

Aawaaj's Guidelines for Responding to Covid-19 Pandemic, May 2020



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Acronyms:

WHO	World Health Organization
MoHP	Ministry of Health and Population
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease-2019
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GOs	Government Organizations
NOGs	Non-Government Organizations
I/NGOs	International Government Organizations

Introduction of Aawaaj:

Aawaaj is a non-governmental and non-profit social organization established in 1999 by the joint initiatives of professionals with strong hope to demonstrate capacity against violence and discrimination of children and women in Midwestern region, Nepal. Lack of awareness and ignorance about issues of violence, sexual abuse and neglect, were highly prevalent in the Midwestern region, Nepal when Mrs. Irada Gautam initiated "Aawaaj." It is the Nepali word for "Voice"; indeed being the voice of those whose voices was often unheard. Incidents were too often unheard/hidden due to fear of stigma, prestige and safety. Sexual abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and domestic violence and conflict based violence against children and women are quite interlinked, and sometime exist together. Patriarchy, poverty, unemployment, low literacy, gender inequity, insecurity, lack of awareness about rights and not fulfilling responsibilities are the root causes of violence. There are number of organizations working at the national level, however there is a big gap in the program strategy of donors, government, I/NGOs to work with boys and men against violence on women and children. Aawaaj is working with boys and men along with girls and women to prepare better manhood and against established traditional gender roles (especially in Nepali context) which induce discrimination, harassments and violent behavior among men. Aawaaj is the voice of those women and children who are living with violence, vulnerability and at risk, and who have no access in social and legal justice .We believe that a violence free world for children and women is possible if all of us speak out, act on against attitude, behaviors and practices that don't respect children and women. A family's safety and happiness lies in non - violence treatment, care and support towards children and women. Based on our experiences; Violence occurs across societies regardless of class, caste, religion, education and geography. It not only affects the woman ad girl but the entire family - especially children.

Aawaaj has been pioneer to establish community care and support mechanisms against violence, sexual abuse, exploitation and neglect towards women and girls in Midwest Nepal. Our mission is to eradicate all sorts of sexual, domestic and conflict based violence through the process of empowerment. We attempt to make a difference in the lives of the women and children who deserve equal rights as any one of us. Aawaaj used the concept of resilience to open new paths for the prevention and response against violence and discrimination. Girls and women when faced devastating trauma and adversity how they are able to develop their inner capacity in a harmonious and positive way? This question is at the starting point of work. Aawaaj is facilitating Rural Communities to Combat the Violence and Discrimination of Children and Women. Since1999, Aawaaj has been respond to the systematic violence toward women and children in rural Nepal. Violence against women and girls—including trafficking, domestic violence, dowry-related violence, rape, and sexual violence—remains a serious problem in the country, but many women and children choose not to report incidents.

Background:

As the COVID-19 spread reached Nepal on January 23rd 2020, the government imposed lockdown from March 24th 2020. There have been a total of 6272098 identified cases and 379,002 death worldwide (MoHP, Nepal, 3rd June 2020). In Nepal, a total of 2300 cases have been infected so far and 9 have died (MoHP, Nepal 3rd June, 2020). With the country under lockdown, daily wages, especially those who have migrated from other districts to the capital are not able to go to work. As daily wage labourers have minimal to no savings, their day to day lives have been affected drastically. Many families face a very real chance of not having enough food to survive if this lockdown continues without immediate and sufficient relief measures from government or other aid agencies. Numerous households share the same tap and the same toilet, which only increases the chances of the coronavirus spreading. They do not have access to essential materials like hand sanitizer, masks, gloves, soap and access to clean water. For daily wage workers the lockdown has deprived them of their only source of income. Although the local government has provided one time ration to families who are living in extremely difficult situation in rented rooms in the capital but the workers say that those rations were enough only for one week. As a result, families which are dependent on them are facing difficulty in finding for foods and other sanitary means.

Rationale of preparing the response guidelines for COVID -19:

Aawaaj has been actively working in Nepal since its establishment through the implementation of projects covering a range of themes like GBV, health and education, child and human rights, trafficking, shelter support and psychosocial support. It has also been operating a child emergency hotline (1098) where children or their caregivers can call if they need any help or need to report right violations, abuse or neglect. It is being done in collaboration and co-ordination with Ministry of women, children and senior citizens, central child welfare board, district child welfare board, district development committee and Nepal Tele-communication since 2010.

