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Governance for Human Security: Response to COVID-19 Pandemic in Morang District, Nepal

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Abstract

This study is focused to probe the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic and human security-oriented response in Nepal. Particularly Morang district is purposefully selected as the area of study. Qualitative meta-analysis and semi-structured telephone interview were the methods utilized for the qualitative data collection. The response mechanism adopted can be made further influential through minor adjustments as public always look forward to receiving extra effective responses during emergencies. Local levels have been doing their best with limited resources, where some are capable of mobilizing additional resources. Good practices relating to economic decision-making and implementation by all three levels of governments can amplify the vibes of responses posing positivity in the fighters at the frontline during the fight against non-traditional adversary such as COVID-19 pandemic.

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Introduction

The pandemic situation we experienced was hardly in our imagination. Planes stopped flying, ships stopped sailing, and vehicles forgot rounding. The world was locked due to the ongoing pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The COVID-19 is caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) which was first identified in Wuhan city, Hubei, China, in December 2019 (MoHP, 2020a; WHO, 2020b). World Health Organization (WHO) recognized the COVID-19 as a pandemic on 11 March 2020 (MoHP, 2020a; WHO, 2020a). The infectious disease proliferated so fast that it travelled to most of the countries around the globe within few weeks. This created an environment of terror to the public and tension to the states. Consequently, Nepal could not remain apart. A student, aged 31, returned to Kathmandu on 9 January 2020 who was tested and found COVID-19 positive was the first case in Nepal (Shrestha et al., 2020). With the intention of preventing the outbreak of pandemic, country-wide lockdown came into effect on 24 March 2020 in Nepal (OPMCM, 2020b). By the end of August 2020, period of this study, total number of positive cases reached 25,406,588 including 850,878 deaths in the world. In the same period, there were 39460 positive cases and 228 deaths in Nepal (MoHP, 2020b).

The COVID-19 pandemic abruptly hit the world impacting almost every aspect (CCSA, 2020). Businesses, industries and markets were closed disrupting people's daily life. Similarly, tourism industry was devasted (Ulak, 2020). Due to the lockdown and restrictions, people lost their employment and livelihoods to force them in poverty. This pandemic situation reduced people's capacity to afford food (Pereira & Oliveira, 2020; United Nations, 2020). At this period, people faced challenges to access healthcare facilities, threats to physical integrity and economic insecurity. Health system remained one of the hardly impacted aspect due to COVID-19 pandemic (Dwinantoaji & DW, 2020; Legido-Quigley et al., 2020). This infectious disease ultimately became one of the non-traditional challenge to human security (Dwinantoaji & DW, 2020; Kandel et al., 2020).

As Nepal began to come across the infections, the government introduced response mechanisms which have been novel to all tri-tired governments. Though the response to COVID-19 is still ongoing, the lessons learnt during the practices can be beneficial to enhance the response mechanisms in coming days. Thus, this study entitled 'Governance for human security: Response to COVID-19 pandemic in Morang district' aims to explore the impact of COVID-19 pandemic and human security-oriented governance. For the cause, case of response to COVID-19 pandemic in Morang district is purposefully taken for the study. The objectives of the study are to examine the federal pattern of response on the issue of human security in Morang district, and to examine the human security issue during the pandemic response in Nepal.

Methodology

This is an empirical paper which incorporates learnings from the involvements of the frontliners in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. My personal experiences as the member of the District Security Committee (DSC) Morang are largely fused during arguments since I was posted as the Battalion Commander of Armed Police Force, Nepal Morang from the 2nd August 2019 to 2nd August 2020 that is the initial terrifying period of pandemic. Qualitative meta-analysis of the selected papers massively used to rationalize the outcome of the qualitative data through telephone interview. The interview schedule was semi-structured with most open-ended questions. Morang district as the area of the study was chosen purposefully since the researcher was amongst the frontliners during COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents of the telephone interview, total fifteen in number, were the Mayors/Chairpersons or Deputy Mayors/Deputy Chairpersons of the local levels, political leaders, journalist, Chairperson of the trade association and member of DSC Morang.

Nearly sixty percent of the local levels that is ten out of seventeen in Morang were randomly sampled for the interview. Sampling was done to make fifty percent number of rural municipalities. The sampled local levels were Belbari, Biratnagar, Rangeli, Ratuwamai, Sundarharaicha, Budiganga, Dhanpalthan, Gramthan, Jahada and Miklajung. Among them, fifty percent of the respondents were randomly sampled deputies of the local levels namely Biratnagar, Budiganga, Dhanpalthan, Jahada and Miklajing. District chiefs of two main political parties in Morang were purposively samples for the interview. One chairperson out of three associations of trade and commerce in Morang was randomly sampled. President of Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) Morang was also purposively sampled for the telephone interview. Similarly, a member of DSC Morang was purposively sampled for the interview as he was the only remaining members since other members including the researcher were already transferred.

Human security: Neglected question in academic inquiry in Nepal

'Security' as an extensively debated notion is an intricate term to describe. It is not only physical idea but also incorporeal and insubstantial in nature. Existence of security apparatus in many instances does not entail being secured, and sense of security prevails even in the absence of such machinery. Explaining evolving concept of security, Jovanović and Burbiel (2014) opines that the vague concept of security is differently interpreted across and within different societies and cultures, institutions, domains of human activity and academic disciplines. From time immemorial, state-centric concept of security continued overseeing the whole system of statecraft. Territorial integrity, sovereignty and non-interference within the state boundary received traditional security priority. Studying the non-traditional security challenges in different countries, Jovanović et al. (2016) found the challenges such as religious violence, organized crime and cyber-attacks, natural hazards and climate change are common. Here, we see the shifting security paradigm from state to individual.

