

ABSTRACT
An Assessment of Impact of Conflict on Health Service delivery system for the rural population of Nepal, June 2005

Nepal has been affected by a violent insurgency since 1996 when the Maoists declared a “People’s War”. The intensity of the conflict has increased over the years, and to date more than 12,000 people have been killed. Vital infrastructure has been destroyed and in many areas, developmental efforts and Governmental reform has been significantly affected.

Nepal has made significant improvements in the health outcomes over the past 15 years, but the direct and indirect impact of the conflict on the health system delivery is a cause for concern. Although the health sector is comparatively less directly targeted than for instance the education sector, the indirect impact of the unstable security situation has not been well documented. The World Bank commissioned a study in 2005 to assess the impact of the current conflict situation on the delivery of essential health care services for the rural population of six districts (two in the Mid Western Region and four in the Central Region) of Nepal and to recommend remedial measures.

The six districts of Nepal were purposively selected based on the level of insurgency and from different ecological zones. Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies were applied to collect information. Altogether 38 group discussions were conducted with 215 participants. The interviews were conducted at the center and the district level focused on impact of conflict on health infrastructure, service provision, health workers, management of quality health services and experiences in dealing with security personnel in districts.

The study shows that the community level workers and volunteers like Female Community Health Volunteer (FCHV) continue to provide basic essential health care services but the delivery of health services in rural areas by the existing public health system remains fragile and uncertain for assuring quality of care.

The main findings of the study are as follows:

Impact on health infrastructure: Health facilities had not been directly targeted by the insurgents. Nevertheless, some facilities housed in Government building such as Village Development Committee (VDC) offices had sustained damage or destruction during attacks on the VDC offices.

Impact on service provision: The outlook of insurgents towards health programs and health workers was reported to be relatively positive as compared to other sectors. Special national campaigns such as National immunization days for polio and Measles immunization, biannual Vitamin A supplementation & de-worming programs as well as family planning sterilization camps were not much affected. It was also reported that insurgents supported such events by participating in the advocacy efforts and making allowances for the vehicles to move unhindered.

Impact on health workers: The insurgency had affected health services due to a large number of undesirable factors noted in the field as: intimidation, harassment, extortion and threats. Most of the health workers reported that they were compelled to pay levy and donations to the insurgents. Health workers reported that they were also facing problems by security forces, who would pressure the health workers not to treat the insurgents.

Impact on management of quality health services at district level: Technical support visits and supervision had been confined to safe and accessible areas. Frequent and unpredictable general strikes necessitated adjustment of Health programs planning and implementation. The strikes also badly affected the supply and distribution of commodities, drugs and vaccines as shown in the study. Furthermore, in the absence of locally elected bodies, the Local Health Management Committees (LHMC) was not functioning effectively. INGOs and donor agencies were also not implementing activities directly at the field level at the time of the study, but through governmental systems (District Public Health Offices (DPHOs), and District Health Offices (DHOs).

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following remedial measures were recommended to increase access, availability and utilization of health services as envisioned in the National Health Policy.

- Improving the confidence of health workers is an urgent priority. There is a need to assess the impact on the quality of health services to enhance quality of care and maintain staff motivation.
- Improvement in technical support and supervision in innovative modality by introducing a third party continuing technical and managerial supervision system in partnership with capable and experienced NGOs and private institutions.
- Local health management committees (LHMCs) are to be empowered and made more autonomous.
- Central level authorities to monitor continuously conflict and health management system by developing a conflict and health monitoring approach and indicators in coordination with district officials and External Donor Projects.
- A feed back to security forces to extend appropriate behavior with health workers be conveyed from central health authorities that helps development of right kind of interpersonal communication skills, respect for human values and human rights.
- Orientation of security forces at front lines level on Geneva Convention and other international resolutions and practices governing the rights and duties of health workers and other civilians.

Source: The World Bank, Health, Nutrition and Population (HNP), Nepal Country Office