

CSOs Amidst
COVID19
Pandemic in
India

Fighting from the Front



Untold Narratives from the Ground

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A Force in Action on Ground Amidst COVID-19 Pandemic

India has witnessed a newer outlook towards Civil Society Organisations with the development of liberal policy-linked privatization-based economic development agenda. In this perspective, many questions have been raised about the role, intent, practices and the very existence of social institutions. There are three mechanisms in the human system community, market and the state. The community forges its structure based on traditions and the inherent values. The market, whilst undertaking the business of services and goods, also determines as to who will be stronger in the social structure. While the role of the State is to regulate, but to achieve it, it has started placing its absoluteness at stake. Since the State has the power to make rules and regulations for groups and markets in the community or communities, selfishness too has crept into their reciprocated relationships. The community wants the State to recognize its activities and interests. Hence, it supports that State which fulfills its needs. The State needs more and more power. Therefore, it compromises with its sense of absoluteness and chooses to be seen in favour of the interests of the community and community groups. On the other hand, market seeking to exercise interminable control over capital and resources goes on to extend support to that State which affords such statutory or policy opportunity.

This kind of kinship between the community, market and the State causes anomaly across the world. Consequently,

economic-social inequality, exploitation, injustice, famine and poverty become part of normal structure. The relationships amongst the human beings within the society get marked by acrimony and ill-feeling and that violence in human nature is established as a value.

When capital and political power for society become more important than the tenets of justice, non-violence and fraternity, naturally policy priorities also undergo a change. The value of humaneness becomes secondary to economic development.

Under these circumstances, some people in the society take on the role of civic institutions seeking to shape up the dream for a better society. These people and institutions believe that justice is necessary for all and that no one should be subjected to starvation or neglect, everyone has the right to express their opinion and all should also have the right to disagree and that resources should not be under the control of particular groups. Education is also vital for all and there should be an opportunity to participate in all kinds of decision making. These institutions have belief in dialogue. They think that if a single person is left poor, the country will not be free from poverty. If a single person is left illiterate, the country cannot claim to be fully educated. Even if one group spreads disharmony, peace and goodwill cannot be established in the country. If a single person suffers from starvation, the country should also

be considered to be suffering from starvation. They consider that if a better and happier country has to be built, any group, individual, class or idea cannot be discriminated against. Policy of exclusion cannot and must not be supported. It is not merely a spiritual idea that all people are free from poverty, happy, all get justice and that there is no exploitation or violence of any kind. Environment cannot be harmed even to meet our greed or need. These are also the basic values as are enshrined in the Constitution of India.

And, Civil Society Organisations come into being with the very idea that Society, Market and the State adhere to basic human socio-economic-political values whilst playing their respective dedicated roles. They must not adopt a policy of subjugating each other.

Civil Society Organisations have, in their role, reached out to those individuals, communities and classes which have rather remained unreached by our traditional or existing systems. These individuals, classes and communities have so far been discriminated against because of race, gender, interest, dress, dietary habits, standard of living, faith, religion or expression. And that ill-will is espoused against them. It is this purpose of these institutions that drives them to reach out to such communities or individuals living within their own society and to work for their betterment.

In fact, the Civil Society Organisations repeatedly highlight policy and behaviours that prevent our society from becoming an equal, exploitation-free and a justice-focused society. These institutions undertake a critiquing study and analyse the politics and policy that keeps people disadvantaged and poor. Civil Society Organisations hold the belief that

communalism, casteism, racial discrimination, gender discrimination etc., prevent any society from becoming civilised and cultured.

Under these circumstances, the Civil Society Organisations also conduct an in-depth analysis of the behaviour of society and look into the strategies of the political system. It is necessary to do so because it is not possible to be poor or exploited in a society in a natural form. Poverty and exploitation are rather the structural outcomes of the policies. However, this analysis is not acceptable to the political ideologies that want their monopoly on resources, exploit the labour and have no faith in the democratic values.

This is the precise reason that over the past centuries, policy efforts have been continually seeking to limit the realm of socio-civic institutions' dreams. It has been experienced since the British Rule that groups or parties which are critical of the "State" or seek to review its policies have been pronounced to be the criminals in the guise of law. On the other hand, the 'nationalist' groups which have been struggling to make India a free and self-respecting country have been viewed as committing 'sedition' by the government.

In fact, India or for that matter any country has always needed humanitarian civil-social institutions. These institutions have given precedence to the wider social and national interests by deliberately keeping the narrowness of religion, thought or political party at bay. These groups have reached out to and have identified themselves with the disadvantaged sections of the country and society hitherto remaining unreached by our political system and the governments. If there has been any engagement, it has

only been superfluous in nature, like being limited to seeking votes. It is also notable that the relationships built between the disadvantaged and neglected sections of the society with the Civil Society Organisations have not been built on the strength of economic resources or power, but on the premise of empathy. Dialogue and faith in equality have been the key elements in this bondage.

It is a fact that all along the history in India, political efforts have been made to dismiss and prove the Civil Society Organisations to be irrelevant. Further, these efforts have been heightened over the past few decades because more formidable challenges have been posed to the notions of environment, natural resources, economic equality and justice in the name of 'development' and that the Civil Society Organisations have sought to analyse and question the hidden agenda.

However, Civil Society Organisations have played extremely important roles in the storm of every socio-political-environmental-economic challenge. For overcoming the challenges and obstacles and carrying on with creating a better society, a new combination term - a twin word - 'Struggle and Creation (Sangharsh aur Nirmaan)' has now come in popular parlance which has been adopted by the socio-civic institutions. It calls for thwarting the attempts of the vested interests so that exploitation of resources is shunned in the best interests of the nature and the country. The real struggle lies in confronting such harmful policies and to secure and guide human freedom and dignity.

When we dream of a better society, it has to be created and proved. Civil Society Organisations oppose or criticize an idea or policy not just because these are made

by the governments. They also recreate their dream of equality, justice and fraternity on the ground in any part of the country and society. They also seek to experiment and demonstrate as to how the policy advocated by them can actually be implemented at the ground level.

But with this twin word, there is a third word too 'Relief with Dignity'. What is Relief? Relief means - food in the crisis, health care, protection from violence, crime and exploitation, livelihoods, housing, psycho-social counseling, support to homeless and migrants with all essential needs, participation in decision making and access to entitlements under state schemes etc; and all these should be accessible with "Dignity";

It means that the term is wider. Struggle-Build-Relief! When we openly discuss the role of socio-civic institutions, we find that 'relief' is also an important and permanent constituent of these institutions' role. Whether it is earthquake, flood, tsunami, drought, cyclone, storm, communal riots or the recent COVID-19 catastrophe; the Civil Society Organisations have always played a strong and responsible role in situations of emergency. Indeed, the existence of Civil Society Organisations in our world is crucial because they envision a future of value-driven development. They undertake the review of prevalent beliefs of policies and development with a sense of pro-humaneness and empathy. So, whenever any challenging situation arises, these institutions stand in the first line to play their role, albeit unsolicited.

The disaster of the COVID-19 Pandemic has been an unusual situation. It must be acknowledged that the government,

society, public health system and the economy have not been prepared to face this calamity. There was also some delay in gaining an insight into the signs of this epidemic. Thus, by the time attempts were made to combat it, some significant strategies were found to be wanting.

COVID-19 is definitely a health disaster. However, an element of 'fear' has also been associated with it. Safeguarding against the epidemic rather necessitated the strategy of maintaining 'distance' amongst the people. With no treatment being available to fight the infection, it has also not been possible to visualise the probability of saving life of the infected persons.

When lockouts were imposed for treatment and prevention of contracting the infection, when all the means of employment were discontinued, when transportation was stopped, three-fourth of India's population faced the challenge of meeting its basic needs. The country witnesses a harrowing problem of unemployment. In such a situation, the Civil Society Organisations have promptly come forward "unconditionally" with their roles and have commenced their alleviating and supportive measures.

In every state, every part of India, Civil Society Organisations immediately prepared themselves to deal with various situations caused by COVID-19, and that social workers have been and are in the forefront.

Vikas Samvad is also a socio-civic group. The group decided that it would document the efforts and stories of actions by socio-civic groups during the phase of COVID-19 transition. Vikas Samvad, therefore, sought to bring these stories before the wider society so that it can appreciate the existence and significance of the roles of these institutions. If these sto-

ries were read with an open mind, the readers will actually realise that the most significant purpose of Civil Society Organisations is to protect the human being, humanity and human society with a sense of civic values. Howsoever attempts are made suppress or crush the very existence of these institutions. These are the seeds that will germinate again and again so as to perform their due roles, notwithstanding any formidable situations. This has rather happened in the current times of COVID-19 as well!

In this compilation of stories, we have included some of the many stories. It does not mean these are the only stories. Stories number into thousands. We will seek to come up with more of these awe-inspiring stories in the ensuing times. Let us introduce you with the stories and topics compiled herein.

