

A coordinated approach and effort for broader health emergency preparedness and response

Sanjit Singh has been working at Gaddachauki Ground Crossing Point for the past two years. As the District Coordinator of the Peace Restoration Home, Singh used to inform Nepalese going to India about potential human trafficking and smuggling, robbery, fraud and other risks. Women and children who were going to India or those at potential risk were rescued from the border and reunited with their families.

Along with Singh, there are now employees from many organizations at the Gaddachauki Ground Crossing Point (GCP) who are screening and counseling those going to India, mainly for employment purpose. Similarly, they are also screening returnee migrants, and providing them psychological first aid, and providing them with information and referral services as deemed necessary.

Sanjit Singh, Coordinator of Peace Restoration Home Kanchanpur, said "Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) training conducted by the project has made it possible to offer counseling to the migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic. Previously, counseling to migrants focused only against the possible trafficking. The situation at the Ground Crossing Point and the behavior of the migrants were different during the pandemic. Most of them had returned because they lost their jobs due to the pandemic. Many migrants were depressed, and when the staffs at GCP tried to maintain public health and safety measures and provide information about the COVID-19, they would

get angry and agitated. The misconceptions about COVID-19 was rampant."

"The training on Risk Communication and Community Engagement to the staffs working at the border, such as security personnel, health desk staff, NGO staffs etc. provided the factual information about the disease and effective way in communicating with the migrants. As we were able to impart the actual information in coordinated way amongst all the workers at GCP, it became easier to inform the migrants against the COVID-19."

He also shared, "When the transmission rate of COVID-19 was high, migrants did not express willingness to get tested at the border. They were also scared that they would be sent off to quarantine after the test, and while they were alone there, they could even die. Likewise, there were even bigger misconceptions about the COVID-19 vaccine. Nobody wanted to get vaccinated. At the training, we learned how to deal with the misconceptions, and how to offer counseling to the migrants."

Similarly, Laxmi Kunwar of Maiti Nepal also shared that the Risk Communication and Community Engagement training made it easier to work at the border. She said, "The training helped the personnel mobilized at the border areas to spread public awareness about COVID-19, and also supported in providing the services to the migrants in coordinated manner."