

THE FEDO QUARTERLY POST

The Official Quarterly Newsletter of Feminist Dalit Organization



FEDO RESPONSE TO COVID-19

OVERVIEW OF THE IMMEDIATE ASSESSMENT STUDY

The pandemic caused by COVID-19 has worsened the pre-existing inequalities, vulnerabilities and increased the possibility of violence against women and children specifically of the most vulnerable population: Dalits of Nepal. Across every sphere, from health to economy, social protection to government security, the impact of COVID-19 is exacerbated for Dalits. So, as to ascertain the impact of COVID-19 on Dalits and to identify the needs and capacities of Dalit community to cope with this unprecedented situation, Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO) conducted the rapid assessment survey in 19 districts of 7 provinces with altogether of 265 Dalit women respondents of Nepal.

According to the study, out of 265 respondents, even though 94.4% Dalit women had some knowledge of COVID-19 and its symptoms, only 43% were applying different preventive measures such as; regular hand wash, use of sanitizer and mask, avoiding public gathering and maintaining social-distancing.

WHAT'S IN OUR LATEST ISSUE:

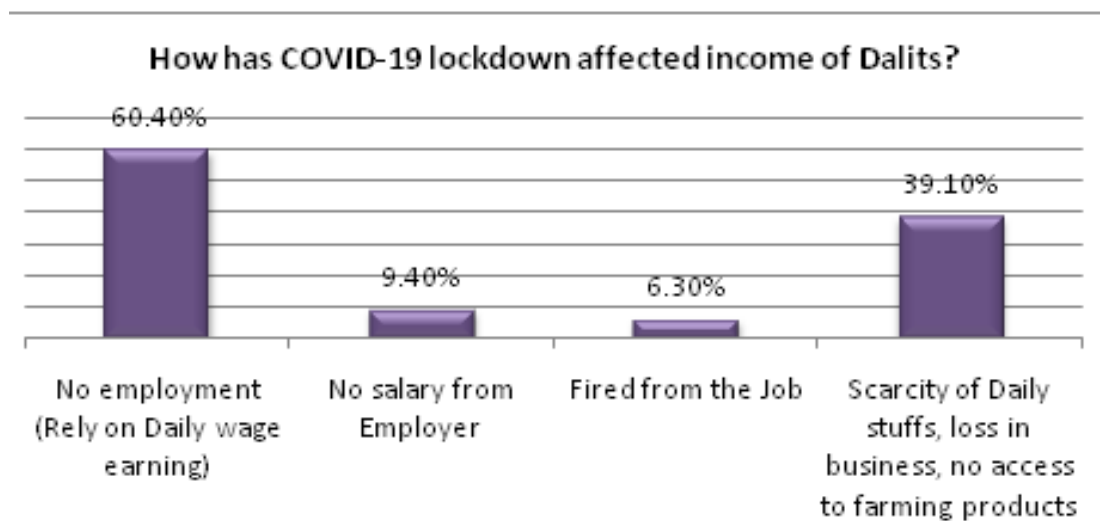
Overview of the immediate assessment study

Organized National-level webinar on "Effect of COVID-19 on the lives of Dalit women"

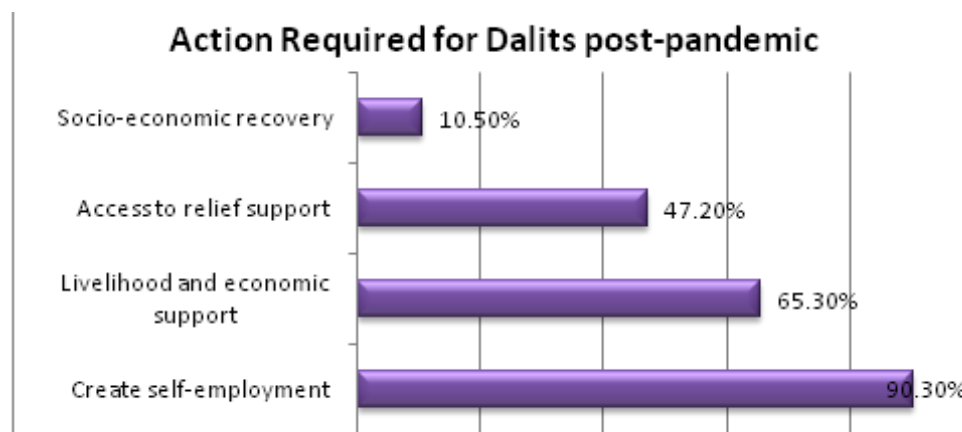
Cases of violence against Dalit women and girls during COVID-19 lockdown

