

Responses to the impact of lockdowns from partners in Southern Asia

The Southern Asia region, comprising of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei, Cambodia, East Timor, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam, is one of the most populous regions in the world. Although many of these countries have reported fewer deaths and confirmed cases, as per some analysts, it is hard to be definite about these claims in view of the limited testing and monitoring capacities. With current indefinite lockdowns and with hardly any economic activity, millions of people who live on daily wages are now exposed to hunger and homelessness. Churches in this region, although small and many, are actively engaged in community awareness and in reaching out to the most marginalized sections with daily supplies.

The following are news updates from some of Global Ministries partners and associates in the region:

West Sulawesi, Indonesia

Following Indonesian government's orders to follow "physical distancing" and "stay at home", all our church activities have adapted themselves accordingly. Starting from March 22, worship services are being done online and ministers and elders have been preparing liturgies to be used at home. Pastors, individually, still make pastoral visit to the very needy congregation member like those who need to be prayed at home.

Protestant Church in West Sulawesi (GKSB) is cooperating with government's policies and measures to stop Coronavirus spread. Even though West Sulawesi is still free from Corona infection (in theory), we encourage our people to stay at home and follow the advice – to wash their hands often, avoid gatherings, eat good food, etc. We have put up banners in front of church building to encourage people to fight corona together but not to be intimidated by Corona. Our government has extended the stay-at-home orders up to April 21. But many of our people cannot stay at home; they must work outside in order to earn something for themselves and their families. All villages are closed to outsider. We pray for our people, our nation and those who are risking their lives - doctors and other medical personnel. We thank Global Ministries for thinking about and praying for us. We also pray for you that God may continue to use you all in God's mission.

Robert P. Borrong, Advisor, Protestant Church in West Sulawesi, Mamuju.

Sumba, Indonesia

As of April 17th, there are 407 new confirmed Covid 19 cases and bringing the total number of Covid19 Patients in Indonesia to 5,923. Total number of recovered patients has increased to 607, meanwhile the current total death toll is 520. The government issued a program called "Large-scale Social Restriction" (PSBB), but people seem to ignore it. This is the end of fifth week where some people are working from home and many people got laid off. My main concern is the result of Covid 19 test which is very slow. It takes 3 to 9 days for the results to come out.

CSOs and church groups are working together to help those who are in needs such as giving out a package of basic food; PPEs, masks and vitamins to the hospitals; financial support for drivers of online taxi; support small restaurants and asking them to provide lunch box for anyone who is in need, etc. Even though there is no positive covid-19 patient in Sumba now, but the local government is following the orders from the central government. Thus, the impact is mostly the same like those who are in the big cities.

Like many churches in the big cities, some churches in Sumba are offering online Sunday services while others who are in the village distribute paper liturgy and ask their congregation to conduct the service at home. Several churches in Sumba are giving out a package of basic food and educate people on how to stay clean and home as much as they can. My church in Jakarta, *GPIB Tugu*, is giving out a package of basic food to the church members. I signed up as volunteer at the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (CCI) for their program called “Church fights for Covid 19” ([GMC19](#)). With my college friends, we collected money and send out to 5 friends who are ordained ministers and currently in serving in Sumba and Timor island. It is not much but we hope it helps whatever the program they have such as providing soap and bucket for cleaned water, masks, or a bag of basic food. Having said that, we put our faith in God and humanity as well.

Meliani E. Murtiningsih Yeni Kurniawati, Indonesian Women Theologian Network in Sumba (PERUATI Sumba) and Protestant Church in Sumba, Wiangapu.

NEPAL

As of 14 April 2020, Nepal has confirmed 16 cases of COVID-19 disease, 10 of them had recently returned from abroad, and three others are Indian nationals residing in Nepal. Altogether 6607 individuals were tested for the COVID-19. The community-level expansion of COVID-19 is still stable and most reported cases are from the plain area of Indo-Nepal border. Altogether 13 provincial hospitals with 29913 quarantine and 3128 isolation beds are conducting an examination of COVID-19 through Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) method. The country has been facing nationwide lockdown since 13 March and will be effective until April 27 as part of measures to stem the spread of the coronavirus in the country.

Before the lockdown, most of CSOs and Churches have been engaged in awareness-raising activities. However, after the lockdown, the community mobilization is totally stopped, then after most of the CSOs and churches are promoting a digital way to raise a practical way to prevent COVID-19.

The government of Nepal has announced a relief package includes a 25% discount on electricity for consumers who use more than 150 units every month, and no penalty if utility bills and tax payments are not cleared till mid-April. The government has asked Internet Service Providers to extend a 25% discount to customers on data and voice call packages. However, the government failed to address the impact of lockdown on the daily life of low-income people, with special priority for expecting mothers, orphans, disabled and excluded communities. As per the government's announcement those poor families and informal sector workers, who have a citizenship certificate can access relief from the ward level, whereas there is thus a risk of the relief package being politicized and being diverted to party cadres.

