

30<sup>th</sup> May 2022

# Project Report: Sow against Covid- Response and Recovery Project 2021-22

Community-based Response to Needy COVID-19 Affected at- Risk Groups through Village Model Farmers'/ Local Support Center in Province 3 of Nepal



Submitted to: **Sowers Action, Hong Kong, China**

Submitted by: **Volunteer Corps Nepal, Kathmandu, Nepal**

## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

**VCN: Volunteer Corps Nepal**

**COVID: Corona Virus Disease**

**EOI: Expression of Interest**

**PMP: Project Management Professional**

**VMFs: Village Model Farmers**

**SA: Sowers Action**

**SM: Social Mobilizer**

**UNICEF: United Nation Children's Fund**

**UNDP: United Nations Development Programme**

**UNFPA: United Nations Population Fund**

## PROJECT OVERVIEW / SUMMARY

<b>Program Name:</b>	Sow Against Covid- Response and Recovery Project 2021-22
<b>Project Start And End Date:</b>	5 <sup>th</sup> August 2021- 4 <sup>th</sup> May 2022
<b>Name of Prime Implementing Partner:</b>	Volunteer Corps Nepal
<b>[Contract/Agreement] Number:</b>	A02984
<b>Project Code:</b>	IV012
<b>Major Counterpart Organizations</b>	Social Welfare Council, Barhabishe Municipality and Ward Office
<b>Geographic Coverage (cities and or countries)</b>	Barhabishe Municipality, Sindhupalchowk District, Bagmati Province, Nepal
<b>Project Period:</b>	August 2021- May 2022

## **From the President**

In an exceptional situation; COVID-19, when Nepal was suffering with high number of cases, extended lockdowns and difficult economic, social and political conditions, Volunteer Corps Nepal in the support of Sowers Action, Hong Kong, China was able to aid people in need from Barhabishe Municipality, Sindhupalchowk with livelihood measures and psychosocial support. This was an extraordinary that we got form Sowers Action and we would like to offer our sincere gratitude to them including all individual and institutional donors who trusted towards SA mission in Nepal.

300 families/ households from low income background who were struggling to meet their ends after the second wave of COVID-19 were selected during the project. They were supported with Food and Nutrition packages during the first phase of the project and with support in vegetable farming and psychosocial aspect in the second phase. The farmers were assisted with training on commercial vegetables farming, high quality seeds, saplings and agricultural equipment like hybrid vegetables seeds, construction of agriculture tunnel, sprayer, watering cans, hermetic bags and organic fertilizer. 6 VMFs were chosen to lead the rest of the farmers and were aided with nursery tunnels and pesticide sprayers. Psychosocial counseling sessions were carried out for farmers and recreational activities were carried out for school children.

Farmers grew the vegetables and some sold them in the market, some donated and some gifted and consumed themselves. The Radish seeds we had provided and with the help of the training, our farmers were able to grow the second largest Radish of the year in Nepal. They weighed up to 10 kg each. The Broad Leaves Mustard Green also gave a large quantity of harvest and was delicious to eat as per the farmers. Women were able to share their feelings and experiences during our counseling session and were elated to get such platform. Also, children were excited to take part in the activities conducted in school. They were supported with different present for their participation.

The project had to face different hurdles like persistent rain during the start, unexpected torrential rainfall during October and third wave of Covid. Taking up all the challenges, we have been successful in reaching the targets of the project as planed ahead. Steps like coordinating with schools and distributing seeds of two types of vegetables to the farmers in the first round instead of saplings were also taken as per the situation arose. The 10 months long project was fruitfully ended on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2022.

Every beneficiary of the project has been happy to the support they have received because of Sowers Action. They are hoping for the project to continue and addition of new techniques and measures to make the farming even better in the coming time. The joy and happiness of our beneficiaries has been priceless for us, which is all because of Sowers Action.

Thank you Sowers Action for your faith upon us. We are looking forward for more opportunities to work with you.

With all our gratitude,

Volunteer Corps Nepal

## **PROJECT SUMMARY**

**PROJECT TITLE:** Sow against Covid- Response and Recovery Project 2021- 22

**DONOR:** Sowers Action, Hong Kong, China

**TARGET AREA:** Barhabishe Municipality, Sindhupalchowk, Nepal

**IMPLEMETING PARTNER:** Volunteer Corps Nepal

**PROJECT PERIOD:** 10 Months (5<sup>th</sup> August 2021- 4<sup>th</sup> May 2022)

**TOTAL DIRECT BENEFICIARIES:** Farmers – 300, Psychosocial Counseling – 500 Individuals, Recreational Activities – 800 School Children

**TOTAL PROJECT BUDJET:** NPR 5,720,220

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The pandemic that emerged in 2019 due to the outbreak of disease called COVID-19 caused by Novel Corona Virus has left the world stunned. The pneumonia like disease has infected 521,920,560 people worldwide and 6,274,323 deaths have occurred. The world was completely shut down in order to contain the disease. Even the countries like America, Italy, the U.K., China, Japan, France, Spain etc. struggled to prevent the disease from spreading. Large number of infections and deaths were recorded in these countries.

The developing country like Nepal was already short of necessary health facilities for its people and when Covid struck the country, there was a havoc in every sector of the country. Health system was struggling to save lives of people, economic sector was collapsing as tourism industry was completely closed, agriculture was heavily affected, retail had dropped by 15% and foreign remittance was dropped to 1% during the lockdown. Schools and colleges were closed and mobility of people were restricted. People were confined in their homes. This phenomenon affected the wage workers, migrants and households from low income setting the most. They were jobless and many had nothing left to eat.