We have found that well in the midst of the outbreak of COVID-19, Civil Society Organisations carried out a host of interventions. The AIM Trust in Varanasi started functioning as soon as the fear of the Novel Corona Virus began to spread. The Trust was receiving reports from the communities where it was working that families in the slums areas were in a very poor state and that no authentic messages were reaching them. Responding to the situation, the Trust started working on it from 25th March 2020 itself. After a while, the administration also established coordination with the Trust. The group highlighted the situation of migrant labourers from Jharkhand who were stranded in Varanasi and extended assistance to them.

In Madhya Pradesh, the Spandan Samaj Sewa Samiti has been working in an area that has been marked by a huge challenge of malnutrition among children. This organisation has had its presence

amidst the Korku tribal community for more than 15 years. Whilst the district administration was engaged in the treatment management of COVID-19, the Spandan undertook the initiative of safeguarding the nutritional security of 2000 malnourished children, pregnant women and the lactating mothers and kept its watch every day.

Likewise, the Synergy Sansthan, also from Madhya Pradesh had a feel of the situation of people coming under its work jurisdiction. The group knew it right from the beginning as to which of the families have exhausted ration, where there is a crisis of medicines and where is the problem of water. They prepared a list 18 members with names and contact details and got it circulated through WhatsApp so that people could reach them and get the required assistance. They also completed the World Health Organization-run online course on COVID-19 so that they could perform their socio-civic role with complete insight and scientific temperament.

Indore city in Madhya Pradesh is among the most COVID-19 affected cities in India. The problem was that many efforts were made to give communal colour to COVID-19 in Indore. For the first three weeks, there was no communication with the community in Indore, making the situation rather challenging. Then an institution by the name 'AAs' went to the community and engaged in dialogue with the community and prepared the people for being tested for the infection. They provided the community with support of telemedicine counseling with a group of dedicated doctors who offered service free of cost. The organisation also delivered the requisite message to the people in the community that physicians and health workers engaged in COVID-

19 treatment deserve and must be treated with respect.

The collective of Civil Society Organisations and Individuals came together and worked as Jan Sampark Samuh in Bhopal; this re-established the culture of collectiveness and reached out to around 2 Lakh persons in Bhopal with food, care, child nutrition and transportation support to migrant workers to reach home.

In Chhattisgarh, the Mitwa Mahila Kalyan Evam Seva Samiti has been working amidst the quarry workers. The organisation helped the mining workers so that their crisis of food insecurity is mitigated. Here, the migrant workers too had started returning. The institution took up the initiative in rendering the right information and counseling so that they willingly go into 14 days' quarantine.

'Samagra Vikas Sansthan' in district Badayun (Uttar Pradesh) worked amongst those groups who have not been able to access services and schemes. These include Girha community, Shoe polishers, Baheliya and the Kewat communities.

In the national capital, Delhi, 'Pahel Multipurpose Social Service Organization' arranged for 1.20 lakh sanitizers. They connected the migrant workers with the Public Distribution System.

In Bihar, 'Abhiyan' organisation secured continuous ration for the Mushar community, one of the most excluded community of India.

Savita Ben of the 'Mahila Samaj Manch' of Gujarat decided that the Gram Panchayats should be activated in the wake of situations created due to COVID-19 and that her efforts were successful too.

'Mehfooz Bachpan', an active group for child protection in Uttar Pradesh found that the pregnant women and lactating mothers in Agra were suffering from the acute problem of food and nutritional insecurity. The group sought to continue to provide ration to the deprived. However, ration got exhausted even in the market as time passed by. Then they decided in consultation with others that they will provide ration to those who could pay on 'No-Profit-No-Fee basis'.

In Gujarat, the PUCL took the initiative to activate the administration on immediate basic needs of the marginalised people.

In Morena, the 'Dharti Sanstha' especially worked amidst the deprived Sahariya, a particularly vulnerable tribal group, so as to mitigate its food insecurity and promoted awareness amongst them.

Lalita Ujale, a worker of the 'Samaan Sanstha', whilst working on ration distribution in Indore happened to see a little girl who was crying continuously. It was learnt that the baby girl had not got milk for one full week. Milk powder and sugar were arranged and the girl was fed and the arrangement for her continued feed was also done.

'Prayaas', an organisation in Rajasthan established COVID-19 Resource and Assistance Centres in two districts, in addition to undertaking other measures.

In West Bengal, a group of students along with other youth and social institutions started working as joint action groups. They had information about migrant labourers from West Bengal spread across the country and then they were able to reach out to those workers by mobilizing help from institutions in other states.

In Uttar Pradesh, 'Sonbhadra Vikas Samiti' provided health and nutrition assistance to the migrant labourers who had returned to their villages on foot.

Similarly, "Prasoon" undertook a sustained initiative in district Vidisha, Madhya Pradesh in providing ration and nutrition to the Sahariya tribal workers who were affected due to exposure to Silicosis and were now facing the livelihood crisis too.

Our governance dispensation treats certain sections of the society with neglect. According to a report published in the Guardian, more than 6.5 lakh women in India are in flesh trade, and that COVID-19 has had a profound impact on them. 'SANGRAM' (Maharashtra) took up the initiative to reduce the impact on this section of the society. The experience of SANGRAM revealed that whatever welfare schemes have come up in the COVID-19 era, none of them have helped these vulnerable women because they are not reckoned as workers!

'Yuva' (Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action) in Mumbai has provided communication, support and food security to the rag picker groups, persons without shelter, and socially stigmatized Pardhi community.

'Bhavya Bharat Foundation' and the 'Bahujan Samaj Trust' in Gujarat helped the migrant workers with protection, provided food and ration and made transport arrangements for returning to their homes.

Likewise, the Delhi-based trans-feminist resource group, 'Nazariya' was receiving frequent reports of domestic violence, abuse of trans-gender and homosexual persons. The organisation got financial assistance to the trans-gender

persons at a large scale. Towards this end, Nazariya mobilized resources and support from friends and supporters.

In Guwahati (Assam), some unwitting people teamed up to form a group "Support during Pandemic-SDP". Around 1000 persons associated with the group and that the group has been incessantly helping the disadvantaged sections of the society.

Likewise, in Chhattisgarh, 15 independent voluntary workers came together and formed a group called 'Gram Mitra'. They worked to get ration from the Fair Price Shops for the poor and deprived and engaged in distribution of ration and awareness generation.

'Vikas Samvad' has been an active group engaged in bringing about food security and elimination of malnutrition in Madhya Pradesh for last 15 years. Under this group's programmatic interventions, as many as 5,000 families have established Kitchen Gardens in the last 5 years. During COVID-19, these families have helped other families having younger children, pregnant women and lactating mothers with the vegetables grown in their kitchen gardens so that they do not slip into the state of malnutrition. This group sought to work on the principle of 'Relief with Dignity'.

In Uttar Pradesh, a children's organization "Bal Paharua" has been formed under the programme of Shambhu Nath Singh Research Foundation. During COVID-19, when the direct communication with the public became limited, children of Bal Paharua maintained communication with the use of digital technology and carried forward the process of their work.

Similarly, Sahaja Trust in Koppal district of Karnataka developed a street play fo-

cused on COVID-19 for dialogue and communication and continued the process of dialogue amidst the community. "Praajak" in West Bengal reached out to 16000 children to food security and protection from exploitation.

Whilst recording these stories, we have found that the Civil Society Organisations have taken forward the process of communication with the community in the wake of COVID-19. In India, wherever there has been a conflict between the community and the service providers, the phenomenon owes it to the lack of dialogue. Under these circumstances, certain attempts were also made to communalize the incidences. The institutions sought to shun such attempts.

Fear has been concomitant with the pandemic of COVID-19. However, the social institutions took on immediate initiatives and tried to reduce fear through counseling services. Naturally, the steps taken to deal with COVID-19 have created a state of food insecurity. In every nook and corner of India, these Civil Society Organisations have provided significant food and dry ration services for the innumerable needy citizens.

Continuous food ration distribution has been the most important task of all institutions. At the same time, intensive efforts were also made to provide safety items, such as distribution of masks and sanitizers; rendering counseling services to communities, motivating migrating workers to stay in quarantine when they return, facilitating the provision of financial assistance to workers and ensuring access of benefits of the government's schemes to the people.

It is important to mention that these institutions have descended within the society and reached out to those groups and

sections which have generally been the victims of socio-economic deprivation and neglect. These neglected groups include, inter alia, transgender community, communities engaged in flesh trade, communities like Kanjar, Baheliya and Pardhi; Gihaar community; various vulnerable tribal communities like Korku, Korwa, Mushar, Sahariya and Baiga; community of Dhimars and Kewat, rickshaw pullers; malnourished children, pregnant women and lactating mothers; rag pickers and the homeless people.

