interact with one another. The economic blow has caused a level of suffering due to hunger that could reasonably be deemed as exceeding the current capacity of the world. Therefore, this pandemic is a disaster. Disasters tend to illuminate inequalities in society by having a clear, disproportionate negative affect on the lives of the most marginalized (Reid, 2013). In its effort to reduce the risk of outbreak, the lockdown is posing an increasingly dire threat of hunger for lower income individuals (Shrestha, S., 2020).

Citizenship is a prominent source of inequality within Nepal. Nepal operates off of *Jus sanguinis* system, which means that the right of citizenship is not just from place of birth, but from having one or two parents who are citizens (United Nations, 2011). The United States, for example, operates off of the *Jus soli* system, which means “right of the soil” (United Nations, 2011). Anyone born on U.S. soil is automatically a U.S. Citizen (United Nations, 2011). Due to inconsistency with the application of Nepal’s citizenship law, Nepalis can often only obtain citizenship by presenting documentation of their father’s citizenship to their Chief District Officer with the citizenship certificate of their father (United Nations, 2011). Mothers who have been left or widowed by their husbands and husbands abroad for work at the time of child birth

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are only a couple examples of situations that leave children unable to show documentation of their father's citizenship, and therefore, stateless (United Nations, 2011). "The people who are unable to prove their citizenship in Nepal are generally [poorer individuals] and not in a position to question the status quo" (United Nations, 2011). Now, during the COVID-19 pandemic, people without citizenship cards are unable to gain access to life-saving relief materials (Yuyu, 2020). Already marginalized by statelessness, this puts them at increased risk during the pandemic.

Self-quarantine is not affordable for most families, especially in low- and middle-income countries (Chung et. al., 2020). Along with economic inequalities, which will exacerbate the ability for some families to stay safe and healthy, inequities in access to health care are also illuminated in the midst of this disaster (Gurung, 2020). For Janajati/Adivasi communities, access to health and vital resources during this time is disproportionately low (Gurung, 2020). COVID also threatens to erase indigenous knowledge if it penetrates these communities, where elders hold the majority of knowledge and are also at the highest risk of death from the virus (Gurung, 2020).

Dalits are also among the most affected, currently more worried about economic implications of the lockdown than the virus itself (Shrestha, S., 2020). The globally used term "social distancing" has stirred the traumas of caste by reinforcing the notion of "untouchability" and "impurity" that has violently discriminated against Dalits since the caste system was created (Folmar, 2020). Along with hunger, Dalits are faced with the challenge of having the least access to health care due to discrimination (Shrestha, S., 2020). While social distancing may bring comfort to the elite, it is directly discriminatory against Dalits. The impacts of the lockdown on Dalits in Nepal is so dire, that many are more afraid of starvation from being unable to buy food

than the virus itself (Shrestha, S., 2020). Similar inequalities were illuminated after the 2015 Earthquake disaster in Nepal.

2015 Earthquake Disaster Response

Studies show that after the 2015 Earthquake, those who are disregarded socially and politically were largely left out of response efforts. This included those not properly supported or represented by the Government of Nepal (Sanderson & Ramalingam). The Government of Nepal does not prioritize people from lower castes, Janajati/Adivasi peoples, or other marginalized populations, leaving them at a greater risk during times of disaster (Baharmand et. al., 2016). After the earthquake, non-state actors were left to collaborate to support these populations but did not do so equally (Sanderson & Ramalingam; Baharmand et. al., 2016). Social capital was used by non-state actors as a means of assessing needs, collecting data, and providing necessary and prioritized relief (Baharmand et. al., 2016). Disconnected from these vital social circles, the most vulnerable households were left out of the counts and the decision-making (Baharmand et. al., 2016).