Highlighting the everchanging security pattern, Hameiri and Jones (2015) argued that security governance today is a loose concept. Governance of non-traditional security threats is neither wholly national nor supranational: it is best described and analyzed as 'spatial'. Prevalence of asymmetric and non-traditional security challenges started bothering human more that those weapon-centric disputes. Time and tides of generations brought 'human being' in the hub of governance naming the conception 'human security' approach.

Eventually, Dr. Mahbub ul Haq as the Special Advisor to United Nations Development Program (UNDP) led the crafting of human development report and officially instituted the concept of human security through Human Development Report, 1994 (Upreti et al., 2013). As per the report, the concept of security has been narrowly construed as the territorial security from external invasion, or defending national interests, or safeguarding from the threat of a nuclear holocaust (UNDP, 1994, p. 22). Security has always been heavily associated with the state than people. Exemplifying the day-to-day human security worries, UNDP (1994) observed ordinary people needing security every day. Security for many of them meant protecting from the threat of disease, hunger, unemployment, crime, social conflict, political repression, and environmental hazards (p. 22). Here, people need protection from these threats which is the goal of human security. Furthermore, the report elaborates human security as the protection of people from chronic threats as hunger, disease, repression, and from disruptions in the patterns of daily life (UNDP, 1994, p. 23).

Subsequently, the concept of human security received global preference. The 2000 UN Millennium Summit made an initiative of an independent Commission for Human Security. According to the report of the Commission on Human Security presented in 2003, definition of human security

> is to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment. It means protecting fundamental freedoms-freedoms that are the essence of life. It means protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations. It means using processes that build on people's strengths and aspirations. It means creating political, social, environmental, economic, military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity (Commission on Human Security, 2003, p. 4).

Highlighting on human security, Commission on Human Security (2003) claims that the concept of human security incorporating non-traditional security threats complements the concept of traditional security that is 'state security'. The concerns of human security are the individual and the community rather than the state, which entails protecting and empowering people simultaneously. Formerly, UNDP (1994) focused on two major components of the human security. First is freedom from fear and the other is freedom from want. These are the two freedoms of President Roosevelt's four freedoms. As per the concept of human security, freedom from fear encompasses using all possible means to protect the people from any form of physical violence. Secondly, freedom of want comprehends economic and social wellbeing of the people by ending poverty and

empowering them to live peaceful and healthy life with dignity. The threats to human security can be incorporated under seven main categories: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security.

During the study, obtaining academic research papers on human security matters regarding Nepal was indeed arduous. Nevertheless, limited profound dialogues initiated by some scholars are praiseworthy. Writing on the status of human security, Khatiwada (2013) opines that poverty upshot of economic insecurity has been the cause and the result of weak human security condition in Nepal. He further emphasizes on participatory and inclusive development process for the elevation of people's life thus addressing human security. Social protection as the matter of human security keeps pace in Nepal which should be focused more on the disadvantaged people though it is needed for all (KC & Upreti, 2013). Similarly, Ghale and Bishokarma (2013) itemized hunger and food as the significant aspect of human security which is also the part of psychological wellbeing. They recommended Government of Nepal (GoN) to adapt such policy as to ensure food security so that peace can prevail. Likewise, Adhikari (2013) found significant levels of health insecurity in the health sector of Nepal. Health as the substantial factor of human security requires tremendous priority and efforts. Raising another important issue, Uprety (2013) reveals that there are obvious climate change risks that can impact on human security and livelihood of Nepali people. Then after, discussing human security challenges caused by natural and human-made environmental insecurities in Nepal, Khawas (2014) claimed that particularly eastern Nepal is more vulnerable.

Officially, we find few occurrences of the term 'human security' in the endorsed papers. Inclusion of the term alone is insufficient, rather it needs to be imposed through the enforceable strategies. Going to the Constitution of Nepal, Article 51 specifies 'to guarantee the overall human security system' under the policies of the state relating to national unity and national security (Constitution of Nepal, 2015). Similarly, Schedule five of the Constitution enlisted traditional security apparatus on the federal power. Underlyingly, Schedule 6 booked health services, very essential non-traditional security concern, within the list of state power, while Schedule 7 mixes up some non-traditional security matters on the joint part of federation and state power. We can find most of the non-traditional security matters on the responsibility of local levels in Schedule 8 and 9. Later, National Security Policy (2016) placed 'attainment of all-round human security…' among the bases for guiding the National Security Policy of Nepal. At the same time, 'to prioritize human security and to guarantee Nepali people's freedoms from threats and poverty' is included among the working policies in the security policy.

The evolving concept of human security has somehow in progress of poking the way of behaving in Nepal and South Asia as well. South Asia continues fight against hunger, poverty and internal conflicts. Thus, human security becomes more concerned for the region. On this regard, Bhattarai (2013) seems less optimistic opining that human security in South Asia is debated much and implemented less, consequently the region remains most vulnerable. Unlikely, Lahiry (2020) observes the changing narrative of security from

state security to human security in South Asia. For the betterment in the region, Ashraf et al. (2016) focus on the pragmatic argument and justifiable execution of the spirit of human security. As one of the South Asian country, Pakistan similarly clashes with those threats to human security. Researching on the aspects of human security in Pakistan, Sayed (2014) recommended the adoption of human security in actual practice. These days, terror of crime and socioeconomic deficiency are found to be major concerns of human security and people want these daily problems to be solved through policy revision (Zia-ur-Rehman et al., 2014).