In this compilation, you can read stories from 12 states (Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Assam, West Bengal, Delhi, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Delhi, Rajasthan and Gujarat). We will endeavor to expand them further in the future.

If you have sources for similar stories, please message us at

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Story Lines

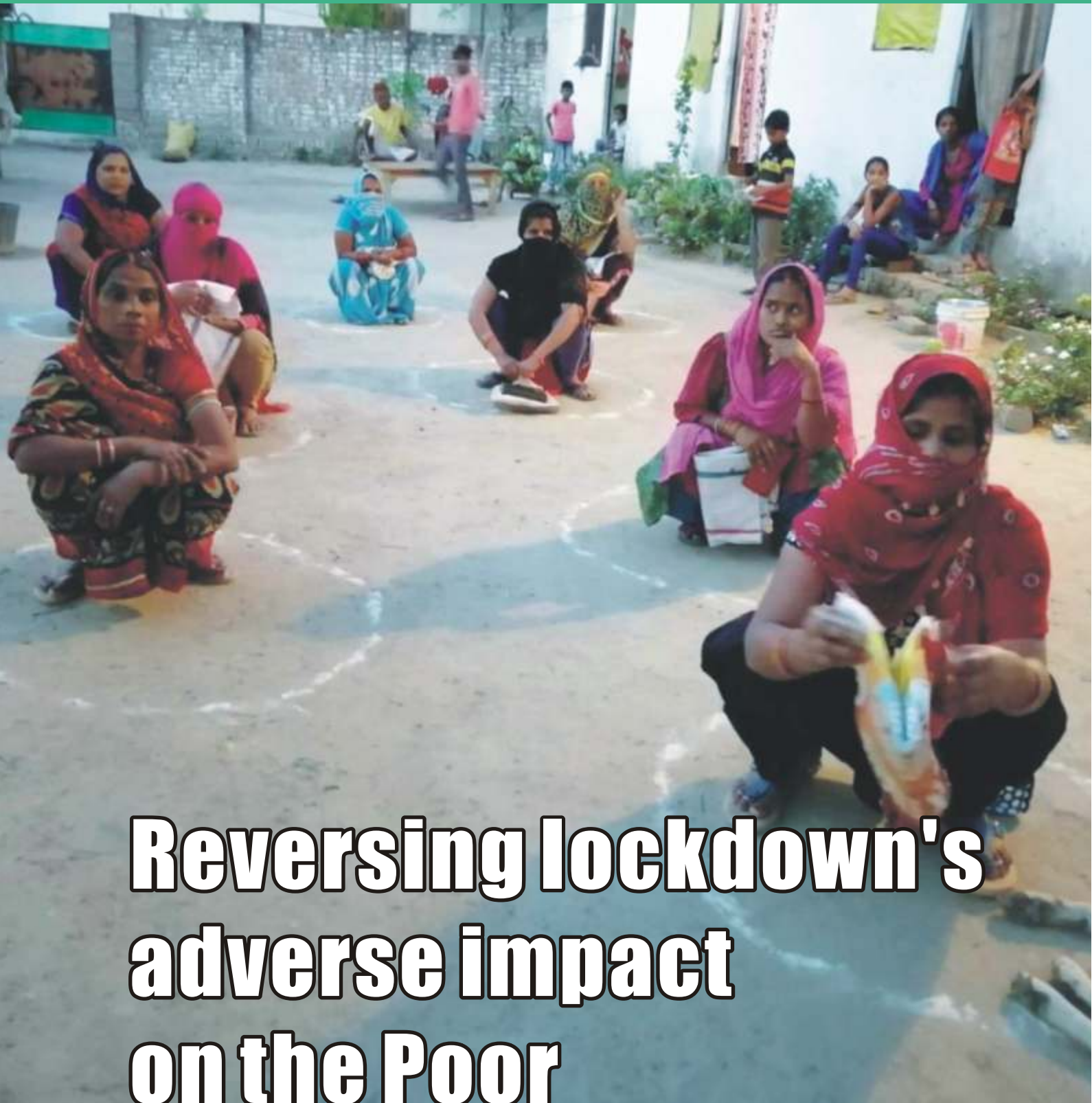
1. Aim Trust (Uttar Pradesh)
Reversing Lockdown's Adverse Impact on the Poor 12
2. Spandan Samaj Seva Samiti (Madhya Pradesh)
Fighting Hunger and Keeping COVID19 at Bay 16
3. Synergy Sansthan (Madhya Pradesh)
Advocacy on People's Issues Goes a Long Way 20
4. Jan Sampark Samuh (Madhya Pradesh)
Showcasing the Culture of Collectivism 23
5. Mitwa Mahila Kalyan Evam Seva Samiti (Chhattisgarh)
Korwa Adivasis Engaged in Coal Mining Face Livelihood Crisis 28
6. Samagra Vikas Sansthan (Uttar Pradesh)
Voluntary Organizations Have Stellar Roles in COVID19 Crisis 31
7. Pahel Multipurpose Social Service Organization (Delhi)
Give me some Atta Sahib...I have not eaten Roti for the last 15 days 35
8. Abhiyan (Bihar)
Empowering Musahar Community on Safeguards Against COVID19 38
9. People's Union of Civil Liberties (Gujarat)
Activating State Systems is Also a Crucial Role 41
10. 'Mahfooz Bachpan (Uttar Pradesh)
A Barrier Came in the Way and He Crossed it! 44

11.	Prayaas (Rajasthan)	
	Responding to the Plight of Migrant Labourers	47
12.	Dharti Sanstha (Madhya Pradesh)	
	Reaching Out to the Sahariyas!	51
13.	Samaan Sanstha (Madhya Pradesh)	
	Empowered Women Drive the Relief Work	54
14.	Koshish (Jammu and Kashmir)	
	Developing Trust with United Efforts	57
15.	Sampada Grameen Mahila Sanstha - SANGRAM (Maharashtra)	
	Sex Workers' Community and the Pandemic	61
16.	Sonbhadra Vikas Samiti (Uttar Pradesh)	
	Migrant Workers Find a Helping Hand	65
17.	Bahujan Samajik Trust (Gujarat)	
	Fighting COVID19 Pandemic with Passion	69
18.	Bhavya Bharat Foundation (Gujarat)	
	Utilizing Volunteerism to the Best	72
19.	Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (Maharashtra)	
	YUVA in the City of Death in Corona Times	75
20.	Prasoon (Madhya Pradesh)	
	Multilayered Burden for Mine Workers and Silicosis, TB patients	79
21.	Bal Paharua and SRF (Uttar Pradesh)	
	Creating a Help Network Using Digital Means	82

22.	Sahaja Trust (Karnataka)	
	Relief with Messaging and Communication	86
23.	Gram Mitra (Chhattisgarh)	
	When the Unknown Join Hands!	89
24.	Vikas Samvad and Collective (Madhya Pradesh)	
	When the Most Deprived Share Their Resources!	92
25.	Joint Forum against Corona Crisis (West Bengal)	
	When Students Become a Force to Reckon With	98
26.	Support During Pandemic-SDP (Assam)	
	Organic Emergence of Civil Society Collective	102
27.	Aas (Madhya Pradesh)	
	Ray of Hope Amidst Hatred and Disease	105
28.	Nazariya (Delhi)	
	A Different 'Nazariya' Helps the LGBTQ + Communities	109
29.	Praajak (West Bengal)	
	Protecting Childhood amidst COVID19 Pandemic	114
30.	Savitaben from the Katodiya Village of Bhavnagar (Gujrat)	
	A Role Model in Pandemic Chaos	118
31.	Vikas Samvad Samiti (Madhya Pradesh)	
	Namaste! Aid from the Society is here for you!	121
32.	ANANDI & Partners Organisations' (Gujrat)	
	Eliminating 'Hinsa' Virus in Times of COVID-19	125

1

Aim Trust
(Uttar Pradesh)



**Reversing lockdown's
adverse impact
on the Poor**

Varanasi, like rest of India, plunged into sudden crisis as Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced lockdown-1 on March 24, giving barely four hours for preparations. It was in fact an urgent and emergency call for restricting spread of COVID19. The hardest hit by the announcement were, of course, the poor whose storing capacity for essential items such as food grains is minimal, lasting barely for a few days. This is a routine lifestyle of the daily wage earners.

Those who had stored away some essential items managed to somehow make do for some days. But a sizeable number of daily wagers had neither ration at home nor money to buy it. Some workers' wages were still pending with the contractors or employers. But collecting the pending dues was nearly impossible as police had been deployed to strictly enforce restrictions after the lockdown. As days passed, the situation worsened to an extent that several families were on the verge of starvation. That was the time when the M Trust, a voluntary organization, stepped in to provide succor to the needy.

