

NPC-NPI Policy Dialogue

May 20, 2020

Policy Dialogue Series I- Full Report (INPUT FROM NPI)

National Planning Commission (NPC) – Government of Nepal (GoN) and Nepal Policy Institute (NPI) held the first in the series of NPI-NPC Policy Dialogue on May 20, 2020 via Zoom conference. The dialogue seeks to provide expertise and knowledge of the global community of scholars and practitioners of Nepalese origin to contribute to GoN's policymaking. In the context that the Covid-19 is causing huge economic and social disruption in Nepal and is likely to continue for significantly longer period, this dialogue aims to provide with the knowledge about the best practices and innovative ideas to inform GoN's Economic and Social Recovery Plan in Post Covid-19. Several experts from NPI Global Experts Community and NPI Board Members based in South East Asia, Australia, North America and Europe shared their experience and expertise with NPC VC Hon. Prof. Dr. Puspa Kadel and NPC member Hon. Min Bahadur Shahi, and NPI Chair Khagendra Dhakal, among others, on matters widely ranging from health measures to urban planning, agriculture, tourism, investment, manufacturing, employment including sociological and geopolitical aspects. The following is a compilation of the NPI Chair's opening remarks and presentations done by the participants.

NPI Chair Khagendra Dhakal, Bangkok

Topic: Nepal's Response to Social and Economic Impact of COVID-19

Policy statement by the President of Nepal includes positive spirits in the middle of serious global threats created by the spread of COVID-19 and possible adverse impacts on global economic landscape and shifting global political environment - a situation never experienced since the World War II. One only hopes government's optimism will continue to prevail on Nepal's development as the Policy and Program narratives demonstrate.

NPI takes this opportunity to express its general concerns on the COVID-19 situation, and share following swift measures for the government's consideration.

1. Ensure safe evacuation and arrival home in Nepal of Nepalese working abroad and their orderly integration into the community and economic structures.
2. Enhance food security through liberal policy measure to boosting agricultural production, processing, transportation to market, and availability at affordable costs to ensure no one goes hungry.

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3. Promote micro, small, and medium size enterprises using local resources, skill, and technology of returnee-population at community levels.
4. Devise and implement social protection measures (Food for work, cash for work and other measures) to address the vulnerable segments of the population living on daily wages.
5. Expand connectivity and digital transformation of economy (e-commerce, e-governance, e-learning, and education) and computer literacy program in rural areas to empower rural population in government programs.
6. Provide free basic health services (not only specialized life-style related health conditions) for the entire population in public hospitals and nominal charge in private hospitals, including for those underprivileged and marginalized groups who have might have been dropped out of government's safety-net program.
7. Ensure safety, protection, and comprehensive health insurance of front-line workers, particularly to those in health and other essential staff running essential services.
8. Introduce austerity measures in government expenditure, including the MP fund while avoiding excessively front loading of austerity measures at the lower economic strata level.

Expert: Sharad Neupane, NPI/UNDP, Fiji

Topic: Social Protection and Employment

Social Protection:

1. One-time cash transfer for the most vulnerable population (daily wage earner, landless, disable and marginalized population)

Strategy for implementation: Proper targeting, Preparation of transparent guidelines and standard operating procedure and partnership with local Government, CSOs/NGOs and community groups

2. Partial wage subsidy for employee of Industries, service sector and tax exemption for Micro/small and medium enterprise

Strategy for implementation: Tripartite discussion and agreement with Government, employers and employee.

Employment creation:

1. Cash for work for creating rural infrastructure and review of PM employment programme.

Strategy for implementation: Proper targeting, Preparation of transparent guidelines and standard operating procedure and partnership with local Government, CSOs/NGOs and



community groups. Focus more on agriculture marketing infrastructure, drinking water, irrigation, rural road and health centres.

2. Wage subsidy to bring fallow land under cultivation and timely provision of agricultural inputs (seeds, fertilizers etc).

Strategy for Implementation: Mapping of fallow land engaging local government ward committee, community groups/CSOs/NGOs and agriculture service centre. Temporary lease agreement between the landlord and the farmer.

3. Assist returnee migrant workers to establish and promote Micro and small enterprises based on acquired skill of returnee migrant workers.

Strategy for implementation: Compile information of those returnee migrant workers and prepare their profile. Based on their skill profile, explore the possibility of establishment of micro and small enterprises. One-time subsidy could be provided.

4. Promote domestic tourism with new health and safety protocol.

Strategy for implementation: Discourage international tourism (stop foreign currency issuance for international travel) and encourage domestic travel and tourism with attractive packages and new destination.

* More on **cash transfer** is given in the Annex of this report. As per the interest of NPC as expressed in the Policy Dialogue conference, Dr. Netra Chhetri has kindly prepared an article about Cash-Based Transfer (Social Protection Program).

Expert: Sharu Shrestha, Feminist, NPI Board Member, Kathmandu Nepal

Topic: A Rapid Assessment of Nepali Migrant Workers in Major Destination Countries during COVID 19 Pandemic

1. Due to pandemic, thousands of Nepali migrant workers are clamoring to return home, on their own or with the government's help, despite the current restrictions on land and air travel, and transportation in general.
2. The situations surrounding the migrant returnees is diverse: Kuwait announced amnesty to all undocumented workers, Malaysia is arresting undocumented workers, most workers are facing lockdowns in their destination countries, women domestic workers are mostly invisible and not registered in Nepal so their whereabouts is not known- all of which pose significant humanitarian, political, social challenges as well as economic stress on the nation.
3. Nepal Policy Institute's (NPI) initiative to conduct a **rapid assessment** to gather data and detailed information on migrant returnee profiles, their current situation and future aspirations after homecoming to inform the government of Nepal in the designing,

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planning and implementation of Repatriation and Reintegration Policy and Plan during this global pandemic.

4. The analysis of this rapid assessment will be valuable in ensuring that the repatriation and reintegration policies and plans currently being prepared by the Government of Nepal reflect the perceptions, aspirations and concerns of migrant workers who are the intended beneficiaries.
5. This is not an academic research per se, and the data collected is not representative. However, covers GCC, Malaysia and India.
6. The work will be conducted in partnership with Migration Lab in Nepal
7. NPI/Migration Lab will share the findings to the NPC within few weeks.

Expert: Nalini Subba Chhetri, NPI/Arizona State University, USA

Topic: Science Policy and the Complexity of Decision Making for Policy Makers

Based on over two decades of global work with the Consortium of Science Policy & Outcomes (<https://cspo.org/>), a premier Science Policy think-tank housed in Arizona State University, I have tried to apply the work of how science/research influences policy for desired outcomes, and, in this case, as it applies to the plans and priorities of the Nepalese government and its governance structure.

1. The inherent value of science and research is to enhance knowledge. For policy makers, science informs them to allow better decision making. But we know that **science and research alone are not sufficient for sound decision-making**. Political reality, real-time priorities, institutional set-up of the government, power structures including the government's executive, legislative and judiciary bodies all play part in decision making.
2. Experts provide policy makers with carefully researched recommendations (WHAT to do) for desired outcomes and rarely consider the process (How to do it) to achieve them. For this reason, **prescriptive recommendations are largely ineffective**.
3. Governance is complex and the work of nation building is even more complicated. The **government cannot do the work of nation building alone**. It needs to continuously forge and leverage partnerships at all levels and at all scales to achieve this goal (e.g. partnerships with public-private agencies, with academia and industry, and with media, civil society, local governments and the people). With local governments, responsibilities that is coupled with authority, resources and accountability are likely to produce better results.
4. In addition to top-down hierarchical imposition of task-driven governance that only utilizes the carrot and stick modus operandi, the focus of leadership needs to be on cultivating a **culture of trust and accountability** for more robust outcomes.
5. Often programs may not be achieving the objectives they were meant to deliver, in such cases the practice of **asking the hard questions** is often more important than seeking the right answers. Expensive programs and plans may be answering the wrong questions. Reflective processes, when embedded in programs, allows course correction specially of inefficient programs.



6. While evidence-based knowledge and research will always be key in planning and strategizing – **engaging with different knowledge systems** that may be local and indigenous offers additional knowledge platforms and ensures government listens to, values and respects wisdom of its diverse ethnic groups of Nepal. This is particularly important in management and protection of the country’s diverse natural systems, for cultural cohesiveness, and in bi/multi-lingual education necessary for capacity building of Nepal’s diverse population.
7. The “**devil is in the details.**” Nepal has robust planning process with respected, reputed and highly qualified individuals at its helms. Nepal’s problems are not necessarily at the planning level but more so during implementation and deployment. The complexity and the challenges of implementation in an ecologically and ethnically diverse and complex country like Nepal is a daunting undertaking, and programs often fail because such challenges and complexities are neither properly anticipated nor adequately addressed in details.
8. In the COVID 19 situation there has been overwhelming amount of information which has invariably confused people, and this is a global problem. Best practices of leadership around the world to address such issue has been when the government established regular channel of **communication** and **engagement** for transparency, credibility, authority and clarity with the public. Nepal needs to continue to do that.
9. Nepal, like most countries, needs to rethink its systemic **inequality**. It is our most significant problem and some would argue, more so than climate change. Aside from the moral, ethical, social and economic implications of inequality, global events have shown that the direct manifestations of inequality have severe implications. In the short and long term, we have already witnessed vast inequality leading to disgruntlement among its citizenry, to unrest, and, in many cases, riots and civil protests which means that scarce and precious resources and funds are redirected to address the concerns of public safety. Consequently, funding for law enforcement, police and defense increases leaving even less for nation building. Inequality is an insidious cancerous ailment that has potential to erase all the progress made over decades.