As per the government relief package, 4,346,046 who have no citizenship certificates (Forum for Women, Law & Development, 2015) will be affected. In panic, many are heading back to their villages from the major cities of Nepal. The effect has been a walking exodus of hundreds of people. Those who couldn't make it on time are attempting to walk many miles to get back to their home. Similarly, Human Rights Watch in a statement released on 31 March 2020 said Nepal had abandoned its workers in the fight against COVID-19, as it denied the right to return of its citizens. The authorities in Nepal have failed to take necessary measures to fulfill the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief even in the pandemic situation.

SUS (Samari Utthan Sewa) to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic through scaling up distribution of WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) items and is establishing hand washing stations at strategic locations in Dalit and indigenous people populated areas. Staff are working hard to best respond to the food shortages affecting families, especially in Morang, Sarlahi and Chitwan district of Nepal. Moreover, they are busy exploring the best ways of providing psychosocial support for those experiencing discrimination or feeling anxious and hopeless, now and in the critical months ahead. SUS recognizes the role played by religious leaders and faith-based organizations in the development of Nepali society, including in relation to promoting fundamental rights granted by the constitution of Nepal even in a pandemic situation. Many religious minorities and indigenous communities are poorer than majority communities, and the existing inherited structural-injustice directly impacts the design and implementation of COVID-19 response mechanisms.



- Bimala Gayak, Samari Utthan Sewa (an NGO working with Dalits, women and landless labourers, Lalitpur.)

Bangladesh

Covid-19 pandemic has had a huge socio-economic impact on growth, job losses and upsurge in poverty. Garment factories and remittances are the main sources of Bangladesh economy. Since it may result in a severe humanitarian crisis as part of global recession, we need to think seriously about an appropriate response from NGOs/church for ensuring rights and justice of the poor, marginalized ethnic, religious minority groups in populous countries like Bangladesh.

Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh's Responses distributed 45000 leaflets on COVID-19 as preventive measures to all our field offices, since the virus has transmitted at the

community level. We have contributed out one-day salary for food assistance to the poor beneficiaries. Also we are exploring opportunities to secure additional funds through certain appeals to support this people in crisis. Our microfinance programme has already stated food distribution on a small scale in our intervention areas. Rohingya Programme already distributed Hygiene Kits among selected Rohingya beneficiaries and mosques within the camp and host community. Comprehensive Poverty Reduction Programme and Climate Change Programme are expected to start food distribution this month in accordance to government safety compliances.

Ms. Julaite Malakar, director designate, CCDB, adds: Until April 17, 2020, 1838 person diagnosed with Covid -19 virus and 75 died as per Govt reference. The healthcare system of the country is actually struggling to provide support to the infected people. The government has closed all offices and transportation systems around the country. The low-income people such as rickshaw pullers, daily wage laborers, and small entrepreneurs/traders are struggling most in this crisis and facing a great decline in their earnings because of the enforcement of social distancing measures and lockdowns to fight COVID-19. Thank you once again for your concern and solidarity to fight this crisis together. Please keep us in your prayer and stay safe.



- David Hilton, Associate Director, CCDB

SRI LANKA

Curfews and Lockdowns are not new to us. Particularly, we, the North-East Tamils and Tamil-speaking communities in Sri Lanka, have had enough experience under the government orders of curfews and lockdowns from the early 1980s to 2009. However, the situation is very different now. The entire country is locked down and all diverse communities have been subjected to the order of government in the name of the COVID-19 global pandemic. To date (April 17, 2020), 242 people have contracted the virus, 77 persons have recovered and there have been 7 deaths. If we compare our situation to other parts of the world, we feel relatively safe due to the government's serious action of curfews, lockdowns and personal quarantines and free medical care systems. But behind the screen of curfews, lockdown, and quarantined households, certainly, we hear lots of mourning, screaming, sufferings. Of course, lot of hidden people are rapidly dying not only by the infection of COVID-19 but also the cause of poverty, discrimination, and purposed hidden. In

the context of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka; On the one hand, curfews and lockdowns are keeping us from contracting the contagion of COVID-19 but on the other hand, many people are greatly suffering due to the lack of income, access to proper food, safe water and medical care. The most threaten matter is; racism and religious extremism strategically rising up in the name of COVID-19 response. During this uncertain time of death, disaster and darkness, the CACM is committed to be a “Participatory Church,” it means the church is ready to physically and ethically engage with suffering and marginalized community to ensure their holistic wellbeing. Secondly, the CACM is committed to be “Productive Church, it means the church empowers marginalized children and youth to be a creative and transformative source of the communities, likewise the CACM empower selected rural community to be socially empowered, and economically sustained in household level. Thirdly, being a prophetic church, it means the church is the voice of voiceless, practicing the God’s transformative love and praxis it term of protected and sustained life of all the people and creation.