Due to the COVID-19 crisis and the subsequent lockdown, Aawaaj's role and involvement at the community level is limited. COVID-19 crisis has affected a lot in Karnali province and throughout the country. 9 cases has already died and infection has been increased day by day. The beneficiaries and those in need of help have been directly affected. Community level activities like meetings, trainings, awareness campaigns, advocacy as well as coordination with the local stakeholders and partners have also impacted negatively. Some reliable media sources have reported that GBV and child rights violation cases are in the rise during the lockdown. This clearly indicates that the work we have been doing needs to be continued adapting to the reality of the pandemic. So, we decided that a strategy should be developed according to which we can continue our work while complying with the safety measures taken by the government and WHO.

Organization's response guidelines during lockdown of COVID-19

This is a challenging time. Civil society and organizations have added responsibilities despite the challenges of preventing and addressing COVID-19. While the Government of Nepal has appealed for assistance to civil society, we also need to respond and with high alertness and effective strategies immediately. As Aawaaj is a service-providing organization, we need to continue our services and activities, more now than ever. However, we should also take necessary measures for minimizing the risk of the spread.

Some strategies for conducting our activities in specific areas are mentioned in brief here. These strategies and measures are in alignment with guidelines and protocol provided by the national government and WHO.

1. Guidelines regarding Field Work

Since COVID 19 has already started spreading in the community in Nepal, special precautions should be taken while working with the community. Additionally, Aawaaj works with an already vulnerable population. So we have adapted some measures for the safety of both our field staff as well as the community.

- Postpone all community activities in the field.
- Reduce the psychological impact of different groups by providing online and telephone counseling time to time.
- Assist the victims for reporting the incidents of sexual violence in the community while in lockdown.
- Coordinate with local government and maintain regular communication.
- All staff should be in regular contact with their line manager and central office.
- Field staff should be mobilized in their own communities only.
- Prepare a clear action plan following the guidelines mentioned.
- Provide protective materials like masks, gloves, hand sanitizers to the field staff.
- Avoid public transportation as far as possible

2. Guidelines regarding Official Work

There is also a risk of spread in the office because the staff have to travel to and from their work. This increases the potential of spread and poses a threat to health of all other staff. Therefore, we have taken some measures following which all official work will be performed during the lockdown.

- All employees must work from home while in lockdown.
- They can conduct regular meetings online if necessary.

- If staff has to come to the office, s/he should take all essential precautions and should inform the office if they are experiencing any COVID related symptoms.
- Staff are advised to avoid visitors unless absolutely necessary.
- All employees should keep their planning, reports and documents during lockdown.
- Work in coordination and maintain regular communication with the government and other sectors.
- Focus on the tasks that can be performed immediately.
- Safety guidelines will be regularly updated as per the government and will be displayed in visible places like notice board or doors.

3. Guidelines regarding the safety of officials, employees and volunteers

Since the COVID-19 is contagious and it is still unclear how and when the vaccine will be discovered and become accessible for all. For the time being, prevention is better than cure. So there is no option except taking essential precautions and avoiding public gatherings. As social workers, our first priority will be personal safety then service delivery. So for this purpose, our organization administers following strategies for staffs safety and efficient service delivery.

- All the staffs and volunteers will be properly oriented about fact based information regarding COVID-19 and its essential precautions. Safety and security materials/equipment will be provided while delivering the services.
- Protective materials such as masks, gloves, sanitizers and Personal protective equipment will be managed. Protective materials such as masks, gloves, sanitizers, PPE will be distributed as needed.
- We encouraged to all the employees and volunteers to follow social distancing rules as well as promote phone/online contact and perform work in a comfortable environment.
- Social gatherings, physical trainings, orientations programs will be postponed and online training, orientations, workshops and meetings will be conducted. Organizations is fully compliant with the government's protocol or guidelines while performing any activities.
- It is mandatory for staffs to wear a mask and gloves while coming office.
- Washing hands every 2 hours and applying sanitizer after touching and any objects is mandatory.
- All the safety measures will be taken while going to the bank and field visits in case of need.

4. Regarding emergency shelter home operation and management:

As the problems related to sexual violence will increase in the situation of lockdown, the emergency services can be provided by adopting the following safety and security strategies.

- No cases will be except the case related rape and severe domestic violence of within the district will be admitted in the shelters.
- The cases from outside of district will not be enrolled in shelter home during this lockdown, instead, phone counseling and appropriate referral will be made for the time being.