Predictably, we can take the case of 'ten-years long Maoist armed conflict' as an instance to look upon for what we have done to ensure 'freedom from fear' – a prerequisite component of human security. If we probe into the armed conflict, it was also a fight to guarantee 'freedom of want' – another component. Today after years, the issue of socioeconomic upliftment remains similar. Unfortunately, the 2015 Earthquake hit Nepal which was an anticipated non-traditional security threat. It is already late 2020 and we are struggling for regaining and reconstruction. Its not just the state, credit or shame equally goes to the academia for commission or omission as pathfinder through the products of rigorous researches on the contemporary issues. However, the concept of human security was introduced long ago, we are lagging behind debating and internalizing its spirit. On this regard, Upreti et al. (2013) encourages reorienting Nepali development plans and policies towards the human security perspective. Likewise, Khatiwada (2013) suggests policy makers in Nepal to incorporate human security into poverty reduction strategies so as to identify risk and vulnerability factors and integrate them into poverty analysis. In conclusion, what we observe in South Asia including Nepal is ongoing surficial arguments rather than factual academic inquiry on the threats to human security we have been encountering today. These challenges to human security will remain unresolved unless we choose to be rational and argumentative during our academic studies.

COVID-19 pandemic in Nepal: A non-traditional adversary of 21st century

The world is terribly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in many ways and so does Nepal. This unprecedented pandemic outbreak of corona virus disease compels the international community to seriously think about non-traditional security threats we are susceptible to. I observe COVID-19 as 'a non-traditional enemy of 21st century' meaning COVID-19 is just one of those anticipated or unanticipated non-traditional security challenges. The world may face severer threat to human security of any nature in future.

Identically, Hameiri and Jones (2015) claimed that the infectious disease has been frequently posing dangerous security threat on a global scale. Discussing on the influenza epidemic, they further argued that non-traditional security issues like this easily cross borders (Hameiri & Jones, 2015; Shafi et al., 2020). Ignited from the Chinese city Wuhan, COVID-19 has reached almost every corner of the globe in very short span of time infecting above twenty-five million and killing more than eight hundred thousand. Dangerously, the statistics goes on increasing and effects too. Studying on the disastrous impact of the pandemic, researchers have usefully shown that such public health issues are

almost invariably rapidly spreading which have the potential ability to proliferate around the world, threatening the global economy (Hameiri & Jones, 2015, p. 124). On top of all, Shafi et al. (2020) claimed that the COVID-19 has created health, economic, political, and social challenges worldwide. Naming the pandemic an 'invisible, elusive and the advancing enemy', they opine that corona virus has erected the utmost threat to security for human survival, for which neither individuals nor nations were prepared. Agreeingly, Elbe (2018) describes that infectious diseases have linked health and human security together. Factually, infectious diseases like Spanish flue, SARS, plague, influenza pandemic, Ebola and COVID-19 are now known as horrifying threats to human security. Currently, we have been witnessing the petrifying impacts of the corona virus disease in most of the countries of the world including Nepal.

Presently, Nepal has been fronting the snowballing figure of the infections and deaths due to COVID-19 pandemic. By the end of August 2020, total COVID-19 positive cases were 39460 within the seven months of the detection of first case in Nepal. Among those cases, 45.1 percent were still active, 54.3 percent were recovered and 0.6 percent that is 228 were death cases (MoHP, 2020b).

Morang district: Gateway and state capital of Province No 1

Morang is the second most populous district after Kathmandu with 965,370 population which includes 466,712 male and 498,658 female making 520 density of population per square kilometer (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011). In addition to the permanent residents of Morang, many people have been dwelling in the district since larger part of the Morang-Sunsari industrial corridor lies in Morang. The district is getting dense as it has been declared as the state capital of Province No 1. With such density of population, Morang remains fifth with 1626 infected case (66.7% male, 33.3% female) in the list of five most infected districts following Kathmandu (total 4522, male 67.8%, female 32.2%), Parsa (total 2309, male 77.6%, female 22.4%), Rautahat (total 1856, male 91.1%, female 8.1%) and Sarlahi (total 1811, male 84.8%, female 15.2%) in Nepal (MoHP, 2020c). Among the infected individuals in Morang, above thirty-three percent are the female becoming the top among those five districts in female mortality rate.

The table 1 below shows the local level-wise distribution of the infected people in Morang. As expected, Biratnagar metropolitan as the furthermost crowded city in the district has the highest number of infected people of 1069. It is also at the top on the list with 9 deaths due to COVID-19 among those infected persons. Similarly, Rangeli municipality comes at the second position. In spite of being a rural municipality, Budiganga surprisingly possess third place of COVID-19 infections. Kanepokhari has the lowest number of infections sharing the position of single digit infection with Kerabari, Jahada and Gramthan rural municipalities.

Table 1: Local level-wise status of COVID-19 in Morang district as of 31 August 2020

| S.N.	Local levels	Infections			Deaths		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1.	Biratnagar Metropolitan 657	412	1069	6	3	9	
2.	Rangeli Municipality 83	41	124	1	-	1	
3.	Budiganga Rural Municipality	74	15	89	1	1	2
4.	Ratuwamai Municipality	77	1	78	-	-	-
5.	Sunbarsi Municipality 59	6	65	1	-	1	
6.	Katahari Rural Municipality	20	21	41	1	-	1
7.	Sundarharaicha Municipality	28	11	39	-	-	-
8.	Dhanpalthan Rural Municipality	22	9	31	-	-	-
9.	Belbari Municipality 13	9	22	-	1	1	
10.	Letang Municipality 11	3	14	1	-	1	
11.	Patharisanischare Municipality	12	2	14	1	-	1
12.	Urlabari Municipality 4	6	10	-	-	-	
13.	Miklajung Rural Municipality	10	-	10	-	-	-
14.	Gramthan Rural Municipality	6	1	7	-	-	-
15.	Jahada Rural Municipality	4	3	7	-	-	-
16.	Kerabari Rural Municipality	3	1	4	-	-	-
17.	Kanepokhari Rural Municipality	2	-	2	-	-	-
	Total	1085	541	1626	11	5	16