Thus, to support wage workers, migrants and people from low income background "Sow against Covid – Response and Recovery project 2021–22" was developed in the financial support of Sowers Action, Hong Kong, China. The collective aim of the project was to support and empower immediate food and nutrition needs, livelihood sustainment in selected COVID-19 affected communities having domestic wage laborers and migrant workers. During the first phase of the project, 300 families in Barhabishe Municipality, Sindhupalchowk were provided with immediate Food and Nutrition Packages. And in the second phase 300 families were assisted with different activities for livelihood support through vegetable farming. Psychosocial support was also provided to reduce the distress in them as well as in children caused by the pandemic and lockdown. 50 Group Counseling and 100 Individual Counseling sessions were carried out for the adults and 33 recreational activities sessions were carried out for the children. Farmers were supported with Radish, Broad Leaf Mustard Green and Onion seeds and saplings and trained for commercial farming. The farmers were assisted with training on commercial vegetables farming, high quality seeds, saplings and agricultural equipment like hybrid vegetables seeds, construction of agriculture tunnel, sprayer, watering cans, hermetic bags and organic fertilizer. 6 VMFs were chosen to lead the rest of the farmers and were aided with nursery tunnels and pesticide sprayers. The project has been ended on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2022.

## Project Background

After the detection of a new virus in Wuhan China, it did not take much time for it to spread across the world. A pneumonia of unknown origin was detected in China on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019, and there was no looking back. The disease was named COVID- 19, caused by a highly infectious Novel Corona Virus now known as SARS CoV-2. The first ever case of COVID-19 in Nepal was detected on 13 January 2020. The second case took about 2 months to emerge on 24 March 2020 and immediately after the detection of second case government of Nepal imposed a country wide lockdown, to prevent the virus for spreading. Nepal was not prepared enough to battle the virus and restricting mobility and shutting down everything was the only way towards saving people. The first lockdown extended for 3 months and was eased on June 2020. Vaccinations started in September 2020 in Nepal and cases started decreasing to around 100 per day during the last months of 2020. The weakened economy of the country started to activate with the reduction of cases. Offices and businesses had started to reopen. However, in April 2021 second wave of COVID-19 hit Nepal and spread immediately spiking the cases to about 10,000 per day. The positivity rate of Covid infection during second wave was 50% during the second wave. A second lockdown was imposed from May 2021 which again restricted the daily life of Nepalese citizens.

Many people had lost their jobs. Migrants from India and third countries were returning as the risk of infection was getting greater with each passing day. The Asia Development Bank had anticipated the impact of the outbreak on every economic sectors of Nepal with reduction of up to 0.13 per cent of the GDP and 90,880 jobs, during the first lockdown, which were further aggravated by the second wave of COVID-19 and lockdown. The economy of Nepal was affected by the pandemic on three fronts: first its dependence on tourism, trade and foreign employment, second an overwhelming situation on inadequate health system and infrastructure of the country and third our heavy geo-economic reliance on India and China. According to a report published by United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 3 in 5 employees in Nepal lost their jobs during the pandemic. Day laborers, people with informal jobs and internal migrants suffered the most and were the most vulnerable group of people based on income and their ability to sustain through the lockdown. Not being able to find an alternative source of income was the main impact of crisis for them.

Around 9 million students in Nepal were out of schools and universities due to COVID-19. The pandemic changed the academic calendar for schools and colleges, making it arduous for

students and teachers to finish the curriculum and follow the annual plan of study. While 35% of the schools in Nepal have the access to the internet, only 13% were able to run online classes for the students. No schools in Barhabishe, Sindhupalchowk carried out the online classes because of inability of students to access the internet. It is estimated that 53% of Nepalese have access to the internet in Nepal.

Thus, targeting the same vulnerable group of people from Sindhupalchowk district of Nepal which is a disaster prone district and harbors maximum daily laborers and migrants, Volunteer Corps Nepal (VCN) with the support of Sowers Action, Hong Kong, China developed a two phase project **“Sow Against Covid- Response and Recovery Project 2021-22”**. In the first phase of the program 300 vulnerable families with supported it emergency food packages during the second lockdown in the country. The second phase of the project aimed at providing the target group with a sustainable means of income. The project consisted of three major strategies for Covid Response and they were:

1. Introducing target beneficiaries (wage workers and migrants) to commercial vegetable farming through Village Model Farmers (VMFs) and training them to ensure a sustainable means of income.
2. Psychosocial counseling of the farmers to reduce the psychosocial impact of COVID-19 on them.
3. Structured recreational activities for children impacted psychosocially due to the pandemic and lockdown

Thus, in support of Sowers Action, VCN has trained and supported 300 small farmers from Barhabishe Municipality, Sindhupalchowk for commercial vegetable farming, provided them with individual and group psychosocial counseling sessions and conducted recreational sessions for children which benefitted 800 children in total.

## **Update on the Situation:**

Sindhupalchowk is the largest district of Bagmati province, which is composed of 13 districts. Sindhupalchowk district is 2,542 square kilometers in size and is located east of Nepal's capital, Kathmandu. It has 12 administrative units, including three municipalities and nine rural municipalities. One of them is the popular Barhabishe Municipality.