Expert: Netra Chhetri, Arizona State University, USA

Topic: Food Security

A. Background

1. Covid19, most likely started in a “wet” food market, and is causing havoc with already stressed global food systems. As a result, food insecurity is set to become the bigger ‘pandemic.’
2. Even if the stocks of food are currently at record high in many countries, if the food supply chains are disrupted for just 30 days, access to food would be denied to tens of millions of people. This is particularly worrisome for the world’s poorer countries, over three dozen of them, where supply chains are fragile. Transition to self-sufficiency is a must.



3. Transition to a sustainable and desired food system cannot happen in isolation of innovation in technology and supportive policies.
4. To ensure greater independence of the food and energy system (closely coupled) countries will have to focus on being more self-reliant with emphasis on innovation of location-specific technology. Programs that help greater self-reliance in food systems need to become one of the top priorities once the dust settles.
5. Health is strongly linked to food. Moving forward, countries need to pay attention to agro-ecology based agriculture systems, that is low external input agriculture.
6. It is crucial that farmers be at the center of policy thinking. Important to engage both professionals and farmers to co-generate knowledge and develop solutions at scale.
7. Do not look to western countries for best practices, especially in agriculture and energy sectors.

B. Technological Innovations:

1. The Himalayas may be ‘water towers’ but they only manifest themselves as springs at the bottom of the hills – far below easy access of settlements. The engineering challenge is that water needs to be either piped from distant sources or “lifted” from rivers, streams and aquifers to settlements and agricultural fields. While small electric or diesel-powered lift irrigation is common in certain parts of Nepal (and in south Asia), erratic supply of electricity and high cost of the fuel pose economic hardship to farmers. Solar powered lift irrigation can be a solution, especially as costs of solar panels are declining, and entrepreneurs are producing solar integrators pumps at 25 percent of the original cost.
2. A 10-kilowatt solar array can pump approximately 7,100 cubic feet of groundwater per day from a 158-foot-deep aquifer (same is true for streams and rivers). This USD 18-20K irrigation project has the potential to irrigate ~50 acre of land, double the productivity and income of more than 30 small farmers. We have implemented three such community-based irrigation systems in the Kulani village of Nawalparasi. With assured water supply these farmers can grow multiple crops throughout the year, and can plan their crop calendar to grow offseason vegetables that fetch four times the market value. This is a transformative change for farmers who previously were entirely at the mercy of the monsoons. Solar-powered lift Irrigation can be a refreshing innovation to this problem. Innovations customized to location specific needs of farmers can be part of the solution to lift people out of poverty, empower communities, and ultimately contribute to food security. Agricultural innovations must not only improve the existing farming practices, it should also be competitive.
3. Hydroponics - is one of the most intensive methods of crop production. It doesn't need fertile land. Known to effectively use water and nutrients, hydroponics can produce as much as 60-65 kg/m² of vegetables. It is actually fun to work in a hydroponics garden.



C. Climate-smart agriculture and green economy

1. Among the biggest challenges of the 21st century is the need to nearly double food production by 2050, reduce persistent energy poverty while reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, and build resilience to changing climate. The strong need to focus on solving these challenges have sparked a global interest in climate-smart agriculture (SDG2), which focuses on solutions to the three challenges, has sparked curiosity in using *biochar* as a tool to fight climate change (SDG13) while also improving soil fertility. If incorporated in soil, biochar enhances soil's ability to retain nutrients, reduces run-off chemicals from agricultural land, improves water-holding capacity of soils and lowers CH₄ and N₂O emissions from land. Additionally, the provision of clean energy through the production of green charcoal from biochar offers an opportunity to address energy poverty (SDG7).
2. Biochar, created by pyrolyzing invasive species in oxygen-deprived chambers, is promoted as the universal answer to climate, energy and food problems. It is a source of bioenergy; improves agricultural productivity particularly in degraded soils; reduces nutrient losses; thereby improving overall food production. Additionally, production of green charcoal offers an opportunity to address energy poverty - providing a uniquely powerful case for pathways to meet multiple UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
3. The drive for a green and low carbon economy is being implemented in rural and urban communities, and generating interest and policy changes around the world. In China, by building on the cultural experience of ecological agriculture stretching back centuries, the nation's thought experiment on *green growth* has the potential to affect a system that not only produces food for its 1.4 billion inhabitants but also aims to protect its environment. By making organic and ecological food systems as the nation's vision for food security, Nepal can protect its agricultural biodiversity, decrease dependence on purchased inputs (e.g. chemical fertilizers and pesticides) and increase resiliency of the food system while creating opportunities and value for especially rural communities throughout the country. This is a win-win-opportunities.
4. Smart agriculture is about engaging farmers and their supporting institutions with nature in a harmonious way, with focus on generating benefits for the future generations. Some of the strategies may include research and development of key technologies so that the practices of green growth expands in rural settings. This approach necessitates a number of things to be aware of in the future including the training of farmers for resource management, marketing, processing of farm products, and continuous transformation of scientific and technological achievements into demonstrations and promotion of the vision of *green growth*.
5. Agritourism (or eco-tourism) has become a big industry in some countries. Organic farms, especially peach and apple farms, are increasingly attracting agricultural ecotourists during the flowering and harvesting season. The booming agritourism through the



introduction of the concept of green or climate smart villages can also serve as a multiplier for such ecosystem services. For example, peach flowers and their nectar can be a very good source of organic honey that can bring a huge amount of income. One of the near-term activities that local governments can do is to conduct the inventory of homestay communities across the country and select pilot communities to develop the idea of agritourism.

Expert: Binod Chapagain, USAID Thailand

Topic: Environment for private sector development and collaboration in Southeast Asia – Lesson for Nepal

Context

1. Many migrant workers will be returning Nepal if the COVID crises prolongs. The Government of Nepal has also accepted the fact that youth migration to third countries as laborer is not a long-term solution and therefore, has been developing plans to create employment in Nepal.
2. It is globally accepted industries and businesses are the backbones of national economies and employments in the current business age.
3. We know that all people cannot be entrepreneurs – it is not easy to start and run a vegetable shop. Therefore, Nepal cannot expect all youths to be entrepreneurs. Many (majority of) youths expect a decent employment/job as their priority.
4. Nepal can learn from 20 years of experiences that Southeast Asian countries have gained. These countries did not just wait for national entrepreneurs, but also invited international investors and entrepreneurs to invest in them. Although, many countries in this region does not have popular democracy, but they have made significant achievements in economic growth and infrastructure development. Cambodia which was poorer than Nepal has already left us behind. Thailand does not have so called 'foreign employment' trend.

Creating environment to develop private enterprises in forestry sector: Experience from Indonesia

A company in Indonesia manages over 60,000 hectares of forestland and sales timber and rubber products in global market. The company generates above 10,000 direct employments throughout the year. It does not include employment created in value chain. The following are some examples of agreement between the government and the company:

1. The land is leased for long-term (about 50 years) and the company is responsible for sustainable management of forests. However, there is a condition that the government will take the responsibilities for the losses if there are changes in policies that contradict with the existing lease agreement. If the company does not get compensated for the loss because of changes in condition, the company can seek legal actions at international level. Mainly, the government has given the company a legal (written) assurance that there will not be any changes detrimental to the existing leasing conditions.

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2. Company is responsible for finding its market and investments. Until 2019, they have secured 100 million dollars (10 crore dollars) of international investments and additional 50 million dollars has been agreed in later 2019. This business is going to be carbon neutral.
3. The company has received third party forest stewardship certification (FSC) that ensures that the company does not violate human rights and harm forest resources and local people in production and value chain. If there is any report against the company, FSC investigates the case and can disassociate the company at any time. With the disassociation, the company loses a big international market.

Potential learnings for Nepal from Southeast Asia

1. The private sector engagement and collaboration is possible if the government provides policy and operational environment. If they get the environment, they like to come to Nepal, invest and create new employments (openness is the key);
2. State can ask businesses to invite independent regulators – it should not invest its resources to monitor all business activities. There are independent certification bodies for various types of products including rice, lentils, vegetable products, dairy products, forest (timber, non-timber) products and many others. The certification increases the credibility of Nepalese product in the global market.
3. Investors need a legal environment that facilitates remittance of money to country and outside of country – this gives investors options to move their money between countries and work in multiple countries.
4. International investors can be big or small – if they create 3-4 employment throughout the year, the Southeast Asian governments have given them approval to run their business. They also facilitate visa of investors and their family members. Education sector has also boomed because of investors' children in Southeast Asia (there are indirect benefits).
5. Bank interest is another factor to encourage investors – the high interest rates pose them challenges. None of the Southeast Asian countries have two-digit interest rate. Vietnam, which is steadily achieving its economic growth, has surprisingly lowest interest rate in the whole region.