Source: District Administration Office, Morang

As the subtitle expresses, Rani border point in Morang district has been the gateway of the province since it remains one of the entry and exit points in all time decisions of governments of Nepal and India ("Govt Decides to Open Only 10 Border Points," 2020). As per the data received from Armed Police Force Nepal No. 3 Battalion Headquarters Kankalini Morang, more than five thousand eight hundred Nepalis formally entered Nepal since the GoN decided to close the Nepal-India border. Among them, some were from Morang, whereas most of them were from other districts. As in all the bordering districts, Holding Centers are being operated in Morang district where these incoming Nepalis are provided with lodging and fooding before dispatching them to their respective local levels. During the same period, 6548 Indians left Nepal through Rani checkpoint. At the same time, 7508 individuals were quarantined in various quarantine centers in Morang (APF Nepal Morang, 2020). Most of them are the people coming from abroad. During this period, only 1362 infected persons were kept in the isolation centers because of insufficiency of beds.

Mechanism for responding COVID-19 in Nepal

On 1 March 2020, GoN officially responded to the possible outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic by forming an eleven-member 'High level coordination committee for the prevention and control of novel corona disease' coordinated by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Ishwar Pokharel (OPMCM, 2020a). The committee was mandated to perform necessary action in order to prevent and control the novel corona disease. Later, on 22 March 2020, cabinet decided to enforce lockdown all over Nepal and close border points from 24 March 2020 as per the Infectious Disease Act, 1964. After a week later, cabinet decided to response the pandemic through an institutionalized mechanism. For responding the COVID-19 through prevention, control and treatment in rapid, managed and coordinated way COVID-19 Crisis Management Center (CCMC) was constituted on 29 March 2020. Through the same decision, the government formed the High-level Direction Committee under the leadership of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense. Other members of the Direction Committee are Minister of Home Affairs, Minister of Federal Affairs and General Administration, Minister of Health and Population, Minister of Industry, Commerce and Supply, and Minister of Finance. There is a facilitation committee led by the Chief Secretary of the GoN includes Chief of Army Staff, Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Inspector General of Nepal Police, Inspector General of Armed Police Force Nepal, and Chief Investigation Director, National Investigation Department.

Figure 1: Organogram of COVID-19 Crisis Management Center in the Federation
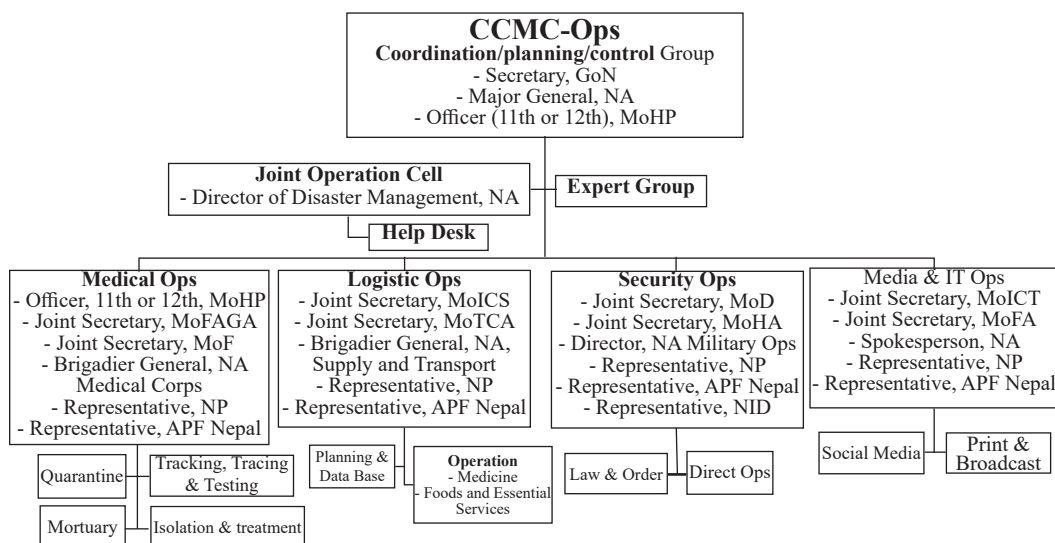
Source: (OPMCM, 2020b)

As presented in the organogram in figure 1, CCMC in the center is coordinated by the Secretary of Office of Prime Minister and Council of Ministers. It has tried to incorporate inputs from subject matter experts when required. There is a joint operation cell accompanied by a help desk to address the public concerns. Here, CCMC has four major sections. First is Medical Operation looking after health-related matters like quarantine,

isolation, tracking, tracing, testing, treatment, mortuary and so on. Second is Logistic Operations that is responsible for supply of essential goods and services. Third one is Security Operations dedicated to maintain law and order, and to resolve other security related issues. Forth and the last is Media and Information Technology Operations accountable for handling media-related activities.

On 6 April 2020, government decided to provide additional responsibilities to some ministers. Seven federal ministers were appointed as the coordinators for seven provinces in order to speed up the campaign against COVID-19 (OPMCM, 2020b). Similarly, CCMC is coordinated by respective Chief Minister at the province level, where other members are Minister of Social Development, Minister of Internal Affairs and Law, Minister of Economic Affairs and Planning, Principal Secretary, Provincial chiefs of Nepali Army, Nepal Police, Armed Police Force Nepal and National investigation Department, and Head of the local level where the Office of Chief Minister and Council of Ministers is located.

