

PRESS STATEMENT

# **Covid-19: As hunger continues to plague pandemic-hit Asia, gov'ts urged to guarantee people's right to food and nutrition**

Friday 11 December 2020, by [GNRTFN \(Asia Chapter\)](#) (Date first published: 10 December 2020).

**As states continue to fail in reaching out to the neediest sectors of society amid the Covid-19 pandemic, civil society and mass-based organizations in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, and the Philippines have urged their governments to guarantee the right to food and nutrition of their people.**

In their joint report on the impact of Covid-19 and state responses to the pandemic on people's right to food and nutrition, which was published on December 10, during the celebration of Human Rights Day, member-organizations\* and supporters of the Asia Chapter of the Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition (GNRTFN) [[1](#)] pointed out that "the pandemic (had) exposed the flaws of the existing food systems and the limits to relief measures."

And because government solutions to cushion the impacts of the pandemic on people's health and livelihoods were anchored in these flaws and limitations, state interventions proved deficient and ineffective, and in many instances exacerbated hunger among the already impoverished and marginalized, according to the organizations.

## **Assistance inadequate, vulnerable sectors made more susceptible to pandemic**

In the report, GNRTFN-Asia cited the situation in Bangladesh wherein the pandemic-spawned lockdown defeated the purpose of safeguarding people's life and health as the government's cash assistance to the poor, who lost their income sources due to the pandemic, was inadequate to buy items essential for survival.

In India, the hunger problem among the poor and unemployed during lockdown was primarily addressed via food rationing. However, the solution proved futile among millions of internal migrant workers as they were not accounted for in the rationing system.

In Indonesia, the partial lockdown implemented starting in April 2020, resulted in employment terminations without prior notice, non-payment of leave credits, and the lack of money to buy nutritious and adequate food.

## **Gov't responses become part of the problem**

This pattern of government responses to tackle the pandemic that either failed to solve the problem or became part of it, was also observed in Nepal, Pakistan, and the Philippines.

In Nepal, lockdowns and curfews caused work stoppages that gravely affected internal migrant

workers living on meager wages and increased food and nutrition scarcity by 8 percent in one month of movement restrictions alone.

Worse, no policies were enacted by the state to avoid layoffs during the crisis to ensure decent incomes for people under confinement.

In Pakistan, the lockdown was unplanned and government efforts to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19 on the economy largely benefitted businesses via a Rs. 12-trillion (USD 7.2 billion) stimulus package and Rs 100-billion (USD 624 million) tax refund.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's most vulnerable sectors - agricultural workers, small and marginal farmers, elderly pensioners, widows, people with disabilities, slum dwellers, garbage collectors, and the homeless - were pushed further into poverty and hunger as they failed to get immediate assistance from the state.

In the Philippines, though the Agriculture ministry addressed rural poverty that worsened during the lockdown, only Filipino farmers with a hectare of land or less were included as among the recipients of a P6,500 (USD 130) cash aid under the state's social amelioration program.

Sans marketing support from the state, peasant families found it difficult to buy survival essentials as the lockdown prevented them from transporting and selling their produce in urban centers.

### **Specific recommendations**

In their report, GNRTFN's Asia Chapter urged the governments of the six countries to immediately guarantee the right to food and nutrition of their people in line with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Among GNRTFN-Asia Chapter' specific recommendations to the governments in the region are the following:

- Immediately provide adequate support to those suffering from hunger and malnutrition.
- Compensate people for their loss of livelihoods by guaranteeing their right to food and nutrition.
- Conduct human rights impact assessments of Covid-19 on the right to food and nutrition of all vulnerable persons, groups, and communities, paying special attention to children, women, elderly, and marginalized groups.
- On the basis of those assessments, engage with concerned persons, groups, and communities to jointly formulate short-term, mid-term, and long-term plans to mitigate the food crisis and nutritional deficiencies. Mid-term and long-term measures must be oriented towards the universalization of public distribution systems for food grains and other staples.

10 December 2020

### **Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition-Asia Chapter**

*\* The members of the Asia Chapter of the Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition that produced the Covid-19 Monitoring Report are the following:*

Center for Social Development (Manipur, India);

Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO - Nepal);

FoodFirst Information and Action Network (FIAN);

Focus on the Global South (Regional/India);

Kilusanpara sa Repormang Agraryo at Katarungang Panlipunan(Katarungan, Philippines);

KHANI, Bangladesh;

MaleyaFoundation (Bangladesh);

Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee (PKRC, Pakistan);

Right to Food Campaign (India);

and

Solidarity Perempuan (Indonesia)

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## Footnotes

[1] The GNRTFN is a network of public interest civil society organizations and social movements - peasants, fisherfolk, pastoralists, landless people, consumers, urban people forced to live in poverty, agricultural and food workers, women, youth, and indigenous peoples - that recognize the need to act jointly for the realization of the right to food and nutrition.