



Session 3: Pandemics, disasters and shocks: Impacts on livelihood, occupations, habitat, resources, life

TS 311: “THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 AND COPING STRATEGIES OF THE SMALLHOLDER WOMEN VEGETABLE FARMERS IN THE EASTERN TARAI REGION OF NEPAL”

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Background

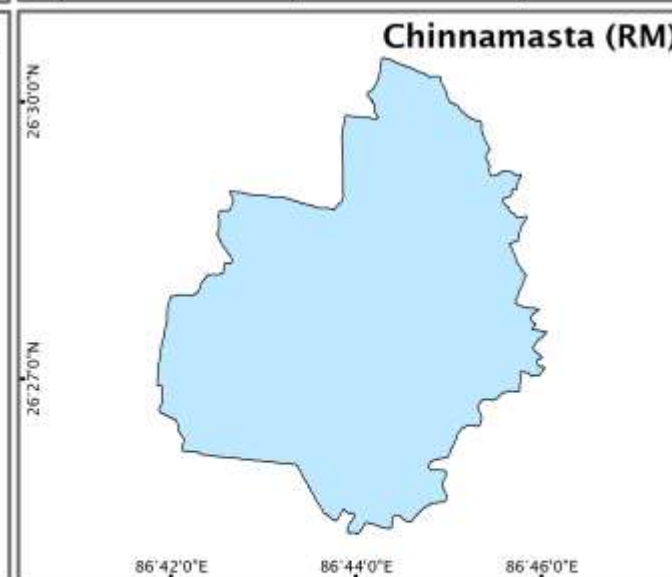
- The COVID 19 pandemic affected almost all the livelihood sectors globally, including the agriculture sector. Among them one of the most vulnerable was the livelihood of smallholder farmers (Leonardelli et al., 2021).
- The impact of the pandemic was disproportionate to low-income and women vegetable farmers.
- Rural women vegetable farmers in the Tarai Nepal were one of such hardest hit groups (Magar et al., 2021, Leder et al., 2022).
- It is important to understand their vulnerabilities during a shock to support for their sustainability and food security.



Aims of the study

- To explore the impact of COVID-19 on the smallholder women vegetable farmers.
- To identify the coping strategies smallholder women farmers implemented to survive during the COVID-19 crisis
- To identify the needs of smallholder vegetable farmers to remain resilient during a shock event like COVID-19.

**STUDY SITES (MUNICIPALITIES (M) /RURAL MUNICIPALITIES (RM)) IN
SAPTARI DISTRICT, NEPAL**



Study area features

- Four Municipalities - Shambhunath, Surunga, Balan Bihul and Chinnamasta Municipalities in Saptari district of Nepal.
- Lies in the Eastern region of Nepal Tarai and part of greater Gangetic Plains
- One of the main agricultural producer of the country.
- Social stratifications can be seen in terms of class, gender, ethnicity and land tenancy types.
- Densely populated area, Low Human Development Index (HDI) , literacy rate, per-capita income.
- Patriarchal system of society and agricultural practice.



Methodology

Qualitative study method

Method	Number	Participants
Focus Group Discussions	10	women vegetable farmers
In-depth interviews	25	women vegetable farmers
Key-Informant Interviews	16	District agriculture officer, Agriculture knowledge center, Prime-Minister Agriculture Modernisation Project officer, Market management committee, Local leaders

Gender lens

- Used **Feminist political ecology (FPE)** to look at the norms, gender relations embedded in power hierarchies in terms of social, economic, and cultural in specific historical, ecological, geographic, and political settings including to gendered subjectivities and roles (Harcourt, 2017).



Impact of COVID-19

Mobility restrictions

- Mobility opportunities for men and women are not same for both. Women do face mobility challenges but during the time of COVID the mobility for both were restricted. While in partial lockdown it was easier for mens to go out but women remained at home due to their gender roles.
- “There were restrictions on mobility everywhere in our district”. BB2

Difficulties in purchasing input supplies for farm production.

- “We always face shortage of fertilisers and input in our area but during the lockdown the shortage went very high especially fertilisers, seeds and pesticides were not available during the lockdown”. FGD2



Impact contd....