- Sometimes police brings the emergency cases for shelter at night, in such situation, full details of contract tracing will be maintained and at least RDT should be mandatory. Proper hygiene practices recommended by WHO and government, such as washing the hands with soap, using sanitizer, gloves, masks and other essential precautions will be taken before handling any cases.
- In the shelter house, proper social distancing will be maintained, good food and unnecessary gathering will be discouraged.
- Washing and drying of all clothes and other utensils before and after using these in the shelter home. The same utensils while the rent is settled.
- Shelter warden and assistant should not be in direct contact with the cases.
- In case of consultation on any issues with those client who visit shelter home, separate place with proper maintaining social distance will be allocated.
- Sufficient tissue papers, sanitizers and dust/trash bins in the office rooms will be arranged.
- Staffs sitting at proper distance (2 m) will be maintained. Sitting chairs and tables will be placed in proper distance if there are more than one staff in the same office room.

5. Child Helpline 1098 Operation guideline:



Aawaaj has been operating the child helpline 1098 service for long time. During this pandemic situation the cases of child abuse and other violations have increased. Following are the strategies taken by Aawaaj.

- The child helpline will be operated 24 hours a day and 7 days in a week.
- The cases will be referred to senior supervisor if the case is serious and not able to respond properly from the call receiver staff. The documentation will be maintained properly.
- The cases will be referred to the police if the case is severe and emergency.
- Confidentiality will be maintained of all the cases.

6. In case of infection within the staff and volunteers

More than 4.5 million people have been infected with the COVID-19 pandemic so far all over the world. And the rate of infected people have been increasing in Nepal significantly. In such situations, Aawaaj's priority would be prevent all the staffs, volunteers and beneficiaries from being infected. However, if someone is infected, immediately essential precautions will be taken and the person who is infected will be kept in isolation. Continue follow up and psychosocial support will be provided for individual and their family members. The family members and other individual who are close with them will be encouraged to stay in self quarantine as per prescribed protocol of government and WHO.

7. Guidelines for relief distribution:

The food crisis has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and there is no environment to distribute relief to the community more easily. In case of the crisis, relief will be distributed as follows:

- Proper coordination and cooperation will be made with the District Disaster Management Committee.
- List of the beneficiaries will be confirmed in the collaboration with the local government. The beneficiaries will be selected without discrimination, biasness and prejudice.
- Compliance with the criteria of Nepal Government of Nepal during the relief distribution.
- Priorities will be made during the relief distribution such as most vulnerable, marginalized, women, children, persons with disability and elderly people of the target areas.
- Field staff and volunteers pay special attention to monitoring while distributing the relief package.
- Signatures and photos will be taken during relief distribution with the relief distribution for the proper documentation and reporting.
- Social distancing and other precautions for minimizing the risk for the contamination of virus will be maintained during the relief distribution process.
- Receipt of relief materials should be obtained from the ward or municipality.
- Distribute soaps, masks and sanitizers to the child-friendly centers. If the staff can do it themselves.

8. Guidelines for Coordination and Cooperation with Local Government

The Government of Nepal is distributing relief through a one-door system. In this situation, Aawaaj has been working with coordination and collaboration with local governments so that the chances of duplication would be managed and beneficiaries will get reliefs and other services without any discriminations.

The facility will be suspended for this time. If the pandemic crisis lasts for more than 6 months, and the working conditions are not met and donors stop providing fund, the organization will proceed as per the decision of executive board.

9. Fundraising strategy

As Nepal government has taken the strict measures for preventing spread of COVID-19, there are significant number of population who have been affected and face difficulties for arranging food and basic needs. People who migrated for working in various places inside and outside the country now returning back to their home. People who are quarantined are facing various problems due to the insufficient facilities. In this situation our organization will make effort to

response to the vulnerable communities by collaborating with government and other like-minded aid agencies. Efficient and practical plans and proposals will be developed to aid the people affected in various ways due to the disease as well as lockdowns. These plans will be discussed among our partners and funding agencies. The approved plans will then be prioritized and implemented based on their reach, impact and comprehensibility with funds and contribution from Aawaaj and its partners.

Useful links and Reference:

How to stay informed: Find the latest information from WHO on where COVID-19 is spreading:

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports/>

Advice and guidance from WHO on COVID-19

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

<https://www.epi-win.com/>

[https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/nepal-documents/novel-coronavirus/covid-19-nepal-preparedness-and-response-plan-\(nprp\)-draft-april-9.pdf?sfvrsn=808a970a_2](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/nepal-documents/novel-coronavirus/covid-19-nepal-preparedness-and-response-plan-(nprp)-draft-april-9.pdf?sfvrsn=808a970a_2)

https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/nepal-documents/novel-coronavirus/health-sector-emergency-response-plan-covid-19-endorsed-may-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=ef831f44_2