



Binaya Pasakhala

15 June 2022

Harvesting the Himalayan Gold in a time of crisis: Comparison of three countries

Presentation outline

Introduction

Methodology

Results and discussion

Conclusion



Yartsa gunbu – Himalayan Gold



- Caterpillar infected by fungus
- Habitat: 3500-5200m



- Length: 4.3 to 11.3 cm





Socio-economic Importance

Large influx of collectors to high altitudes at the harvest sites during May to June annually

Worth more than its weight in gold

Contributes <60% of total cash income of rural households (Shrestha et al. 2013; Negi et al. 2017; Laha et al., 2018)

Objectives

Examining knowledge, attitude, and perceptions of COVID-19 among rural mountainous communities

Assess the impacts of COVID-19 on livelihoods of caterpillar fungus collectors



Study sites

Bhutan

Tsento, Paro

27° 26' N, 89° 25' E

Access only to individuals from the local administrative unit- *dzongkhag*

India

Chiple-Kedar valley,
Pithoragarh

30° 00' N, 80° 20' E

Access only to individuals from the local administrative unit- *Van Panchayat*

Nepal

Marma
Darchula

29° 50' N, 80° 31' E

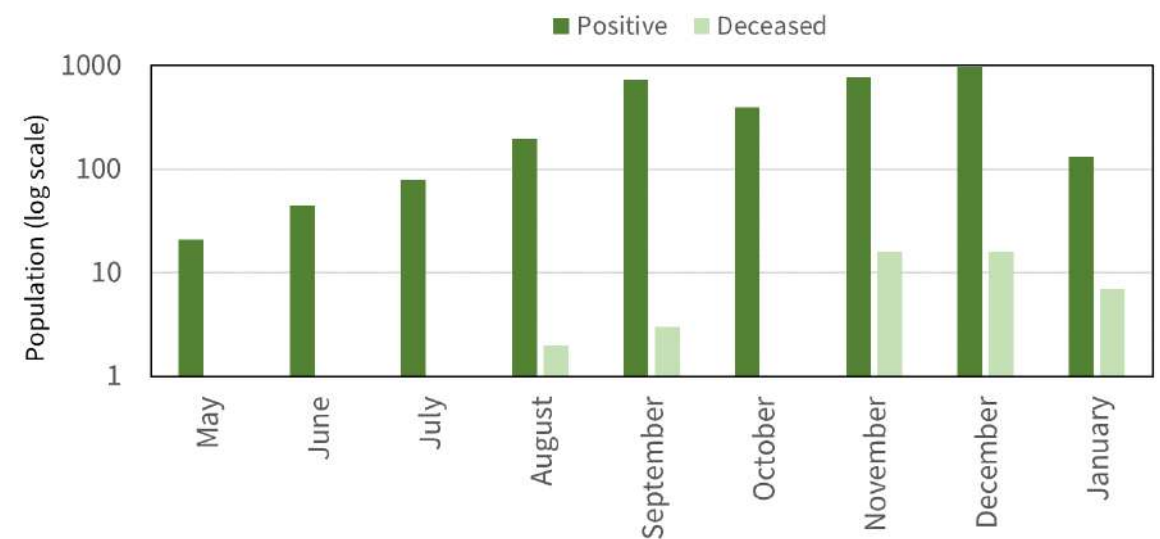
Access to any Nepali citizen upon the payment of a collection fee charged by the local government