Important lessons to learn from after the 2015 Earthquake response include the lack of coordination between the government and non-state actors, that the socially and politically underrepresented were left out of distribution, and that decision-making for relief happened from the top-down. Coordination between non-state actors and the Government of Nepal did not allow for the most efficient and far-reaching disaster relief (Sanderson & Ramalingam). After the earthquake, communities were disconnected from available information, information gathering, and resources and tools available, which took away their self-agency in the relief effort (Baharmand et. al., 2016). This cursory response by both the Government of Nepal and non-state

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actors made the relief efforts more difficult and less efficient, with misdirected aid and a smaller reach than what was needed.

Conflict theory is useful for understanding this dynamic of underrepresented populations being left out of the disaster response, and more privileged individuals receiving the best treatment. Due to the pandemic being global, resources are even more limited than they usually are right now. The Government of Nepal is exerting its power over the Nepali population by implementing and enforcing a strict lockdown in an effort to protect people against the virus. With the government as the sole decision-making entity of how resources are distributed, a power dynamic is revealed between the Government of Nepal and the rest of the population.

Nepal's Current Political Situation

Nepal's current constitution was just promulgated in 2015, the same year as the Earthquake (Vaidya, Simkhada, & Simkhada, 2020). It could be argued that the lack of coordination between the government and non-state actors in the 2015 Earthquake response could partly be attributed to the fact that Nepal only recently switched to federalism³ (Bhattarai, 2020). Coordination between the 3 tiers of government (federal, provincial, and local) was, and is still, not streamlined (Bhattarai, 2020). Challenges that Nepal continues to face during this transition to federalism include unclear roles and responsibilities of local authorities, human resource management, and local level political capacity (Vaidya, Simkhada, & Simkhada, 2020). These all have direct effects on the ability of non-state actors and the government alike to respond efficiently in times of disaster.

³ Federalism is the combination of general and regional government in a single political system.

One-Door Policy

The one-door policy, which was created on August 14th, 2017, changed the relationship between the Government of Nepal and non-state actors (Rogers, 2017). Because of this policy, any local or international humanitarian aid must go through the government before distributing relief materials with mandatory coordination with the local District Disaster Relief Committees (Rogers, 2017). This drastically slows down the distribution process, as all aid that comes in must be put on hold until it is approved by the government for distribution. Many professionals in the humanitarian aid sector believe that while this does address the lack of coordination caused during the 2015 Earthquake, it does not do so effectively (Rogers, 2017). Since the beginning of the lockdown, this policy has left many groups willing to help distribute resources like essential food items and personal protective equipment (PPE) to those in need unable to do so. Provinces across Nepal have diverted their funds to local governments to carry out distribution of rice, lentils, oil, and salt (Himalayan News Service, 2020). This policy has been transformative for the humanitarian aid sector in Nepal, and the pandemic is one of few other disasters to happen since its implementation. Experiences non-state actors are having while trying to respond to the pandemic under the condition of the one-door-policy will be discussed in the findings section.

Methodology

To begin the study, current and relevant research on COVID-19 generally and in the Nepal-specific context, as well as existing studies on Nepal's 2015 Earthquake disaster response were analyzed. Once the existing literature was analyzed, a generalized set of interview questions was prepared. Snowball, purposive, and selective sampling were used to find participants. Amina Singh, the research advisor, gave initial suggestions for potential

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participants. This initial list of participants was contacted via email. After initial contact, Facebook became the main tool for participant recruitment. Using the researcher's public profile, additional participants were found through purposive sampling, looking through the many COVID-19 related Facebook Groups based in Nepal. These participants were contacted via Facebook Messenger, then correspondence continued over email. In each interview, snowball sampling was used by inquiring participants about any other NGOs, informal groups, etc. that are responding to COVID-19 in Nepal and asked to be connected with them directly.

All interviews were conducted in English via phone or video calls, using a mixture of media platforms including WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger depending on the participant's preference. Follow-up interviews were not required of any of the participants. For the participants who agreed to audio-recording, a transcript was made of the interview. For those who did not agree to this, notes from the interview were digitalized. From the digitalized notes and transcriptions, general themes in the data were extracted. These themes were then analyzed and compiled into similar categories to be used as results.