Nepal may conduct a study about the policies and practices that have facilitated the private sector investments in the Southeast Asia region. If Nepal could bring-in the learnings, it may get benefits to develop private sector and create a big number of employments in the country. Probably, the embassies in the region may help in conducting such studies (?).



Expert: Bijaya Rajbhandari, NPI/formely UNICEF, Kathmandu, Nepal

Topic: Primary Education

Facts on the education in Nepal:

1. Though the education till secondary education is free we also know that about 250000 children are out of school which is reflected in honorable president's speech. This realization is welcome.
2. The slogan of retention is mention and hopefully this will done as we know that 61% of the students do not reach to secondary schools due to multi-faceted reasons which need to be addressed
3. Pre School or ECD is being launched and now reach about 50%, so 50% is still out of reach. This is also affected by geographically and ethnically. If you look at the South Asia, we are the worst and followed by Bhutan and Pakistan
4. Focus in ECD is only in the education aspect rather than the holistic which includes social and emotional development. Nepal has done well in education and social development but other health factors e.g stunting of 36% is still a problem.

Suggestions:

1. ECD: As we know is important factors. World bank research has said that if you invest a dollar in ECD, the return is 7 times. In the President's speech, it says in general we will put all schools in ECD but the access and quality is something that needs to be focused. I have visited many schools, the quality is poor wherever they are. First we need to have teachers trained in ECD, supplies of learning materials, holistic approach to child.
2. Primary Education: Teachers training: Lack of qualified teachers is big issue. Strengthen the teachers training and their quality
3. The rationalization: pupil: teacher ratio. This is now left to the municipality as per our new guidelines but politicization has hindered this process. The committee to do rationalization has not yet been established. This may require federal level intervention.
4. Invest in education. We are very much low. For any sustainability, invest in education. It is only 5% of GDP. In fact it was less in 2018 compare to 2017.
5. Mid day meal: This is a big boost not only in nutrition but also in attendance and learning
6. Our slogan should be not just enrolment and retention but also LEARNING. Grade 5 should learn what grade 5 curriculum is.
7. Language of teaching: Use local language where appropriate. Use the materials and teachers equipped for that.



8. Toilets for the girls_ just like twean ko campaign. Replace all the tweans with suspension bridge. Have the campaign of construction of gilrs toilets in all the schools. This will help in girls enrolment and retention.
9. Geographical focus: We know the groups and geographical area that we have the problem. Give incentives to the teachers
10. Access to internet: Long distance teaching is actually creating the digital divide between the Haves and Have not. This needs to be refrained and find the community level arrangement of learning.

Expert: Ambika P. Adhikari, DDes, AICP, Arizona, USA

Topic: Post COVID-19 Urban Development in Nepal

The rapid urbanization in Nepal is caused by people moving from rural areas to urban areas for jobs and increased income and other opportunities. Wages in urban areas can be from 5 to 20 times higher than in the rural areas. Urbanization promotes innovation, and increase in productivity and supports national prosperity

The Covid-19 pandemic has forced the policy makers and planners to rethink on how future urban development should be managed. The following are some recommendations.

1. Higher urban density helps save agricultural land, and makes the urban living more efficient, but the density can also seem problematic during pandemics requiring better, design and planning to contain sprawl. Major covid-19 fatalities have been mostly in dense urban areas.
2. Although single occupancy vehicles seem safer during pandemics, this practice is not sustainable and affordable in developing countries.
3. Public transportation needs to be reorganized with sanitation protocol including regular disinfecting and providing glass or plastic barriers between seats.
4. Promote remote working alternatives to drastically reduce congestion and pollution.
5. Consider permanently closing some vehicular roads to pedestrian only areas.
6. Revamp water supply, and sanitation. Provide hand washing stations at all strategic locations.
7. Provide adequate open spaces in strategic locations for recreation, and use for emergency evacuation, staging medical facilities, promote urban gardening, urban forestry and food security.
8. Promote light weight, mobile, modular and spaces that can be repurposed e.g., hotel to medical facilities.
9. Promote Internet, touchless technologies, distance education and remote education and training opportunities.
10. Many migrant returnees in Nepal can be absorbed in peri-urban and rural areas: supporting agriculture, farming, food processing
11. While urban areas promote economic development, public health issues require the planners to seek a regional balance.



12. These policies will also reduce pollution, accidents, fatalities, and support climate change, environmental and equity goals.

Expert: Ashok Gurung, New School, New York City

Topic: Inequality in Nepal and the Covid-19 pandemic

First and foremost, I am deeply concerned by the anticipated rapid spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in Nepal and other parts of the world. As has already been shown, it has and will continue to cause devastating short- and long-term impact on Nepali people, especially the marginalized majority consisting of Dalits, IPs, Muslims, and women. As a citizen of Nepal, I am also deeply appalled by how Nepali state has spectacularly failed in its basic duty to prepare for dealing with this crisis, which, we all knew is going to come soon, since it emerged in our neighborhood (Wuhan, China) in January 2020. I consider this as a gross negligence, which is highly unethical, unprofessional, and almost criminal. I sincerely hope that at appropriate time, Nepali people will hold our leaders and leading institutions such as NPC accountable for this gross negligence and also for drawing lessons for avoiding such to occur in the future, it is similar to the call for meta-investigation that is being debated now at international forums.

Unfortunately, we are now at this most precarious place, where we – not just Nepalis but also friends of Nepal – must come together to find a way to manage, mitigate, and slowly recover and rebuild from this crisis. For that, even though this is late, I am encouraged by this dialogue between NPC-NPI, hence, I reluctantly agreed to join our deliberations today. Today, I would urge us to pause and rethink the importance of better understanding, broadening, and deepening the idea and practice of “inequality” in Nepal, which if done in a genuine sustained manner, would not only inform but would engage everyone, hence, greater likelihood of effectively dealing with the pandemic and its aftermath.

To me, the idea, the practice, the persistence of “inequality,” which pervades almost every aspect of our Nepali lives, including the way people are seen or dismissed or treated, even during this pandemic. In Nepal, inequality is beyond economics. As is known, it is shaped by deeply entrenched idea and practice of accepting that some of us born better or purer or superior than others. It is no coincidence that that the so called one of the most progressive constitutions in the world that Nepal forcibly introduced in 2015 defines secularism as supporting “Sanatan” traditions, which essentially tacitly allows supporting the practice of unequal citizenship.

In order to design effective response for both dealing with the immediate crisis as well as long term goal of establishing an inclusive just society, our efforts, whether they are at the grassroots, districts, provincial, or national levels... they must be clear in accepting the fact that “inequality” in Nepal is a very serious intractable multi-dimensional problem. If this realization shapes the way we design plans, policies, resources, and implementation then I believe we would have a better chance of somehow not only surviving but becoming a better



just society. In short, this is a historic moment and opportunity, the Covid-19 pandemic will transform our relationships with each other as well as with our environments. I think we are capable of thinking and acting accordingly.

Expert: Tejendra Pherali, University College London

Topic: Educational delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nepal

Education cannot wait until the pandemic is controlled. It must continue even during times of emergencies in order to prevent the loss of human capital and decline in economic activities. Given the current risk of spread and precarity around discovery and availability of the anti-COVID-19 vaccine, our social behavior is likely to change dramatically in the foreseeable future. Places, such as schools where masses gather pose a greater risk of spreading the virus. Therefore, the government must develop a clear policy and guidelines about how to continue learning and teaching across the country in the coming months or years. What is needed immediately is to find alternative ways of maintaining education while the country is under lockdown. Based on global knowledge and practices around education in emergencies, below are few ideas for the National Planning Commission of Nepal that can draw upon to devise policies and planning:

1. Strengthen the role of provincial/ local governments in containing the spread of the COVID-19. Establish a provincial and national education in emergency task force. Local authorities can better administer social distancing and quarantine measures but also provide health information to the local population more effectively.
2. Develop a short-term (e.g. how to keep students learning) and long-term plans (e.g. how to plan for opening schools safely). Accept that the society will not get back to the normal routine we had before this pandemic. What we are experiencing now is likely to be the new normal.
3. In the short-term action plan, account for the most vulnerable children who are likely to be worst hit during the crisis (e.g. children with disabilities, poor children, those who live in remote areas, ethnic and cultural minorities).
4. Create an inventory of existing educational contents in digital forms. There are old NTV videos and radio educational programmes which can be quickly used to engage children in learning. Invest heavily in production of digital educational resources in appropriate local languages.
5. Design and deliver a national level teaching programme via TV and community FM radios. Local authorities can also collaborate with local teachers and community radios to produce and broadcast educational programmes.
6. The government should heavily subsidise on high speed internet across the country at least for a year. Distribute digital equipment - computers/ radio/ TV/ smart phones to families with school-aged children and those who cannot afford the digital equipment. It is a worthwhile investment for the country's future.