Sindhupalchowk has a total population of 287,798 people, with 138,351 men and 149,447 women. The average literacy rate is 59.58 percent (51.88 percent female and 67.97 percent male). Tamang, Chhetri, Brahman, Newar, Bishwokarma, Sanyasi, Sherpa, Darji/Pariyar, Majhi, Magar,

Gurung, Hyolmo, Thami, Mijar/Sarki, Danuwar, Pahari, Ghale, and others live in Sindhupalchowk. Nepali is the most widely spoken language (55.31 percent), followed by Tamang (31.26%), Newari (6.71%), Sherpa (2.86%), Hyolmo (2.11%), Thami (0.99%), and others (0.76 percent). Agriculture is a significant source of revenue in Sindhupalchowk. However, due to disaster-related displacement, low soil fertility, and migration to third countries, just 13.30 percent of the land is now cultivated. Sindhupalchowk is one of Nepal's poorest districts. The district's Multidimensional Poverty Index is 0.17. The district has been identified as a high-risk disaster district for the year 2020. According to a survey conducted by the Home Ministry in the same year, 11,109 families in Sindhupalchowk are at risk of flooding and landslides, necessitating quick relocation. Another geological study conducted by National Disaster Management Authority in 2021, has identified 13 settlements in Barhabishe municipality under high risk of landslide and flood and in the need of relocation. One of our cluster among the three, Karthali is also included in that risk.

Barhabishe Municipality of Sindhupalchowk district is further divided into 9 wards and harbors 26,535 population in an area of 134.8 sq. km. Barhabishe bazar is the famous trade point of this municipality and the municipality as a whole has a significant history of the relations with China as Araniko Highway joining Nepal and China runs through the municipality. Majority of people are Tamang and Newar in Barhabishe, however diverse communities can be seen in the municipalities belonging to different ethnic groups like Brahmin, Chhetri, Sherpa, Gurung as well as the indigenous Thami community.

Subsistence agriculture farming, mainly small scale livestock is the main source of occupation and livelihood of the majority of the population in Barhabishe, Sindhupalchowk, with 79% of the population active in this sector. Due to low level of agricultural production, the majority of the households face acute food shortages for a large part of the year and thus, many people are engaged as day laborers and wage workers. Foreign employment in India and gulf countries is of increasing attraction among the youths of Sindhupalchowk.

After the outbreak of COVID-19 in Nepal, the first death due to the infection was recorded from Barhabishe, Sindhupalchowk district. A total of 7110 cases have been detected in Sindhupalchowk district till 17<sup>th</sup> May 2022. Elongated lockdowns during the first and second wave of COVID-19 had made the living of people in Barhabishe difficult as everything had come to halt. Schools were closed, agriculture in Sindhupalchowk is not as productive as in other parts of Nepal due to less fertile lands and markets were shut down so there was no work for day laborers. Moreover, the migrants were returning from other countries as the whole world was in terror. The pandemic gave economically and social hard time for people.

Thus, to ease difficulties caused in COVID-19 in people's lives of Barhabishe Municipality, Sindhupalchowk, a livelihood project aiming to improve the income of wage workers, internal and transnational migrants and low income families was implemented. During this project 300 such families were identified and supported with Food and Nutrition Packages during the first phase of the project, and 300 families were trained and supported with agricultural inputs for commercial vegetable farming. Majority of the 300 families in the second phase were from the first phase. In addition to the agricultural support, psychosocial support was provided to the farmers and the school going children. The project is in its end phase now. Farmers have harvested the vegetable (Onion) from their second season of farming, estimated psychosocial sessions for farmers have been completed and recreational sessions for school going children were carried out.

People all over Nepal as well as in Barhabishe, Sindhupalchowk are recovering from the economic and social impact caused by the pandemic. The markets have started being active and mobility of people without any restrictions has increased; the situation has started to turn normal. Tourists' influx has increased and availability of agricultural products and necessary materials is also getting back to normal as it was before the pandemic. Few months back in January, third wave of highly infective Omicron strain of Corona virus had occurred in Nepal, and Sindhupalchowk also recorded higher number of cases. Majority of our beneficiaries were also showing mild signs and symptoms of the disease, however no mortality was recorded.

## **Social Impact Results**

The world was not prepared for the COVID-19 pandemic when it started in 2019, and that unpreparedness was clearly reflected through the struggle of many countries in the world to contain the virus. Both developed and developing countries suffered equally with the misfortune the pandemic brought with it. 520,372,492 cases have been identified in the world till date and 6,270,232 people have succumbed to the virus.

Nepal also suffered great loss due to the virus. The country has borne loss of 11,952 human lives in two years and 0.13% of GDP was shaved because of the pandemic. The social impact of the pandemic in Nepal as well as Sindhupalchowk, can be pointed out as follows:

**1. Loss of lives:** As mentioned above already a large number of lives were lost because of the viral infection. The first death because of the virus in Nepal was of a 29 years old post-partum woman from Barhabishe, Sindhupalchowk. Losing someone close always impact humans in a negative and distressful way, and many faced that situation during the pandemic. Moreover, the country has lost a pool of human resource. It was not only Covid that took lives during the

pandemic. Harsh restrictions had brought a mental turmoil in many people and 7,141 suicides were reported in 2020 in Nepal.

**2. Education:** The government after the outbreak of COVID-19 in Nepal constrained people from gathering at one place and calculating the risk of transmission of the virus, schools were closed immediately after the detection of second case in Nepal. This affected the education of 9 million students. The schools in towns and city areas opted for online education, however the remote schools couldn't do so because of lack of internet either at school or at the houses of students. The schools in Barhabishe also couldn't afford online education, thus majority of students were out of education for almost a year.