Founded in 2005, the Varanasi-based Aim Trust is active among urban poor, construction workers, domestic workers, rickshaw pullers, horse-cart drivers, roadside vendors and weaver community.

Sanja Rai of the trust recalls that the NGO's volunteers started getting desperate calls for help from distressed poor families, including domestic helps. They narrated their tales of woes. The relief package announced by the UP government had not reached them even by March end, days after the lockdown had kicked in.

Suresh Yadav, a resident of Malviya Pool, Nai Basti, is a mason. He had migrated from a village in Ghazipur district as a landless labourer 25 years ago in search of livelihood. Over the years, he graduated as a mason. Even if he works for eight to ten days a month, he is able to earn not more than Rs 10,000. Now he is without work as the lockdown has brought construction works to halt. Although he has a card issued by the state labour department, this did not help him in the time of crisis. Whatever little money he had was spent in buying food items. The UP Government had announced to deposit Rs. 1000 in the accounts of daily wagers, but Suresh's bank account did not get any financial aid. Worse, he was denied ration at PDS shop as he did not have ration card.

Chandrama Nishad, son of Ramlal Nishad, a resident of Kila Kohna basti is in deeper trouble. A construction worker, Ramlal has a family of 10 members five daughters, one son, wife and parents. He used to get work for about 20 days in a month in normal times. Wife Malti Devi chips into the family's meager income by making wire brushes at home. They are getting essential food grain supply from PDS shop, but the ration is not enough to sustain a large family of 10. The family fears that if lockdown continued, they might face a situation of starvation.

The Aim Trust came into contact with many more such distraught families including women and children. Helping them out was a challenge because the lockdown had severely restricted movements out of homes. The trust volunteers chalked out a strategy to reach out to the needy in coordination with other NGOs, public-spirited

individuals and trade unions. Ten volunteers were selected for the relief work by the M Trust and the Asangathit Kaamgar Adhikar Manch. Trust members Amit Kumar, Premshah Kumar and Nikhil Kumar were tasked with contacting distressed people in different localities on telephone and apprise their problems to government authorities and local organizations. Also, the problems of the needy were highlighted using e-mail and WhatsApp on the government helpline numbers at district, state and union government levels.

Dr Mhd Arif of Asangathit Kaamgar Adhikar Manch, Dr Noor Fatma of All India Secular Forum and volunteers of Gurudwara Committee were given the responsibility of distributing ration, packets of cooked food (poori-sabji), other household essentials, personal sanitary items such as soap, detergent powder besides masks in poor settlements of Varanasi.

Relief work was started with own resources and later contributions from other sources started coming in.

Help was provided to thousands of families in 10 poor settlements of the city. Under the Varanasi Janpad, families of construction workers, domestic workers, rickshaw pullers, horse-cart drivers, roadside vendors and others at Kila Kohna, Khirakia Ghat, Nakkhi Ghat, Kajjapura, Saraiya, Tulsi Kuan, Rehmat Pura, Momimpura, Jalalipura and other poor settlements were provided relief. Volunteers reached out with ration and food packets to children, women, senior citizens, disabled persons, destitute, commercial sex workers and eunuchs. These are socially most vulnerable communities and supplying relief to them was a big challenge.



As the situation worsened and the administration also faced crunch of manpower, the volunteers lent helping hand. Administration also started supporting after seeing the good works.

“When we had started work, the local administration was not cooperative. The government machinery mistreated the needy people. No priority was decided in ration distribution,” Trust notes.

Gradually, our persistent interventions caused situation to improve. Orders were issued to provide ration to everyone irrespective of whether they had ration cards. Discrimination in help between local residents and migrants was also done away with. We managed to expand our network of relief operation with the support of the Varanasi Municipal Corporation.” Sanjay Roy of the Aim Trust says.

The network of volunteers is still carrying out the task of informing the UP government about migrant labourers stuck in the city on the helpline numbers, so that arrangement for their stay and food could be made in time.

On April 14, the Aim Trust volunteers learnt about the plight of 30 families of migrant

labourers from Jharkhand. They were stuck in Varanasi without food arrangement.

Volunteers of the organization coordinated with the police and administration officials to ensure supply of ration and food packets for the stranded people.

Conference calls are constantly made to monitor condition of poor community members and, if any problems are noticed, the administration is approached with request to take care of their issues.

The Air trust has also made intervention at policy level by highlighting deteriorating plight of the Varanasi weavers in a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

“On April 25, we wrote a letter to chief minister Yogi Adityanath about 300 migrant labourers stuck in the city. We have regular communication with the media people and keep them updated about the relief works. We helped the urban poor in filling up forms for getting Rs 1000 in Jan Dhan accounts. Work of updating the accounts of construction labourers is being carried out so that they could get the financial assistance meant for the registered labourers,” Roy adds.

The Aim Trust, along with associates, has managed to ensure food security for about 450 people. Help was provided to about 3000 migrant labourers.

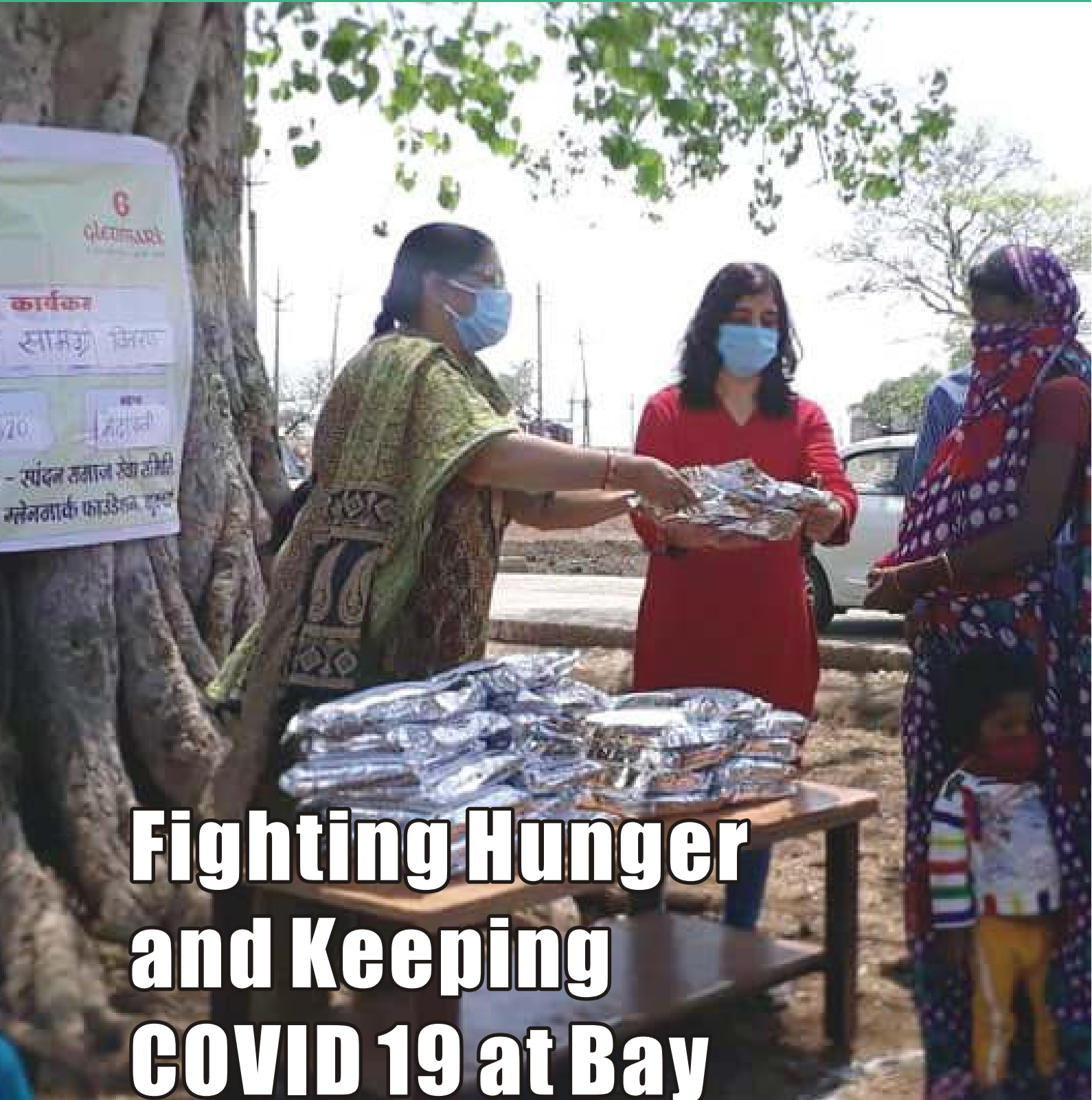
“We are anticipating that after the COVID19 pandemic is controlled, there will be a large-scale migration from bigger to smaller cities and villages. This is likely to cause a huge problem of unemployment in unorganized sector. The labourers, who have managed to reach their native villages, might be unwilling to go back to bigger cities any time soon,” Roy says.