7. Organise educational contents according to learning objectives. Just providing access to resources does not lead to meaningful learning.
8. Collaborate with the private education sector and INGOs/ NGOs who have the experience and expertise to deliver distance education.
9. Engage with and mobilise young people to facilitate digital learning. Launch a national level volunteering programme on digital learning and teaching.
10. Establish Phone-In radio programmes where parents can share their experience of educating their children at home and educational experts are available to provide guidance.
11. Encourage the use of WhatsApp/ Viber for learning purposes.
12. Prioritise teacher professional development focusing on how to produce digital contents, use digital tools for educational purposes, and teach during emergencies.
13. Provide subsidy to teachers to pay for mobile calls so that they are able to speak to their students to provide personalized learning guidance on the phone.
14. The Education Ministry cannot work alone - collaboration with ICT and finance ministry is needed.
15. Learn from educational practices from other low/ middle income countries - Mexico, Ghana, Jordan, China and Brazil.

Expert: Sriram Bhagut Mathe USESDP, Cambodia

Topic: Upper Secondary and Higher Education

Education is the prime generator of human resources and central to advancing human development, and thereby, accelerating economic development, therefore, education at all levels need to be of EXCELLENT QUALITY.

Quality of education at all levels can only be assured if our government recognizes that the root cause of all the problems faced by the public schools and public universities is political meddling and interference, where meritocracy has taken a back seat to political patronage. Government should have the following enabling and positive policies which will allow education institutions to compete and grow to attain academic excellence.

1. Implement a 2-pronged strategy to significantly improve the public schools and universities to ensure accessibility and equity for the disadvantaged population and to allow private institutions with proven track record to forge international partnerships and offer international programs, so that students do not have to go abroad for quality international programs. The more the students go abroad, the more likely they may never return.
2. Give autonomy and empower education institutions to focus on excellence in delivery of all the academic programs. These institutions must be intellectually challenged to cope with the ever changing needs of society, such as the current covid pandemic, which demands innovative solutions in the way we think and the way we impart education. The focus must always be on academic rigor and in the pursuit of excellence.



3. Enact necessary legislation to change the charter of universities so that the universities are governed by a “non-political” Board of Trustees, and not by the Prime Minister as Chancellor, Education Minister as Pro-Chancellor and their political appointees in the very important leadership positions.
4. Enact legislation to select academic leaders (head masters/principals in the schools, VCs, Rectors, Registrars, Deputy Deans, Deputy Deans, Campus Chiefs) on the basis of their proven academic and leadership credentials through an open, transparent, competitive and merit-based selection process, free from political meddling and interference.
5. Continue to freeze affiliations of private colleges by public universities as these affiliations have morally corrupted the public universities,
6. Approve University Umbrella Act to allow the creation of Madan Bhandari University of Science and Technology as well as 10-15 non-profit private “deemed to be universities”, so that private institutions with well-proven academic track record, adequate human and physical resources, can be upgraded to university status
7. Enact necessary legislation to ban all types of “political unions” – faculty, staff and students – in all education institutions and declare education institutions “zones of peace”.

Rudra Aryal, NPI/Franklin Pierce University, New Hampshire, USA

Topic: Air Pollution/Environment

1. Strong Implementation and updating every year's progress report (deviation from the threshold pollution limit) of **बाताबरणीय मापदण्ड तथा सम्बन्धीत सूचनाहरुको संगालो, 2075**, which was published by the Ministry of Environment of Nepal.
2. Investigation of real-time air pollution measurement and data analysis by involving research institutes of the country at pre-during and post-COVID 19, time, especially in the Himalayan region. This scientific data will support highlighting the air pollution problem in a global forum regarding transboundary air pollutions such as from Indo-Gangetic Plain, Africa, Europe, Southeast Asia, and many other countries.
3. Bringing Climate Justice issues in a global forum such as the melting of Himalayas, health issues.
4. Involving local /regional governments to implement the environmental policy at every level and developing strategies of announcing pollution-free cities will promote the tourist industry and health issues.
5. Developing Air-purifying towers (as China and many other countries recently started to practice) at different locations of the country, mainly in the most polluted areas of the towns such as in high-traffic locations Kathmandu-Ratna Park, New Baneshwor, Chabahil, Kalimati. Recently, India has practiced at an intense level of using test water cannons to remove dust particles through the rain wash along with filter-based air cleaners at the ambient level to combat deadly air pollution and we can practice these types of techniques.



Expert: Anil Sigdel, NPI, Washington DC

Topic – international supply chain and manufacturing in Nepal

The economic disruption caused by Covid_19 will continue as both global economy and Nepal's economy will have a slow growth, fund crunch and lack of employment. Countries are looking for different ways to support their economies and employment. Therefore, for Nepal, the currently reshuffling international supply chain and logistics could become a historic opportunity to bring in investment, create employment and support the economy in such hard times.

Shifting Asian/Global Supply Chain:

1. New coalitions and alliances for new supply chains are being discussed as the Covid-19 continues to hit the world.
2. China, with a shift to high value products, rising wages and increasing complications with the West, changing its spot in the existing supply chain where China was at the center.
3. International companies seek decentralized supply chain instead of the existing centralized one – not only US, majority of Europe-based companies and South East Asian firms want to be out of China.
4. India is at the core of this change as a potential replacement for China, therefore by extension, South Asian nations are in the global radar for this shift.
5. China is not anymore in the receiving end of investments only but actively seeking to make investment outside– China's venture capital investment in start-ups in India has been going up exponentially, also in Africa and Latin America.
6. Production chains have moved away from China and have gone to several countries, for instance: toys and cameras to Mexico; personal computers to Taiwan; automotive manufacturing to Thailand, Vietnam, and India; textiles to Portugal and South America; Sporting items to Bangladesh and Vietnam; others are going back home to have control over supply chains, and many other moving away for different reasons.

What Nepal should do:

The issue discussed above is an under-researched and under-discussed subject in Nepal's policy community regarding Nepal's economic growth and development. Therefore, Nepal government without any delay needs to formulate a 'New National Strategy' that puts the current shift at the center of its policy and link the geo-economical and geo-political dimensions to its existing economic strategy. Seeking international investments will only go beyond external pledges and investors will follow through if such geopolitical dimensions are embedded in Nepal's economic policies. Because for external investors coming into Nepal are or will not be only purely due to economic interests but strategic interests too, and in the current scenario and for some time to come all the more so.



1. Therefore, Nepal immediately needs to launch an in-depth research on the area in terms of identifying:
 - which manufacturing industries and products that are moving away from China right now will be most feasible to come to Nepal given Nepal's geographic location, cost of transportation, availability of infrastructure and human resources.
 - Determining which laws and regulations will attract those industries – for instance, some states in India have substantially relaxed their labor laws and given tax exemptions in this context.
 - what diplomatic, political and economic strategies Nepal needs for its immediate and active outreach to cash into the ongoing changes before this supply chain transition settles.
 - What areas of cooperation Nepal can have in this regard with India since India is emerging as a major choice for the world to replace the mainland China as world's factory.
2. And India, for its part, has not been really able to capitalize in this despite its desires, if Nepal is able to facilitate better environment, chances are high for Nepal. And the same is true of Bangladesh. Nepal must increase its outreach to Bangladesh in this regard.
3. Regarding China's investment in start-ups in South Asia, for geopolitical reasons, China's investment will face headwinds, and there is an opportunity for Nepal. For its majority of young population, availability of mobile phones, and concentration of tech-savvy youngsters, and in its own right a big market with almost 30 million population, Nepal makes an attractive destination for venture capital continuously coming out of China in many parts of the world.
4. Nepal will have to work out what products will make Nepal's transportation cost negligible – for instance, China sends many products from mainland to Europe via trains now, which is cost-wise much higher than traditional shipping but still the cost is within the range to keep the prices globally competitive. Nepal should work out which products will still be competitive in the global market when using the routes via India or via China or Bangladesh or even air routes or an integrated air and sea routes.
5. A part of some electronic devices or automobiles, for instance, can do the trick in this case. Regarding the technology and know-how, initially the companies themselves should be allowed to bring in their expertise and gradually that will have to be transferred to Nepalese labor through training.

Expert: Hom Panta, Economist, Australia



Topic: Economic and Social Recovery Plan in Post-Covid-19

Key Issues Facing Nepal:

1. How to effectively stop the spread of covid-19 in Nepal and minimise the loss of lives?
2. How to minimise the adverse economic and social impacts of COVID and its response policies?
3. How to manage potential return of a large section of migrant labour back into the country?
4. How to avoid potential shortage of food and other necessities of life?
5. How to achieve highest possible growth in post-Covid world environment?