**3. Health:** Health sector is the first line of defense during crises such as the pandemic. Health system of Nepal was highly unprepared for the outbreak of Corona Virus. Health facilities were already inadequate and about 22% of Nepalis lacked basic health services before the pandemic. During the first wave of Covid, the health system was unprepared and it caused havoc all over the country. During the second wave, there was a huge shortage of Oxygen and Personal Protective Equipment and during the third wave there was a shortage of health human resources, as most of them were infected. The district hospital in Sindhupalchowk was not adept to take care of COVID-19 and the patients had to travel to a nearby district. And at the initial phase there was lack of testing in remote district like Sindhupalchowk.

**4. Social Deviances:** With the increasing concentration of viral infection in Nepal, social problems like child marriage, girls trafficking, gender based violence and rapes also increased. Lockdowns, school closures, and economic downturns linked to COVID-19 are disproportionately affecting girls, with reduced access to sexual and reproductive health services and a rising incidence of harmful practices. Women Rehabilitation Center (2020) reported that 624 cases of Gender - Based Violence (GBV) between March to May from 55 districts during the lockdown period. A study published in the Kathmandu Post mentioned that every ten minutes, a woman somewhere in Nepal dials 1145, the helpline operated by the National Women Commission (NWC), seeking assistance. The mean score of the rigorousness of impact of COVID-19 for females is high due to their inability to find an alternative source of income, which is followed by the incapacity to pay loans, psychological problems, incapability to find a new job, and inadequacy to purchase the food according to United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Similarly, there was a mysterious surge in rape cases in Nepal during the pandemic and lockdown, and the most vulnerable groups were the minor girls. 367 cases of rape were reported in 6 months from April to October 2020

alone. Pandemic exposed different groups of population to vulnerability, especially women and children from different part of the country as well as the world.

## Project Goal

The overall goal of the project was to support and empower immediate food and nutrition needs, livelihood sustainment in selected COVID-19 affected communities having domestic wage labors and migrant workers.

The major objectives of the project were:

1. To provide emergency food and nutrition support to women headed, pregnant, lactating mothers, senior citizen and PWDs from poor, marginalized and excluded communities in COVID-19 affected communities.
2. To support medium and long term food security and livelihood opportunities to domestic wage labors and rural migrant workers affected by Covid.
3. COVID-19 affected women, children, youth and men will have opportunities for recreation, learning and psychosocial support, creating a sense of normal life and social cohesion.

## Project Implementation Methodology



### A. Need Assessment

Home to 285,770 people, Sindhupalchowk district of Nepal has been recorded by the Government of Nepal as a disaster prone area. Every year especially during monsoon disasters like landslide and flood cause significant loss of lives and properties in the district. A brief on the damage caused by disasters from 2014 to 2020 in Sindhupalchowk is provided below:

Details of Disaster Damage in Sindhupalchowk					
S.N.	Year of Disaster	Death	Injury	Disappearance	Displaced Families
1.	2078 (2021)	5	0	20	604
2.	2077 (2020)	74	25	33	389
3.	2073 (2016)	0	0	3	945
4.	2072 (2015)	3570	1569	7	1924
5.	2071 (2014)	150	15	0	337

COVID-19 was another blow for the social and economic status of the disaster battered Sindhupalchowk. The livelihood of people was affected. Lives of low income families, day laborers, migrants and even those with higher income was getting harder. The market and mobility had shut down, which led to minimum economic transactions throughout the country. 61% of the people in earthquake affected area of Nepal rely on skilled or unskilled daily wage work as their main source of income and they were unemployed during the lockdown. 11% of the population had reporting reducing their meal consumption to once a day. The loss of income due to COVID-19 restrictions were 87% in such districts, and Sindhupalchowk is one of them. Many also had no income during this time and 53% of the people had to take loans to fulfil their basic needs. Only 33% of the families had received any kind of support from the government and that was mostly food and hygiene kits. Regardless of the distributions, people were not happy as the provided support was in insufficient quantity.

Taking into consideration all of the above facts, and the consultation with the local governments of Sindhupalchowk district, a dire need of food supply and sustainable livelihood was recognized. Additionally, the restriction measures and loss of income had taken a toll on people's mental health. A comprehensive intervention was felt necessary to relieve people from the economic and mental distress they were going through. Thus, this project was developed integrating emergency food response, livelihood measures and psychosocial support.

## **B. Beneficiaries Selection**

Most of the beneficiaries for the second phase of the project were from the first phase of the project: Emergency Food and Nutrition Support. As, the selected beneficiaries in the first phase were wage workers and migrants from low income class, who were in the serious need of food support. However, 50 beneficiaries from first phase could not continue to the second phase and thus, other 50 were identified through collective effort of VCN, Barhabishe Municipality and ward representatives. Village Model Farmers (VMFs) were selected as per their interests and their experience in commercial farming before COVID-19 restrictions. People with higher needs of project assistance were selected for the project. The same criteria as applied during the first phase was adopted:

- Communities inhabited by the Dalits, Muslims, COVID-19 displaced population (both domestic and migrant workers)
- Women headed and single mother household and low-income families
- Domestic labor and migrant workers those have lost their livelihood due to COVID-19
- Absence of other humanitarian and development agencies working for that community.

## **C. Site Selection**

Barhabishe Municipality was selected as the project site for the first phase: Emergency Food and Nutrition Support and based upon some research, discussions and consultation with the representatives from the district, same project area was continued for the second phase also. Being a highly mobile market with continuous transactions Barhabishe provided jobs to many daily laborers and migrants from the nearby places. They all had gone jobless and incomeless because of the lockdown. Additionally, the influx of former migrants to their home in Barhabishe municipality was also high. Thus, as the area had the settlement of beneficiaries required by our project Barhabishe Municipality was chosen as our project site.

