

**Monitoring report of diarrhea outbreak of Mid and Far
Western Regions
Hotel Himalaya, Lalitpur
August 15, 2009**

Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC) has called for an effective coordination mechanism among government agencies, I/NGOs and other volunteers working in diarrhea-affected districts to control the diarrhea epidemic.

Releasing a monitoring report on diarrhea outbreak of Mid-Western and Far-Western Regions at Hotel Himalayan, Lalitpur on August 15, INSEC has also urged the government to monitor the quality of food distributed by different organizations in remote districts and supply adequate food on time.

Addressing the report release program, INSEC chairperson Subodh Raj Pyakurel informed that people from dalit community were mostly affected due to the epidemic. He also made it clear that INSEC raised the issue as it was directly related with people's right to health.

Pyakurel further stressed the need of monitoring the quality of food upto the point of distribution. He appealed all to initiate efforts for providing hygienic food to people as most of the people of diarrhea-affected districts are suffering from malnutrition. He also added that INSEC prepared the report to present true picture of the epidemic-hit districts and urged all to monitor their activities and provide quality services to the people rather than being engaged in the blame game.

Coordinator of INSEC Mid-Western Regional Office Bholu Mahat presented the situation of Mid and Far Western Regions during the program.

According to the statistics released by INSEC a total of 394 people- 190 male and 204 female have died due to diarrhea in these regions from May 30 to April 15. Similarly, 124 children have also died due to epidemic during the period. Stating that in average over three persons were dying each day in the epidemic-hit districts, INSEC said, "The situation is in emergency phase and in serious trouble according to WHO standard."

INSEC also criticized the government for its failure to provide effective service in epidemic-hit districts. "On August 3, Health Minister Uma Kant Chaudhary claimed that the epidemic was already under control but the death toll has kept rising, which only proves the government apathy towards the problem," the report added.

"According to Regional Health Directorate, of the 101 posts of doctors in Dailekh, Jajarkot, Rukum, Salyan, Rolpa, Surkhet, Dang and Dolpa districts of Mid Western Region, only 33 doctors were working there. Of the four posts of doctors in Jajarkot district, currently only one doctor has been working. Similarly, of the 70 posts of doctors in the Far Western Region, only 39 doctors have been appointed. The health posts and sub-health posts also did not have sufficient human resource," the report further added.

According to INSEC a team from INSEC Mid-Western Regional office carried out field monitoring of Khalanga, Khagenkot, Rokayagaun, Jhapra and Dhime VDCs of Jajarkot district from August 4-9, 2009 and assessed the situation of these VDCs. "During the monitoring visit, locals of these VDCs complained that Deprox Nepal, a local NGO, and some INGOs distributed substandard foods in the areas. Diarrhea outbreak in the area turned into an epidemic this year because of the severe drought which impeded natural water purifying procedure. Likewise, defecating in the open, superstition and rigid tradition were also responsible for the outbreak. Likewise, malnutrition which is a severe problem in the diarrhea-hit areas is also contributing to the spread of disease.

Date-expired water purifying medicine 'Water-guard' and 'Piyush' were also found in the district. However due to the weak monitoring mechanism, it could not be traced which organization had distributed it," the report explained.

INSEC has also stated that absence of health personnel in the health offices and hospitals in remote districts as per the assigned number of positions, lack of effective government system of monitoring the health facilities and lack of state sensitivity and attention towards checking the disease when it showed a sign of being an epidemic are main obstacles/challenges for controlling the disease.

INSEC also displayed the samples of substandard food and date-expired medicine during the report release program and handed over the samples to Consumer Rights Protection Forum (CRPF) for quality test of these samples. Vice Chairperson of CRPF, Sita Ram Maskey informed that they would release the report after testing the samples collected by INSEC.

The comments of the speakers at the program are as follows:

Subodh Raj Pyakurel, Chairperson, INSEC

INSEC has not mentioned it anywhere that the rice distributed by WFP caused cholera which becomes clear on the official reports of INSEC. Our demand is limited to monitoring of the distributed rice by concerned authority as substandard rice was found in the diarrhea-affected areas. But I regret that WFP and WHO issued a refusal statement mentioning me as saying cholera was caused by WFP-distributed food grains.

