

Covid-19 Report : Nepal

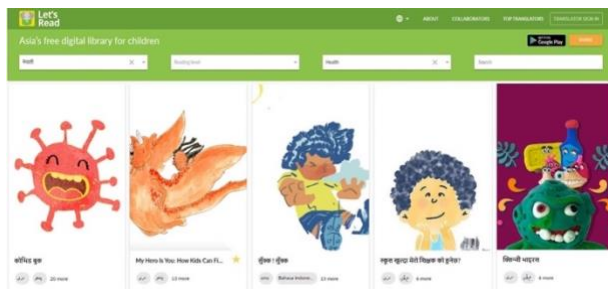
August 25, 2020



The Asia Foundation has worked alongside government partners, civil society, and communities in Nepal for 30 years. In Nepal, the Foundation has a long history of supporting and encouraging peaceful resolution of conflict at the national and subnational levels; enhancing women’s rights and security; supporting accountable local governance; and broadening economic opportunity. Building on three decades of programming, the Foundation stands ready to strategically adapt its portfolio given the current context of Covid-19. In trusting and supporting Government of Nepal’s (GoN) commitment to economic growth and democracy, the Foundation’s Nepal office pursues the following broad thematic areas: education, governance, labor migration and economic recovery, and data and information.

Education & Online Reading

The Asia Foundation Nepal’s longest standing program is education, through [Books for Asia](#) and its more recent digital initiative, [Let’s Read](#). Its [free digital library](#) for children features 33 languages and more than 4,000 books, programmed in 13 countries. Over 500 children’s storybooks can be accessed in Nepali, Nepal Bhasha, Dangaura Tharu, and Bara Jilla Tharu languages with 28 original titles from and about Nepal.



During the lockdown, the Foundation joined the global #LetsReadAtHome campaign with digital books and enrichment activities focused on health, STEM, critical thinking, and resilience. Multiple virtual translation events were organized to swiftly expand book collections with new titles. Storybooks related to Covid-19 such as [COVIBOOK](#), [My Hero is You](#), [Sniffles](#), [Who Will Be My Teacher When School Opens?](#), and [Clingy the Virus](#) were translated and are available for free. [COVIBOOK](#), the most popular book on Let’s Read, has been read more than 40,000 times and is included in the Activity Book for children of early childhood age (4-8 years) in coordination of UNICEF/Nepal Education Cluster/Center for Education and Human Resources Development. The Foundation also made hard copy book distribution available to targeted disadvantaged communities in partnership with the Child Fund Japan, Nepal.

Governance: First Response

Nepal's ambition for governance reform has been supported by the Foundation for decades and continues through diverse local partnerships under its [Subnational Governance Program \(SNGP\)](#) (DFAT-funded), Fiscal Federalism pilot (DFID-funded), and Data for Development initiative (DFID-funded). These programs have adapted to respond to emerging needs of the frontline decisionmakers and responders within governance systems: local, provincial, and national spheres of government and civil society.

Covid-19 Emergency Fund: Emergency funds are critical to subnational governments in order to make and implement needed decisions in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Knowing how to responsibly process funds is needed. The SNGP helped draft and submit a model procedure on establishing and managing Covid-19 emergency fund to the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MoFAGA), Municipal Association of Nepal (MuAN), and National Association of Rural Municipality in Nepal (NARMIN). The associations have shared draft models with their members. All 753 local governments have this resource and have used this to navigate the government's new emergency funds pool.

Fiscal Federalization and the Budget Cycle: To address the critical needs of public financial management during the pandemic and lockdown, the Foundation's Fiscal Federalism program has served as a critical partner with local governments, key provincial personnel and national ministries (MoFAGA) and commissions (NNRFC). The program responded to requests to



facilitate critical inter-governmental fiscal relations and coordination around the annual planning and budgeting systems through virtual meetings in May. The program adapted to support through the Foundation's local field officers' municipalities to implement their annual budgets.

The program has and will continue to:

- Produce timely analysis on overall fiscal and economic situation at the subnational level
- Facilitate Nepal-driven knowledge products on fiscal practices of subnational governments
- Support comparative work with other federal countries under crisis
- Support virtual interactions among and between subnational governments

Finally, upon the request of MoFAGA, the Foundation's Data for Development program supported drafting and testing of a framework for



local governments to integrate a socio-economic recovery approaches in their annual planning and budgeting. The framework is intended to help local governments to assess the impact of Covid-19 and estimate their required budget for the next year.

Moving Online & Leveraging New Technologies: For many municipalities, the pandemic meant all but complete isolation. The Foundation facilitated coordination to bring greater connectivity through a series of virtual Zoom meetings. In June, 24 sessions reached more than 1,280 government representatives, including at least 600 of the country's 753 local governments, with representatives from all seven provinces and attendees from all levels of government. The meetings provided a space for municipalities to raise their concerns over federal and provincial budget plans for the 2020/21 fiscal year and to exchange information on Covid-19 response. Due to of the critical need for strategic public communication, the Foundation partnered with the popular show called 'TOUGH Talk Tapainsanga" on [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#), to convene experts and public officials on contemporary governance and federalism issues during the pandemic. The show has increased visibility of all spheres of government work in

regarding Covid-19 and the issues in addressing immediate needs and challenges.



