

National Early Recovery Cluster Meeting

15th September 2020, Kathmandu (virtual Zoom meeting)

Meeting Note

Participants (see annex 1)

The National Early Recovery Cluster Meeting was virtually organized by Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MoFAGA) as a Lead of the cluster. Officials from MoFAGA, representatives from UN agencies, INGOs, Red Cross the ER cluster members participated the meeting. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Bishnu Datta Gautam, Joint Secretary, MoFAGA.

Highlights:

1.	As being observed the COVID-19 context is different than the previous disaster the country has faced and calls for a concerted approach between government and development partners/actors to ensure that relief and support measures are deployed to soften the socio-economic impact of the unfolding health emergency. As discussed and agreed during the previous meeting of the national ER cluster, dated 17 th June 2020, the Early Recovery cluster has been focusing on supporting Rural/Municipalities to put in place, administer, fund, and implement livelihood and employment generation specific programme interventions targeting those who have been impacted the most. First and foremost, intervention needs are informed by local needs assessments conducted (or being conducted) by respective Local Governments (LG), for which MoFAGA had issued guidance. Under the ER Cluster, activities are being closely coordinated with the Local Governments with national anchoring with MoFAGA.
2.	The priority at this moment is to speed up planned ER interventions across the country addressing livelihood and employment generation specific needs of the worst affected groups of population in the short term through existing resources that different partners currently have at their disposal, also including mobilization of new resources. The complementarity of local government mobilized resources and the potentials are kind of imperative aspect of the efforts, are taking pace in many cases.
3.	MoFAGA, the ER cluster lead, suggested that the ER meeting will take place every month while members are requested to share their progress updates fortnightly including both statistical and narrative updates. This is also highlighted to promote coordination and synergy at planning and delivery level even at district and LG levels, with improved coordination with LGs. Maximizing potentials of in country and external resources are sought important in meeting huge needs of the affected population in helping them stand on their own feet.

Summary of discussions:

Agenda item 1 – introductions and status update

Following introductions, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative, Bernardo Cocco, on behalf of the ER cluster co-leads (UNDP and UNICEF) gave a short recap of Early Recovery Cluster initiatives.

In his opening remarks, Rishi Raj Acharya, Under Secretary MoFAGA, briefly touched on the ER cluster principles, priority areas, coordination mechanism, mapping of contribution from the

cluster member agencies and on quality service delivery and requested UNDP for the ER cluster progress update sharing.

Agenda item 2 – ERC activities update

Kedar Babu Dhungana, ER Cluster Coordinator at UNDP, provided an update on progress/delivery status update of ER activities to respond to the COVID-19. The update was compiled based on the input collected from ERC members. To date, 20 member agencies have been contributing to the ER cluster. ERC cluster programmes have covered 55 districts with 155 local governments, focusing on generation of livelihood and employment opportunities. More than 55,000 households are estimated to have benefitted from these initiatives. Of the total of 82 initiatives/projects currently planned under the ER cluster, 13 have been completed, and the remainder were reportedly ongoing or in progress. Examples of these activities include: on-farm and off-farm support (on the agriculture sector), Skills & Entrepreneurship Development, Cash Vouchers, Micro Enterprises and Community Infrastructures, Small Grants and Soft Loans, Innovations such as Satellite Market Establishment, Linking with Market Facilities and Services, Institutional Support.

Along with progress, key challenges were also discussed. Activities are being conducted under difficult circumstances due to the persisting risk of contagion and the logistical challenges of implementation under the current lockdown and movement restrictions. In particular, the main challenge has been to organize skills development training activities given the existing risk of spread of the corona virus. As the tailored training activities generally are delivered in a group of participants, which often requires handholding by instructors, this may pose risk of virus infection. This in many cases has hampered organization of such training activities and are being explored with alternate modalities. Additionally, given the huge impact on livelihood and employment by the COVID-19, as highlighted in the many impact assessment studies conducted by various government agencies, IGOs and INGOs, the financial resources availability remains limited. This calls for further attention to the beneficiary selection process.

Feedback and suggestions from the floor/participants.

- Dinesh Gurung from DCA mentioned their coverage area and specified the challenges due to COVID-19 that the agencies are facing difficulties in regularly reaching to the beneficiaries. He further mentioned that some of the economic migrant youths from among the targeted beneficiaries from western provinces have started going back to India again in search of jobs, resulting into a need of reidentification of beneficiaries by the agencies.
- Krishna Karkee from USAID Tayar Nepal mentioned that Tayar's ER project is now kicking off in 12 municipalities across the country, will implement livelihood and employment generation focused activities through formulation of a recovery plan under each of the municipalities. Bikash Paudel from WFP also briefly shared about WFP's ER initiatives briefly, were yet to be reported to the cluster. Likewise, Bishnu Kharel from Save the Children briefly shared about their projects and intervention plans. He also put a query on how the long-term solution could be identified and delivered through beneficiary identification process.

Agenda item 3 – ERC activities at province level

An update on ER activities at the province level followed the main presentations. The UNDP Heads of Field Offices, on behalf of the co-leads, shared an update and status in respect of ER activities in their respective provinces, and of coordination conducted by provincial authorities.

Agenda item 4 – Cash Response activities (Unicef update)

Usha Mishra, Chief of Social Policy at UNICEF made a brief presentation on the “Case for COVID Cash Response and UNICEF Innovation”. The presentation covered the COVID survey-Child and Family Tracker (CFT), progress achieved on social protection related issues, the innovative cash transfer mechanism.