Policy Responses:

Stopping Covid-19:

1. Close external borders until the world gets rid of Covid.
2. Internally - effective Lockdown etc.
3. Provide assistance to the people in need.
4. A large part of the economy becomes non-operational, causing unemployment, bankruptcies and other adverse social impacts.
5. How to minimize the adverse economic and social impacts of COVID induced lockdown?
6. Track and treat infected people and trace and isolate exposed people. Divide the country into zones based on the extent of community level infections and other social, economic and terrestrial characteristics;
7. Allow movements of unexposed people and goods within each zone. Interactions of uninfected people is safe.
8. Allow only the movement of goods between zones, with proper monitoring of the health of people involved in the delivery of goods.
9. Allow farmer's markets (haats etc) maintaining safe distances.
10. Allow all industrial and agricultural activities to operate normally if they do not require people to work in close proximity.

Managing potential return of migrant labour:

1. It is highly likely that about 50% of Nepali migrant workers will lose their job and have to return eventually.
2. Prepare places to quarantine them before they return to their own home; and manage their return in batches. Start bringing them in early.
3. Make sure the country has enough food supply to feed additional 10 million people for at least 3-6 months.
4. Provide technical assistance and loan, if necessary, for them to start their own business of their choice.
5. How to avoid potential shortage of food and other necessities of life?



6. Be prepared to raise tariffs on imports, in particular, of agricultural commodities. Keep the domestic markets freely flowing and free of exploitative syndicates.
7. This will raise profits of farmers and encourage many of returning migrants to engage in modern farming/ cash crops.
8. It will solve the immediate unemployment problem and potential food shortages at the same time.
9. Allow the economy adjust to the new environment over time.

Growth in post-Covid world environment:

1. It is likely that we will see a rise of protectionism in the post-covid world. It is not yet clear how it unfolds. At least, countries will encourage self-sufficiency on critical supplies, such as food and medicines. There will be a rise of robots and demise of fossil fuels.
2. Generate more electricity, install recharging stations and stop the sale of new light vehicles with ICEs from next year. Promote EVs., run eBuses in cities. Encourage local assembly. They all create jobs. We don't need to export ely, make it cheap and reliable for local users. Encourage energy substitution away from fossil fuels.
3. Encourage self-sufficiency in agricultural produce and help farmers to supply to the vast Chinese market for protein in the longer run.
4. Improve project planning, design and go with workflows. Build good infrastructures, and design & enforce rule of good and fair law. The country will find its best growth path by itself.

Expert: Padam Simkhada, Huddersfield University, UK

Topic: Health Policy in the COVID-19

Simkhada says that Nepal has made impressive progress in **health** outcomes relative to its income level but large inequalities between urban–rural areas persist, and health is severely impacted by poverty. The country is going through a political transition from a unitary state to a federalized structure with new roles and responsibilities for local, provincial and federal governments. The Federal form of governance introduced by the new Constitution implies a significant restructuring of health services. This new health structure provides an opportunity to pursue and advocate for good health services, but also carries considerable risks for a potential setback for health services until the full implementation and the capacity of the local government are established.

Expert: Sita Ram Ghimire, CSIRO, Canberra, Australia

Topic: Stronger Agricultural Sector for post-COVID-19 Prosperous Nepal



COVID-19 pandemic has brought enormous challenges and opportunities to Nepalese agriculture. At a time, when major sources of government revenue such as remittance, tourism & export are threatened by the pandemic impact, agriculture sector has remained an alternative to absorb those economic shocks, revive & lead national recovery. In the last two decades, this sector has been hit hard by mass out flow of people leaving this occupation to take up foreign employment. As a result, fertile lands in mid & high hills has remained uncultivated or under-cultivated and country started importing significant amount of staple food and vegetables. The import statistics are simply alarming despite pesticide issues in fresh food & vegetables came to public attention in recent years. This simply indicates there is no way enough domestic production to prioritize human health to imported fresh food and vegetables with alarmingly high pesticide residue levels. Government agencies since then, have given more attention to regulate pesticide residue issue to some extent.

Experts predict millions of Nepalese youth impacted by pandemic will return home in the next few months losing their employment overseas. This certainly will have multiplier effects on government capability and services. In addition to losing remittance revenue, current government services and capabilities will be badly stretched to assure supply of food & necessities and employment to those additional millions of its citizen. This could be the high time to integrate those overseas returned youth as well as rest of country into national economic mainstream with new visionary plan targeted in agricultural production and small & medium scale agri-based industries. Even though government of Nepal through its line ministries and national planning commission has been doing this job for decades in agriculture, it could be the time to redouble their efforts, reconsider allocation of government resources and streamline all national capacity to revive national economy through enterprise based agriculture which has enormous potential to absorb economic shocks of other sectors and lead national economic recovery. Here are some of the policy highlights for national planning commission and relevant line ministries to consider while formulating plans and strategies.

Four identified major areas:

1. Promote farming as a business enterprise-A national approach with aligned plan and policies
2. Encourage lease/contract farming, local government agencies could be enabled and empowered to revive uncultivated farmlands.
3. Promote adoption of appropriate agricultural technologies such conservation agriculture, value-added, and high-value agricultural products & education on mechanisation friendly farming practices
4. Provide services assurance for farm inputs, market information, technology services

Proactive Intervention and support from government and line agencies to farm entrepreneurs in:

1. Knowledge & Skill: What enterprise? /technology/Trainings
2. Climate/zone specific enterprise/comparative advantages

3. Market potential of agricultural products (exploration of both domestic & international markets)
4. Assurance of inputs and technological services
5. Enterprise specific technical skills
6. Managerial/negotiation skills
7. Product marketing skills

Resources: Land & Water, investment capital, farm mechanisation

1. Accessible information on land suitability classification, the existing land classification needs to be revisited to update land use pattern
2. Practical policy framework for contract/lease farming
3. Practical policy guidelines of resources allocation (i.e. water)
4. Promoting practices of natural water harvesting (dams)
5. Access to loan with/without collateral
6. Availability of suitable machinery & equipment
7. Availability of servicing and spare parts
8. Establish and enable mechanism to provide necessary skills to operate farm machinery & do minor repair
9. Promoting adoption of mechanisation friendly farm practices

Services: Farm inputs, market information, technology services

1. Assurance of timely availability for fertilizer, seed, chemicals, fuels etc
2. Real time (weekly/monthly) price information of agricultural products
3. Promoting adoption of agricultural product insurance
4. Establish mechanism of regular training & retraining of entrepreneurs on new technology
5. Real time information on disease and pest outbreak
6. Promoting awareness on chemical safety of vegetable, fruits, meats, and other food products
7. Establish and enable testing mechanism in food products before sending to the market (enhanced regulatory framework to abide chemical withholding period)

Disclaimer: This brief note was prepared by S. R. Ghimire at short notice (without any statistical figures added) to present in NPI-NPC Policy dialogue series 1, held at zoom conference on 20 May 2020. This is my personal thinking and opinion and I equally respect other diverse views in those issues.

Expert: Suman Gautam, Daymark Energy Advisors, Boston

Topic: Covid19's impact on energy economy

What does energy economy comprise of?

1. Electric and non-electric (petroleum - transportation, cooking gas, kerosene oil)

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2. All the activities associated with these two sectors - consumption, construction, associated direct and indirect employment

How is COVID-19 impacting?

1. Demand in both electric and non-electric sectors is decreasing
2. Electric
3. Peak demand lower than usual... affecting revenue generation and financial state of Nepal Electricity Authority
4. many hydro projects that are under construction are facing delays. Increase burden to developers
5. Non-electric
6. Petroleum consumption going down... less \$ going out of country, pollution decreasing

What kind of policies will help?

1. Policies to enhance productive electric consumption
2. Assessment of impact of Covid to IPP and relief package

Expert: Kedar Neupane, NPI/formerly with United Nations, Geneva and Manila

Topic: Travel & Tourism in Nepal: Integral of Part of Development Plan

General Characteristics and Policy Options:

1. Traditionally, Nepal 's highest foreign currency earning sources were (i) carpet and garment export (ii) tourism, and (iii) remittances. Carpet and garment industry collapsed; tourism became stagnant and remittances took the top slot. Remittance may be hit hard by the impact of COVID 19 spread in destination countries.
2. Tourist arrivals in Nepal from emerging source markets Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, South Korea, and Bangladesh increased. These source markets should be promoted for more travel and tourism if the focus is to increase the numbers of arrivals.
3. We need to focus on qualitative aspects of the industry. Combination of quality and traditions, culture and heritage into travel packages could positively contribute to more numbers and revenues. Nepal's tourism interest continues to adventure tourism, mountaineering expeditions, and trekking. Government data show this focus has neither delivered high visitor numbers nor increased foreign currency incomes. With changing travelers' profile and travel trend mountaineering expedition will not deliver high arrival numbers, nor higher revenues or additional jobs creation.
4. Foreign direct investment should be promoted for quality development of (a) topmost world class travel destination for high spending visitors and, (b) historical locations and other recreational facilities for high spending visitors, (c) retirement villages.