Aim teams feels that the local organizations will have to play a role in getting works for the unorganized labourers locally and ensure that maximum people get work under MNREGS in villages. The voluntary and people's organizations will have to play a role of advocacy in this regard.



2

Spandan Samaj Seva Samiti
(Madhya Pradesh)





Khandwa, a Madhya Pradesh district on the Delhi-Mumbai railway line, is better known as the birthplace of legendary singer-director-actor Kishore Kumar. But the famous city has a flip side too. It is also known to be inhabited by one of the most backward tribal communities- Korku. The poor tribals living in villages of the district are accursed to lead a severely malnourished life, leading to deaths in many cases.

Voluntary organization Spandan Samaj Seva Samiti identified the Korku community's miserable life and decided to ameliorate their life 20 years ago. The NGO's works have yielded some encouraging results; number of malnourished children has reduced considerably and awareness on malnutrition has increased among the tribals.

Given their poor immune system due to malnutrition, Spandan team realized the Korku tribe's food crisis will sure exacerbate as the COVID19 spread in India. The situation will lead to very serious food security crisis in the community and will hit the severely malnourished children hardest. A majority of Korku community members are daily labourers who migrate in search of job as there is not enough works available for them locally.

Also, a large section is dependent on targeted public distribution system (TPDS) ration but the food grains they get is, unfortunately, both inadequate and irregular. Other essential items are also hard to come by.

Living in remote villages, the community is used to purchasing the items of daily needs and even vegetables from weekly markets. Therefore, Spandan team rightly anticipated that the lockdown would lead to collapse of the weekly market system. Sensitive to their deteriorating plight at the time of the pandemic, Spandan decided to reach out to the Korku tribe.

When anganwadi centres are non-functional, all sources of employment have dried up, weekly markets are closed and essentials are not reaching villages due to break in the supply chain system, the NGO thought it imperative to help out to the poor tribals.

The work was started with culling information about the deprivation of the community through network of volunteers who have contacts in rural areas.

Volunteers' feedback was that essential items were in short supply in the villages and the break in supply chain had turned the situation more critical. The tribal life was getting adversely impacted due to closure of weekly markets. The migrant workers among the community members, who had returned, were stranded in their villages. Some migrants are stuck in other states and faraway places. Anganwadi and schools are closed, thereby causing food insecurity for them, especially women and children.

Decision was taken to provide relief material to them as supplementary to the ration they get from the government.

Since the Spandan had limited resources and no specific plan, the NGO thought it wise to augment the government efforts at mitigating the suffering of the tribals.

As part of strategy it was decided that food grains and soaps will be distributed to the malnourished children. An awareness drive was also launched about necessity of wearing masks made of clean cloths.

The volunteers provided information and created awareness on COVID19 in villages through door to door campaign.

Pulses, rice, oil and soaps were distributed to malnourished children in remote villages of Khalwa block of Khandwa district. A target of reaching 2000 severe and acute malnourished children and high-risk pregnant women in these villages was set.

The district administration was supportive in our drive. The Khandwa District Collector Ms. Tanvi Sundriyal lauded our initiatives, saying she was also worried about the malnourished children. She immediately ordered for issuance of lockdown passes and other helps for our campaign.

"We have been constantly updating the district collector and her team. In the field, anganwadi workers and assistants have helped in bringing mothers to the distribution spots. In every village, a team of 3-4 persons carried out the distribution works.

Our volunteers faced problems in some villages when the local people did not allow teams to enter or move. But such instances were few. We have already reached 500 children and the target is to reach 2000 children and high-risk pregnant women as soon as possible.

As the work gathered momentum, donor organizations also started coming forward with offers for help and support.

On the awareness about wearing masks, we emphasized the point that women need not depend on others. They could easily prepare masks at home even without sewing machines. Some basics were explained to them about mask making. Women even in remote villages managed to make masks for children and themselves, using resources available at homes.

Schoolgirls also started making masks. The district project officer of the women and child development department appreciated our works.

We also regularly updated the administration on migrant labourers from the district who are holed-up elsewhere.

This led to food and shelter arrangements being made for them at different places. The administration is helping in bringing them back," says Seema Prakash of Spandan.

Spandan team feels that combating food security and livelihood issues for the migrant labourers, who are returning, is a long haul. The immediate solution is getting them work under MNREGS.

As the troubles arising out of the pandemic do not appear to go away any time soon,

Korku tribe will need attention for long. The cost of food items, fertilizers and seeds for agriculture, clothes and daily essentials will increase. This will have huge impact the rural life. Food and employment crisis is going to deteriorate.

Those who have returned from migration will add to local workforce looking for works. If the delay in wage payment under MNREGS continues, the labourers will face more troubles, Spandan members say.



3

Synergy Sansthan
(Madhya Pradesh)



**Advocacy on
People's Issues Goes
a Long Way**

Vishnu Jaiswal, a volunteer associated with the NGO Synergy Sansthan, is active among tribals in the Harda district. For a week after the lockdown-1 was announced on March 24, he too was confined to home like most others.

"But", he recalled, "phone calls started coming in from our field of activity, especially from the families whose bread-earners had migrated from the area."

Other villagers too called him narrating their tales of woes such as cash having run out, jobs being unavailable, essentials having gone out of stock at local grocery shops, medicines are scarce etc etc.

"Dejection and depression were evident in their conversation. Most of them seemed to fear divine wrath that might exterminate the humankind enmasse", he said.

It was quite a tough challenge to instill hope among the frightened people who have lost livelihood and staring at blank future.

The NGO Synergy Sansthan took up the challenge. It started with forming a group of 18 volunteers to reach out to the needy callers and other such desperate people.

Names, addresses and phone numbers of the volunteers were circulated to the people through social media with the message to approach them with their problems.

In the subsequent interactions with distressed people it transpired that mounting worries about employment, hunger and agriculture crisis have compounded their fear of the pandemic.

Interaction with villagers, particularly the youths and adolescents, further revealed that occult practitioners and quacks were prescribing superstitious practices to deal with the pandemic such as treatment involving use of cow-dung and cow-urine. We decided to counter this by equipping all volunteers with scientific and authentic knowledge about the pandemic.

To this end, the volunteers not only sought advices of doctors but also undertook the World Health Organisation's online course on COVID19.

The advantage of creating awareness and spreading authentic information through youth was that the activity of regular washing hands and using face masks reached every home.

As we started work in the field, we realized a severe scarcity of food grains in villages. People had run out of money. Essential items were not reaching small grocery shops in remote areas.

"We compared notes and found that there were at least 1000 families in our work area who needed immediate relief. We started collecting fund which, however, yielded only Rs 1000 and that too in Harda proper. We then sought help from various agencies. The Wipro Foundation agreed to help out 500 families. We had sought Rs 18 lakh for the

purpose but could get only Rs 9 lakh. With this amount, we distributed kits of food essentials comprising wheat flour, rice, pulses, oil, spices, biscuits and others. Each kit had material for one month which we distributed among 120 urban and 880 rural families in the area, "Jaiswal says.

"Our efforts to solicit assistance from the local administration bore little fruits. The administration appeared from far ready or willing to deal with the crisis brought about by the pandemic.

Even in the second phase of lockdown, the administration continues to be largely unsupportive. Its attitude was frustrating for our efforts," adds Jaiswal.

"For the distressed people including migrants, who walked back from far off places such as Nagpur, Indore and Mumbai, the administration had little to offer by way of help. There was no arrangement for their food and water, forget providing ration or screening. It was felt that the administrative apathy may not have been so manifest if the tribals had a credible leader to champion their causes. In some cases, though, the administration proved helpful. For example, the Betul Sub divisional Magistrate (SDM) provided help to the migrants, who had walked back from Nagpur to Betul, reach home," he says.

The COVID19 has rendered boatmen and fishermen communities particularly vulnerable as they have totally lost their livelihood. Arrangements were made to supply ration to several families from these two communities.

Phone calls were received from our sources from Indore that some members of Tablighi Jamat had reached there. Local people were apprehensive that if they informed about Jamatis' presence to the administration, it might cause communal confrontation. So, the organization came forward to do this task. Later a medical team reached the locality where Jamatis were staying and conducted screenings.

The migrant workers with whom the volunteers of the organization interacted made it clear that they are unwilling to go back to cities for work. But their problem is that they have ration stored for two months. Only after onset of monsoon they will start work in agriculture fields. But till then, they will have exhausted the stored ration.

Problem of sustenance will crop up for many as all of them will not get ration from PDS shops. Under the circumstances, works under MNREGS is imperative for them to sustain once the lockdown is lifted.

Besides migrant workers, senior citizens and children are two other categories which are reeling under trauma caused by the pandemic. The organization hopes to do something fruitful for them.