FEDO Draws attention towards the increasing number of Rapes

This shows more than half percent of respondents didn't adopt the preventive safety measures to tackle COVID-19 due to their economic constraints and lack of access to information.



Similarly, a situational analysis of Dalit girls and women was also done in regard to the nature of violence and discrimination faced by them during this lock-down. From the study, we found out that only 46.9% have heard, 8.6% faced and 13.2% have discovered about the violence faced by Dalit women in their community, however, the rest 44.9% of respondents are unknown of any incidents of domestic violence. This shows that even though girls and women from Dalit community are more prone to the violence, most of them are ignorant of it due to lack of awareness in them.



Moreover, the study also shows that COVID-19 has highly impacted the livelihoods of Dalit communities, with more than 89.4% of the respondents reporting to have lost their income/ jobs which further expanded the problem of accommodation, food, health and other aspects. Further, 61.3% claimed to have health-related problems, 71.1% facing the problems of food, 15.7% is having accommodation problem and 22.6% of the respondent faced caste and gender-based discrimination in quarantine sites and relief distribution.

According to the study, only 51.8% mentioned they have received the relief support from local government and non-governmental organization but 48.2% haven't received any relief packages yet because of the discriminatory practice during relief distribution, inaccessible relief support to Dalits and also lack of awareness in them about the services provided by the government and other sector (as per the study: 2.8% doesn't know anything about relief distribution).

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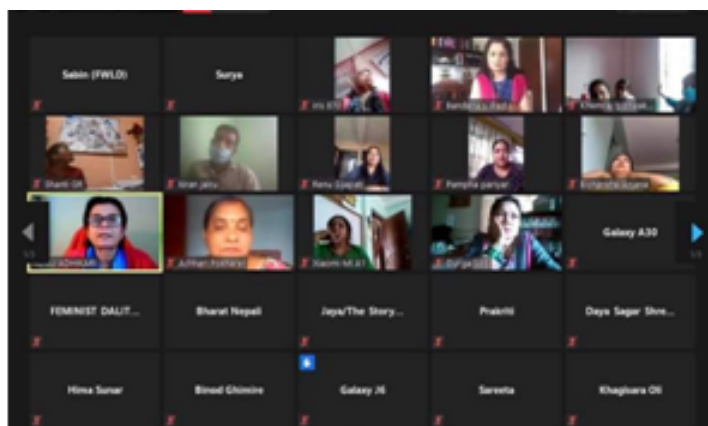
Caste-based discrimination, burden of household chores, mental torture, domestic and sexual violence is some of the major challenges faced by Dalit girls and women during lock-down.

So, based on the evidence from this survey, the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences are amplifying the vulnerabilities of marginalized groups who are already facing exclusion and structural discrimination, and thus possess limited capacities to find viable coping strategies. So, aside from immediate relief support prioritizing the marginalized community in concert with local governments, this study suggests to broaden the need to strengthen existing social security systems at all levels and to ensure inclusive access. Also, the government and non-government organization should plan on implementing those programs which supports or creates income-generation opportunities to the marginalized groups.

Organized National-level webinar on "Effect of COVID-19 on the lives of Dalit Women"

Coinciding the occasion of the 26th Anniversary of its establishment, Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO) hosted a series of webinar on "Effect of COVID-19 on the lives of Dalit Women" across the nation by bringing all the concerned stakeholders: Minister, decision makers, CSO, social activists and human right organizations under the same roof as to discuss and plan for further work to be carried out for Dalit specifically Dalit women in response to the impact of COVID-19 to those vulnerable groups.

Along with this, the quantified status of Dalit women affected by COVID-19, based on the rapid assessment study carried out by FEDO was also presented in the webinar.