Difficulties to access wage labours.

“To find a wage labour during the COVID time was very difficult and they would ask for a higher wage rates. It was extremely difficult for single and widow women in the farming to find wage labours”. SN5

Difficulties in finding a seller/trader.

“Earlier traders (paikar) visited to our farms/home to buy vegetables. I preferred to sell to traders who visited home with respect to the selling at market” CM3



Impact contd....

Difficulties to pick vegetables

- “All of my vegetables (tomatoes, luffas, cauliflower) got rotten and over ripen on the farms as I could not pick on time” BB6

Weaker bargaining power

- “.. I cannot set price for my vegetables I am looking. I need to accept what is offered what customers and traders will offer. If I say I want to stick to my price, they [buyers] will not accept it.” CM1
- “during the pandemic if we find anyone to buy vegetables was really good, so we mention our price but at the end agreed on what they [consumers/traders] would propose”. SR4

Impact contd....

Lack of market access as markets

- Local weekly market (haatiya) generally operated twice or thrice close to villages and nearby market hubs were completely closed.
- “The collection center was not present in every village, instead it was in the nearby district which was 15 kms away.
- Lack of sufficient cold storage facilities available around the village vicinities. Farmers said it was far (20-30 km) and very expensive too.

Lack of market information updates

- Most of the women vegetable farmers would depend on their male or children to use mobile phone.

- **Lack of institutional support from state government**

Interms of essential input of the farm production process was not ensured.

Lack of proper information sharing among all groups, gender and communities.

Impact contd....

Lack of access to resources

- Women are deficit of funds, they are the poorest of the poor. Women vegetable farmers used their scarce saved resources.
- Received financial support from parents and relatives.
- Mortgaged their gold/silver for money, lend money in credit mostly from informal ways like money lending from local individuals and traders at very high interest rates such as 18-36%.
- They sold their livestock [goats, cows, buffalo] for money.
- Selling vegetable was a source of income which was abruptly stopped. Women vegetable farmers started to get resource deficit soon.
- They are the providers in the family so they consumed their saved resources for survival of their families.

What strategies women vegetable farmers implemented to cope with their situation

Modification in vegetables selling practices

- Many women vegetable sellers changed their usual place of selling vegetables such as they sat in the corner of the village ways and sold their produce. They can sell and quickly return to their home.
- “... men went to sell their vegetables to vegetable collection centers in another districts around 10-15 km away on bicycle mostly very early around 2 am- 4 am which was difficult for women to go” SR1
- “I asked my neighbor [brother] to sell for me. But he could help me with only a little amount of vegetable selling” SR3.

Selling vegetables door to door – “It was very difficult for women vegetable farmers particularly because of the restrictions and so I decided to sell my produce from door to door in the areas near by village” CM6.



Coping strategies contd...

- Reduced in farming size
- Changed in cropping pattern
- Shared labour [paichari] to meet the labour demand during the crisis
- Reduced the consumption of food particularly the mothers who became worried of the uncertain situation
- Nutritional insecurity in terms of consuming meat, fish and fruits were decreased in their consumption.
- Seek for resources from family and relatives.
- Also seek any care support needed from their family and friends.
- Vegetable farmers largely relied on their own vegetable production, some also shared and exchanged food with their neighbor. During partial lockdown they could buy during the dedicated time.

Conclusion and Recommendation

- Impact and adjustments related to COVID19 were contextual based on institutional arrangements, socio-cultural and local practices.
- Women largely rely on social capital during a shock event because they lack institutional support to cushion them to face a shock.
- Access to resources was very important for women smallholders to decide how they cope during a shock event.
- Access to vegetable collection center and sufficient cold rooms for the small-scale farmers was necessary for the vulnerable community for their financial security and bargaining power.
- Institution support is needed for the farmers who such shock event occurs to receive the information and how to plan the strategies to navigate the shock event.
- The hardship situation of women vegetable farmers was a result of unequal opportunities given to women which is deeply rooted in patriarchal culture.
- Market security was very important to the farmers, to ensure the demand and supply chain.

Field photos



Thankyou!

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