In Nepal, the UN has worked with the Government from the very onset of the pandemic to provide support to the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP) to prepare and respond to the pandemic. WHO has been providing technical advice, human resources and logistic support to the Government of Nepal. WHO’s technical assistance has ranged from providing information and guidance on latest developments surrounding COVID-19 to facilitating trainings of health care workers on a variety of issues including critical care of COVID-19 patients and Case Investigation and Contact Tracing (CICT). WHO has also worked closely with the National Public Health Laboratory to enhance lab capacity across the country resulting in the increase in number of labs capable of conducting RT-PCR tests from zero to 96, all within a year’s time. With support from WHO MoHP set up a call center in the early days of the pandemic with the objective to provide accurate information on COVID-19 to the public. The center, now being run by a team of 46 agents, has proven to be an extremely useful listening tool and guided the Ministry’s efforts to address rumours and combat misinformation spreading in communities. WHO staff have also been deployed at various COVID-19 hub hospitals across the country and were involved in carrying out rapid assessment of hospital preparedness and response, among other tasks. With support from WHO, MoHP has also conducted two rounds of national seroprevalence survey. Preliminary findings from the second round of the survey have been publicized; and full report is expected to be released soon.

Furthermore, the cluster system is embedded in the government’s humanitarian preparedness and response framework. As such, the decision to officially activate the humanitarian architecture rests with the government. At the outset of the deadly second wave, the UN advocated strongly with the government on cluster activation, in order to ensure the fullest range of support was provided in that critical time of need. As a result, Nepal’s response became the only COVID-19 specific response to be recognized by OCHA globally as an ongoing humanitarian emergency.

In its support to government efforts to combat COVID-19, UN led clusters identified and prioritized key bottlenecks constraining progress on the response, and senior UN officials engaged in high level coordination and advocacy to bring these issues to the forefront. Such issues included constraints in controlling COVID-19 at points of entry and suggestions to strengthen efforts, support to refining risk communication activities and recommendations on developing more integrated isolation approaches. When the second wave of COVID-19, fuelled by the highly transmissible Delta variant, took hold in Nepal, the UN worked quickly to support the government in identify and publishing a list of critical commodity needs. Working through the newly activated humanitarian architecture, the UN led the Humanitarian Country Team and coordinated with key stakeholders to overcome complex logistical challenges associated with supply chain delays and the closed airport and address the most critical needs. Some of the most notable achievements have been essential to saving lives in the COVID-19 response, including oxygen supply, testing kits and finally after concerted advocacy the procurement of vaccines to help address vaccine inequity.