Saipal,
Bajhang

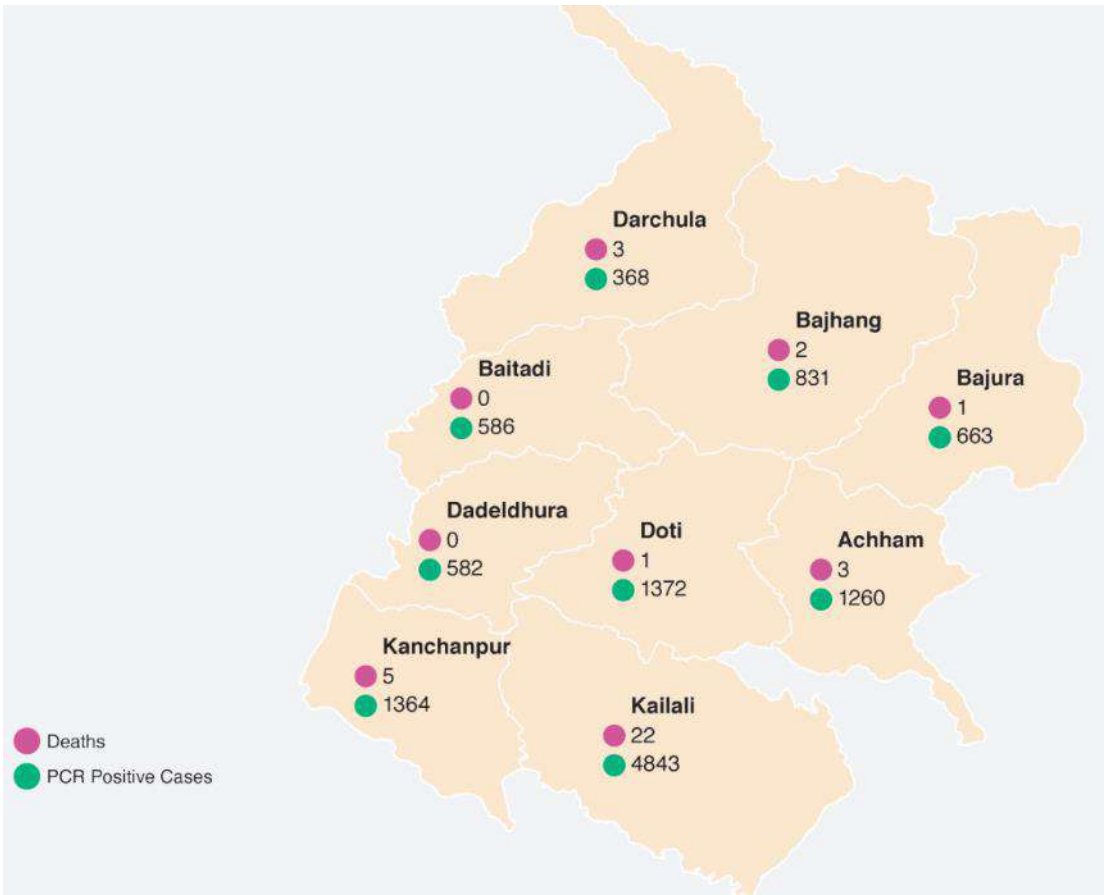
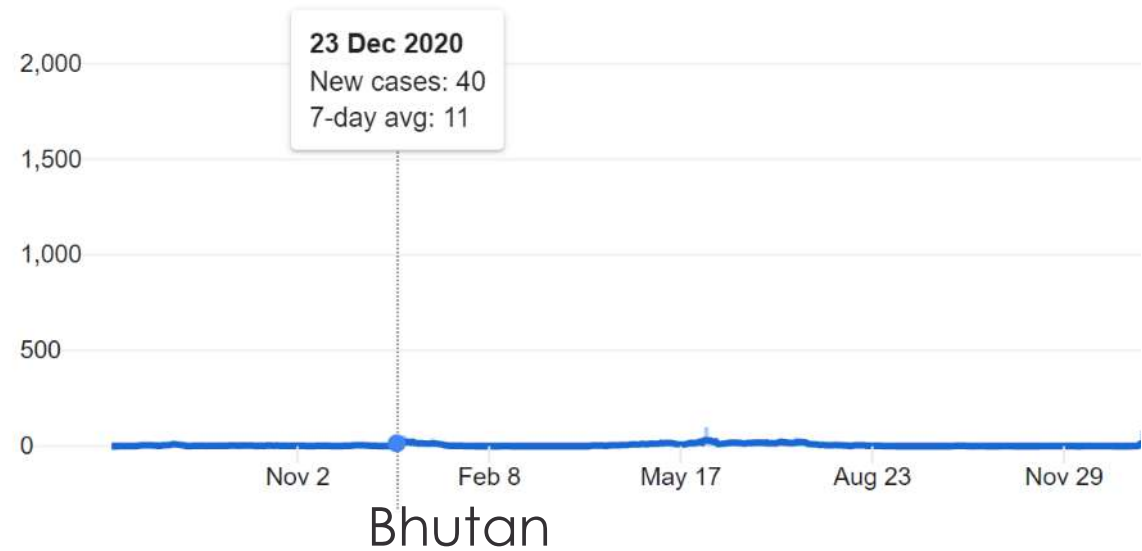
29° 32' N, 81° 11' E



State of COVID-19



Pithoragarh district, Uttarakhand, India



Sudurpaschim Province, Nepal



Study sites

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Access only to individuals from the local administrative unit- *dzongkhag*

