COVID Crisis Response: WASH in informal settlements in Nepal

Lajana Manandhar
LUMANTI Support Group for Shelter
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Status of informal settlements in Nepal

- Recently formed Land Issue Resolving Commission estimates that nearly 6 lakh families live in the informal settlements.

- It is estimated that 46000+ bigha of land has been distributed to the informal settlers in the last 3 decades.

- The informal settlements still exist and the issues remain the same.
WASH situation in the informal settlements

- People struggled for identity, decent life and to achieve their rights; human right, housing right, WASH right in the informal settlements. The struggle continues.

- No adequate investment made to improve living conditions including WASH facilities in the informal settlements.

- Critical WASH issues in the settlements are: Quantity, quality, feecal sludge management, affordability and more)

- COVID exposed the health risks accumulated in the informal settlements.
COVID Crisis

- We conducted FGDs in 30 urban poor communities in Kathmandu valley, eastern and western parts of Nepal to learn the immediate impact of COVID.

- FGDs highlighted issues such as the loss of income, hunger, survival, and uncertainty of future. The earlier demand to the government was also to provide adequate supply of food relief. These issues seem to have dominated WASH issues.

- Purchasing water during lock down had posed a dilemma to the poor; whether to buy food or water? Which one to consume less; food or water?

- Dilemma during a period of ‘shortage’ had given a mental stress. People spoke that the only thing remaining is to go ‘insane’. A desperate situation!
COVID quick survival actions

- Food relief package distributed along with a bar of soap. Hand washing stations installed and water purchased in few urban communities. Public space was sprayed with disinfectants. PPEs provided to the sanitation workers.

- Community groups supported local governments in establishing local quarantine centres.

- The local women managed saving and credit cooperatives were provided access to fund to provide interest free loan to their members to meet their food, WASH, health and livelihood needs.
Protection from Past Practices

- ODF drive resulted in the construction of private toilets and promotion of hand washing practice
- Organized communities and installation of water storage tanks in the poor communities
- Access to piped water supply irrespective of tenure status
- Provision of easy loan for WASH and livelihood improvement for building resilience
- Decentralized water supply system in the informal settlements
- Integrating WASH with secured and permanent housing schemes.
- Availability of WASH materials in the stockpiles for use in emergency
Recommendations

- Create a database. Make it live. Respect the rights. Show seriousness to address the issues of the informal settlements.

- Make and implement a citywide investment plan; short term and long term. Promote the practice of good governance.

- Work in partnership with the communities and build strong monitoring mechanisms.

- Realize patchwork will not give dignity and sustained protection to the people neither ensure safer and healthy environment for all the citizens. This is an important COVID lesson.