Research Instrument

How have your operations changed since COVID?

How are you currently responding?

Are you collecting any data? How?

How are you receiving funding?

Working in partnership with any other group? If yes, how are efforts coordinated?

What challenges are you facing?

Are you corresponding with government?

If yes, what does that relationship look like? What are some challenges you experience?

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What is the current situation in Nepal?

What are the most needed items now?

Who is impacted most by COVID-19? What are they experiencing?

What are your concerns?

What is your top priority going forward?

Limitations

Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, this research was conducted from the United States. Interviews were conducted in English, which is not the first language of the participants, because of the interviewer's limited Nepali language ability. Scheduling interviews was difficult due to the time difference between Nepal and the United States. The time restraint of the study period limited the size and inclusivity of the sample size of participants. Because of the limited number of participants, this research is not generalizable, but it does contribute to a larger body of ongoing research on the response to the pandemic across the world. Pre-existing literature on the pandemic was limited due to the unprecedented nature of the situation. When this research was being done, the pandemic is also still going on. Especially as Nepal is just beginning to see growth in cases, the dynamics of the COVID-19 response by non-state actors in Nepal will likely still change. This research can only be applied to the response efforts before cases started to climb.

Statement of Ethics

Before interviewing each participant, they were informed on the purpose of the study, the study procedures, the position of the researcher, potential risks and discomforts, potential benefits to participants and society, confidentiality, and participation and withdrawal conditions. After being informed about these aspects of the study, participants gave written or electronic

consent to the interview. All participants had the option to opt out of being audio recorded, using their name or the name of their organization, and being quoted. A pseudo name was used for participants who wished to remain anonymous. All participants had the ability to withdraw from participation at any time.

Results

Participants

Kesang Yuyu, Mahila Pads.

Kesang started the charity organization, Mahila Pads, in 2018 with the intention of creating local jobs for women and promoting menstrual hygiene training and education (Mahila Pads, 2018). Her organization employs women from different districts in Nepal to sew menstrual pads that are sustainable and reusable for rural Nepali girls and women (Mahila Pads, 2018). Through education and trainings, the organization works to decrease the stigma around menstruation in rural Nepal and increase hygiene practices (Mahila Pads, 2018). Kesang was asked about her about what Mahila Pads is working on now, as well as herself individually, in response to the needs rising during this pandemic.

Prakriti Shrestha⁴, Samata Foundation.

Prakriti works for the Samata Foundation, which is the only Dalit-led independent think tank in Nepal (Samata Foundation, n.d.). Their work involves promoting and protecting Dalit rights through evidence-based policy advocacy and lobbying of stakeholders (Samata Foundation, n.d.). They also write newspaper articles, information briefs, and policy papers promoting Dalits rights (Samata Foundation, n.d.). Prakriti was asked about her about what she is working on now, and how the virus is affecting Dalits specifically.

⁴ Prakriti Shrestha is a pseudo name used to protect the anonymity of the participant.

Ang Chokpa Sherpa, dZi Foundation.

Chokpa works with dZi Foundation's Nepal team, which works "in partnership with Nepal's isolated communities to create lasting improvement in their quality of life" (dZi Foundation, n.d.). dZi Foundation works in the districts Solukhumbu, Bhojpur, and Khotang in 5 different municipalities and 13 different rural communities (Sherpa, 2020). Their usual programs include reconstruction of bridges, schools, irrigation systems and drinking water systems, all of which have been put on pause due to the pandemic (Sherpa, 2020). dZi is an international non-profit organization, which means it falls under heavy governmental restrictions of the One-Door Policy and cannot directly distribute aid. Chokpa was asked about her about how dZi usually operates, what they are working on now, and what their plans are post-pandemic.

Deepak Chapagain, Volunteer Corps Nepal.