India



30° 00' N, 80° 20' E

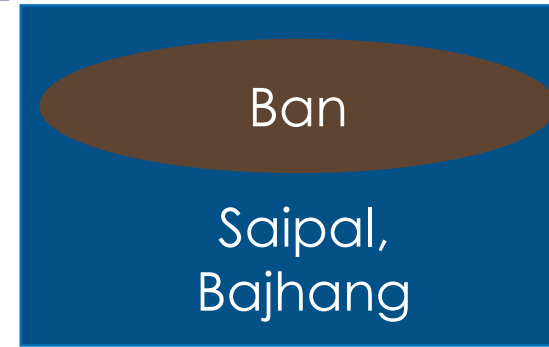
Access only to individuals from the local administrative unit- *Van Panchayat*

Nepal



29° 50' N, 80° 31' E

Access to any Nepali citizen upon the payment of a collection fee charged by the local government



29° 32' N, 81° 11' E



Methods of data collection

Questionnaire Survey

- Paro (Bhutan): 55 respondents
- Pithoragarh (India): 40 respondents
- Darchula (Nepal): 50 respondents
- Bajhang (Nepal): 45 respondents

Semi-structured in-depth interviews (telephonic)

- Darchula (Nepal): 3 respondents
- Bajhang (Nepal): 4 respondents

Findings



Awareness about COVID-19

- All the respondents were aware about the pandemic as well as the precaution measures
- Wearing masks was the most reported precaution measure
- Radio and mobile caller tunes were major sources of information
- Local mobilities were not affected by the lock-down

“No lockdown in our village. Will the government compensate me, if I do not go to field for cropping fearing virus and lockdown?”- 39 years old woman, Darchula

Behaviour and beliefs

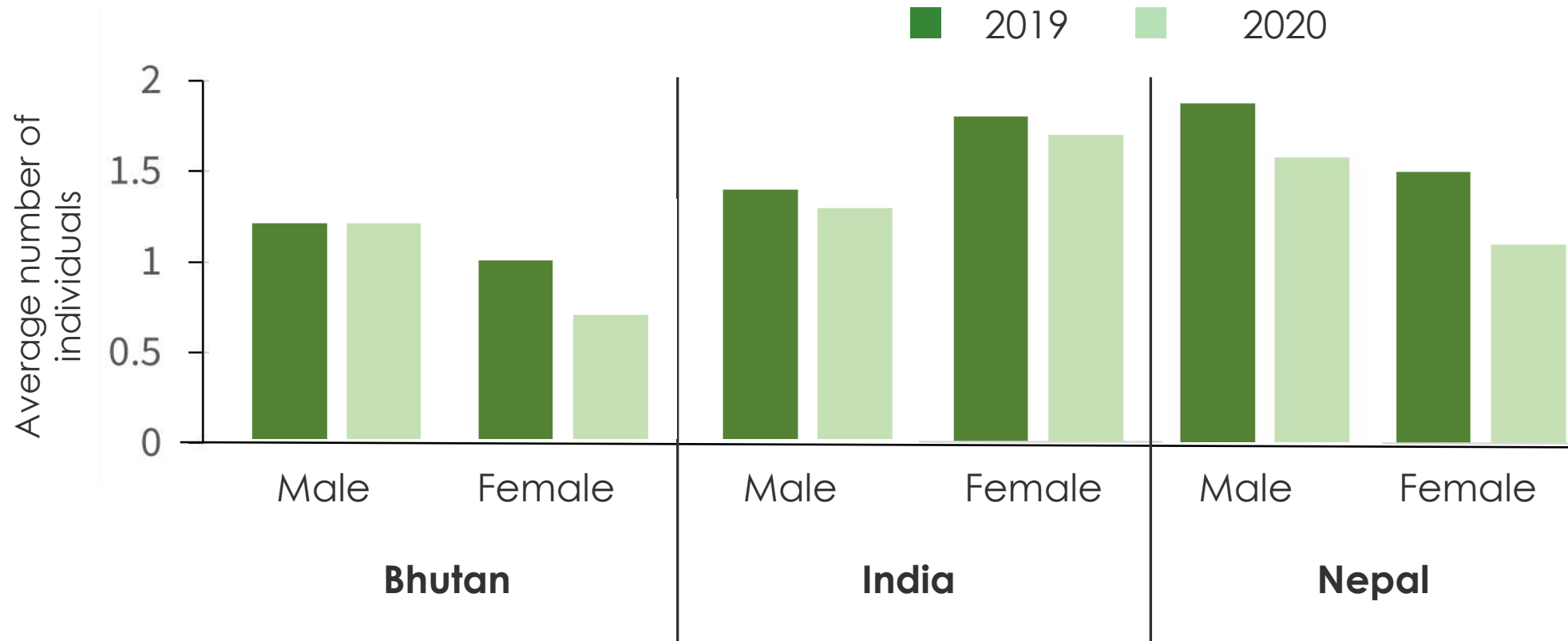
“Our deity resides in the *kharka*, our deity will protect us against all evils, so we need not worry about virus”- 46 years old man, Darchula

