

# Situation Report on COVID-19 and Lockdown Impact in Rural Areas of Darjeeling District

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Submitted by:

**DLR  
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## **Situation Report on COVID-19 and Lockdown Impact in Rural Areas of Darjeeling District**

### **Summary and Recommendations:**

DLR Prerna circulated a Rapid Response Survey to our community partners in rural Darjeeling District. Our Survey was designed to get a basic understanding of the different ways in which the COVID-19 Pandemic and the current lockdown were having an impact on rural communities. A significant portion of our work takes place in rural schools, so we asked some specific questions about education arrangements.

The 158 respondents include Primary School Teachers in Low-Cost Private Schools (27%), Tea Plantation Workers (27%), Students (10%), Community Health and Social Workers (10%), Skilled and Semi-skilled workers (7%), Farmers (5%) Unemployed Community Members (13%).

The survey format (Google Forms in Nepali and English) was only accessible to people with internet access, appropriate technology (smart phone or computer) and who are literate. We also conducted more in-depth telephone interviews with selected community representatives.

The three biggest concerns for all respondents were Food (57 %), LPG Cylinders (36%), Family Health (22%).

- In some rural areas, shops are not opening at all. It is unclear if this is due to lack of stock, due to fear on the part of the shopkeepers, or some other reason. It is essential that people have access to essential goods as close to home as possible.
- While most people have now received free rations from PDS, they have concerns about securing dahl, oil and vegetables.
- Communities are also concerned because many people can not get necessary medicines, masks and sanitizers, cleaning products
- Given that LPG is exempt from current restrictions, it must be examined if there are issues in supply chains to rural areas.
- More than 50% of those who sell vegetables and milk are no longer selling their produce. Of those who usually sell, livestock, meat and poultry, none are currently selling. Food supply should be maintained and producers can maintain their income.
- 74 % of respondents said that some families in their community need immediate extra help with food, money and medicine.

Rural areas have been very proactive and local Samaj, local police and community members have been working hard to ensure community compliance with social distancing and lockdown measures. However, in some villages, this means that no-one can come in and out, posing a difficulty for access to essential goods and services.

In many communities, the vehicle owners and drivers are no longer coming to town. While all travel must be reduced, this must also be balanced with the need to maintain supply chains for essential items like food, LPG and medicines. Some farmers and producers have also been

unable to send their produce to market, resulting in financial losses. Some awareness and support is needed to ensure that the supply chain can be maintained safely.

People are very concerned about wage loss. In some areas, people received only pay for 9 out of 15 days in the last pay period.

### Key Actions

- Support supply chains for LPG in rural areas
- Support access to market for local producers and farmers
- Encourage continued community action to keep rural areas safe is balanced with need to maintain essential goods and services
- Ensure employers comply with orders for payment of full salaries during lockdown

### Children and Education:

About three quarters of teachers were able to send work home to the children, and about the same proportion are in touch with parents/guardians during the lockdown. Most teachers are using WhatsApp groups to send work and remain in touch with children and their families. However, not everyone has access to communication facilities. Some teachers are sending work to neighbours of children who then share it with the family.

Parents are concerned as many children are struggling with their studies within the COVID19 lockdown. We must identify:

- if the type and difficulty of work being set for students is appropriate
- if the amount of work being set for students is appropriate
- what supports students needs
- What support do parents need to guide their children.

Major challenges identified for children (by parents, family members and caregivers - we did not ask children directly) included difficulties in completing studies, loneliness and boredom, having to stay indoors, lack of space/support in the house to study/play

Challenges identified for children by their teachers included:

- Parents are struggling to guide the children in completing any study or work
- The need for some kind of structured learning (although access to some students/parents is difficult, not all have access to whatsapp or other online messaging platforms)
- Need for games, play and enjoyment
- Some children do not have access to their school books, educational materials, pencils

- Need for accurate health information and awareness, as well as good nutrition

We must identify ways to reach out and support parents and children, especially those who are marginalised and may not have access to technology and support.