Deepak works for Volunteer Corps Nepal (VCN), a humanitarian non-profit agency that conducts emergency disaster service, development projects including economic rehabilitation, and volunteer programs in Nepal (Chapagain, 2020). This agency works directly with the Government of Nepal to train volunteers in every district, who will then be registered volunteers with government (Chapagain, 2020). Police and the armed forces conduct the volunteer trainings, which are coordinated by VCN (Chapagain, 2020). Their volunteers are trained on emergency disaster response, and respond immediately whenever there is a flood, landslide, tornado, and now, a pandemic (Chapagain, 2020). They have been working to set up quarantine, health and testing facilities, distribute government-sourced PPE, meals, etc. (Chapagain, 2020). Deepak was asked about how VCN has been able to responded to the pandemic and coordinated with government in doing so.

Dibyesh Giri, Nepali citizen.

Dibyesh is a registered volunteer in Volunteer Corps Nepal (Giri, 2020). Dibyesh was asked about how he has contributed to the COVID-19 response effort in Nepal. He explained that he cooked meals for the migrant workers who were pushed out of Kathmandu valley due to joblessness from the lockdown, forced to walk home to their villages (Giri, 2020). The first day he did this, he made 200 lunch boxes (Giri, 2020). Later, with friends, he made 600-700 lunch boxes every day, until the government banned travel completely (Giri, 2020).

Findings

There are 4 main themes present in the data extracted from the interviews, which respond to the research questions. The first theme reveals that the biggest need present during the initial response period is food security⁵ (Yuyu, 2020). Another is that there has been a pause on pre-existing development and aid projects (Sherpa, 2020). Along with this, there has been a lack of communication between the Government of Nepal as well as a lack of data available on Nepal's population (Yuyu, 2020). Finally, migrant workers, daily wage earners, Dalits, Janajati/Adivasi peoples and people without citizenship cards are experiencing the most need due to discrimination they face both socially and politically. Each theme will be discussed under the research question which it answers.

What needs has COVID-19 created in Nepal?

The greatest need right now is food security. Throughout the initial response period, the greatest need created was ironically from the lockdown put in place to protect people from the virus. The economic implications of the lockdown have left thousands jobless and displaced, unable to afford regular meals (Giri, 2020). In her interview, Kesang Yuyu explained this reality

⁵ Food security is the ability to which an individual can access food.

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which people have faced since the beginning of the lockdown, and that there is the potential of “people falling into abject poverty” (Yuyu, 2020). Kesang herself, unable to continue Mahila Pads operations, has been working with her local ward office to help distribute relief packages (Yuyu, 2020). They have been “giving a few essentials like rice, daal, cooking oil, sugar, [and] salt” (Yuyu, 2020). She says they are giving out sugar because:

Sugar is something you can burn; and for them, having a little bit of sugar is quick energy. Looking at some of the data, if people have a little bit more money, they always want to buy something sugary, so it's like chocolate or candy. (Yuyu, 2020)

This hunger is especially prominent for Dalits. Prakriti Shrestha from Samata Foundation told me that, “in times like this, it is really hard for [Dalits] to join hand and mouth - they don't have savings” (Shrestha, P., 2020). Dalits are also more likely to be daily wage earners and migrant workers, which makes them more vulnerable to joblessness and displacement during this time (Shrestha, P., 2020).

Who is experiencing the most need?

Interview themes reveal that migrant workers, daily wage earners, Dalits, and people without citizenship cards are experiencing the most need, due to discrimination from inequalities present within Nepal. For migrant workers, many are walking hundreds of kilometers to reach home, often leaving in the middle of the night (Giri, 2020). Dibyesh Giri described that he “saw thousands of people walking from different places coming there to catch [a] bus, many already tired and hungry... until government banned travel completely” (2020). Many non-state actors, such as Dibyesh and Volunteer Corps Nepal, are focusing their attention on helping people get back to their villages safely (Chapagain, 2020). When the government still allowed travel, Volunteer Corps Nepal coordinated volunteers in different districts to take care of the migrant

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workers travelling back to their villages (Chapagain, 2020). From the beginning of their journey to the time they reached their village, VCN worked to support people travelling with shelter, food, and health needs (Chapagain, 2020).