The site selection was carried out in coordination with municipality and ward officials, local representatives and district representatives.



## D. Project Implementation

The project was implemented in two phases:

**Phase I:** Emergency Food and Nutrition Support under which 300 identified households in need from Barhabishe Municipality and Food Packages were distributed to them from 3 points: Sano Palati, Karthali and Barhabishe Bazar. The distribution was carried out on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2021. A Food Package contained:

- Rice: 10 kg
- Mung Daal: 1 kg
- Cooking Oil: 1 liter
- Salt- 1 kg
- Horlicks- 1 kg
- Baby Food- 1 kg
- Seasonal Fruit- 1 kg

The reporting of Phase I was completed in June 2021.

**Phase II:** Early Recovery and Development Phase was implemented after the completion of Emergency Food and Nutrition Support, with an objective of introducing sustainable livelihood measures in the lives of beneficiaries to improve their economic position and providing them (particularly women) and their children psychosocial support through counseling and recreational activities. Through community ownership, efficient service delivery, transparency, and linkage of relief, recovery, and development, the project aims to support and empower people in COVID-19 affected communities for livelihood sustainability and psychosocial support, based on right-based approaches, equity, and inclusive efforts.

For the implementation of this phase of the project, three clusters were identified: Karthali, Okhareni and Sano Palati from Barhabishe Municipality and 300 households were selected. A concept of Village Model Farmers (VMFs) was introduced to the project. 300 households were differentiated into 6 groups and a VMF was chosen from each group, who led the group, provided them with saplings and necessary support for vegetable farming.

The below presented matrix summarizes the activities carried out under this phase of “Sow against Covid- Response and Recovery project 2021-22”:

<b>S.N.</b>	<b>Planned Activities</b>	<b>Achievements</b>
1.	Agreement with local government authorities	Approval to implement the project in Barhabishe Municipality from the municipal authorities.
2.	Approval from Social Welfare Council	Approved to implement the project in the purposed areas.
3.	Vacancy Announcement and Candidate Selection	Vacancy announced via social media and candidates were selected based on their expertise through standard tests.
4.	Team formation	A project team for project implementation had been set up.
5.	Office equipment purchase	Quotation was called for the purchase of laptop, and was later purchased.
6.	Field office setup	A field office had been setup in Sano Palati, Barhabishe.
7.	Training and Orientation of Project Team	Two days training and orientation for VCN's board members, project team and volunteers

		was conducted and the project was officially started.
8.	Selection of 300 Beneficiaries	300 farmers were chosen in close coordination with ward representatives.
9.	Formation of 6 Groups	6 groups of farmers were formed out of 300 beneficiaries.
10.	Identification of 6 Village Model Farmers	6 VMFs were identified to lead each group.
11.	Orientation to VMFs	A brief orientation on their roles, responsibilities and expectations.
12.	Training on Seasonal Plantation to 300 Farmers	Brief orientation was provided to 300 farmers on planting seasonal vegetables.
13.	Specification of seasonal vegetables for 300 households	Seeds of Broad Leaf Mustard Green and Radish were provided to each 300 households on the same of orientation to farmers. Additionally, each farmer was provided with a Watering Can with Sprayer for easy watering of the plants.
14.	Establishment of 10 Community Support Centers	6 Community Support Centers are the houses of 6 VMFs as proposed and 3 are the public schools and a community hall.
15.	First bimonthly reporting	The first bimonthly report for August and September was submitted on 6 <sup>th</sup> October 2021.
16.	Establishment of Nursery Tunnels	All 6 nursery tunnels have been constructed and are ready for production of saplings.
17.	Keeping Track Records	Progress of all 6 VMFs and 18 beneficiaries have been recorded till November.
18.	Field Visit	The field staffs for project regularly conducted field visits to see the progress of the vegetables from sowing to harvesting.
19.	Second Bimonthly Report	The second bimonthly report for October and November was submitted on 1 <sup>st</sup> December.

20.	Special Training to VMFs	All the 6 VMFs were given the special training on cleaning, grading, packaging and market linkage.
21.	Training to Farmers	All the farmers were trained group wise on cleaning, and packaging of the vegetables, as training on vegetable production was already provided in the beginning of the project.
22.	Psychosocial training to SMs and volunteers	7 events for Psychosocial training to SMs and Volunteers were planned. The events were carried out in parts from September to February.
23.	Conduction of Recreational Activities for Children	33 sessions of structured recreational activities were carried out for school going children as it was proposed.
24.	Group Counseling Services	50 group counselling session have been carried during the entire project period. The remaining 19 sessions were carried out in April and May.
25.	Individual Counseling Services	100 sessions of individual counseling have been carried out, with remaining 5 sessions been carried out in April.
26.	Third Bimonthly Report	The Third Bimonthly Report was submitted on 15 <sup>th</sup> February 2022.
27.	Distribution of Onion Seeds to VMFs	Onion seeds were distributed to VMFs on 1 <sup>st</sup> February 2022.
28.	Distribution of Hermetic Bags, Organic Fertilizers and Sprayers to VMFs	VMFs received Hermetic Bags, Organic Fertilizers and Pesticide Sprayers on 4 <sup>th</sup> March 2022.
29.	Distribution of Hermetic Bags and Organic Fertilizers to Farmers	Farmers received Hermetic Bags and Organic Fertilizers on 4 <sup>th</sup> March 2022.
30.	Distribution of Onion Saplings to Farmers	The onion saplings produced by the VMFs were distributed to Farmers on 28 <sup>th</sup> February 2022.
31.	Submission of 4 <sup>th</sup> Bimonthly Report	
32.	Keeping Track of Onion Farming	After the distribution of onion saplings to the farmers, the plantation and farming of the saplings were monitored by the field staffs.

