

Early Policy Recommendations on Migrant Workers for Government of Nepal

(A) Contemplating immediate measures:

1. The top priority of the government should be to welcome all stranded Nepali returnee migrant workers, daily wage earners and any other Nepali who have been impacted by the spread of coronavirus and arrange transportation back to their home destinations in Nepal. At the same time, the government must also start planning for post-return livelihood activities related programs for their employment.
2. Evacuate all stranded Nepali workers to safe places on the basis of individual's needs and urgency of the situation, and organize repatriation in safety and dignity, preferably in groups, upon assessing their mental, physical and health conditions.
3. Empower Nepali missions abroad hiring of laid-off Nepalis workers/students as interns, with some living expenses, in support of mission's work to provide extended services to the needy migrants and support their family members within communities during the crisis period. Give special attention to needy migrants from Malaysia and Gulf countries by utilizing the **Migrant Workers' Welfare Fund**, centrally collected from the migrant workers.
4. Include social protection provisions in employment contracts and other safety nets to cover unforeseen calamities like this pandemic by destination and source countries, with financial incentives to those who may have lost jobs during the crisis and provide social counseling, mental and health services to all returnees in safety and dignity, including vulnerable groups.
5. Give financial cash support to migrant laborers, including those who also lost jobs domestically, for an initial period of two to three months and other in-kind material and relief supplies during the period of lockdown and beyond if so required, and until the time economy starts functioning and businesses resume operations.
6. Support financially Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, farmers, and producers whose products have been held up in the supply chain process and/or destroyed due to disruptions from extended lockdown.
7. Provide support to all workers in safety and dignified manner to vulnerable people like women, children (boys and girls) and elderly who may have suffered during the time of crisis, including support to prevent domestic violence, social discriminations, physical domestic violence, and psychological abuses and rape.
8. The precise impact of COVID 19, at this stage, is unknown but likely to be widespread in all areas of the economy and human life. This is so because it is going to be a choice between human life and money. Priority must be on saving lives and then taking basic steps safeguarding economic activities. The government must ensure an adequate supply of basic food items, maintain food item reserves, ensure availability at affordable but low prices, and ensure basic medical and health care services.

(B) Thinking about the long term:

9. Prioritize large projects through a rescheduling work program and evaluate if such projects are able to employ returnee migrant workers. It is likely many migrant workers will lose jobs in destination countries due to massive disruptions in the local economy, impacts on businesses and other disruptions in the world economy. The government should consider community-level self-help projects jointly with local government and migrant workers, like community forestry, and promotion of environment-friendly kitchen gardening by growing food locally organically and consume local produce- just as examples.

10. Provide employment protection, who may have lost employment due to natural calamities and pandemics, through contract negotiations with the employer and the receiving governments guaranteeing that migrant workers do not face the sudden collapse of income, loss of access to basic health care, food and accommodation and other basic necessities.

11. Gather data on people and compile information on 'who, where and what' and the damages occurred; and how local, regional and global economic environment would affect the business environment, and develop financing of activities to restore economy from local to national level. Also, involve the participation of business leaders, local entrepreneurs, and other industrialists in developing plans for restoring livelihood projects in the community and support social structures as well, not just the economy.

12. Local governments should prepare and maintain records on returnee migrant workers, information on their skills, work experiences and encourage them to up-skill themselves by enrolling at the locally established TVET schools. The government should provide some financial support to do this.

13 Promote and encourage international investors who are interested in investing in many high demands agri-products - coffee, cacao, coconut if so desired by them.

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