Dalits, the lowest caste of the caste system, often referred to as the “untouchables”, have been discriminated against for centuries (Shrestha, P., 2020). Because Dalits are more likely to work daily wage jobs and migrate for work, they are put at a higher risk by the economic downfall caused by the lockdown (Shrestha, P., 2020). Prakriti Shrestha states that, “social distancing is not a luxury that everyone has” as Dalits disproportionately live in tighter quarters due to discrimination (Shrestha, P., 2020). Trauma that arises for Dalits during a time when people are constantly reminded to disinfect (Shrestha, P., 2020). Prakriti told me, “COVID is invisible, caste is also invisible” (Shrestha, P., 2020). You must disinfect your hands to “purify” yourself from the virus (Shrestha, P., 2020). Historically, people would purify themselves of untouchability with quarantines after travel (Shrestha, P., 2020; Folmar, 2020). The way that Dalits think about the virus reminds them of the traumas caused by the caste system (Shrestha, P., 2020). The way that the pandemic is framed and the decisions that are made by the Government of Nepal have been hostile towards Dalits well-being and security (Folmar, 2020).

The Government of Nepal is currently not handing out relief packages to people who do not have citizenship cards (Yuyu, 2020). Kesang Yuyu noticed this as she was helping distribute relief packages in her local area (2020). This leaves people without citizenship cards, an already marginalized population, to find a way to meet their needs on their own.

How are non-state actors in Nepal responding to meet needs present?

Non-state actors who have the financial ability to respond are experiencing challenges, including a lack of coordination between the Government of Nepal and non-state actors in relief

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distribution, and a lack of data available on Nepal's population to know who needs relief (Shrestha, P., 2020; Yuyu, 2020). While Volunteer Corps Nepal explained that they are constantly in communication with the government, international non-state actors are experiencing difficulty in coordinating with the government due to the One-Door Policy (Sherpa, 2020). The One-Door Policy is currently preventing dZi Foundation from helping villagers from the districts dZi works in that are stuck in Kathmandu get back to their villages (Sherpa, 2020). The lack of data available also makes distribution of relief materials less effective (Yuyu, 2020). Kesang Yuyu said in her interview that there is no way for them to know who is living where, and who is "going hungry, and who is fine for a week" (2020). She noted that another reason that they have not been able to see the reality of the hunger present is because of the shame that is often associated with being hungry (Yuyu, 2020).

Many non-state actors which had humanitarian aid projects going on before the pandemic began have been forced to pause all of their projects due to the lockdown. Mahila Pads' operations have been put on pause due to the employed women having to return to their villages, but Kesang Yuyu herself is still finding a way to respond (2020). She donated around 200 pads to the non-profit organization Hiteri, which is currently able to do relief work (Yuyu, 2020). dZi Foundation's staff have personally donated time and money into the relief effort, even though they are also unable to continue their normal operations (Sherpa, 2020). They have been able to hold on to their agriculture program, where they work with farmers to develop more efficient farming practices, as the program is vital to food security in the area (Sherpa, 2020).

Discussion

What was found in interviews is largely congruent with what was found in the literature review. Politically and socially underrepresented Nepali people are being left out of relief

distribution due to inequality and a lack of coordination between the Government of Nepal and non-state actors, currently putting them at the highest need level.