At the district level, CCMC is coordinated by the Chief District Officer, which incorporates District Coordination Officer, Members of District Security Committee (District Chiefs of Nepali Army, Nepal Police, Armed Police Force Nepal, National Investigation Department and Assistant Chief District Officer), and Chief of government hospital located in the district headquarters as the members. The chief of District Coordination Committee and the district presidents of Federations of Municipalities and Rural Municipalities are within the advisory group of the CCMC. Similarly, local level CCMC at the lowest level but with the highest significance is composed of Head of the local level, Chief Administrative Officer, Health Coordinator and Representatives of security forces as the members.

In the last week of March 2020, Ministry of Health and Population finalized the a binding document which sets standards for the quarantine centers. The Quarantine operation and management criteria (2020) constituted a 'Quarantine operation and management committee' in the leadership of Assistant Chief District Officer includes Officer representatives from security forces, Medical superintendent of the District Hospital, Representative of Nepal Red Cross, Respective Ward Chairperson, Officer representative of Office of Division Urban Development (If not available, technical representative from local level), and Officer representative of Health Office as member secretary. The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Law of Province No 1 initiated the concept of preparing a 'Holding Area' near to the Nepal-India border for the returnees from India anticipating the mass influx. It became a wonderful concept to minimize the risk of infection by holding the returnees for sometimes before they can be registered and managed in their respective local levels. The federal government later prepared similar action plan for the returnees from third countries. The Joint action plan for the management of the returnees from India (2020) formed the 'Holding Area Operation Committee', which involves Assistant Chief District Officer/Officer representative, Officer representative from Nepali Army, Officer representative from Nepal Police, Officer representative from Armed Police Force Nepal, Officer representative from National Investigation Department, Officer/Doctor representative from Health Office and Chief Administrative Officer/Respective Ward Chairperson as the members.

Human security-oriented governance during COVID-19 pandemic: From the sense of the frontliners

Presenting the policy brief on the impact of COVID-19 in the South-East Asia in this July, United Nations (2020) claims that most of the countries in the subregion responded the pandemic swiftly. It was observed that there was huge impact on health and economy despite the limited spread of the corona virus in comparison with other parts of the world. Lack of essential medical supplies and access to health services to the people living in poverty became common to the affected countries (Caballero-Anthony, 2008). Violence against women and children during the pandemic also remained amongst the issues to be timely addressed. If we talk about the pandemic-hit areas, exceptions can hardly be traced. Let's accept that COVID-19 has somersaulted the world (CCSA, 2020). Millions have lost their livelihoods forcing them to live poor life. The rights of the vulnerable people including women and children are jeopardized (CCSA, 2020; Majee, 2020). Children have been missing their life-saving scheduled vaccinations and education is interrupted. While presenting the statistical perspectives on how the COVID-19 is changing the world, Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA) claimed that human development has been severely obstructed, and conclusively stated that "the COVID-19 pandemic is not just a health crisis, but also a humanitarian and development crisis that is threatening to leave deep social, economic and political scars for years to come" (CCSA, 2020, p. 44).

Scholars agreeingly conclude that good security governance during the response phase of pandemic plays vital role on ensuring human security. Security governance practices need to be focusing on the enhancing freedom from fear and want. For this, state capacity alone can hardly be pivotal aspect for effectively controlling the spread of COVID-19 infections in order to reinstate normalcy. Excluding very few exceptions, Khorram-Manesh et al. (2020) found infections of corona virus has spread to all countries irrespective of their high or low prosperity, rather higher risk for more prosperous nations to be infected by COVID-19 and consequently higher death rates was observed discarding some exceptions. Human security-oriented response requires wide-ranging activities to address widespread implications of the pandemic. Responses need to be extensive enough to handle assorted impacts of the COVID-19 detrimental to social protection (Summerton, 2020). Discussing on the response approaches during pandemic, Caballero-Anthony (2008) opines that such threats are reinforced by a more holistic approach that is human security approach as our numerous initiatives will remain inadequate. Allison and Taylor (2017) found civil society influencing non-traditional security governance during the emergencies like pandemic.

As Nepal is the new federal state, governments at all levels of the state are exercising federalism through learning by doing. During this novel federal practice, novel corona virus abruptly hit the world and subsequently Nepal. The elected people's representatives as the three-tier governments have been responding the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the local levels formulated local coordination mechanism for the management of resources so that they were able to immediately distribute the relief items to the indigent people. Some local levels practiced the coordination mechanism even at the Ward level. Most of the

local levels instantly prepared quarantine centers after the request of at least twenty-bed quarantine by district level CCMC. Good example of anticipation of the situation can be taken from the preparation of isolation center by Belbari, Rangeli and Sundarharaicha municipalities in the initial days of pandemic. Subsequently, we observed volunteer agencies, groups and individuals coming forward to share hand in hand with local levels for the relief of the poor population.

After imposing lockdown in the country, essential goods and services were given free access of production and transportation as well. All the interviewees observed one of the good practices that no passes were required for the vehicles used for essential goods and services. Most of the interviewees liked the initial response of the federal government to the COVID-19 pandemic throughout the country with the formation of various mechanisms at all levels of the state. Some local levels tactfully adopted the strategy of identifying the areas under the risk of infection which made them response smoothly. Some of the respondents opine that such strategy might have lessened the possibility of mass outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic as well. Some of the interviewees highly commended the establishment of 'COVID-19 Treatment Center' in Biratnagar, preparation of quarantine centers in Tandi and Gothgaon, and response to pandemic outbreak in Bhulke, Udayapur by the government of Province No 1. Almost all the respondents explained about the problems they faced at the ground regarding insufficient beds in the quarantine and isolation centers, for which federal and state governments should manage or provide local levels resources required to manage.