Although funding agencies have not been too much supportive till now, the organization is looking forward to getting aids from them in future, the volunteers say.



4

Jan Sampark Samuh
(Madhya Pradesh)



**Showcasing the
Culture of
Collectivism**

The Jan Sampark Samuh (JSS) Bhopal is a loosely banded network of individuals and organizations responding to the humanitarian crisis of COVID19. Many in the group have a history of activism and hence the group is able to look at larger issues of food security and access to qualitative health services in the context of fundamental rights.

When the nationwide lockdown was imposed with view to contain COVID19 spread, it became evident that the poorest were paying the price of the Centre's failure to assess the nation's preparedness for a health emergency, especially a Pandemic. The unplanned declaration and imposition of the lockdown compounded by the global economic crisis and the inhouse political turbulence spelt trouble for Madhya Pradesh. With harvest season around the corner, bad weather damaging crops and absence of any state reassurance for farmers, things were already looking bleak. Inter-district migration meant a large chunk of the rural population were out of their homes, in temporary work settings. The sudden lockdown meant no work, no daily wages, no cash in hand and eventually no food.

Migrants started walking back to their homes. Never mind if they had to cross three districts with blisters on their foot. With no money to pay rent and buy food, entire families walked highways in the absence of any transportation. Those who could not go continue to live in a state of anxiety, fear and frustration.

Those individuals and groups who were involved in community work in Bhopal knew that the lockdown would bring immediate distress for daily wagers due to their inability to stock reserves of food. The community kitchen idea was initiated anticipating this distress and to avoid any outbreak of food riots leading to hunger deaths. The very first community kitchen was initiated by the Muslim community in old city. Slowly it reached out to other parts of the city through multiple chains.

"But soon, the largest community doing relief work had to deal with the communalization of the situation. It had a huge negative impact on the morale of the relief workers who were toiling hard to feed the poorest irrespective of their religion or any other background. The Muslims in the city were the most generous contributors to relief work, with money, transportation support, procurement of grains and physical labour in cooking, packing and reaching food to the most vulnerable families. But the community constantly targeted communal hate mongering. Ironically, these are the same people who would line up highways to provide food, water, scarves and even footwear to migrants walking their long walk back home," core team member Seema Kurup says.

Despite the changing political and social scenario, the Jan Sampark Samuh, Bhopal stood their ground. A collective of activists who led the anti-CAA movement in Bhopal, this team could gauge the gravity of the situation when lockdown was enforced in the state. They began the first community kitchen in a friend's house, with shared resources on the very first day serving about 200 food packets to the stranded migrants and daily wage labourers. As the lockdown extended and food requirement went up, the kitchen shifted to a marriage hall, Zam. Till a week back, Zam kitchen used to serve around 3000 packets of food each day.

One of the young leaders of JSS, Sana shares "A team of 60 volunteers organically mushroomed and took charge of various tasks in the kitchen. A media team evolved, an office corner came up and fundraising went on briskly to keep the vegetable biryani supply moving. Professional cooks arrived armed with mammoth cooking utensils, the packing team arrived dot on time, and the distribution network simply broke all records in dodging the police in their defiance to reach food to the poorest,"

Soon, as a felt need, localized, smaller 15 community kitchens were set up in bastis (poor settlements) where women and youth groups took charge of cooking anything between 200-2000 meals for their own community members. Accordingly, the group further diversified to add 4 collection centres in different corners of the city which would receive grains, raw materials and funds that would be supplied to the community kitchens. However, this was planned as a stop-gap arrangement till the district administration got its act together.

Around 120 volunteers were engaged in all the community kitchens. They collectively provided up to 8000 food packets each day.

Another major intervention was Mazdoor Sahyog Kendra on the highways. When the migrants started walking the highways, the teams set up the Mazdoor Sahyog Kendra which provided first aid, transportation support, food, water and counseling to the walking migrants. During this period, along with the regular numbers almost 5-6000 packets of food were distributed on the highway to the walking migrants. The fund collection group went into a massive donation drive to collect this extra food. More volunteers joined the highway work including interns from AIIMS, youth groups and religious groups.

"The core contribution of the JSS has been in preventing food riots and hunger deaths, preventing chaos in the city and preventing people's anger from spilling out onto the streets in violent forms. Hungry people with hungry children are capable of taking extreme actions. The coordinated work with other community kitchens as well enabled the extensive spread of the community kitchen work in the city, collectively ensuring food security of over 2 lakh families in the city," Seema says.

Food Distribution (both, cooked food packets and dry ration kits) was done mostly in the old city area which housed the most marginalized population, with a majority of Muslim community and Gas Tragedy survivor colonies. These areas also house vulnerable communities including transgenders, commercial sex workers, homeless people in and around railway stations, people in the night shelters, district hospital, women's hospital, bus stands, migrant workers on construction sites, domestic workers, students living in hostels & PGs, survivors of violence, children's shelter homes and many categories of de-notified tribes among others. The Jan Sampark Samuh also gradually started working in the new city reaching out to migrant workers.

The Jan Sampark Samuh earned the respect, goodwill and support of a wide range of donors including writers, artists, media persons, Jain and Muslim religious groups, gurudwara, doctors, and many individual donors including food packets made by families from housing societies. The group also received food donations from Bhaskar

Foundation, SBI and some well-established families, local farmers, masjids, and trader communities.

Right at the outset, the Jan Sampark team also met with the District leaderships to propose a decentralized ward focused CSO-District administration Collaboration plan. The plan would help restrict mobility, enable counseling for migrants, students and other distressed groups, enable food networking in the ward, establish a connect between the administration and people, and make localized COVID19 messaging possible. The plan was agreed upon but the very next day top officials in the health department tested positive for COVID19, so did the Mandi president.

The plan was dropped, the Mandi sealed, containment areas were declared, police tore up food volunteers' passes, and strict enforcement orders were passed.

While sharing experiences, Abdulla Haq of JSS narrates "The administration declared that the 4 Deen Dayal Rasoi (government run kitchens) would take care of over 1 lakh meals per day in the city. The DD barely managed to roll out 3000 to 4000 meals per day! Community kitchens were forced shut and the Jan Sampark Samuh raise the questions on this policy of shutting down Civil Society run kitchens. Following democratic and symbolic protests, the administration gradually called off the restrictions, also since it was unable to meet the thousands of distress calls,"

Due to the unwillingness of the government to collaborate with civil society groups, the Jan Sampark Samuh was never able to work together with the administration, Abdulla added.

Different sections helped in their own ways. Religious groups and individual donors went out of their way to provide active support both for food and donations. The presence of journalists in the group ensured that the print and electronic media regularly published news reports of the Jan Sampark Samuh's work, especially the work of the Mazdoor Sahyog Kendra on the highways. These reports also helped reinforce the fact that it was civil society and not government that was taking care of food security and working to mitigate migrant distress.

The challenge continues though many migrants have left due to the increasing number of COVID19 positive cases. With the looming economic crisis, the lockdown relaxation will only further increase the distress taking into fold the lower middle class and middle-class families who have run out of cash and will have no income for months to come. Many individuals have lost their jobs, small businesses have shut down and markets are struggling to stay alive. A new line of people for the ration have emerged, besides the daily wagers. The educated, unemployed middle class who does not ask for help easily.

The Jan Sampark group continues its work on the Mazdoor Sahyog Kendra, by establishing centres for community connect for workers in the unorganized sector. Efforts are being made to set up these centres for registration of workers in maximum wards, helping them with accessing their entitlements and addressing any need-based issues. Unionization is a long-term goal.

The group also has gone back to working on citizenship issues. Working on livelihood issues, building an understanding on labour laws, building leadership capacities among the workers themselves are also on the priority of the group.

There was a time when within the Jan Sampark Samuh, a debate sparked up - shouldn't we stop this safety valve arrangement and stop spoon feeding the community? When will they stand up to demand their rights? Let us close the kitchens or bring down the number of packets. However, when the calls for food flowed in; the group went back to their work.

Malnourished children suffered due to the lockdown of the Anganwadi services as well. The Baccha Rasoi was conceptualized to provide hot nutritious cooked food and milk/eggs/fruits to undernourished children and pregnant women. The Rasoi was set up with complete community participation being run by donations from the local groups and managed by a team of youth from the local community.

The community identifies with the work of Jan Sampark Samuh beyond its relief work. They are identified as people who stood by them when the government failed and prevented them from dying of hunger. There is a sense of solidarity that can be felt when the team carries out extended work on the Mazdoor Sahyog Kendras. However, the community continues to be in a state of distress, they will need the relief groups to stand by them for a much longer time in multiple other ways.

Migrants who have received assistance during the pandemic and have returned home continue to stay in touch informing them about their plans to seek livelihood opportunities in their own villages or return to the city when work opens up. A relationship of trust has been built which is a huge opportunity to mobilize and collectivize the workers in the unorganized sector.