Comparing The 2015 Earthquake and COVID-19

Five years after the 2015 Earthquake, there is still a lack of communication which has not been improved by the One-Door Policy. While the policy takes one step in the right direction by forcing more communication between the Government of Nepal and non-state actors, it takes another step in the wrong direction by discouraging rapid distribution of aid. Whether the disaster be a flood, tornado, earthquake, or pandemic, relief in these situations needs to be as quick and efficient as possible. The time that non-state actors must wait in order to approve their relief effort with the government could potentially cost lives in these types of situations. What we are seeing with COVID-19, is people on the brink of starvation, and many non-state actors wishing to lend a helping hand, but unable to do so. If the government had the capacity to rapidly and efficiently respond in these situations, the One-Door Policy would be more fitting, but this is not the case. The government's weaknesses in communication between the three tiers, unclear roles and responsibilities of local authorities, and limited local level political capacity hinders their ability to respond in the way that Nepali people need them to during disaster. Scrapping the One-Door Policy may be the quickest way for the Government of Nepal to lean on the many local and international non-state actors eager to help in the relief effort as it continues to transition to federalism.

Another stark difference between COVID-19 and the earthquake in Nepal, is that Nepali people are unable to come together to support one another the way that they were able to after the earthquake. Interviewee Prakriti Shrestha explained that “during the earthquake, [people] physically went to villages so [they] could clearly see what was happening” (Shrestha, P., 2020).

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Now, during the pandemic crisis, people are unable to see the need present. They are unable to come together as a society and help one another as they did after the earthquake, both because of the lockdown and because of the One-Door Policy.

Implications

Because there is limited existing research on global pandemic responses due to the novelty of this event, this research is among the first available which tracks the COVID-19 response effort in Nepal. This research will be useful for existing and future, new formal, informal, international, national, or local non-state actors in Nepal as they navigate relief distribution.

The mass exodus occurring of Nepali workers abroad making their way back home on charter flights or through the border with India as well as workers in Kathmandu returning to their villages points to an interesting reversal in a phenomenon that has been occurring in Nepal. For decades, Nepal has been experiencing dramatic increases in out-migration and urbanization rates due to a lack of local job availability (Sunam & Adhikari, 2016). This outmigration and urbanization of labor has caused one third of the entire working male population in Nepal to be absent (Sunam & Adhikari, 2016). The decrease in male labor has caused a decrease in use of rural agricultural land, increased reliance on imports like rice from India, and declining biodiversity due to the lack of land use (Gartaula et al., 2014). Urbanization has also been causing a decrease in use of rural agricultural land for food production (Gartaula et al., 2014). Because of the lack of men available to do agricultural work that is traditionally done by men, women's workload has increased immensely (Gartaula et al., 2014). The reversal of this phenomena, caused by the global pandemic, will present Nepal with many issues in creating jobs for the over 5.5 million migrant workers making their way back home (Sunam & Adhikari,

2016). It will also present interesting research opportunities as Nepali society and its new federalist government adapts to this mass return of labor.

There is the potential to dive further into the effects of disaster and relief decision-making in a discrimination-based world. This is a topic that is becoming extremely important in today's context as marginalized groups are put at increased risk of contraction and economic vulnerability during the current pandemic, and other disasters sure to come. Living in a climate crisis, the world is likely to see more and more natural disasters. Living in an overpopulated and rapidly growing world, it is also likely that pandemics will continue to become a greater and greater threat to humans. Because of this, it is vital to produce research that illuminates a pathway to more equal societies and disaster relief that works for all, not just the few.

Conclusion

Inequality and the economic blow from nation-wide lockdowns continue to put marginalized populations across the world at risk of contraction of the virus, as well as at risk of poverty and starvation. During the initial non-state actor response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Nepal, politically and socially underrepresented Nepali people are being left out of relief distribution due to inequality, a lack of coordination between the Government of Nepal and non-state actors, and a lack of population data available. Among those who remain in need are Dalits, Janajati/Adivasi communities, displaced migrant and daily wage workers and people without citizenship cards. Pre-existing development and aid projects have been paused due to the lockdown as hunger grows in the bellies of those left out of relief efforts.

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