The Constitution provides the specialized health facilities on the list of federal power, evidently, we observe the referral and specialized hospitals in federation. During the telephone interview, almost all interviewees stated that there would be possibilities of more smooth functioning of the Central Direction Committee if it were constituted in the leadership of the line ministry that is Ministry of Health. This is a health emergency and flowless operational activities can be expected from the mechanism already in place for health facilities, and importantly these mechanisms will always be waiting for the orders from own channel. Health facilities always become inadequate in this type of disastrous conditions even in the countries with good health system (Font et al., 2020). Today, Nepal has been facing terrible paucity of the health facilities and services. In order to cope with such status quo, some interviewees stated that state must formulate the legal provision to use all kinds of health system, be it public or private, in case of emergencies. Similarly, many of the interviewees underlined that there should be such legally binding provision that all the people's representatives from federation, state and local levels must be in the respective electoral constituents in such pandemic situations.

All the interviewees are together imputing the Nepal-India open border as the main reason behind burning infection in Morang. Proper management of the open border in such emergency situation has been one of the prioritized worries of all the interviewees and the public as well. They experienced that dedicated border security force of Nepal namely Armed Police Force Nepal has critical shortfall of resources including lesser numbers of personnel contrasting the porousness of the Nepal-India border.

However, there was the obligation of formulating the response policies rapidly, some of the respondents opine that the policies could have been more action-oriented if it was formulated through 'bottom-up approach' as the local levels are facing the problems on the ground. This approach would have given a sense of applied coordination and provided the local levels a space for pragmatic planning. During the telephone interview, most of the respondents emphasized on inclusion of the deputies of within the local level CCMC. As per the 'Direction on formulation of annual plan and budget at local level, 2018', deputy of the local level is the important member of the Source Estimates and Boundary Setting Committee, and coordinator of the 'Committee on Budget and Program Formulation', 'Local Revenue Consulting Committee' and 'Project Implementation Monitoring and Supervision Committee' (MoFALD, 2018). In this context, inclusion of the deputy head of the local level in CCMC seems essential for effective decision-making process. During the interview, it was revealed that some of the heads of the local levels invited the deputies in the meetings of the CCMC, but some intentionally took advantage of the absence of their opposing deputies.

Insecurity for person and community

Lockdown and physical distancing have hit vulnerable populations (United Nations, 2020) imposing personal and community insecurity in various forms. We have been witnessing people losing their work and livelihoods, consequently stressing them for survival. As a result, number of self-physical violence has increased (DPO Morang, 2020). Suffering from the traumatic pandemic situation, people have been harming themselves and others. It was experienced that returnees are imposing risk of virus infection. Locals repeatedly made oral complaints of returnees and Indian workers trafficking through Nepal-India border. This creates hazards to others and the persons being trafficked as well. Likewise, the cases of domestic and gender-based violence are going up during COVID-19 pandemic (Wenham et al., 2020).

As the Vice-Chairperson and the Coordinator of Judicial Committee of Rural Municipalities, some of the respondents experienced the scrambling number of domestic violence and rape. Due to the restriction, returnees are gathered from abroad and cities adding the number of unemployed persons at homes. Staying at home demanding for good food items, women cannot afford for they lack food, or they lack money to buy and importantly they are fatigued of working for those stuffs at home. Some of the interviewees witnessed the elected female people's representatives being the victims of domestic violence at their homes since they are repeatedly going out of the homes in the response to COVID-19 related issues. In such crisis, protection of vulnerable people and groups remains overlooked. Chances of unwanted labour and child labour cannot be denied for the sake of fulfilling basics. Importantly, possibility of identity-based tensions in relief distribution was experienced. Those identities were particularly political, ethnic and religious in nature. Black marketing and adulteration of food items were other bothering issues. Hossain and Islam (2020) found similar kinds of threats to human security erupted due to COVID-19 in South Asia.

Food insecurity: An anticipated fear of hunger

Due to the lockdown and restrictions for long, scarcity of food items was observed. Taking advantage of such crisis, sudden hike of the price added extra sufferings to the general public. Most of the interviewees observed that shopkeepers in the countryside were unethically selling date expired food stuffs. The people already living in the poverty can feel the nightmare of anticipated fear of hunger in pandemic situation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, agriculture and food are most impacted facets of daily life (CCSA, 2020). At this high time, effect of the virus has been for long period. Restrictions have lowered agri-cultural activities, and at the same time there is serious shortage of required pesticides and fertilizer. This will lead to low productivity which will ultimately threatens food security. Dealing such condition, encouraging policy for home gardening and urban agriculture is found as the good practice in response to the COVID-19 in India (Lal, 2020).

Food is fundamental basis for human security (Ghale & Bishokarma, 2013). Losing jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic may increase poverty and food insecurity levels. People's ability to afford adequate food has been reduced due to the pandemic (United Nations, 2020). For providing food security, many states have been practicing incentives for the production and distribution of food to socially and economically vulnerable groups (Pereira & Oliveira, 2020). It is observed that at least one foodbank was established in each local level to support the indigent people by the informal groups like youth clubs and associations. These foodbanks received significant support from the industrialists, businesspersons, agencies and individuals ("Food bank for indigent family," 2020; "Food bank in Biratchowk," 2020). Most of the respondents agreed that food distribution to the affected families during the lockdown has been observed as one of the best practices of local levels.