33.	Monitoring and Final Evaluation of the Project	The final evaluation questionnaire was prepared by VCN and approved by Sowers Action and the evaluation was carried out at the last of April 2022.
34.	Project Closure Meeting	The Project closure meeting was conducted with all the beneficiaries of the project on 4 <sup>th</sup> May 2022.

### **Brief on Project Objectives:**

#### **I. To support medium and long term food security and livelihood opportunities to domestic wage labors and rural migrant workers affected by Covid.**

To fulfill the above mentioned objective of the project, the beneficiaries were introduced to commercial vegetable farming through agricultural input support. After the selection of 300 beneficiaries for the project, they were differentiated into 6 groups: 50 farmers in one group. A Village Model Farmer (VMF) was selected from a group, for the purpose of leading the group. VMF was a farmers who already had some experience with commercial farming of vegetables and their marketing, who could help the rest of the group members with farming and guide them. For the assistance of the farmers, high quality seeds, watering cans, hermetic bags, fertilizers, vegetable saplings were provided at different stages of the project. Similarly, VMFs were supported with Nursery Tunnel and Pesticide Sprayers so that they could grow saplings of vegetables and distribute them to their respective groups. The beneficiaries were provided with training on vegetable farming: Production, Harvesting, Cleaning, Grading and Marketing.

Vegetable seeds and saplings were distributed in two phases: **Radish and Broad Leaves Mustard Green** in first phase and **Onion Saplings** in second phase.

##### **a. Radish and Broad Leaves Mustard Green Distribution:**

Each farmer was given with 250 grams each of Radish and Broad Leaf Mustard Green along with a watering can with sprayer. Hybrid Japanese seeds with high productivity were provided. 4 packets of seeds each weighing 125 grams was given. These amount of seeds is enough for production throughout the year i.e. three harvests per year. Training on ways to sow and produce radish and mustard was provided to the farmers. It took them about 55 days in average to harvest the vegetables.

The total income of 300 farmers during the first harvest of the Radish and Mustard Green was **NPR. 3,996,563**. The average income of each farmer was **NPR. 13,321.88** Per harvest. Some

farmers used the vegetables completely for self-consumption, while others sold the surplus remaining after gifting to their relatives and neighbors and using for self.

#### **b. Onion Saplings Distribution:**

After the harvest of Radish and Mustard Green, VMFs were provided with onion seeds for the production of saplings inside the nursery tunnel. Each VMF received 1kg of the seeds to be planted.

Later, saplings were distributed to the farmers. Each farmer got 15 bunches of onion saplings: 1 bunch had 150 saplings. Average income of a farmer from the onion is estimated to be NRP. 33,750 annually.

### **II. COVID-19 affected women, children, youth and men will have opportunities for recreation, learning and psychosocial support, creating a sense of normal life and social cohesion.**

COVID-19 not only affected people's health, social and economic life, but also gave them a tough time mentally. Many people had to go through mental issues like depression, anxiety, stress, violence and other troubles. Thus, to help those with the mental troubles caused by the pandemic and lockdown psychosocial support were provided to adults and children. Adults were provided with psychosocial counseling and structured recreational activities were conducted for children. For this purpose, our social mobilizers were trained along with our volunteers.

#### **a. Psychosocial Counseling:**

Individual and Group Counseling were arranged for the participants, where our social mobilizers and volunteers would listen to the individuals and counsel them. 50 sessions of group counseling and 100 sessions of individual counseling were carried out for the participants during the project period. They were counseled on stress management, anxiety, domestic abuse and substance abuse. The houses of 6 VMFs were identified as the Community Support Centers, from where counseling were provided.

#### **b. Recreational Activities for Children:**

To break down the monotony of children who had to stay at home for about a year in total during the lockdown, recreational activities were planned. However, schools started reopening at the time of our project implementation because of which coordination with schools was carried out for the execution of such activities for children. Three government schools "Namuna Sunkhani Basic School", "Shree Kshyamadevi Secondary School" and "Nepal Rastriya Madhyamik Vidhyalaya" were chosen as three of our Community Support Center for children and Community Hall was

chosen as the fourth. Activities such as Quizzes, Spelling Contests, Handwriting Competitions, Writing Covid Messages, Dances, Singings, Essay Writing and Games like Spoon Races were carried out in schools. Activities like aiding children with their homework and studies and local Nepali games like (races, Rumal Lukai, London Stop etc.) were carried out in community hall and ground. 30 activities were planned for children and we were successful to carry out 33 sessions. Around 800 students benefitted from the activities directly and indirectly. Prizes were provided to those who did well in the activities.

