# Success story: Nepal

## Responding to communities during COVID-19
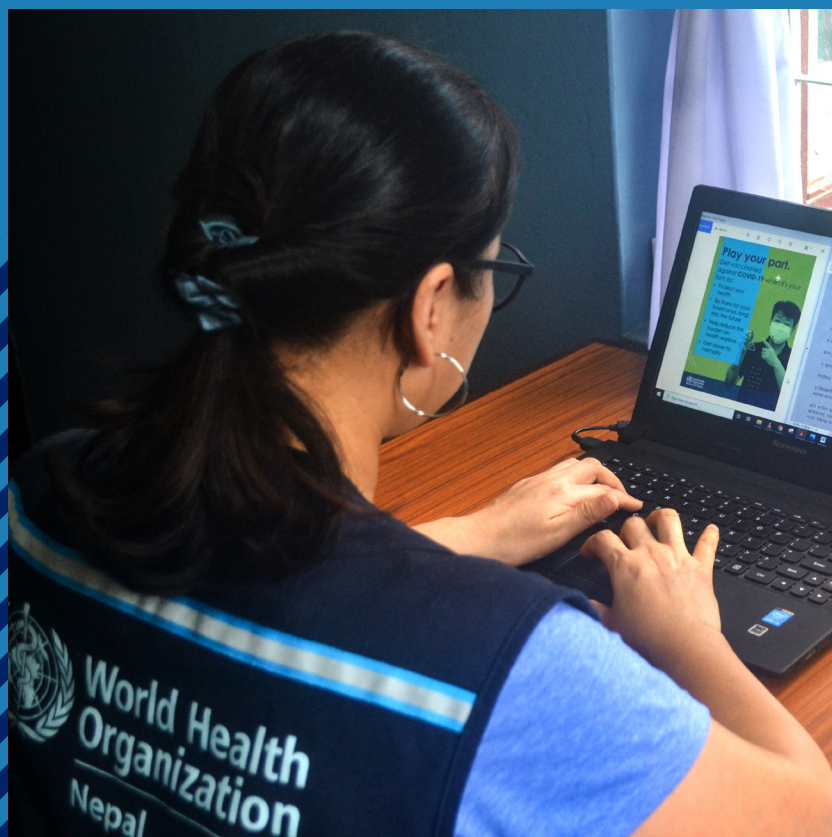
# The AMR-SORT IT programme supported national call centres to increase community awareness for tackling COVID-19

## The challenge

The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic and the lack of early and effective communication with communities in Nepal created an environment ripe for rumours and misinformation. Health workers reported unnecessary fears, self-medication with antibiotics and reticence about vaccination.

## The solution

The AMR-SORT IT programme helped address this challenge by ensuring that the operational research team at the WHO country office were trained to acquire a "tool-kit" of skills and core competencies that were used transversally for building health system resilience at the time of a pandemic[1]. They acquired skills in areas of outbreak response such as situation analysis, setting up surveillance systems and effective communication. These skills were used to:

- Provide technical support for the launch of a *central call centre* with 15 staff, which rapidly evolved to become the national hub for responding to rumours and concerns on various aspects of COVID 19. The centre also supports surveillance by receiving notification of suspected COVID-19 cases and deaths and transmitting this information for action. The centre also provides education on avoiding unnecessary antibiotic use and on the benefits of vaccination.

- Support the Ministry of Health and Population in designing and delivering key messages on COVID 19 for media briefings, radio, television and social networks. Technical support was led by the AMR-SORT IT operational research fellow and supported by the communications team of the WHO country office in Nepal.

## The importance

The call centre, the media network, the capacity built and the financial and technical support provided through the AMR-SORT IT programme all contributed to improving communication and surveillance activities in Nepal. The call centres and social media contribute to the ongoing COVID-19 response and in tackling antimicrobial resistance. A sustainability plan needs to be developed to ensure the viability of the centres and the media network for future pandemics.

**From March 2020 to mid-December 2021, there had been 286,451 responses to calls. This success has resulted in the progressive scale-up of such centres to six more provinces in the country. Three organizations, including the Nepal Medical Association, Nursing Department of Epidemiology and Disease Control and the GTA Foundation have also established call centres and telemedicine facilities.**



Health staff at a call center responding to calls

**I commend the valuable technical support provided by the AMR SORT IT fellow in debunking COVID 19 rumours, misinformation and concerns. The skills acquired through the SORT IT training proved useful for the review and validation of information, data analysis and effective communication, which helped generate simple and transparent messages for public awareness on COVID-19.**

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## References:

1. Investing in Operational Research Capacity Building for Front-Line Health Workers Strengthens Countries' Resilience to Tackling the COVID-19 Pandemic. Tropical Medicine and Infectious Disease 2020, 5, 118. https://www.mdpi.com/2414-6366/5/3/118