“Those coming from plains and unfaithful to their spouse are bringing the virus in the village”- 52 years old woman, Bajhang

“I felt feverish and had body pain but did not get tested. If I test positive, I will be socially ostracized and they will keep me in isolation, then who will look after my animals”- 28 years old man, Bajhang

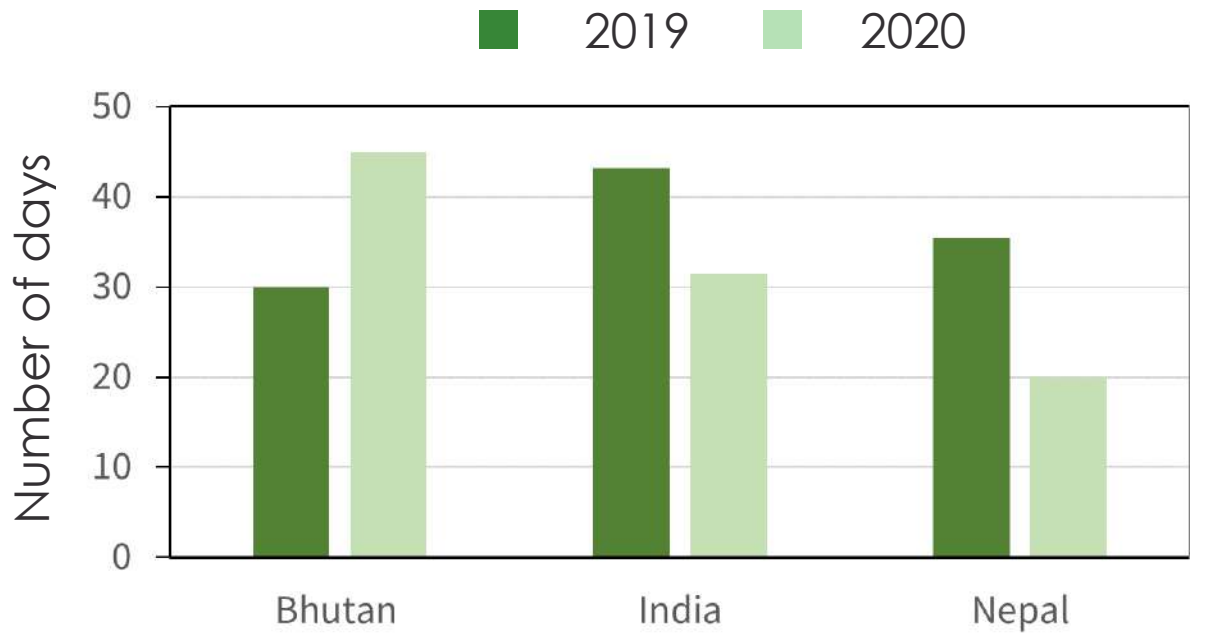


Impact on collectors

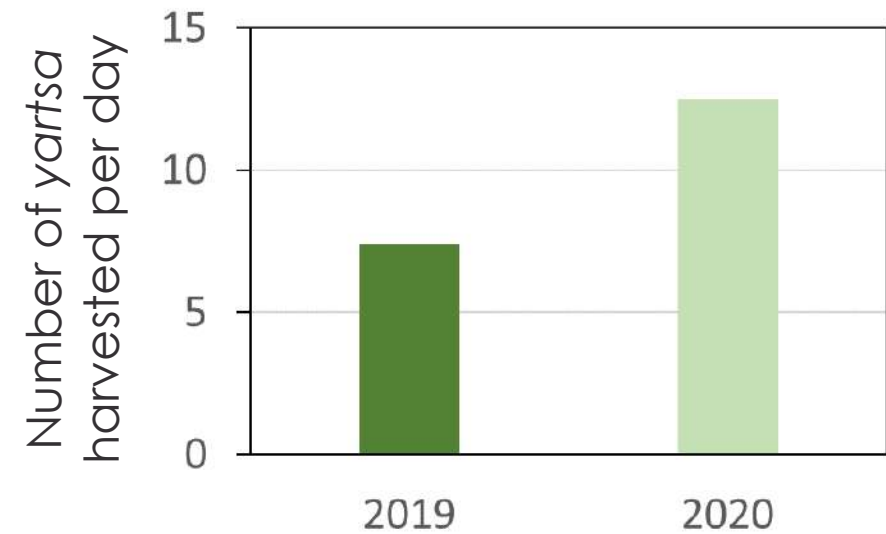


- Fewer family members at collection site

Impact on collection days and harvest

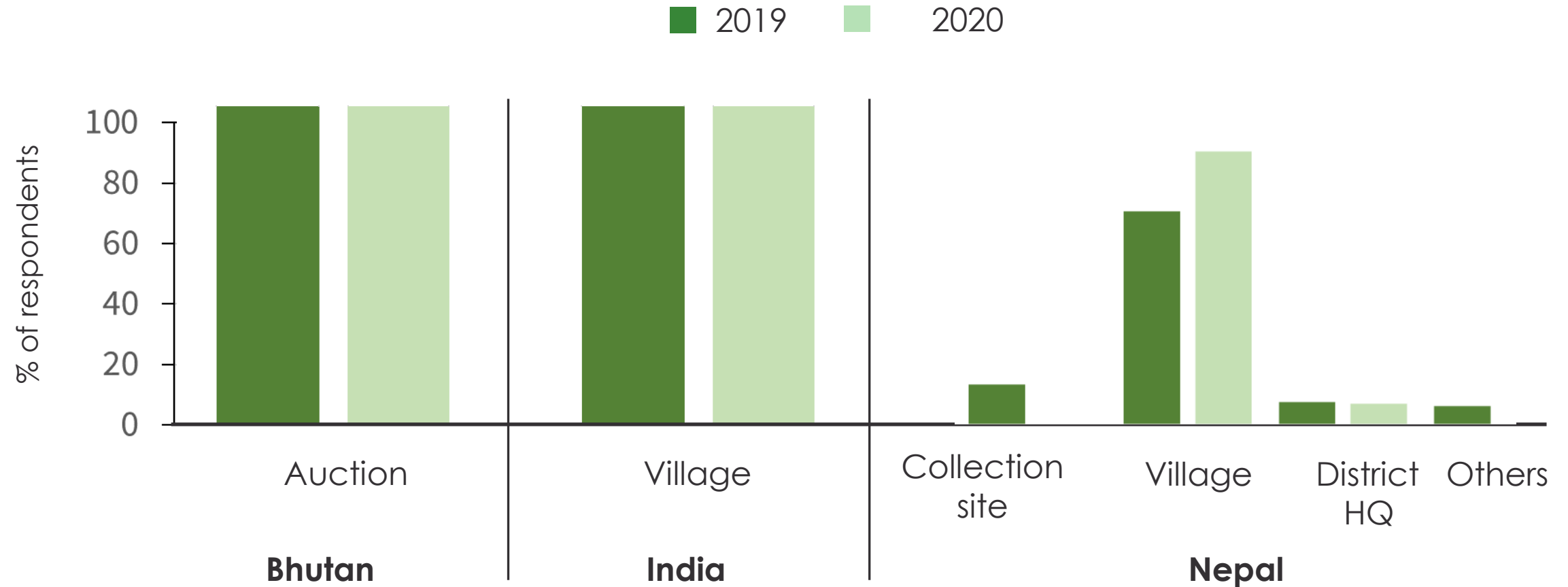


Decline in number of *yartsa* collection days



- Increase in average number of yartsa harvested $\text{day}^{-1} \text{ person}^{-1}$
- Decrease in total number of harvest person^{-1}

Impact on trading



- Fewer traders
- Decline in price of *yartsa gunbu*

Coping strategy

Coping strategy	India	Nepal
Use savings	52.5	11.4
Other income sources	45	20.0
Out-migrate for labour work	27.5	61.4
Sell livestock	25.0	21.4
Borrow money from relatives/local lenders	25.0	24.3
Reduce expenses	15	31.4
Do not know	12.5	14.3

“My family does not have much option. My son will return to Delhi, once they open the border. Meanwhile, I will borrow from local lenders. This is how my family has survived so far.”- 48 years old man, Bajhang



Conclusions

- Social and religious stigma persisted about the virus
- COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected livelihoods of *yartsa gunbu* collectors in all three countries, particularly Nepal
- Diversified strategies to uplift the socio-economic conditions of poor mountain communities



Thank you

Let's protect
the pulse.