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- Rajan Rohaan, Church of American Ceylon Mission, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka

India

‘Before we are infected by corona, we will die of hunger.’

India’s poor, about a third of the 1.3 billion people, a large majority of them from the Dalit, Tribal, Muslim and other Minority religions, nomadic communities face unemployment, devoid of any cash income, hunger, poverty, abuse and ill-health immediately and may continue for six months to year ahead. The lockdown from 24th March 2020 has brought the country to an economic standstill. Many of the poor - daily wage workers and distress migrants – are reporting cutting down on meals. Their resources do not stretch beyond 3-4 days. With the lengthening of the lockdown, the second layer of the poor – domestic workers, artisans, tailors, washer people and small business, workers in restaurants, mall and factories are all facing hunger. Without work and money, migrants preferred to walk 200-400 kilometres home. In many places, they faced police violence, hunger and thirst including cases of death.

The civil society organisations have been among the first to respond. Despite the lockdown, NGOs are organising feeding centres and dry rations for a family for 2 weeks to one month of

rice, wheat, pulses, oil and some spices, provide masks and soaps. All other organisations have come forward, churches, Christian medical centres, gurudwaras, Hindu and Muslim religious organisations have come forward to open up their spaces for the migrant labour, support cooked food and dry rations, provide masks and soaps. In some places, local communities and organised groups are also pitching in to provide food and immediate cash benefits too. However, the need and demand can only be met, according to experts by setting aside 5-7% of the national GDP for the response.

The Center for Social Equity and Inclusion, New Delhi, having its work with Dalits, Tribals and Muslims in Delhi and Bihar were only too aware of the context of these communities across the country. On 25th March we started with whatsapp group to get partner NGOs and volunteers report what was happening in their communities. About 41 organisations and 212 volunteers from Bihar, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan linked on it and we kept a daily review of the situation of about 500 villages.

Our immediate effort was to pool up resources and request for donations from family and friends, locally and also to donors. We have been able to link many families to local donors for immediate cash benefit. CSEI in addition have provided dry rations to 500 families in the first round, a week after the lock down, and to another 400 families in the second week. We have so far reached about 900 families with just dry rations. We are into the process of making the third round of about 800 families. We fear that what progress was made will go backward, caste and communal riots and violence will increase – dark days ahead and not sure where the end of the tunnel is.



- Annie Namala, Director, CSEI, New Delhi.

Thailand

Public services, schools and all non-essential shops are closed and all public gatherings, including religious services have been suspended. Many events have also been cancelled such as the Thai New Year (13-15 Apr.). Also, the government has announced a nationwide curfew from 10 pm to 4 am every day from the end of March until now. Many people such as taxi drivers, motorcycle taxi, street food sellers and similar others are without work and income.

Today (15 Apr.), number of Thai people infected with the coronavirus are 2,613, 1,405 have recovered, and 1167 are still being treated, and 41 people have died.

The Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) is encouraging its churches to strictly follow the health guidelines of the government and health Ministry. It is also encouraging to our churches to do Sunday worship through the electronic media, i.e. Facebook and online live, so that the church members. CCT is also arranging a special life insurance to its pastors and staff.

CCT headquarters in Bangkok has had the opportunity to help 500 people with food packets and 800 families with rice. CCT-Social Development and Service Unit (SDSU) encourages our churches and brothers and sisters in Christ to grow vegetables during the time of the government ordered to stay at home. SDSU has launched a campaign with the following slogans - "Stay home, Grow vegetables, Love your neighbor as yourself". "Stay Home: To protect yourself and family, living life with discipline and cooperate with the government", and "Grow vegetables: To build Food security in the organic community in their own area".



- Rungtiwa Mamo, Ecumenical Relations Officer, CCT, Bangkok

Pakistan

Bordering China and Iran the two hotspots in the Pandemic, Pakistan recorded over 7000 cases of infection and 137 deaths till 17th April, however the actual number of infections and fatalities may be much higher because of limited testing and data collection and hospitalization capacity. The paucity of resources delayed the government response after the lock-down announced on 17th March 2020, however, the NGOs and churches stepped in to help the needy as 25% of the population is living below and another 15 percent of the poverty line. The people who are discriminated and marginalized on account of their religious, sexual and origin are particularly vulnerable to disease as well as prone to suffered neglect in provisions of relief.

Initially, the Centre for Social Justice contributed food rations to 250 families. It is reaching out to 750 more during this week. We pray and wish to reach as many needy as possible.

- Peter Jacob, Director, Centre for Social Justice, Lahore