Moreover, with an aim of benefitting maximum students with our activities, 5 different children clubs were set up in schools: 1 in Namuna Sunkhani Basic School, 2 in Shree Kshyamadevi Secondary School and 2 in Nepal Rastriya Madhyamik Vidhyalaya. All the activities in schools were planned and conducted with the help of students in club and the teachers.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

The monitoring and evaluation of the project was carried out in the presented framework:

	Indicator	Definition	Target	Achieved	Data Source	Frequency	Responsible	Reporting
Goal	Support and empower immediate food and nutrition needs, livelihood sustainment in selected COVID-19 affected communities having domestic wage labors and migrant workers.	Distribution of Food and Nutrition Packages during the first phase, training and supporting the beneficiaries on vegetable farming, providing them with psychosocial counseling and conducting recreational activities for children	Improved nutrition, income and mental health of the participants.	Distributed 300 Food and Nutrition Packages during the 1 <sup>st</sup> phase, distributed seeds of Radish and Broad Leaf Mustard Green and saplings of onion to 300 farmers, distributed watering cans, hermetic bags and organic fertilizers to farmers and nursery tunnels to VMFs, provided training on production, harvesting, cleaning, grading and marketing of vegetables, conducted 150 counseling sessions in total (group and individual) and 33 recreational	Record Sheets for training and distribution, Minutes for counseling, minutes for recreational activities, letters from schools and track records of farmers.	6 times during the project.	Project Coordinator, Agri specialist, Psychosocial Counselor, Social Mobilizers, Finance Assistant and Volunteers	Bi- Monthly Reporting (Program and Finance), Final Program and Financial Report from the Project Coordinator and Finance and Logistic Officer

				sessions for children.				
Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seed and Saplings of vegetables Received</li> <li>No. of training Sessions</li> <li>No. of hermetic bags, fertilizer, watering cans received</li> <li>Nursery Tunnels and pesticide sprayers received by VMFs</li> <li>No. of Group Counseling sessions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seeds and Saplings collected by one individual</li> <li>No. of training sessions attended by one individual</li> <li>Sum of agricultural equipment received by each farmer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Year round vegetable seeds for 300 farmers.</li> <li>Training on Production, Harvesting, Cleaning, Grading and Marketing for all farmers and a separate training for VMFs.</li> <li>Hermetic Bags and Organic Fertilizers for farmers and Nursery tunnels and Pesticide</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>250 grams of Radish seeds and 250 grams of Broad Leaf Mustard Green seeds to each of 300 farmers and 15 bunches of onion saplings for each farmer.</li> <li>2 sessions of training for each farmer and a separate session for VMF.</li> <li>2 hermetic bags, 1 packet of organic fertilizer and 1 watering</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Record Sheets for training and distribution, Minutes for counseling, minutes for recreational activities, letters from schools and track records of farmers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3 times during distribution, 2 times during training, 1 time for the closure.</li> </ul>	Project Coordinator, Agri specialist, Psychosocial Counselor, Social Mobilizers and Finance Assistant	Program and Financial Report

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No. of Individual Counseling sessions</li> <li>No. of recreational sessions for school going children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sum of all counseling sessions</li> <li>Sum of all recreational sessions</li> </ul>	<p>Sprayers for VMFs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>100 Sessions Counseling (Individual + Group)</li> <li>30 sessions of recreational activities for children</li> </ul>	<p>can for each farmer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 nursery tunnel and 1 pesticide sprayer for a VMF.</li> <li>150 counseling session in total (Group+ Individual)</li> <li>33 Sessions of recreational activities.</li> </ul>				
Outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase in Income</li> <li>Households Benefitted</li> <li>Individuals benefited</li> <li>Families benefited</li> </ul>	Total households, individuals and families got the direct and indirect benefits of the project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase d Income of a household, 300 households from low income and their children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The average income of a household from radish and mustard green was <b>NPR. 13,321.8 8</b> and from onion is estimated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Total direct beneficiaries number from all activities</li> <li>Beneficiaries receipt record sheet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Once at the end of the project</li> <li>Once during the closure meeting</li> </ul>	Project Coordinator and Finance Assistant	Program Report

				<p>to be <b>NPR.</b> <b>33,750</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 300 households</li><li>• 1500 individuals</li><li>• 800 children</li></ul>				
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## **Integration of Cross Cutting Issues:**

### **1. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)**

The focus of the project were day laborers, migrants, women, the impoverished, and people from marginalized communities. Thus, to reach the targeted objectives GESI was adopted in the project as per VCN's policy. Our project beneficiaries comes from different ethnic backgrounds and 236 of our 300 beneficiaries are females.

### **2. Accountability and Transparency**

To ensure the project's accountability and transparency, the bimonthly report's Summary were shared with all stakeholders. The final project report will also be shared with them and in our website, which will make it accessible to everyone.

### **3. Environmental**

No environment harming activities were carried out during the project and such activities were absolutely prohibited. Farmers were encouraged to use organic fertilizers and pesticides. Farm manure was used to maximum extent by them for farming.

### **4. Resilience and Disaster Risk Reduction and Preparedness**

Barhabishe, Sindhupalchowk is prone to calamities. Flood and landslides are common in the area. In preparation for disasters, our social mobilizers have informed our beneficiaries about food security. For the same reason, we have supported them with hermetic bags. Hermetic bags keep the food safe from moisture. Dry radish and fermented mustard have been preserved by several of our farmers as dry meals for the mid-winter months when veggies will be scarce. These are some of the initiatives that have been put in place to help with food security.

## **Challenges**

“Sow against Covid- Response and Recovery Project 2021-22” was basically targeted to help people impacted socially, economically and mentally by the pandemic. However, the pandemic was a major challenge for us to implement the project. Some of the major challenges we were able to tackle during this project were:

- 1. Persistent Rain and Risk of Disaster:** During the starting of the project in August, our project site was experiencing persistent rain for days. Situated on the bank of Bhotekoshi River, Barhabishe is prone to flood and the steep village areas of the municipalities like

our target clusters are prone to landslide. This caused slight delay in implementation of the project and it started by the end of August 2021, though the team formation was completed by mid- August.