COVID-19 pandemic and health insecurity.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, health related issues have been the threatening challenges for almost all states of the world. Regarding the fears for the human security, generally health comes first (Adhikari, 2013). Nepal as the progressing country has been encountering the paucity of medical supplies, stuffs for testing, and at the top of all budgetary capacity to ensure access to public health services. As experienced, epidemic is among major human security challenges in Nepal (Khawas, 2014). The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the pattern of our behaviour and thinking concerning health facilities. Emerging non-traditional issues compels to consider health not just a medical worry but also a security concern (Caballero-Anthony, 2008). Currently, outbreak of the corona virus has exposed a range of health-related issues like poor hygiene, feeble sanitation, malnutrition, lack of medicines, missing life-saving vaccines, feared health-workers and lack of access to basic healthcare as well. No matter how resilient health system a country has, COVID-19 has hardly hit (Dwinantoaji & DW, 2020). Of course, if one possesses better arrangements, revival and recovery will be relatively faster. That's why, resilient healthcare system has been necessity of the day in the run of response against the COVID-19 (Legido-Quigley et al., 2020). Assessing health security capacity and upgrading timely will be beneficial at the time of pandemic. Evidences illustrate that health security capacity of the state has direct correlation with the impact of response (Kandel et al., 2020).

Essential goods and services: Least prioritized, must required

As time passes, definition of essential goods and services is expanded to include more comprehensive items in the list. The things which were additional facilities yesterday are essential today due to the changing pattern of human life. Significant disturbances were repeatedly reported even though freedom of movement for the people of essential goods and services was allowed during the lockdown and restrictions. For instance, poultry farmers were distressed and complaining frequently that transportation of the basic supplies including feeds was recurrently disturbed due to the lockdown (Poudel, 2020). During the lockdown, it was experienced that the supply chain was disrupted (CCSA, 2020). People were forced to take risk of infection to purchase their items of everyday use which include indispensable clothing, home accessories and appliances including kitchen to bathroom items, and healthcare equipment, goods and services in addition to the basic need for survival. Services like telecommunication, television and internet play significant part for stress management of the people containing at homes during pandemic. We also observed during the COVID-19 pandemic food production and distribution chains were negatively affected consequently reducing the poor people's access to food, where inequalities already prevail in the society (Pereira & Oliveira, 2020).

Locked economy: Cause of unemployment and poverty

Exposing the devastating characteristics of the non-traditional threats like COVID-19 pandemic in their book, Shahar Hameiri and Lee Jones rightly claimed that "invariably rapidly spreading infectious diseases have the potential ability to proliferate around the world, threatening the global economy" (Hameiri & Jones, 2015, p. 158). We have been witnessing the locked global economy as a result of closed businesses, industries, markets and trade. Tourism industries are badly traumatized due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Ulak, 2020). Workers were locked in their places of stay even if the industries were resumed. In such situations, unemployment is expected to increase (United Nations, 2020). Workers lost their employment opportunities eventually pushing them into poverty. At this juncture, we need to remember that poverty is a threat to human security (Khatiwada, 2013). Similarly, most of the respondents experienced that lockdown has impacted not only the individual public but also the traders, businesspersons and industrialists making them deeply think about continuation of their business. Such economic situation ultimately poses implications to the national and global economy.

Discussion

Consequential challenges to human security during pandemic as discussed in the subheadings above were personal, community, health, food and economic insecurity. These threats cannot be discussed or resolved in isolation since each of these have indispensable interlinkages to other. Meaning ensuring personal security somehow requires community or health or food or economic security simultaneously. That is why ensuring human security is possible through wholistic approach.

Agreeingly, security of persons from any kind of physical harm during pandemic involves joint efforts of the individuals, community, civil society, local levels, health authority and district security mechanism. Similar combined efforts are essential to deal with the threats to community security. In dealing with such non-traditional challenges to human security, government effort alone always remains inadequate. As an example, a local journalist initiated stopping the trafficking of workers from India to Nepal in Bhediyari area of Biratnagar 18. Locals, ward office, local police, Armed Police Force Nepal and local administration jointly responded to the scenario which obviously demoralized the traffickers. Avoiding identity-based partiality during distribution of the relief food items in the community is necessary in order to maintain peace which can be practiced through cooperative approach. In such pandemic condition, partialities and inequalities are expected to reduce through political solidarity and commitment to social welfare (Pereira & Oliveira, 2020).

Another significant aspect of human security is health and we observed how it is interrelated by infectious diseases like COVID-19. Health crisis can create chaos when not handled well. Today's ongoing global debate is about whether to prioritize health or economy. Policymakers and politicians may line up economy at front but inevitability of trade-offs between health and economy need to be accepted from a wellbeing perspective (Donaldson & Mitton, 2020). As mentioned earlier, the Constitution of Nepal provides intermingling health responsibility to tri-tiered governments. As the result, mix model of response as conferred in the constitution during the pandemic is being practiced. Most of the respondents of the interview foresee amendments on the system of health budget allocation during such pandemic as local levels are the understandable contact places of the day-to-day public problems. All of the heads of the local levels expect upgrading the healthcare facilities of the local governments so that they will not be waiting for the supports from province or center. Yes, the presence of elected local government proved its significance in the critical time of pandemic as agreed by all the interviewees, but interviewees other than from local levels are together with the existing health system of keeping specialized and referral facilities in the federation for its possible ineffectiveness due to over localization. So, total dependency on the decentralized response mechanism at the local level may not bring expected results and consequently infections may upsurge with subsequent high mortality rate. Presenting Italian experience, Font et al. (2020) found evidences consistence with the idea that the decentralized model may have exacerbated the effects of the pandemic. Rather, they illustrated their argument using evidence for the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak which calls for the development of coordination mechanisms at times of a health emergency. Primarily, information sharing and coordination among working agencies is required for swift response (Font et al., 2020).

