

SAFBIN COVID-19 ASSESSMENT REPORT

CARITAS AUSTRIA

Prepared by:
SUNIL SIMON
HELENE UNTERGUGGENBERGER

SAFBIN COVID-19 ASSESSMENT

SAFBIN conducted an assessment in March 2020 on the impact of COVID19 on smallholder farmers in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan.

All the four countries were under strict lockdown during the assessment and support was taken from the village resource persons (VRPs) to remotely give the status from their respective villages. Each VRP contacted the farmers who could be available over the phone to conduct the assessment. Strict measures were followed to ensure the safety of the people conducting the survey. This report presents the initial findings of the COVID19 lockdowns on the smallholder farmers. Some of the major findings of the assessment are given in this report.

The report has been divided into seven sections, each giving an overview of the situation at each level of the programme.



01

GENERAL

The general section gives an overview of the situation in the national and organisation level:

1. Risks to existing infrastructures in the country/region

The situation in India and Pakistan is getting worse while it is still low in Bangladesh and Nepal. Health systems are being revamped to face the worst-case scenario. There are reported reverse migrations happening in India and Nepal which is expected to worsen the situation in these countries. The most vulnerable communities in the partner countries are adversely affected due to the lockdown situation.

2. Risks to the organisation

All the four partner offices in South Asia are closed due to lockdowns announced by the respective Governments till mid-April, 2020. Emergency response initiatives are being planned (updates available in Baobab).

All the four partner organisations are either in the process or already responding to the COVID19.

3. Specific response plan

Response plans are ready in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. In Nepal, Caritas Nepal is still waiting for the Government directives at the time the assessment was being conducted. However, the organisations do not have a specific contingency plan prepared for the running projects. The teams will be working on it.

At the time of this assessment Support to SAFBIN community partners are facilitated only in Pakistan. Caritas Nepal is maintaining regular communication with community partners over telephone.

02

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

1. Activities that can still take place

No activities are possible during lockdown. Teams are operational for exploring options for coordination

2. Activities that can be replaced by useful alternatives

There are some suggestions from partners. Activities possible without additional allocation / reallocation of budget is being carried out by some partners like awareness raising on COVID19, sharing information on Govt. response, linking farmers to Govt. support etc.

3. Activities that cannot take place and have to be postponed

There are some planned activities which could not be completed and some not able to start due to sudden lockdown. Partners have suggested to postpone these activities and implement after the lockdown situation is eased. This essentially means that some of the activities planned for the 2nd year cannot be completed as per plan and the same has to be carried out during the third year of the project. However, partners are not in a position to share the information due to the movement restriction and their inability to access data.

4. Activities that have to be entirely cancelled

No activities will be entirely cancelled as the programme is based on processes and skipping a process may have negative consequences on the overall programme and intended results.

5. Balance funds from the project which can be allocated for immediate response

The balance funds (savings from completed activities) may not be sufficient for a comprehensive response. It may be more logical to allocate it for implementing the balance activities from second year. Teams can review the situation only after the normalisation of the situation. It is possible that additional support may be required for the farmers to overcome the challenges caused by COVID9 situation.

03

PROJECT RELATED STAFF

1. Impact on staff plan

Programme team members in all the countries are working from home. However, field operations are completely stopped due to restrictions on movement.

2. Alternative tasks for staff within the project

There is sufficient work for data management which is being facilitated by SARE. Apart from this, the teams are being mobilised to raise awareness among the communities and disseminate authentic information from the local government to them. Pakistan team is also engaged in supporting the SAFBIN farmers for accessing Government support. In India, the SAFBIN team is engaged in emergency response of local partner.

t 3. Safety and security of the SAFBIN team members

All partners have taken initiatives to ensure safety and security of the team members. A series of measures are taken by partners but it varies with organisation. Taking proactive steps, SAFBIN teams at programme level were suggested to minimise / stop operations after assessing the COVID19 situation in their respective locations.

4. Community level response activities that maintains social distancing

Each partner has identified a set of activities which can take place while maintaining social distancing. This varies with the organisations. General focus is to share authentic information on COVID19 to the community partners and to generate information on their situation and provide necessary recommendations to the local government.

04

TARGET GROUP/BENEFICIARIES

1. Impact on Target group

The community partners of SAFBIN programme is adversely affected due to COVID19. Their income sources have stopped, and agriculture is affected, causing situation of food insecurity and limited access to agricultural inputs, labour for harvesting crops etc. The most vulnerable community members especially elders, single women, people with special abilities are the most affected.