So, the national webinar was organized on 27th July 2020 where there was an active involvement of all reputed speakers and participants as they discussed on the issues of Dalit and how their life has been affected by this pandemic. Likewise, In the course of discussion, the speakers pointed out and shared their valuable suggestion with FEDO as to design a way forward in developing short term as well as long term strategies to address Food Security, Economic opportunities, shelter and WASH for Dalit community focusing more on Dalit women in coordination and collaboration with government, civil society and other concerned authorities. We also got an opportunity to hear out the efforts made by concerned stakeholders toward mitigating the problems faced by Dalit women in this unprecedented situation.

DURGA SOB, FOUNDER PRESIDENT OF FEMINIST DALIT ORGANIZATION (FEDO)



Shedding light on the objective of the event, Ms Durga Sob shared the overall situation of Dalit women and the consequences brought by COVID-19. Along with this, she also shared about all the discovered data and information from the immediate study conducted by FEDO, existing policies and provided programmatic, community-oriented, federal level constructive recommendations and policy implications to bridge up the gap in existing system of legislation, judicial and societal context.

HON.MINISTER MR. PARBAT GURUNG- MINISTRY OF WOMEN, CHILDREN AND SENIOR CITIZEN



On the occasion, Honourable Minister Mr.Parbat Gurung- Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen congratulated FEDO team for its 26th anniversary and shared his commitment toward helping FEDO in upcoming works, plans and strategies, if needed. He also suggested to approach for the proper implementation of the activities with coordination and collaboration with government bodies for desired socio-economic and political transformation.

ANJANA BISHUNKHE
MEMBER OF THE PARLIAMENT



Until and unless all the movement, be it of women, Dalit or any other groups doesn't accept, address and respect each others identity to uplift the most vulnerable ones, the struggle won't reach to its desired goal as there is discrimination in every section of the societal structured system.

BANDANA RANA
VICE CHAIR OF UN CEDAW COMMITTEE



Speaking at the event, she shared from the perspective of UN and CEDAW regarding the impact of COVID-19 and the consideration/strategies undertaken by UN and other bodies to safeguard the rights, needs of the Dalit women and other marginalized/ vulnerable groups in this pandemic. She further shared the need of internationalizing the issue for uplifting the status of Dalit and other marginalized groups

**RENU ADHIKARI, CHAIRPERSON AT NATIONAL
ALLIANCE OF WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS
(NAWHRD)**



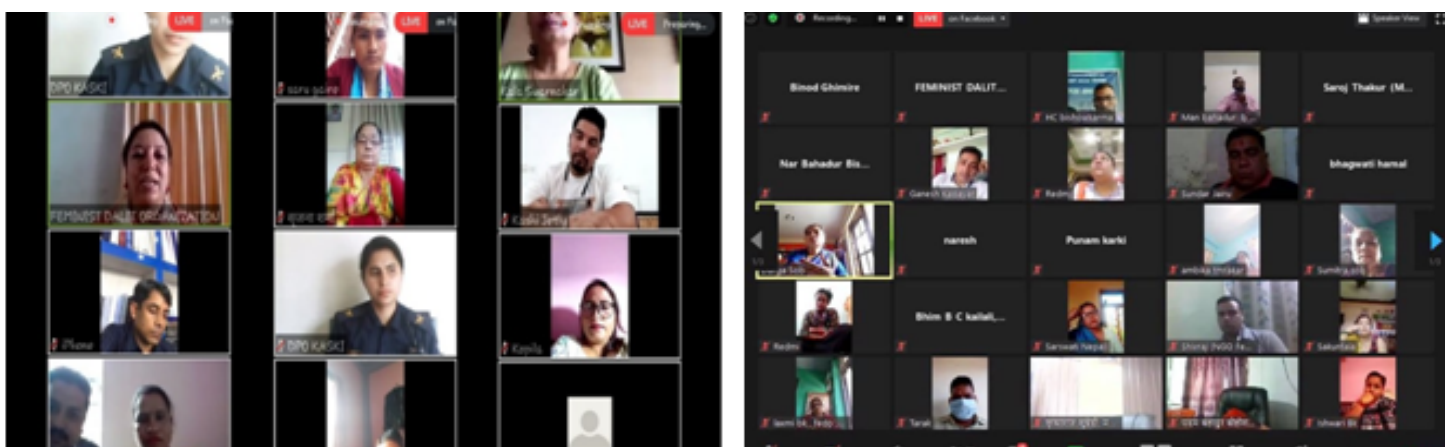
Any women movement not included Dalit women would be a failure. We should revise the existing social, economic and political structure for the well-being of every section, especially backward women with social movement, collective voices and common hardship. The existing intersectionality should be worked out for the just and equitable society