This probably became possible as the Jan Sampark Samuh initiative of community kitchens and migrant distress related relief work was 100% voluntary and followed the approach of collectiveness, dignity and empathy.



5

Mitwa Mahila Kalyan Evam
Seva Samiti (Chhattisgarh)



**Korwa Adivasis
Engaged in Coal
Mining Face
Livelihood Crisis**



Mitwa is a Chhattisgarh based voluntary group working towards protecting rights of and ensuring food security to tribal people.

Mitwa volunteers wasted no time in assessing growing threat to livelihood of tribals and urban poor due to the lockdown that was announced by the Prime Minister on March 24.

The NGO started work with a quick assessment of problems the lockdown brought upon tribal villages in the Raipur and Bilaspur districts in the state. A majority of them are daily wagers working in mines.

The sudden lockdown has rendered the mine workers jobless, creating food insecurity in the community.

Mitwa is active among mine workers of Bilaspur and Raipur districts as well as urban slums in Bilaspur for many years.

These areas are inhabited by Korwas, one of the most backward tribes in India. Their main source of livelihood is coal mining and coal selling. In slums of Bilaspur, most dwellers are daily wage earners and casual labours.

Due to the shutdown, neither there is any work for daily wagers nor any work in the mines. Lack of authentic information and communication has rendered these people even more vulnerable to corona virus infection.

The daily labourers are finding it increasingly difficult to sustain their families. Although the Chhattisgarh government has arranged for ration distribution from PDS system, only rice is available at the fair price shops.

Regular food intake system in the families has collapsed as there are not enough raw materials for two square meals a day. Children and women, in particular, are getting malnourished.

Mitwa chalked out a relief plan for the distressed people. It formed a team of 22 volunteers to provide succor in 22 villages and 8 urban settlements with a view to protecting rights of the Korwa tribe and other poor people. The volunteers enlisted support of local youths at both rural and urban settlements.

Mitwa developed a framework of intervention after a thorough analysis of the situation with the community volunteers.

The volunteers agreed to provide food grains other than rice to needy families facing a lot of adversity. We left out rice because it is already being distributed from PDS. We took special care of the families having pregnant women, lactating mothers and small children.

Our volunteers also worked to connect the community with existing welfare schemes of the government. The organization distributed food grains to a total of 490 rural families and made masks available to them.

Masks, sanitizers and sporting goods were distributed to 625 families in the slums of Bilaspur.

The Mitwa acted as a facilitator in distribution of food grains to the needy tribals and urban poor under the relief package announced by the state government. The food grains reached the beneficiaries through Gram Panchayat, Anganwadi, schools and government fair price shops.

The tribals were deeply fearful about deadly effects of the corona virus. Several misconceptions about the pandemic compounded their fear psychosis. Moreover, they had little information as to what the state government is doing for them to face this unprecedented time. They were largely unaware of the welfare schemes for them being run by the state and central government.

Mitwa volunteers created awareness among the tribals about the corona virus as well as the steps being taken to combat the situation arising out of the pandemic.

"Our long experience of working with the grassroots stood us in good stead. Over the years, the organization has evolved a system of awareness generation which includes monitoring mechanism and advocacy for leveraging benefits of government schemes.

The organization disseminated information and facilitated wall-writing in the community through rural youth. Our volunteers closely monitored the migrant workers, who returned from other places to the state, and got them sent to health centres for check-up wherever required.

During this crisis, providing relief and working actively on measures to prevent spread of the disease have enabled the organization to penetrate deep in the community. Our volunteers have built a relationship of trust with the people," Santoshi Verma of Mitwa Mahila Kalyan Evam Seva Samiti says.

Plight of the poor tribals is unlikely to improve even after the corona virus subsides.

Since workers in this region are largely dependent on mines, they will not get work until mining activities resume, which in all likelihood will take considerable time.

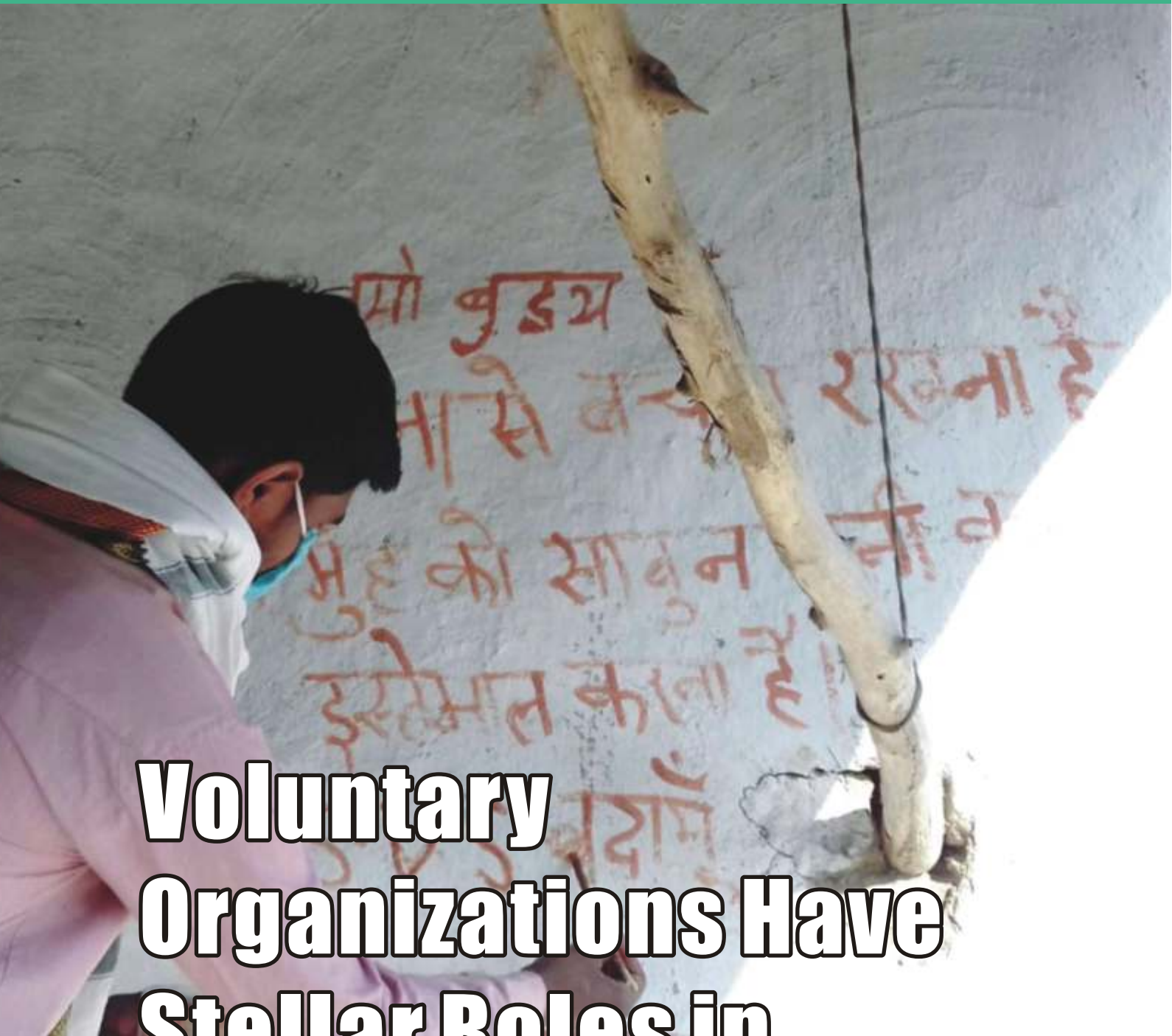
The livelihood crisis is looming large in the horizon. The distressed tribals have to grapple with food insecurity for a long time.

For livelihood and food security, MNREGA and other livelihood options have to be widened to ensure jobs to more people at the local level. Also, in order to monitor implementation of various schemes and protection of the rights and entitlements of the community, sustained advocacy by NGOs and people's organizations is required.

At the local level, the Mitwa got support from Panchayat, Anganwadi workers and teachers in the relief operations. But there were hurdles too. In some cases, despite having valid pass, the police did not permit the volunteers to travel anywhere, the volunteers say.

6

Samagra Vikas Sansthan
(Uttar Pradesh)



**Voluntary
Organizations Have
Stellar Roles in
COVID 19 Crisis**

Samagra Vikas Sansthan, a Badaun-based voluntary organization, has worked closely with the deprived communities such as Bahaliya, Kanjar and Jatav, which are socially discriminated against and traditionally made to live away from relatively socially privileged communities in villages. These historically oppressed communities perpetually face food insecurity.

Samagra Vikas Sansthan has been working with these families on issues related to human rights and child rights for the last two decades.