Also, there occurred an unexpected torrential rainfall during mid-October for at least a week, all over Nepal. Flood and landslides caused death of over 101 people, and destroyed crops worth of trillions. The rainfall affected our project also. The harsh rain impede the growth of vegetables, and as more water is also not good for plants, vegetables of some of the farmers died. They had to sow the plants again.

2. **Seasonal Crops and Inflation:** During the earlier phase of implementation of our project, most of the fields in Barhabishe had paddy and millets growing in them, which could not be destroyed for making the nursery tunnels. Thus, seeds were distributed to everyone against what was planned. Also, the price of construction materials soared up after the loosening of second wave of Covid, which also added to the delay in construction of the tunnels.
3. **Change in the Modality:** Originally, recreational activities for children was planned to be carried out in some public places and not in school as the children were at home due to closure of schools. However, it could not happen as the schools started reopening in early September 2021. Thus, we had to coordinate with schools and choose them as our Community Support Centers for Children. 3 schools were included in the program, and their coordination made it easier for project implementation.
4. **Season of Harvesting, Festivals and Holidays:** Although the target for psychosocial support has been met, there were many hurdles along the path. October- November is the harvesting and festival season in Nepal. Thus, farmers were busy with their work in harvesting rice and after that they got busy in largest festivals of the country. Schools were also closed and everyone was content in celebration. Thus, there were very less psychosocial support activities carried out at this period of time.
5. **Third Wave of COVID-19:** The third wave of Covid started in late December 2021 and cases were soaring with higher number of cases with each passing day. The variant was more infectious and there was a clear shortage of human resources in health during the third phase as many health professionals were diagnosed with the virus. Thus, the project activities needed to be halted for some period because of rising infection in our project areas, and there were some delays in meeting the target during those months.

# Learning

Every project is an opportunity for us to learn. The 10-months long project was full of opportunities for us to learn and improve ourselves. So of the lesson learned during the project are:

- 1. Change in the Modality:** The project activities needed to be changed slightly to reach the project goal because of different reasons already mentioned above. Watering cans were provided and schools were involved in the project, which were the ideas suggested by the beneficiaries themselves. Thus, keeping up with the needs of beneficiaries and some necessary deviations because of situations can boost the project even more.
- 2. Beneficiary feedback loop:** The inclusion of a beneficiary feedback loop improves the project's efficiency. This technique supports project accountability while also assisting beneficiaries in growing engagement and ownership of the project. The beneficiaries would directly talk to representatives from the head office during the field visit and there would be an interactive session with all. They provided us with the ideas and the progress of the project.
- 3. Active Participation of People and Inclusion:** The project was meant for vulnerable people: the people who were in need of support. Inclusion of vulnerable people had ensured the active participation in the project and ownership of the project by the people. People were involved actively and helped us reach the target. They didn't give up when the rain destroyed some of the farmers' vegetables. The persistence shown by farmers to achieve, what we collectively were striving for was commendable. This has made us realize the worth of support of our target group. A project can be successful if everyone associated with it are loyal towards it and work hard. This is what we have learned in these months.
- 4. Schools' Support and Coordination:** The schools were one of our stakeholders in the project. A project's backbone is coordination. Without effective coordination and cooperation from all parties, no project can be successful. The level of support we've received for implementing recreational support from our recipients and schools has been remarkable. This has inspired us to continue doing well.
- 5. Engagement with local authorities is critical:** Coordination with local authorities played a great role in the success of this project. Coordination with local government, ward offices and local volunteers made it easier for us to implement the project. The beneficiaries were identified together by the authorities and our team, which made inclusion possible.

A close relationship with local authority is pre-requisite for us to advocate for the most vulnerable and for the sustainable policies.

## **Stories**

The stories are attached separately.

## **Project Budget Overview**

The financial report is attached separately.

## **WAY FORWARD**

After three waves of COVID-19, economy of the country has experienced a downfall and many speculations are being made regarding the crisis. The inflation of groceries and items of daily uses has affected the purchasing power of the people. Skyrocketing price of petroleum products has further added to the price of basic items needed for survival. Around 15,500 jobs were lost during the first wave of COVID-19 and the lockdown, which was further aggravated by the second wave and extended lockdown. The risk of Covid has lessened but not yet been resolved, cases are still emerging though they are in fewer numbers. Vulnerable communities are still in need of concrete economic development plans from the government and related sectors. For the time being, livelihood recovery of the communities is a major priority. Along with this, there are certain areas where focus is required in order to avert further crises caused by COVID-19 and such epidemic:

- a. Formation and implementation of relevant contingency strategies and plans by the health system for emergencies.
- b. Capacity enhancement of health human resources and strengthening their number in the health facilities.
- c. Emergency resilient development planning
- d. Insurance coverage of investments and productive assets
- e. Livelihood recovery for those who have lost all of their source of income
- f. Research and processing mechanisms on possible outbreaks and their prevention
- g. Establishment of oxygen plants
- h. Striving towards and maintaining 100% vaccination for the appropriate population against COVID-19.
- i. Free Mental Health Helplines and Counseling.
- j. Strengthening health services and integrated disease surveillance and response systems.

k. School WASH facilities

While emergencies like COVID-19 affect the entire process of living, we must focus on converting adversity into opportunity during the recovery phase. The significance of pro-poor rehabilitation must be focused considering the factors such as multi-stakeholder commitment, volunteer involvement, and sustainability considerations.

**Following are attached separately:**

**ANNEX 1. Translation of Remaining Group Counseling Minutes**

**ANNEX 2. Stories**