2. Risks on the target groups

Most of the intervention related to collective action can put both team and the community partners at risk and hence it was decided to limit the intervention through telephone or other options where physical presence is not required.

3. Vulnerable groups

SAFBIN programme is mostly working with the vulnerable groups. Among them elderly, single women, widows, children, people with special abilities, SC/ST/Adivasis etc. are the most vulnerable.

4. Other stakeholders

The teams are in the process of finding out suitable options. At present, some stakeholders are already engaged for data analysis etc. The coordination is continuing over telephone and other communication means.

05

INTERNAL OPERATIONS/ADMINISTRATION

1. Meeting deadlines for reporting and audit

As of now, the teams do not see any delay unless the lockdown situation is extended further which cannot be determined at present.

2. Ensuring money flow and other essential administrative processes

There is no major impact on the money flow. However, only the essential operations like administrative functions are operational especially for maintaining and managing emergency response.

3. Considering realignment of budgets to support Covid-19 related necessities

Since there is limited possibility to reduce SAFBIN funds, any realignment would mean inadequate funding to continue the programme. However, all the teams have expressed the need for emergency response for the SAFBIN community partners. The situation needs to be assessed as it develops further in the next few weeks. Communication with donors about the situation. All the partners have sent out situation reports to CIMOs. The teams are also accessing situation among community partners and developing additional strategies to respond to the situation and support the community partners.

06

SITUATION ASSESSMENT: COMMUNITY LEVEL

1. Major issues of the smallholder farmers during COVID19

- Smallholders have confined themselves in their houses. As the sources of earning are closed, the SHFs are facing an acute financial crisis and the situation may further aggravate in the coming days.
- Unavailability of agricultural inputs: seeds, planting materials and other farming inputs and irrigation facilities: Even though, the farmers in lock down situation, the farmers are doing their agriculture activities such as harvesting, preparing the fields etc. regularly. But lack of labour, seed and planting materials, fertilizers are seriously affecting their agriculture system.
- Limited market opportunity due to restrictions. Grain market/livestock markets are closed. As the markets are closed, the produced items mostly remain unsold.
- The farmers are not able to sell the surplus products such as vegetables, mushroom, milk etc. They are already in financial problem for their daily household expenses.
- Movement of farmers is also limited and they cannot work as labourers. Labour crisis in agriculture makes farming difficult. Some of the agriculture day labourers go out for work at a high risk.
- Some farmers had to sell their produce at a very low rate as they didn't have sufficient storage facilities and are under tremendous pressure of returning loans.
- Transportation facilities are very costly and not available during lockdown. The farmers in some location (Bardia) are selling vegetables through the cooperative managed vehicles once in the week.
- Crisis in availability of agriculture machinery for crop harvesting and management
- Harvesting of wheat, gram and lentil is about to start in Pakistan. Farmers are worried about labour, post-harvest losses, storage, and marketing of crops.
- It is expected that lockdown situation will continue, and it will increase poverty and food insecurity of smallholder farmers.
- The farmers from Nepal mentioned that they have now realized the importance of having vegetable garden in their households. The farmers are having enough vegetables even in this hard time. Similarly, they now also understand the necessity of having seed banks.

2. Major issues of women in SAFBIN area during COVID19

- Daily wage women labourers lost their job and not generating any income. Also, women who used to sell vegetables on daily basis, have no income.
- Emergency cases and people requiring regular medical check-up especially, pregnant women may face trouble in regular check-up.
- In most of the cases the women are given charge to take care of the sick and hence highly vulnerable to contract the virus. Rural women have high risk to get infected due to their low immunity level.
- Considering the present situation, PLW may face problem to access medical facilities due to limited connectivity during this emergency.

3. Major issues of children in SAFBIN area during COVID19

- COVID19 poses extreme threat to the Children in SAFBIN programme locations. Children in all programme locations are affected by COVID19 lockdowns and restrictions forcing them to stay at home. Children living in small houses have limited space to move around.
 - The children with less immunity and malnourished children are the most vulnerable among them to contract COVID19.
 - Children being innocent and immature do not care about precautionary measures. There is no awareness /communication materials targeting children on COVID-19.
 - Education is hampered due to the closure of schools and other educational institutions.
 - No opportunity to play outside, affects their physical and mental health.
 - Mostly they are not aware about the social distancing which risks their families too.
- In rural families, children often play in the village streets and hygiene/sanitation of children is not maintained well.