5. Kathmandu Valley is endowed with rich tradition and heritage but saddled with poor urban development. Flourishing culture, arts, crafts, traditions and temples and stupas sites are overshadowed by poor quality urbanization and in-country rural to urban migration. Warnings of future volcanic possibilities like that of 2015 and 1930s is a looming Apocalypse in the making because Kathmandu valley could not sustain qualitative expansion of human settlements due to its geophysical setting and soil characteristics. Government should contemplate exclusive development of the Kathmandu valley into a prime travel destination through restoration of Nepal's historical, architectural, and ancient glory. To do this, one must first shift national capital Kathmandu out of the valley to a new site, and instead of building satellite cities within the valley.

Policy Recommendations

International Travel and Tourism industry is likely to hit rock bottom this year. Revival may take years for there are COVID-19 fear warnings that this contagion disease may continue to persist for longer period. If this situation is combined with rising geo-political tension and growing economic protectionist perception it could alter the globalization landscape and free market environment. Nepal will also get the heat as the country is highly vulnerable to basic food imports, among others.

There also are opportunities for recalibrating industrial policies, including travel and tourism, and government of Nepal could contemplate following initiatives:

1. **Relocate national capital away from Kathmandu Valley** to another suitable new location. Many countries like India, Pakistan, U.S.A., Canada, Brazil, Myanmar, and Indonesia for example have done that. Why should it be a big deal for Nepal?
2. **Develop pilgrimage sites, national parks, and conservation areas**, with due consideration to preservation of environment and eco-systems for attracting high spending visitors and **focus on domestic tourism** for creation tourism inspired employment opportunities in micro, and small and medium enterprises.
3. **Develop Nepal as a true retirement destination** in collaboration with international entrepreneurs to attract aging world population as baby boomers are retiring.
4. Finally, promote tourism theme of **“Reinventing Oriental Spiritual Circuit”** incorporating pilgrimage sites within Nepal that are linked with spirit of Hinduism and Buddhism stretching from Janakpur Dham, to Devdaha, to Kapilavastu, to Siddharthanagar, to Lumbini, to Doleshwor Mahadeva, to Pashupatinath temples for spiritual enlightenment of visitors, from Asian countries and beyond. This travel circuit could be enlarged by incorporating additional sites such as Ayodhya and Sarnath, to Bodhgaya in Northern India.



NPI Global Expert Community Participants' Shot-bio:

Mr. Khagendra Raj Dhakal is currently engaged in teaching and research as a Faculty Member at King Mongkut's University of Technology North Bangkok where he holds a specialist position under the Royal Thai Government Ministry of Education. He served as an Assistant Dean at the same University from 2011-2015. Dhakal holds an M.Ed. from Avondale University College, Australia and PGC in Applied Linguistics from University of Oregon. His research areas include linguistics, policy analysis, educational innovation, and communication. He was awarded the 'E-Teacher Professional Development Award' by the US Department of State and the Best Reviewer Award by the International Higher Education Teaching and Learning Association, New York in 2013. He was the President of the Non-Residential Nepali Association (NRNA) Thailand for two terms from 2013-2017.

Sharu Joshi is a feminist activist and Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Advocate. She has served Government of Nepal and UN System for more than two decades. She holds two masters degree on Political Science, and Women and Development. She designed and lead programmes on foreign labour migration, mainstreaming gender into Census, Empowering Women Migrant Worker, Supporting GESI implementation of the Agriculture Development Strategy and Partnership with Private Sector portfolio and projects. She has supported Government to draft major policy documents like the Foreign Employment Act, Foreign Employment Regulation, Migration Policy and its Action Plans and National Youth Policy, Strategy to End Violence Against Women, Action Plans to eliminate Child Marriage etc, through UN Women. She was also a Task Force Member to recommend reforms on Foreign Labour Migration in 2018. She is supporting Government of Nepal on drafting of Periodic Plans, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion policies and building capacities of Federal and Local Government. She has been supporting as a mentor for many young people and women of Nepal. She is also an author of a Book called Euta Sinko Bhachi Herda. She is also a member of the Women Friendly Disaster Management Group and the Inter-Generation Feminist Forum, Advisor at the Nepal Road Safety Society and the Gender, Energy and Water Network GEWNET.

Dr. Nalini (Subba) Chhetri is the associate director for international initiatives, and clinical associate professor in the School for the Future of Innovation in Society and the School of Sustainability at Arizona State University, USA. She is a social scientist who holds a doctorate in education policy studies with a minor in demography from Pennsylvania State University, USA, and an M.Sc in Cyto-genetics from India. Professor Chhetri's work centers on science policy interface, energy access, sustainable development, climate impacts, technological impacts in developing nations, knowledge systems, gender, and urban sustainability. She currently has projects related with energy, higher education, migrants, refugees, green growth with think-tanks and agencies in Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Ghana, Guyana, India, Nepal, Sierra Leone, and the USA. Dr. Chhetri has had extensive field experience that entailed coordinating diverse

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communities and projects, and she spent more than a decade developing and implementing integrated sustainable development and poverty alleviation programs incorporating agriculture, forestry, technology and engineering, literacy, health and community level entrepreneurial programs working with international organizations in Nepal, Southeast Asia, and West Africa. She has consulted for United Nations and numerous European bilateral agencies.

Mr. Kedar Neupane, NPI Board Member, is an international expert with wealth of inter-continental work experience in management operation of some of the largest refugee programs of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Africa, South-Asia, and South West Asia and the Horn of Africa. His work stretches from working with Sri Lankan Tamil's returnees from India to reintegration into North-East Sri Lanka, Afghan refugee programs operations in Pakistan and Iran to their repatriation to Afghanistan, including development of refugee hosting areas for reintegration of returnee population into local community. Mr. Neupane has worked in Ethiopia, Sudan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Iran, and Sri Lanka part strongly associated with planning, designing, managing refugee program operations. Besides working in field locations, over three decades, in different countries, Mr. Neupane has also worked at UNHCR Headquarters in Switzerland with responsibilities of program management in Asia and the Oceania, South-Asia, and as Senior Change Management Adviser to the UH High Commissioner for Refugees in Geneva. He lives in Geneva, Switzerland.

Sharad Neupane brings more than 30 years of experience in governance reform, agriculture and rural development in Asia and Africa, and has worked governments, INGOs, bilateral donors and the UNDP. He holds a Master's degree in Agri-Economics from Kasetsart University, Thailand. He is also a member of Rotary International.

Dr. Netra Chhetri is an Associate Professor at Arizona State University's School for the Future of Innovation in Society. The core focus of Dr. Chhetri's scholarship for more than two decades has been in the area food security, climate adaptation, resource governance, grassroots innovation, and citizen engagement. Throughout his career, Dr. Chhetri has been in the forefront of developing, applying, and testing innovative approaches to climate adaptation for marginalized communities. Some of his work has been recognized for its importance by USAID, published in *Nature* and *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. Among his many exemplary works, his longstanding contribution to the Assessment Report of the IPCC is impressive.

Dr. Suman Gautam's professional interests are in the fields of Electricity Markets, Economics, and Big Data. He works on market design, pricing, supply and demand forecasting, and policy evaluation by applying different methods (microeconomic, econometric, and probabilistic analysis) and tools (SAS, Stata, R, big data). He has multiple years of post-PhD consulting experiences in successfully managing complex projects and virtual team members, maintaining

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regular communication with the clients, and delivering high-quality products within specified budget and timeline. He has a PhD degree in Energy Economics and Policy from Pennsylvania State University. Prior to that, he completed BA in Physics and Economics from Illinois Wesleyan University.

Dr. Ambika P. Adhikari, DDes, is a Principal Planner at City of Tempe, AZ, USA heading its long-range planning division. He is also a Faculty Associate, and Sr. Sustainability Scientist at Arizona State University (ASU). At ASU, he had held positions of Research Professor, and Research Program Manager. He was the Director of International Programs at DPRA Inc. in Toronto and Washington DC, where he managed international projects funded by the World Bank, North American Development Bank, and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). In Nepal, he was Associate Professor at Institute of Engineering, Tribhuvan University, and later, Country Representative of IUCN (International Union of Conservation of Nature). He received Doctor of Design degree from Harvard University and M. Arch. from the University of Hawaii. He was a Fellow at Special Program for Urban and Regional Studies (SPURS) at MIT. Dr. Adhikari has authored one, and co-edited five books on planning, environment and development. He has published several articles, reports and essays.