The people are still dying when the Prime Minister is claiming that all things are in place to control the disease. Along with this, there are discrepancies in statistics provided by different government agencies which exposes how the system of the government functions.

This program is organized to shed light on present condition of the Mid and Far Western Regions from the regional coordinators of the said regions who are continuously monitoring the diarrhea-affected areas and to hand over the samples of the food distributed in the areas to Consumers Right Protection Forum (CRPF).

We are not the law-implementing agency. Our job is to draw the attention of the concern bodies. Whatever we said is based on our observation and the words of the locals. The samples are collected from the local consumers.

The main reasons for the spread of the disease include rigid tradition, people choosing domestic treatment and shamans over modern treatment, no

maintenance of the water resources damaged during the conflict, the compulsion of the people to drink polluted water from dirty water tanks and defecating in the open. Diarrhea outbreak in the area turned into an epidemic this year also because of the severe drought which impeded natural water purifying procedure. Likewise, malnutrition which is a severe problem in the diarrhea-hit areas is also contributing to the spread of disease.

Sita Ram Maskey, Vice-chairperson, Consumers Rights Protection Forum (CRPF)

CRPF will make the report public as soon as possible after handing over the food samples provided by INSEC to lab of the Department of Food Technology. I would like to request the friends working as monitors at CRPF from this platform to reveal the truth and to provide the report to INSEC also.

It is necessary to make the consumers aware of the type of the collected samples, distributors, origin, quality and what the government was doing while such kind of food was being supplied because this is the issue directly related with people's health. It is another matter that what kind of results these tests will reveal and the consequence of the results but such discussion on this issue shows that there must be some shortcomings which should be rectified with collective effort.

Mohan Raj Adhikari, Deprox Nepal

It should be made clear whether the WFP-distributed rice was responsible for the spread of diarrhea. It would have been better if INSEC had clarified the weaknesses in distribution procedure which led to degeneration of the quality. Along with that whether polluted water sources and lack of medics were also responsible or the rice distributed by WFP alone, this also should be made clear.

Palbir Thapa, Legal Practitioner

This program has been a big answer to those criticizing human rights defenders of being inactive. CRPF should make public the report of the lab testing of food samples collected by INSEC within two days. Those who were distributing food would claim that they were distributing good quality food but nearly 400 persons have lost their lives. No body is raising voice even when such a number of persons are dying. This all happened due to negligence, reason of which should be dug up.

Pitambar Acharya, Deprox Nepal

DEPROX has been working for six years in the area where the diarrhea is raging. Negligence is also a reason for diarrhea. During the test, we did not find the quality of the water in Jajarkot district headquarters acceptable. Lack of public awareness might have been a reason. I don't mean that rice was not bad. If there are some weaknesses during distribution, let's find that out. WFP gives us sample of the rice to be distributed and we provide that to our staffs. We have turned back tens of truck of rice when the samples and the food brought for distribution did not match. We returned 16 trucks of rice brought for distribution to the Kosi-affected people. We have also returned rice which had reached Jajarkot. Shortcomings do occur at times. I don't claim that rice was not bad. I think the problems of drinking water and toilets are also quite serious.

Trilochan Upreti, Secretary, Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers

INSEC reports were reliable during the conflict period and even now we are using them as reference. The food items reached the districts through different government agencies after the WFP provided them to Nepal government. It might not be true that WFP-distributed rice caused diarrhea. INSEC should be careful about dependability of the publicized report regarding the reliability of food items distributed by WFP and the collected samples.

Ratna Kumar Sami, SAPPROS

It would have been better to collect the samples of the food items distributed by WFP in the presence of all stakeholders. Toilets in the open are used in Mid and Far Western Regions. Food might be a major cause of diarrhea but it would have been better to include issue of open toilets in the report.