Legalities of Emergency Response: The SNGP in partnership with key local organizations has supported central and local governments during the pandemic to adapt and implement key legal frameworks to swiftly make decisions and respond to the emerging needs of the nation and communities. For example, the Legislation Management Committee of the National Assembly and SNGP were able to host a series of discussions on amendments to the Contagious Diseases Act necessary to meet the needs of the current crisis, through the Foundation’s local partners. As a result of these discussions, the committee advised the government in a timely manner to amend the Contagious Diseases Law. Additionally, the program supported partner municipalities in implementing the recently passed Local Health Act and Local Market Management and Monitoring Act. Partner municipalities are now better able to manage the supply of essential goods and supplies while preventing the entry of black-market medicines.

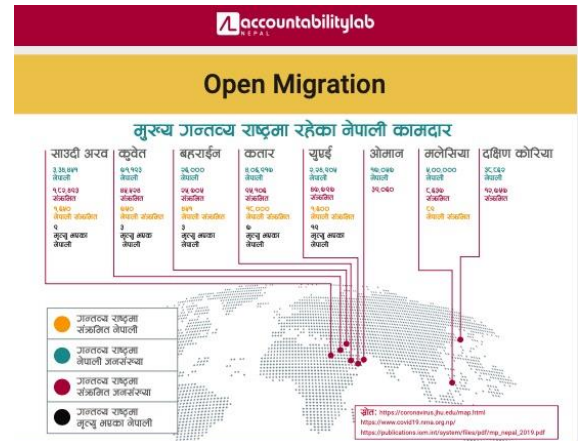


Labor Migration & Economic Recovery

Access to Information: Since labor migration remittances are a dominant contributor to Nepal’s economy, The Asia Foundation has been working with civil society organizations to better inform current, prospective, and returnee

migrants through the [Shuvayatra app](#) and [website in partnership with a consortium of partners](#).

Shuvayatra has partnered with local radio stations and services designed to strengthen their capacity to engage with the formal financial sector and secure employment. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Foundation has been working closely with the partner organizations to provide timely information to Nepali migrants on health and safety in the pandemic, government’s plans and policies on relief and repatriation, and



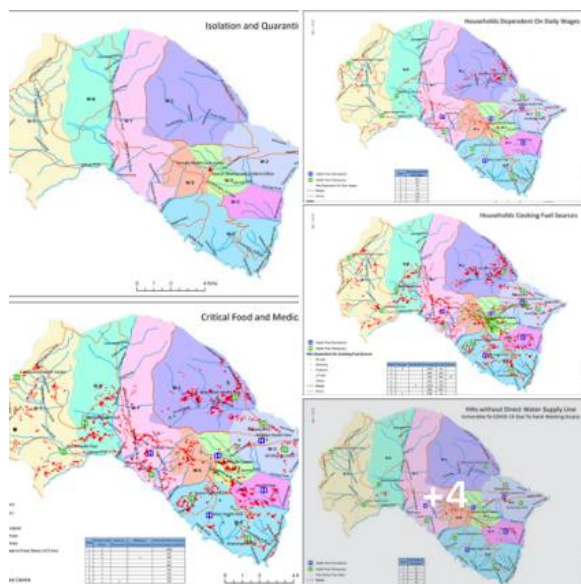
relevant news and updates. As a result, 60,000 app and web users have received these critical announcements.

Impacts of Covid-19 on Nepal’s Economy: The Foundation’s long history of providing key analysis in Nepal and the region is being called upon during this pandemic. First, in partnership with the World Bank, the Foundation conducted snap research to assess the impact of stop work orders for infrastructure projects on laborers and their return to work considerations in the future. This has supported reopening plans for the industry, the third largest contributor to the job market in Nepal.

Second, through a global rapid assessment, The Asia Foundation identified the gap in analysis on the economic impacts of Covid-19 on women in South Asia. The Foundation’s country offices throughout South Asia are working to fill this gap. In Nepal, the ongoing research aims to assess the short- to long-term effects of the pandemic and lockdown on Nepali working women. This report will be available in September. The Foundation has produced a number of shorter analyses through blogs and articles. Building on this, the

Nepal office is seeking support for women returnees' reintegration into the domestic workforce in coordination with the Shuvayatra app.

Data & Information Needs



Data Generation for Local Government Decisions: The SNGP in partnership with [COMMITTED Nepal](#) has made significant investments in partner municipalities' accessibility to and use of data to support their decision-making. Households dependent on daily wages, those with foreign employed family members, families with migrant returnees, households with personal water taps, those recorded with chronic illnesses, and those having senior citizens were tracked through GIS maps. Data collected was shared with municipalities to inform response and relief plans.

Data Programs Responding to Covid-19: With GoN's interest in using and developing data sets for various sectors and government departments, the Foundation has been actively supporting ministries and civil society organizations. Some of these initiatives were already in place before the pandemic, while some started after the Covid-19 breakout. All data-related initiatives are now used for responding to the pandemic. Information ecosystems like the [Coronavirus CivActs Campaign](#) (CCC) monitor and track false and harmful information on Covid-19. The Foundation's Data for Development programme has supported the [Robotics Association of Nepal](#), which has worked on the portal, Nepal Innovation Mapper, to identify, map, and disseminate information about innovators and innovations, which could be used for Covid-19 response. Finally, the Foundation's partnership with the [Nepal Peace Monitor Project](#) has adapted its dashboard and indicators to monitor new and emerging trends that are specific to the pandemic and lockdown, including, for example cases of gender-based violence and competition for essential market goods.

Nepal Covid-19 Dashboard: Upon request from the Ministry of Home Affairs, Foundation partner, [Young Innovations](#), provided technical support to the long-time partner National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority in the development of an integrated and comprehensive [Covid-19 portal](#). Young Innovations are supported by the Foundation's Data for Development program.