Dr. Anil Sigdel is global political consultant based in Washington DC and provides his expertise to different international firms, governments and individuals. Sigdel holds a PhD in political science/international relations from the Institute of Political Science, University of Vienna, Austria. He holds a Master degree in International Studies from the Diplomatic School of Madrid where he was merit scholar under the Spanish Agency of International Cooperation and Development, Ministry of External Affairs, Spain. Dr. Sigdel contributes to Hudson Institute's South Asia Program in Washington. His views and commentaries have appeared in Real Clear Defense-US, South China Morning Post-Hong Kong, East Asia Forum-Australia, Observer Research Foundation-New Delhi, People's Daily China, The Kathmandu Post-Nepal, Asia Pacific Bulletin- Washington and many more. He is the author of forthcoming book *India in the Era of China's Belt and Road Initiative (2020)* (Rowman and Littlefield's Lexington Books, Washington DC). He is also founding director of Nepal Matters for America, a think tank established with an understanding with Congressional Nepal Caucus in the Capitol Hill.

Professor Padam Simkhada is a Professor of Global Health and Associate Dean International in the School of Human and Health Sciences at Huddersfield University, UK. He is interested in different aspects of international health particularly in public health problems in developing countries. His current research are on health system, reproductive and sexual health including HIV/AIDS and migration. He has methodological expertise particularly in systematic review, evidence synthesis and mixed methods. He has published a wide range of peer reviewed journal articles and book chapters related to his research field. He has published over 170 research articles in international peer-reviewed journals. He is internationally known in public health field. He has received many prestigious awards of his field such as Global Health Award 2013.



He has experience of working many countries such as USA, China, Nigeria, India, Bangladesh Nepal and Malaysia,

Prof Simkhada has completed M.Sc. in Public Health and Health Promotion from Brunel University and PhD from Southampton University, UK. Before he moved to Huddersfield University, he was professor of International health at Liverpool John Moores University (2015-2019), Senior Lecturer in International Health at Sheffield University (2010-2014) and Programme Co-ordinator and Lecturer in International Health at the University of Aberdeen (2002-2010). Previously, he worked for Save the Children (UK) and Ministry of Health in Nepal. He is also a Visiting Professor in Nepal, Visiting Bournemouth University UK and Adjunct Faculty at Datta Meghe Institute of Medical Sciences Nagpur, India.

Dr. Binod Chapagain brings over 20 years of multi-sector international development and research experiences. He has directly worked in 15 countries in Asia and the Pacific and supported development programs in numerous countries, globally. Binod has earned his PhD in Development Studies from the Australian National University, under Australian Leadership Awards. Based in Bangkok, currently, he works for USAID supported program which provides technical assistances to medium and large-size agriculture and forestry sector companies in Southeast Asia to improve their sustainable commodity production and manage environmental risks. The program also matches entrepreneurs with the global financial institutions and investors looking for environmentally and socially friendly land use business.

Dr Sita Ram Ghimire is a researcher in Agriculture & Food division of Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO), a world-renowned commonwealth science agency of Australia, based in Canberra. He holds PhD in Agricultural Science and have expertise in crop physiology & abiotic stress tolerance. Besides having experience of working in three different countries, Dr Ghimire has worked as an agronomist for about a decade in department of agriculture and briefly in department of irrigation, Nepal. Dr Ghimire also actively participates in activities of Nepalese diaspora overseas; Vice president of NRNA Australia (2013~2015), Chair of technical working committee, NRNA Australia Skill, Knowledge & Innovation Taskforce (2015~2017) & Adviser to NRNA Australia (2017~2019). During this, Dr Ghimire contributed significantly in diaspora engagement in Nepal matters, organised skill seminars, presented and published article on farm mechanisation in Nepal. Subsequently, his work was recognised with “NRNA Australia of the Year (2017~2019)”.

Dr. Rudra Aryal was born and raised at Rampur in Palpa district of Nepal and now lives in New Hampshire, USA. Dr. Aryal is an Advisor of NRNA USA (2015/17 – 2017/19) and has involved in many social activities in America, in Nepali communities in the USA and beyond.

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Dr. Aryal received his Ph.D. in Physics from University of Miami, Florida, USA. Currently his research focused on air pollution over Nepal. Dr. Aryal's research affiliation with Nepal, social activities in the USA and Nepal are a few of the key factors that motivated him to be part of the Nepal Policy Institute.

Ashok K. Gurung is Associate Professor at the Julien J. Studley Graduate Program of International Affairs at The New School in New York City. He is engaged with teaching, research, writing, and public debates on questions involving politics and practice of dignity, equal rights, equity, and sustainable futures, especially in South Asia and China. As one of the founding directors of India China Institute (ICI) at the New School, New York City (January 2005-July 2019), Gurung was responsible for establishing and directing ICI, including a distinct global network of scholars and institutions focused on China and India. He has taught graduate and undergraduate courses on sustainable development, politics and social justice at The New School as well as Columbia University. He has designed and directed field-study program for students from the World College West, Columbia University, and The New School. Among various global engagements, Gurung was the program officer for the International Fellowships Program, the largest innovative global leadership initiative (\$280 million) of the Ford Foundation (2000-2003). Since 2015, he is a Steering Committee member of the Himalayan University Consortium convened by the International Center for Integrated Mountain Development, Nepal. He is also an advisor to Samata Foundation, a think-tank committed to ending caste-based discrimination in Nepal. A native of Nepal, Gurung holds an MA in International Affairs from the School of International and Public Affairs of Columbia University and a BA in International Service and Development from World College West in Petaluma, California.

Prof. Dr. Sriram Mathe is currently Chairperson of Nepal Education Foundation – Consortium of Colleges of Nepal, Asian Institute of Technology and Management, Xavier Academy, Kathmandu Don Bosco College, Leadership Academy of Nepal and Team Leader of two ADB financed education/TVET projects in Cambodia.

A former Dean of the Institute of Engineering, Tribhuvan University, first Principal of St. Xavier's College, second President of Society of Nepalese Architects, former Secretary General of Federation of Engineering Institutions of South and Central Asia, he has served as a member of the National Development Council and the Ministry of Education's High Level Task Force. He is also currently serving as a member of Education Commission of International Union of Architects and UNESCO-UIA Validation Council for Architectural Education.

With over 45 years of work experience, including 20 years of international consulting, he is passionately committed to establishing a reputed, non-profit private Sagarmatha University in Nepal.

Bijaya Rajbhandari is an engineer by profession with a post-graduate degree in environment management and has worked with the UNICEF for more than 35 years. He worked in Nepal

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and was based in western and central regions of Nepal. He also worked in eight different countries in Africa, Central Asia, South Asia and Far East Asia. He was in a leadership position in the UNICEF as Country Representative in his last two countries in Thailand and North Korea before retiring in January 2016.

Dr. Tejendra Pherali is an Associate Professor in Education and International Development at University College London. He leads the research area on *Education, Conflict and Peacebuilding* within the Centre for Education and International Development. Tejendra specialises in education in conflict-affected societies and has led several educational projects in Nepal, Afghanistan, Jordan, Lebanon and Somalia. In his doctoral research, he examined the impact of Maoist rebellion on Nepal's school education and explored the role of education in addressing the causes of conflict and promoting peace. He is currently co-leading a research project on inclusive education in Nepal and involved in a multinational project on social movement learning including Colombia, Nepal, South Africa and Turkey. He is also researching into how to provide education for Syrian refugees in exile and recently co-developed a *Massive Open Online Course* on teacher professional development in refugee settings. He has worked and published extensively on education and conflict in Nepal. Currently, he leads an MA course on *Education, Conflict and Fragility* and directs several PhDs looking at educational challenges faced by countries that have been affected by violent conflict and protracted crisis. Tejendra is also the Vice Chair of British Association of International and Comparative Education.

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regards



ANNEX

NPC-NPI Policy Dialogue

Cash-based transfers (CBTs) to assist vulnerable population

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A. Introduction:

1. Cash-based transfers (CBTs) are provisions of money that planners use to assist resource-constrained households. Over the past two decades, CBT programs have become a more popular poverty intervention. Many humanitarian organizations are drawn to the efficacy and lower operating costs of distributing cash compared to provisions made in-kind.
2. The success of the first widespread CBT program attracted the attention of humanitarian organizations and governments who were looking for a more robust, cost-effective alternative to existing welfare programs. Accordingly, The World Bank noted a proliferation of CBT programs following Progres's inception, as many institutions hailed them as a means of “reducing inequality ... helping households break out of a vicious cycle of poverty ... [and] promoting child health, nutrition, and schooling” (Fiszbein & Schady 2009: 29).
3. Even the World Food Programme (WFP)—the most prominent champion of food aid—has started using CBTs to achieve the zero hunger, SDG#2. They note that if administered correctly, CBTs have the capacity to improve the quality, quantity, and consistency of food vulnerable households consume in addition to preventing them from selling valuable assets to afford food. CBTs can also produce a multiplier effect in the local economy, thereby strengthening a community's overall capacity and resilience.
4. Despite the many benefits of CBT programs, there are challenges to their success; they may be helpful in one context and wholly inappropriate in another. In fact, lower operating costs and perceived efficiency may mislead inexperienced social planners into believing CBTs are a foolproof solution to every vulnerability. Instead, social planners should design interventions based on the source and cause of the vulnerability they are trying to mitigate rather than by their own ideological views regarding the perceived superiority of one intervention over another.