Agenda item 5 – Linkages of Early Recovery cluster with Socio-Economic Recovery Framework with a focus on Pillar 3 of SERF.

Yanki Ukyab, Economist at UNDP, briefly highlighted the key pillars of the United Nations Framework for Responding to the Socio- Economic Impacts of COVID-19 in Nepal, commonly referred to as the UN Socio Economic Recovery Framework (SERF). In particular, the linkages of early recovery activities to the Pillar 3 of SERF: Socio Economic Response and Recovery were emphasized. Pillar 3 prioritizes jobs, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and the informal sector workers and by doing so, scales up and provides substantive re-enforcements to ongoing Early Recovery initiatives. The presentation emphasized the inter-agency nature of the endeavor; the strong congruence of the proposed approaches with the Government of Nepal’s own strategic response priorities and budget; the alignment of approaches under Pillar 3 with the initial response under the ERC cluster. Participants requested that the framework be circulated for further reference. Questions were received regarding the breadth of consultations beyond UNCTs on the social protection elements in particular, for which further alignment was recommended to reflect the ongoing work of the Social Protection Task Team.

Conclusion:

In his closing remarks Bishnu Datta Gautam, Joint Secretary, MoFAGA, expressed appreciation for the efforts by ER cluster members to protect livelihoods and generate employment in response to the unfolding crisis. He mentioned that LGs’ efforts on the COVID-19 recovery process are being reported to the MoFAGA as the contact Ministry for the LGs. He wished success to the cluster members in continuing with their good works and committed for the MoFAGA support on every aspect as the ER Cluster Lead Ministry. He also requested to upscale the efforts so far possible, ensure regular sharing/reporting of the progress, and suggested for a monthly meeting to the cluster. Rishi Raj Acharya, Under Secretary at MoFAGA, from the ER Cluster lead role, thanked all the members, over phone as his connected was disrupted, for their continued engagement and contribution, and suggested for the following:

- ER meeting to take place every month while members are requested to share their progress updates fortnightly including both statistical and narrative details.

- Members to promote coordination and synergy at planning and delivery level including at LG level with improved coordination with LGs.
- Maximize potentials of in-country and external resources mobilization in meeting huge needs of the affected population in helping them stand on their own feet.

Annex 1 Participants			
S.N.	Name	Title	Organization
1.	Bishnu Dutta Gautam	Joint Secretary	MoFAGA
2.	Rishi Raj Acharya	Under Secretary	MoFAGA
3.	Reenu Thapaliya	Section Officer	MoFAGA
4.	Bernardo Cocco	Deputy Resident Representative	UNDP
5.	James McQuen Patterson	Deputy Country Director	UNICEF
6.	Thakur Dhakal	Social Policy Specialist	UNICEF
7.	Yanki Ukyab	Development Economist	UNDP
8.	Kedar Babu Dhungana	Cluster Coordinator/SPO	UNDP
9.	Sudip Aryal	Head of Field Office, Gandaki Province and P-V	UNDP
10.	Dhan Chand	Head of Field Office, P-I & II	UNDP
11.	Baijanti Giri Singh	Head of Field Office, Sudurpaschim Province	UNDP
12.	Rafeeqe A. Siddiqui	Head of Field Office, Karnali Province	UNDP
13.	Kalpana Sarkar	Portfolio Manager	UNDP
14.	Anders Magnusson	IUNV	UNDP
15.	Subhash Nepali	Economist/SDG Advisor...	UN RCO
16.	Prem Awasthi	National Field Coordinator	UN RCO
17.	Benjamin Zeitlyn	...	British Embassy

18.	Usha Mishra	Chief of Social Policy	UNICEF
19.	Mandhoj Khatri	Project Officer	LWF
20.	Milan Karki	...	NUGIP-WB
21.	Krishna Kumar K.C.	Programme Manager	IFRC
22.	Santosh Gyawali	AID Development Program Specialist	USAID
23.	Manorama	...	...
24.	Krishna Karkee	Disaster Preparedness & Response Specialist	USAID-Tayar Nepal
25.	Sajan Neupane	Programme Officer	Mercy Corps
26.	Bidyanath Bhurtel	Country Representative	ICCO
27.	Sofia Olsson	Representative	AIN/FCA
28.	Bishnu Kharel	Resilience Advisor	Save the Children
29.	Asim Shrestha	Programme Officer	UNICEF
30.	Raja Ram Chhatkuli	...	UN Habitat
31.	Jyoti Pandey	Social Protection Specialist	World Bank
32.	Manoj Kumar Lal	...	...
33.	Rakesh Shah	...	...
34.	Prabin Shrestha	...	...
35.	Kishor Rai	...	
36.	Dhruba Aryal	...	...

37.	Sirish Khadka	...	...
38.	Jonas	...	
39.	Stephan Russek	...	
40.	Dinesh Gurung	DRR/Humanitarian Manager	DCA
41.	Amish Shrestha	Programme Manager	FCA
42.	Bikash Paudel	Project Officer	WFP
43.	Vijay Raj Panta	...	OXFAM
44.	Santosh Dahal	DRR Specialist	WVIN
45.	Ramesh Ghimire	Cash Preparedness Coordinator	NRCS NHQs
46.	Surendra Bahadur Bam	Programme Coordinator	CARE
47.	Nilkantha Pandey	...	CARE
48.	Umesh Bhusal	Project Officer	WFP
49.	Pranaya Nakarmi	IMO	UNDP