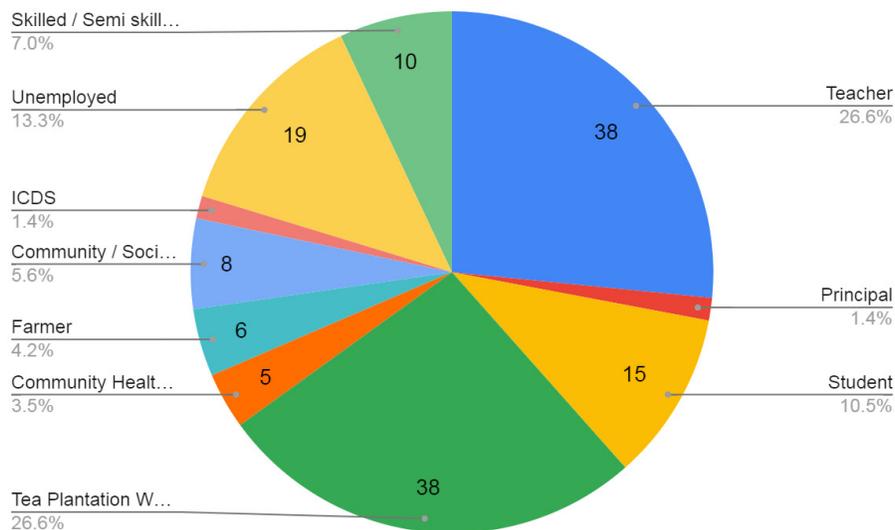
**Key Actions:**

- Further investigation of current education practices
- Ensure teachers and parents have reasonable expectations of children
- Practical supports and advice
- Mental health supports for parents and children
- Key public health messages for parents and children
- Accessible tools and resources
- Proper planning for school opening after lockdown that is fair and reasonable for students, teachers and families.

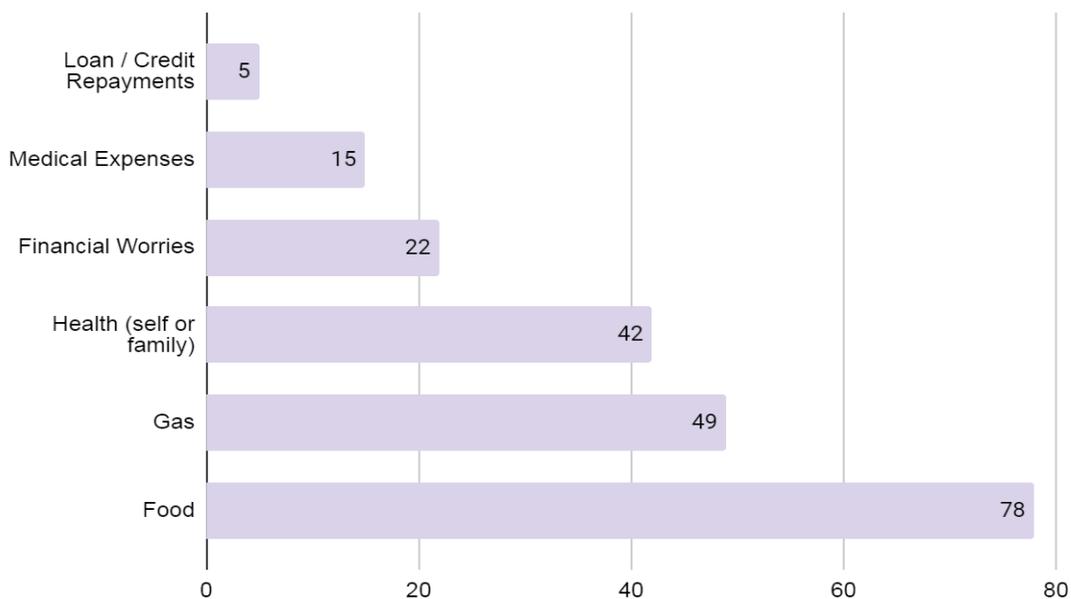
Please reach out to Roshan [rairoshan@gmail.com](mailto:rairoshan@gmail.com) +91 99320 24812 for details or clarifications.

## Situation Report on COVID-19 and Lockdown Impact in Rural Areas

Darjeeling Prerna circulated a Rapid Response Survey to our community partners in rural Darjeeling in a google survey format in Nepali and English. The first survey was sent on 1 April 2020. In addition to basic details on the respondents, the survey asked about their current concerns, about their access to essential food and medicines, about financial implications, and about the impact on children and their education.



The three biggest concerns for all respondents were Food (57%), Gas (36%) and Family Health (22%). However, among non-teachers, 70% reported that food access was a major concern. Respondents were from 16 tea plantations, 3 forest villages and 9 different khasmal villages and towns.