B. Conditions That Drive Negative Outcomes of CBT

5. Development economists Rachel Sabates-Wheeler and Stephen Devereux explain “cash transfers are vulnerable to food price rises that erode their real value [...] in places where



markets are thin and imperfectly integrated.” This phenomenon is due to one or more of the following reasons. First, introducing cash “could create an imbalance between demand and supply, which in itself drives prices up” (pp: 276). Second, merchants can charge different prices depending on whether the goods they are selling are in season. The third reason is due to “general consumer price inflation, which could range in severity from single-digit inflation to hyperinflation” (pp:276).

6. Ethiopian lawyer Emebet Kebede’s paper on the Meket Livelihood Development Project (MLDP) in Meket (a *woreda* in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia) provides an apt illustration of how cash transfers can fuel inflation. Starting in 2005, Save the Children UK and Ethiopia’s Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) came together to form MLDP. Program administrators paid enrollees “5 Ethiopian Birr per day to buy 3 kg of grain on the assumption that the average consumer price for grain would be Birr 1.7 per kg” (Kebede 2006: 584). During MLDP’s initial year, the price of grain rose significantly in Meket for reasons program administrators later attributed to MLDP and PSNP. First, injections of cash increased demand amongst consumers, which is a desirable outcome in cases where markets are strong enough to respond to increased demand. But in this case, traders were unable to satisfy the sudden influx in demand. Second, the cash disbursements “were late and arrived in unpredictable lump-sums, resulting in price spikes due to demand surges when food supplies were scarce” (Sabates-Wheeler & Devereux 2010: 276). Third, there was evidence merchants took advantage of cash recipients by charging an exorbitant amount for their goods. Finally, many recipients who were farmers abstained from delivering their grain to the market because selling their goods was no longer necessary for generating an income.
7. Planners who wish to address food shortages through a CBT program should first consider how agricultural vulnerability exacerbates food insecurity. In other words, providing money or provisions of food in the short-term may stave off hunger temporarily, but it does not address the underlying causes of crop failure. A key feature of the UN’s eighth SDG (decent work and economic growth) is to facilitate agricultural practices that are resilient and increase production. A CBT program could support this feature if governments are willing to design an intervention that subsidizes the resources, land, and labor necessary to enable successful and enduring food production systems.
8. In 2013, The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) published a review of several CBT interventions designed to alleviate hunger. The authors noted a trend amongst the programs—part of their success depended on which member of the household received the benefit. They specify that depending on the cultural context, men and women have different concerns when it comes to spending money; hence, it is likely a CBT program will have different outcomes depending on whom administrators give money to. The review noted that in couple-headed households, women who received the transfer spent a greater share of the money on food compared to when men received the transfer. Based on the above, social planners should consider how local culture and gender relations will affect their intervention based on the knowledge that giving money to one member of a household versus another is more likely to produce results that align with their objectives.
9. A 2016 randomized experiment in Ecuador found that giving cash to women “led to decreases in controlling behaviors [and] physical and/or sexual violence ranging from 6



to 7 percentage points” (Hidrobo et al. 2016: 292). Designing a CBT program without considering how gender interacts with poverty would not only undermine the UN’s first goal of eliminating poverty, it would also undermine their fifth goal of achieving gender equality.

10. Example here, The National Health Mission of India created a conditional cash transfer and support services program in 2005 called Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) to incentivize pregnant women to deliver their babies in hospital facilities. An analysis by BioMed Central noted several complications that discouraged women from enrolling or continuing in the program. First, many facilities lacked maternal and child health specialists. Second, facilities in remote rural areas were not prepared for the influx of patients following JSY’s implementation. They had difficulty ensuring doctors and nurses were available 24 hours a day. Third, overcrowding made some facilities an even riskier place to give birth due to compromises made on “infection control, hygiene, immediate postpartum care, sharing of beds and the duration of stay following delivery” (Gupta et al. 2018: 5). Finally, many facilities in poor areas lacked proper diagnostic equipment, running water, and electricity. The cumulative effect of these inadequacies led many women to forgo delivering in institutional facilities, which was the opposite of JSY’s intent. Weak infrastructure can also impede the efficacy of CBT programs.
11. So, it would be prudent for planners to consider whether the vulnerability they are trying to mitigate (e.g. poverty, food insecurity, good health and wellbeing, etc.) would be improved by strengthening public resources rather than by increasing household purchasing power alone.

C. Conditions that drive positive outcomes of CBT

12. 2005, Malawi introduced the Food and Cash Transfer Programme (FACT) following a nationwide food shortage. Part of the program’s efficacy was due to administrators commissioning an agency to monitor local markets so they could compensate recipients for unexpected hikes in food prices. This meant households received enough money to purchase the same quantity of food each month regardless of market fluctuations.
13. Cash and food aid interventions do not need to be in competition with one another when several studies have shown that a combination of the two can have a greater impact than just one. For example, in 2007, Swaziland implemented a CBT and food program called the Emergency Drought Response (EDR) following a food shortage. The 6,200 families enrolled received “a half ration of food (maize, beans, and oil) and the equivalent in cash, every six months from November 2007 until the harvest of April 2008” (Devereux & Jere 2008: 4). The success of EDR is attributed to the following reasons. First, the intervention was well organized in the sense that families received the transfers in full and on a predictable basis throughout the project’s duration. Second, the people running the program were able to modify the transfer amount based on market prices so families could purchase the same amount of food month-to-month.
14. In addition to the above, Concern Worldwide and Oxfam GB created unconditional cash transfer projects in Malawi and Zambia in 2005 to complement “the distribution of food aid relief” (Devereux 2006: 11). The goal of both projects was to refurbish the food deficit in each household following a harvest failure by increasing household purchasing power rather than through food assistance alone. Evaluations confirm Oxfam GB and Concern



- Worldwide achieved their goals. Oxfam households used 80-85% of their cash transfer on food and Concern households spent nearly 60% of the transfer on food (Devereux 2006).
15. Families living in poverty contend with a range of challenges other than just agricultural failure or famine. Because of this, CBTs have a role to play in non-emergency contexts. The largest poverty reductions around the world resulted from economic growth in developing countries, and although future economic growth will continue to mitigate extreme poverty, it is not an immediate solution.
 16. Indonesia created a number of social protection programs that provided subsidized health insurance for poor families and scholarship money for disadvantaged students. Likewise, Iran implemented a social protection program in 2011 that allocates an annual fixed amount to all its citizens. These programs are proactive in nature because governments are thinking long-term about how to help their citizens graduate out of chronic poverty. In other words, social protections are a prudent investment because a healthier, more educated workforce is likely to boost a country's GDP statistics.
 17. Before designing an intervention, planners should consider how men and women spend money differently and how these differences align with their goals. There is evidence to support that cash transfers to women rather than men have a greater impact on total food consumption within a household. Therefore, if the goal of an intervention is to eliminate nutritional deprivation and support children's growth and development, then it follows that giving money to women supports this objective. Accordingly, enabling women to have greater control over expenditures usually leads to an improvement in the household's nutritional status.
 18. Some studies have also demonstrated that transferring cash to male heads of households leads to a "larger impact on standard measures of economic welfare" (Haushofer & Shapiro 2013: 20) as they are more likely to use the money to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities or make investments in home durables. However, even if increasing food consumption is not the goal of the intervention, social planners should still take care to ensure women have opportunities to pursue their own entrepreneurial endeavors.
 19. The predictability of cash transfers is one of the most critical features of a CBT program because of its capacity to improve recipients' livelihoods and increase their productive activities. CBTs delivered for the purpose of stimulating entrepreneurial activities would also need to be predictable because people will be unwilling to take risks unless they can be certain more money will arrive to refurbish what they have spent.
 20. Since the late nineties, the majority of Latin American countries have adopted conditional cash transfer (CCT) programs to combat poverty. The intention of CCTs is to maximize beneficiaries' health, education, and economic potential by incentivizing behavior that is health promoting and/or conducive to breaking the cycle of poverty. For example, Mexico's Prospera distributes CCTs to households on the condition their children attend school regularly, every family seeks preventative medical care, and mothers and children attend nutrition monitoring clinics (Rawlings & Rubio 2003).
 21. Despite the virtues of CCT programs, there are instances where the conditional aspect places an undue burden on recipients. For example, the cost of complying with the requirements may be unaffordable or the services the program prescribes are "inconsistently available or are not properly suited to meet the users' demands" (Rossel et al. 2019: 8). A second factor that leads to non-compliance is confusion or a lack of



information regarding the rules for compliance. Miscommunication led enrollees in Uruguay's program to believe they had to be paying into the social security system to receive their benefits. Uruguay's CCT program—and others that experience similar issues—are a good model to learn from to rectify the problems that lead to non-compliance.

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