As per the record of the District Police Office Morang, the number of the registered suicide cases is 68 and 136 in second and third quadrimester of the fiscal year 2076/077 BS (DPO Morang, 2020). Here, later represents the four months of lockdown when cases of suicide are doubled. During the same period, the cases of rape were 37 in the second quadrimester which increased to 54 in the first four months of lockdown period. At this point, experiences of the heads and deputies of the local level as expressed during telephone

interview are corresponding to the record. Agreeingly, the circumstances resulted from the restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic have been friendly for the commission of the social crimes. It also reveals that public mental health is seriously impacted during the period.

Wide-ranging impact on global economy has been the salient feature of the COVID-19 pandemic, that is a non-traditional adversary of 21st century. We observed the implications extending from individual to institution due to the locked economy. Integrated efforts of the state and non-state actors including informal groups remained impressive facilitation for responding to provide relief to the people under poverty. Food distribution to the needy people by individuals, groups, agencies and state actors has been counted among the good practices. In times of pandemic like COVID-19, nontransparent or less transparent economic decisions and implementations at all levels of government push the frontliners into public interrogation. Even the effective result-based response of the state is shaded many times due to the questions on the practices of governance. Thus, swift response mechanism needs to be accompanied by the good practices of the government.

While exercising the authorities of the CCMC at local levels, some of the deputies were completely excluded from the decision-making process just because of the constitution of the mechanism in paper. Many of the Mayors and Chairpersons of the local levels have included their deputies as the assistant coordinator of CCMC inviting their constructive inputs during planning and execution process. Since, binding documents for the local levels have provided significant and dynamic role to the deputies, they should be legally included to make the mechanism more comprehensive and efficient, and most of the interviewees are together in this regard. Most of the respondents of the interview opined that CCMC at the center could have been more effective and efficient if it were led by health ministry. Rigorous involvement of the line ministry is assumed by its lower units since this is a health emergency.

Does the Nepal-India open border really form feeble atmosphere to explode the infections of COVID-19? Six local levels of Morang are adjoining to Nepal-India border. Ratuwamai municipality shares the longest part of seventeen kilometers amongst them. Similarly, Jahada rural municipality shares fifteen kilometers, Dhanpalthan nine point two, Rangeli nine, Biratnagar eight and Sunbarsi five kilometers of total 63.2. If we see in the table 1 above, we do not find correlation between the rate of infections and the exposure to border in the local levels. For example, Jahada as the bordering local level with kilometers has significantly low rate of infections and at the same time, Rangeli has higher rate despite of narrower attachment to Nepal-India border. But, as per most of the interviewees, lesson learnt for Nepal is that we should have the adequate capacity and border security system so that border can be completely controlled during emergencies. Interviewees claimed that Morang and Parsa have mounting rate of infection because there are the busy border points for the transportation of goods from India. Dissimilarly, Rupandehi and Banke have only 1014 and 1022 infected individuals within the same period of time in spite of having similar border points.

Conclusion

Federal pattern of response is being instigated for the first time in the pandemic situation in Nepal. As experienced, 'learning by doing' was the optionless approach for all response mechanisms. At such juncture, the question is whether we are able to adapt good practices as learnt in the course of implementations. Though the initial responses including lockdown from the federal government for the containment of COVID-19 infection were appreciated, the space gained for the preparations could not be fully utilized. Consequently, lack of beds in the quarantine and isolation centers, and paucity of healthcare materials including personal protective equipment even for the frontline health workers remain bothering issues. Formation of the response mechanisms at all required levels has been an intense idea for governance, but these mechanisms can be made more efficacious and operative. The CCMC in the federation may be more practical and functional when led by the Ministry of Health since the line ministries need to be at the frontline of decision-making and implementation in such pandemic situation. Similarly, Deputy Mayor or Deputy Chairperson of the local levels are to be incorporated in the CCMC at local levels due to the lively character of the deputies provided by the policies.

Response to the COVID-19 pandemic at local level was found above the level of available resource with the all-round support they have been getting, yet it seems essential of resourcing local levels through adjustment on budget allocation system during pandemic like COVID-19. Involvements taught the frontliners that bottom-up approach of planning will be pragmatic to identify and analyze the real requirement at the ground. Few local levels have taken the non-traditional initiative of 'infection risk mapping' which benefitted their response in case of outbreak of the infection. All of the respondents urged to strengthen border security machinery to prevent illegal crossings during such emergencies.

Another crucial objective of the study was to probe the threats to human security experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic in Morang district. Evidences verified that pandemic situation emerged challenges to human security resulting insecurity especially to person, community, health, food and economy. At this high time, swift response of the dedicated mechanisms is exceedingly demanded. Combined efforts of state and nonstate actors may ease the fight against such threats to human security. In times of health emergencies like COVID-19 pandemic, good practices in economic decisions and executions of those decisions at all levels of government surely boost the response mechanism.

For this study, qualitative meta-analysis method with telephone interview was used to rationalize the arguments, but any specific theoretical framework was not followed. Researching to develop a theoretical framework that can be used to study human security during pandemic such as COVID-19 can lure some scholars. Human security during the disaster particularly the COVID-19 pandemic is studied but important question 'can it be generalized in the other disaster situations?' remains unanswered. For this, studying 'status of human security after the 2015 Nepal Earthquake' can be an interesting area of research. One more noteworthy issue raised during the discussion 'whether open Nepal-India border has been detrimental to COVID-19 infection control or not ?' can be another question to explore.

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