SABIN SHRESTHA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FORUM OF WOMEN, LAW AND DEVELOPMENT



COVID-19 lockdown has intensified discriminatory practices and domestic violence in Nepal, ultimately leading to 2200 suicide cases registered only during this lockdown. The government is failing to protect the life of victims facing domestic violence and discrimination in this pandemic due to lack of implication of the amended constitution laws.

Likewise, with the same motive, FEDO conducted province-level webinar at different provinces: Province 1,2,5, Gandaki, Sudur Pashim and Karnali province respectively as to draw attention of the concerned stakeholders and held them accountable for addressing such issues of Dalit and Dalit women at local as well as national level.



Screen shots of province-level webinar

By successfully hosting the event, FEDO was able to enlighten and aware 342 peoples on the impact of COVID-19 to Dalit women and the efforts to be made for mitigating such problems in this unprecedented situation.

HON. SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT MINISTER JASMAYA GAJMER OF PROVINCE-1



Certainly, the novel coronavirus is worrisome for everyone. But for marginalized Dalit population who lives with poverty, health inequities, and other burdens, the outbreak is especially brutal. Even though the Dalit women representatives are working on ensuring the rights and creating an opportunity for Dalit communities, the Dalit population are still prone to it.

UMITA BARAILI
MEMBER OF STATE PARLIAMENT OF PROVINCE-1



The majority of Dalits working in the informal service sector, mostly in lowest-level jobs, relying on daily wages are more suffering from hunger, deprived from having access to basic services, and right to information. Even though the state government has brought some subsidy programs and vocational programs to the vulnerable families in the agricultural sector, Dalit arent able to use that opportunity since they don't have their own land and investment for production, hence lead to downfall of their livelihood.

SOM NATH PORTEL
HEAD OF DCC, JHAPA



During the global epidemic, caste discrimination and violence against women in the Dalit community is extreme. Various incidents has been registered and encountered throughout this time period. The worst reality is even in this pandemic, we could not unite, come along for each other and help. In Dalit, while falling sick they couldn't walk out to hospital in fear of getting beaten-up by the police, due to no access to resources to get the passes, no enough money to pay for the ambulance have made them die of disease and hunger.

DAL RAWAL
MINISTER, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT MINISTRY
OF KARNALI PROVINCE



Concerning the issue of Dalit and marginalized people, Nepal Government has formed the monitoring committee under Women and Children Welfare Department of Social Development Ministry for addressing the violence and discrimination at local level. Through this committee, the Government has been monitoring the quarantine area regularly for controlling the case of possible violence.

Cases of Violence against Dalit women and girls during COVID-19 lock-down

One's home is said to be the safest place for everyone but the increasing number of cases of violence against Dalit women and girls during the lock-down shows that it's not really safe for them. This COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the pre-existing problem of rape, murder, violence and discrimination against Dalit women, particularly domestic violence in Nepal. In most of the cases, the perpetrators of violence were found to be husbands, in-laws and parents. These cases have been recorded but go unreported since the perpetrators are family members and despite of filing formal complaints, the survivors rather repress such instances even from their family members.

So this makes the situation unpleasant and dangerous since the victims of domestic violence have very limited options when it comes to receiving help and support under lockdown and in spite of the huge effort to save a large number of lives from the pandemic, this lockdown has put some vulnerable groups more at risk.