4. Major issues of specially-challenged people in SAFBIN area during COVID19

People with special abilities are extremely vulnerable to COVID19. With family income stopped, specially abled people are more dependent on their families. They are confined to their houses and not able to access to their basic service deliveries.

5. Other Issues

Not every households/families in the SAFBIN locations have access to food and other essential items for atleast two weeks.

While the partners in India and Nepal are still in the process of accessing information on provisions and support mechanism available from the Government, a good proportion of our community partners are aware of the provisions and support mechanisms. All the community partners are eligible in all partner countries to access the provision from Government. However, they are not able to receive most of the locations. However, it is extremely difficult for the most vulnerable among the community to access these special provisions.

6. Immediate support required by the community partners

Following are the list of support identified in the assessment:

Food materials, wash kit, protective equipment like sufficient mask, gloves and sanitizer etc. and unconditional cash support to the vulnerable groups like people with special needs, orphan children, elderly, widow, day labour, people below poverty line, slum dwellers, small entrepreneurs, people with low income. Agriculture inputs (seeds, fertilizers, irrigation, labour etc)

7. Specific impact of COVID19 on agriculture

- Production is hampered which may lead to food crisis
- Production hampered due to the unavailability of farming inputs like unavailability of seeds, planting materials, pest, insect and nutrition inputs and veterinary medicines, limited irrigation facilities etc.
- Prices of agriculture inputs have gone up
- Crisis of labour, agriculture machineries for crop harvesting and management has made the production tougher to the farmer.
- Alternate income sources are closed for farmers. SHFs are facing an acute financial crisis and they don't have sufficient funds to engage in agriculture.
- As the markets are closed, the produced items mostly remain unsold and wasted. Just few amounts of the production are being sold, but in a very cheap rate.
- Very limited and costly transportation facilities: Farm produces are stuck due to unavailability of proper transportation facilities and limited market opportunity.
- The perishable products will be lost since the farmers don't have enough storage structures.
- If the situation goes on like this for a few more days, the impact will be dangerous.
- Access to animal feed is reduced and business of selling animals in the market has suffered a lot.
- Shortage of labour could disrupt production and processing of food

8. Specific impact of COVID19 on access to food security

- Empty shelves can be frightening, but empty fields and barns would be devastating." If the situation goes on like this for few more days then most of the people specially the poor and marginalized people will go through a great risk of food insecurity.
- If the lockdown situation continues, lack of production and marketing will eventually hit not just the smallholder farmers but the whole population in the regions and there will be an inevitable food crisis. Stock will be over, and no production/ supply will be done due to lockdown.
- Definitely the food price will rise very high which is also an opportunity to the farmers but there is a risk of middle person taking the opportunities leaving the small farmers poor again.
- If this lockdown continues for a longer time, people dying of hunger will become a larger problem than COVID-19.

9. Specific impact of COVID19 on access to nutrition

- Nutrition of people of all ages will suffer, particularly children, PLW and elderly people. Nutritional disorders among children and PLW will give rise to other health issues.
- As the situation affects the supply chain directly, most of the people, specially the poor and marginalized won't get access to the proper nutrition.
- It is expected that the food production will be reduced at least for a year. This will definitely affect the nutrition aspect.

10. Specific impact of COVID19 on livelihood

- Many people have become unemployed and this situation is expected to continue and intensity also with respect to global economic slowdown.
- Many families are living without any income. Day labourers, transport workers like the rickshaw/van pullers, bus/train/car drivers, helpers, are now without work. Apart from the Smallholder farmers, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) as well as small businesses are facing a huge loss due to the lockdown.
- Limited resources may lead to community conflicts
- The situation of food insecurity can soon turn into a situation of hunger due to no income

11. Activities that can be taken up while maintaining social distancing

- In Bangladesh, the team can convey necessary information over phone, and help the local government to find out and suggest the names of most vulnerable people to ensure the support to be distributed to the right person.
- Caritas India is taking necessary steps in coordination with local authorities to support vulnerable peoples via phone, e-mails and other social media platforms.
- Caritas Pakistan volunteers are spreading awareness using mega phone and IEC material. Food packages and sanitizers were distributed to people in need, maintaining social distancing. More families will be given ration support
- In Nepal, the team is still exploring options to engage with the local authorities.
- Caritas Pakistan staff including SAFBIN staff are facilitating daily wagers, widows and smallholder farmers to register for cash support.