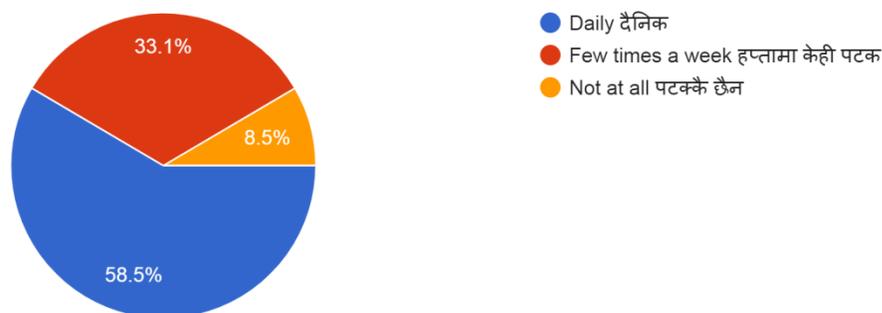


It is important to note that many respondents are concerned about access to Gas(LPG). Given that this is exempt from current restrictions, we are not sure if there are issues with supply chains to rural areas.

### Access to Food:

Is your local shop open? के तपाईंको स्थानीय पसल खुला छ?

142 responses



While it is clear that many shops have reduced their opening times, it is concerning that for some respondents, their local shop is not open at all. It is unclear if this is due to lack of stock, due to fear on the part of the shopkeepers, or some other reason. It is essential that people have access to essential goods as close to home as possible.

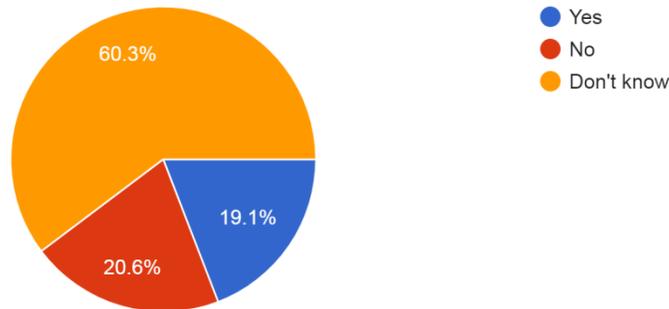
Even in rural areas, only one third of respondents are growing any kind of food. Of those who are growing, maximum (82%) are only growing for home consumption which is an encouraging step towards food security. Although the sample size is small, more than 50% of those who sell vegetables and milk are no longer selling their produce. Of those who usually sell, livestock, meat and poultry, none are currently selling.

This needs further investigation to ensure food supply is maintained and that producers can maintain their income.

When asked if stock levels in their local shops were sufficient, respondents were unsure. We must ensure sufficient food stock as close to community as possible.

Is there enough stock right now in the shop? पसलमा अहिले पर्याप्त सामान छ?

141 responses



74 % of respondents said that some families in their community need immediate extra help with these items. Even with the distribution of sufficient food under the PDS there needs to be a relook on food distribution from the perspective of nutritional security of rural communities by ensuring diversity of food distribution to include pulses and other key nutritious food.

#### **Questions about Children and Education:**

For parents who were surveyed, we asked if they had received schoolwork from their child's school:

40% of parents reported that children are not managing to complete studies and work sent by the school. This needs further exploration to understand the challenges and find out:

- if the type and difficulty of work being set for students is appropriate
- if the amount of work being set for students is appropriate
- what supports students needs
- how can we support parents to guide the children

Major challenges identified for children (by parents, family members and caregivers - we did not ask children directly) included:

- Difficulties in completing studies
- Loneliness and boredom, having to stay indoors
- Lack of space/support in the house to study/play

Challenges identified for children by their teachers included:

- Parents are struggling to guide the children in completing any study or work
- The need for some kind of structured learning (although access to some students/parents is difficult, not all have access to whatsapp or other online messaging platforms)
- Need for games, play and enjoyment
- Some children do not have access to their school books, educational materials, pencils
- Need for accurate health information and awareness, as well as good nutrition

About three quarters of teachers were able to send work home to the children, and about the same proportion are in touch with parents/guardians during the lockdown.

We must identify ways to reach out and support parents and children, especially those who are marginalised and may not have access to technology and support. Key messages must include:

- Acknowledgment of stress and anxiety
- Mental health supports for parents and children
- Key public health messages for parents and children
- Practical ways to support teachers and parents