12-YEAR-OLD DALIT GIRL SAMJHANA BK MURDERED AFTER RAPED- 24TH SEPT 2020

On 24th Sept 2020, the body of a **12-year-old Dalit girl Samjhana BK** was found in a temple in Masta Rural Municipality-2 of Bajhang district. The girl had gone to feed cattle with grass and foliage at a shed which was 10-minute walk away from her home. When she did not return home till late night, her family went out searching for her and found her lifeless at the Shiva temple located at a distance of 200 metres from the shed, then police informed. Police suspected that the girl may have been murdered after the culprit/s raped her as the clothes in the lower part of the body were missing while there were injury marks on different parts of the body.

It has been learnt that the girl along with her two sisters had been living with her grandparents as the parents are working in India.



Picture of Samjhana BK

A TEENAGE GIRL HELD CAPTIVE AND GANG-RAPED FOR DAYS AFTER BEING DRUGGED IN KANCHANPUR- 1ST SEPT 2020

"I was drugged and raped by four people multiple times,"

On 1st Sept 2020, **a 16 year-old girl was gang-raped** by four youths from the same village. The girl was held captive for five consecutive days and was gang raped several times. The girl, who had been living in her maternal uncle's house in Beldadi Rural Municipality-5 in the district, had been missing since August 30. Her maternal uncle filed a complaint at the area police office about her sudden disappearance on the following day. After several days of their search, police were able to find her near the same area last Friday. She was later handed over to her uncle. After a few days, the girl filed a complaint against four youths from the area claiming that they raped her multiple times by holding her hostage.



Shedding light on the increasing rape cases, FEDO staged a peaceful demonstration in Maitighar mandala demanding justice for all the victims and stringent punishment against the perpetrators involved. Likewise, FEDO also issued a press release demanding the government and police personnel to conduct an impartial, thorough, and transparent investigation of the incident to hold all the culprits accountable to this premeditated crime without being susceptible to political and economic pressure and other forms of coercion.

WOMAN ASSAULTED ON WITCHCRAFT ALLEGATION

"I have been accused and cursed of being a witch countless times,"

45-year-old Dalit woman of Golbazar Municipality-3 of Siraha District, Shova Paswan was accused of witchcraft by her own family members and was bitten almost to death since the last 2 years. Experiencing such a pathetic conduct of torture, she isolated herself from participating in any social functions or gatherings. She suffered a lot from violence and struggled really hard to overcome it. So seeking for help, she came in contact with FEDO Siraha for concrete legal backing as to ensure protection and justice to the victim. Not only this but FEDO also supported her in social rehabilitation and provided social counseling to her family members as well.

Now, Shova Paswan is involved in a group formed by FEDO where she actively participates in women right campaign and trainings that relates to the human rights situation of Dalit women, the problem faced by them, the issues that are prevalent; the bottlenecks that obstruct in achieving justice and the ways to overcome it.

SAVED A DALIT GIRL FROM HUMAN TRAFFICKING

A 14-year-old girl living with her parents Rita Devi and Radhechan Ram at Bisangbharpur-11, Bara district was kidnapped by 18 year-old boy Sonu Mahato, son of Jatiya Devi on 19th Ashoj 2076. Sonu was their neighbor and was keeping an eye on her since the last 6-7 months. So, seeking the chance, he took her to India at his Aunt's place planning to sell her in the brothel of Betiya, India. However, due to 5 days of strong investigation, the villagers were able to find them out. After that, with 400 witnesses, the villagers of Bisangbharpur-11 came up with a decision to get them marriage within 1 month of time.

They even got married but marrying didn't seem to be an ultimate solution toward that problem. As that girl was of Dalit community (Chamar), it was indigestible for the boy's family to accept her. So because of this, they didn't let her (girl) stay inside their house, instead forced her to sleep at cow byre. So after spending days sleeping in the cow byre, the boy again took her off to Kathmandu with an intention to sell the girl at brothel of India. So seeking for help, the girl's parents reached to FEDO and after listening to them, FEDO pressurized the District Police Office of Bara to file the complaint and to carry forward their search for the lost ones. The search was successful as the girl returned safely to her house. She even got settled marrying another guy after 4 months of that incident. But did the culprit was punished for his crime? Did that 14-year-old girl obtain justice? NO, because the girl's family didn't want to take it forward despite of FEDO's initiation to help them.

Though the justice wasn't served in this case, we are satisfied that we could save the girl from human trafficking.

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