The organization has helped families of these communities access relief materials from governmental welfare schemes.

When the COVID 19 pandemic broke out and forced the Prime Minister to announce lockdown on March 24, the organization was naturally worried about the fate of the oppressed families who do not get adequate food even in the best of times.

Following the lockdown, which exacerbated food availability for the poor especially migrant workers and daily wage earners, worries increased for the Bahaliya, Kanjar and Jatav communities.

Organisation members started getting calls from families for food grains. "What should we eat, what to do, how to live as only two days of food is left in the house." Such desperate calls from the poor families made the organization realise that the situation is getting very complicated by the day.

People in the deprived communities started panicking as most of them are dependent on daily wages which are in serious peril.

Volunteers of the organization noticed that the people in the intervention villages mainly work as agricultural laborers, hawkers, etc and did not know much about the Corona virus. Therefore, it was the top priority to create awareness among them about ways to prevent spread of the virus. Also, it was important to connect the people with the government relief schemes at the time of lockdown so that they could get necessary assistance.

Most of the people in the five villages of the region work as migrant labourers in brick kilns in Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab etc. They have returned from the kilns which are closed due to the lockdown. It was imperative to get the migrants to put to medical tests and, if necessary, put them in quarantine as precaution.

There was acute shortage of food for these people.

The organization put in place a plan that incorporated activities such as awareness building and ration distribution. A total 16 active workers and 35 volunteers were roped in for implementation of the plan.

Samagra Vikas Sanstha started relief work in the villages of Ujhiyari and Osawa blocks of Badaun district of Uttar Pradesh. This area is mostly inhabited by Baheliya,

Kanjar, Jatav and other communities who do not have their own land.

The lockdowns has also hit the livelihood of other daily workers such as shoe polishers, vegetables and toys venders, rickshaws / e-rickshaws pullers and hawkers. Many of them have come back from cities. The stored ration in these households exhausted in two days after the lockdown, leading to severe food insecurity. Samagra Vikas Sanstha had managed to provide support to 1000 families with food, masks, health service support and support to quarantined people.

The organization has formed children's group in the villages, which are known as Krantikari Bal Manch. These groups contribute immensely in ensuring child rights at the village level. The organization worked closely with these groups in 7 villages and provided relief to the needy families.

The organization's teams visited the rural areas to educate people about the symptoms of corona virus (COVID19) and methods of staying safe. Wall writing and posters were used as effective modes of communication in the villages. It was ensured that people with any symptoms of the virus could go to the nearest health center or call helpline No. 112, 1098, 181 and 1076 without any fear.

In one village of Badaun district, a volunteer of the organization gathered local material and made 50 masks at the village level, which he donated to the local children.

This encouraged the children to wear masks all the time. He encouraged people to maintain social distance by making them aware of the COVID 19 effects.

In the Meera Sarai village, there is a Basti inhabited by the Gihar community. Traditionally, this community faces a lot of social discrimination in the village. The Gihar people are daily laborers, mostly involved in shoe polishing.

In the lockdown many of them were forced to go hungry. The organization's team could provide only limited relief to them. The team talked to the concerned SDM and ration was made available to them from the fair price shop.

Some people who did not have ration card or did not have money to buy ration, could not procure food grain. The organization approached the Scouts, who were distributing packets of prepared food door to door to poor families. On hearing the condition of the Gihar Basti, Scouts distributed ration to the children in the villages.

Cooked food was delivered to about 75 families of Gihar basti for three days and further assistance was also promised by the scouts.

The organisation members feel that post COVID19 situation can be even more frightening, especially for people who are still stranded due to lockdown. Soon after the lockdown is lifted, they would rush back to their respective areas of work, thereby increasing risk of infection manifold.

People who have already returned to their native places are too traumatized to go back to cities, giving rise to possibility of hunger in the villages.

Due to lack of infrastructure, there is no access to online education for rural children. This will create a huge learning gap, wherein it will be difficult for children to adapt themselves to schools after the lockdown opens. As a result, there will be a surge in number of school dropouts. If social distancing norms are not followed after the lockdown, there will be a grave risk of a second wave of infection, the members say.

The organization has consistently coordinated and collaborated with the local administration in the process of providing relief. Representatives of the local bodies were cooperative and helpful, but expectation of cooperation from the administration was not fulfilled.

"The organization mostly conducted relief works without the help of the administration. The administration did not issue passes to carry out any activity to volunteers, doubting that the social distancing norms will not be maintained. The lockdown passes were canceled by the district administration after cases of corona infection were detected in Badaun. The denial of passes obstructed movement for relief purposes. During this crisis, the attitude of the police administration remained tough. Needy people were also harassed unnecessarily. The local administration did not take cognizance of the matter and asked the organization to stay away from helping the poor people," Rajkumar Sharma of the Organisation says.

During this national crisis of COVID19, the role of NGOs is of utmost importance in ensuring food security, developing dialogue, socio-psycho counseling and prevention of disease among the disadvantaged and marginalized communities. Engaging directly with them helps cement the bonds with the communities. It also serves to build an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect between the community and the organization, the Samagra Vikas Sansthan team says.



7

Pahel Multipurpose Social
Service Organization (Delhi)



**Give me some
Atta Sahib... I have not
eaten Roti for the
last 15 days**

Pahel, a Delhi- based NGO, is working tirelessly to provide relief to hungry and helpless workers. Pahel is a national level organization actively working on issues of child welfare and child rights, health and women empowerment in Delhi, Bihar and Rajasthan since 2003.

At present, Pahel started relief work keeping in mind the circumstances arising out of the COVID19 outbreak.

Initially, it was difficult to reach out to stranded people in need owing to strict implementation of the lockdown rules in Delhi. After a while, the NGO formed a 12-member team to plan, organize and carry out relief operations in the labour settlements where most of the families depend on daily wages to sustain.

Pahel volunteers are working in 3 industrial areas of North and Northwestern districts of Delhi among daily wage earners, most of whom are migrant workers from other states. They comprise single women, daily wage earners, factory workers, domestic workers and rag picker families. The number of child labour is also high here.

After talking to the Commission for Protection of Child Rights, Pahel volunteers reached out to the families in dire need of help but deprived of benefits from the government schemes for some reasons. Such benefits are available to only those families which are registered workers having ration card.

Pahel has provided relief to nearly 2000 families with the support of partners such as CRY, Smile Foundation, CARE, Zomato and individual donors.

Due to the lockdown, the condition of daily wage workers in North and Northwest Delhi is deteriorating steadily. Due to gap in implementation of relief measures announced by government, poor people are wandering but there is hardly any assurance of continuity of food supply.

The factories in Badli Industrial Area of ??Delhi have closed down. Since the laborers are mostly migrants, they do not have money to buy food items being sold at higher prices at local grocery stores. Not knowing how long the lockdown will last, people are in panic. Many families used to have illegal LPG gas connections, which are not available anymore.

The effect of lockdown is worse on women and children. More women are seen in the long queues for food than men. Women also bear the brunt of the stress and anger arising out of the crisis, both inside and outside the homes. Field workers of Pahel, Rahiman and Savitri recall poignant tale of suffering of a woman standing in queue for grocery items, who said "Didi, please give us food first, our children have not eaten anything since morning. It is 12 o'clock and they must be waiting for us".

Some families do not have money to get even milk for their children.

Due to the shutdown in these industrial areas, a large number of people are on the verge of starvation. Therefore, distribution of food grains and food to the needy was our first priority.

Pahel pooled in resources on its own and prepared food kits (5 kg flour, 5 kg rice, pulses, oil, spices, sugar and soap) for distribution to around 2500 families. As number of help seekers grew, more people were provided ration with support from like-minded individuals and organizations.

When community kitchens started, demand for food increased. Some youths lent support to operate the kitchen. Cooked food was distributed in many settlements.

A volunteer from Pahel was deployed at the Hunger Helpline run by the Delhi government for help.

The organization is making efforts to connect families with the PDS system. An app has been created by the government through which such families are being registered, so that they can get ration. A team of Pahel is helping people apply for ration cards through this app.

While helping the poor, Pahel team members were at times overwhelmed by emotions. People are struggling for two square meals. A rickshaw puller said, "I am not getting any help, sir, I am not even able to go home."

When he was asked to assist the NGO in distribution of food, he said the rickshaw he pulled was not his; it is rented.

During food distribution, a daily wage worker pleaded with the volunteers to give him more wheat flour in place of rice. With tear in eyes he explained he had not eaten roti for 15 days and as a result had developed stomachache.

The biggest problem for daily workers after the pandemic effect subsides would be to get back to their work. All businesses are badly disrupted.

Those migrant workers, who have returned, will have to find work all over again. For daily wage earners it will take time to rebuild their work. Food security crisis might worsen and render children, women and destitute people extremely vulnerable.

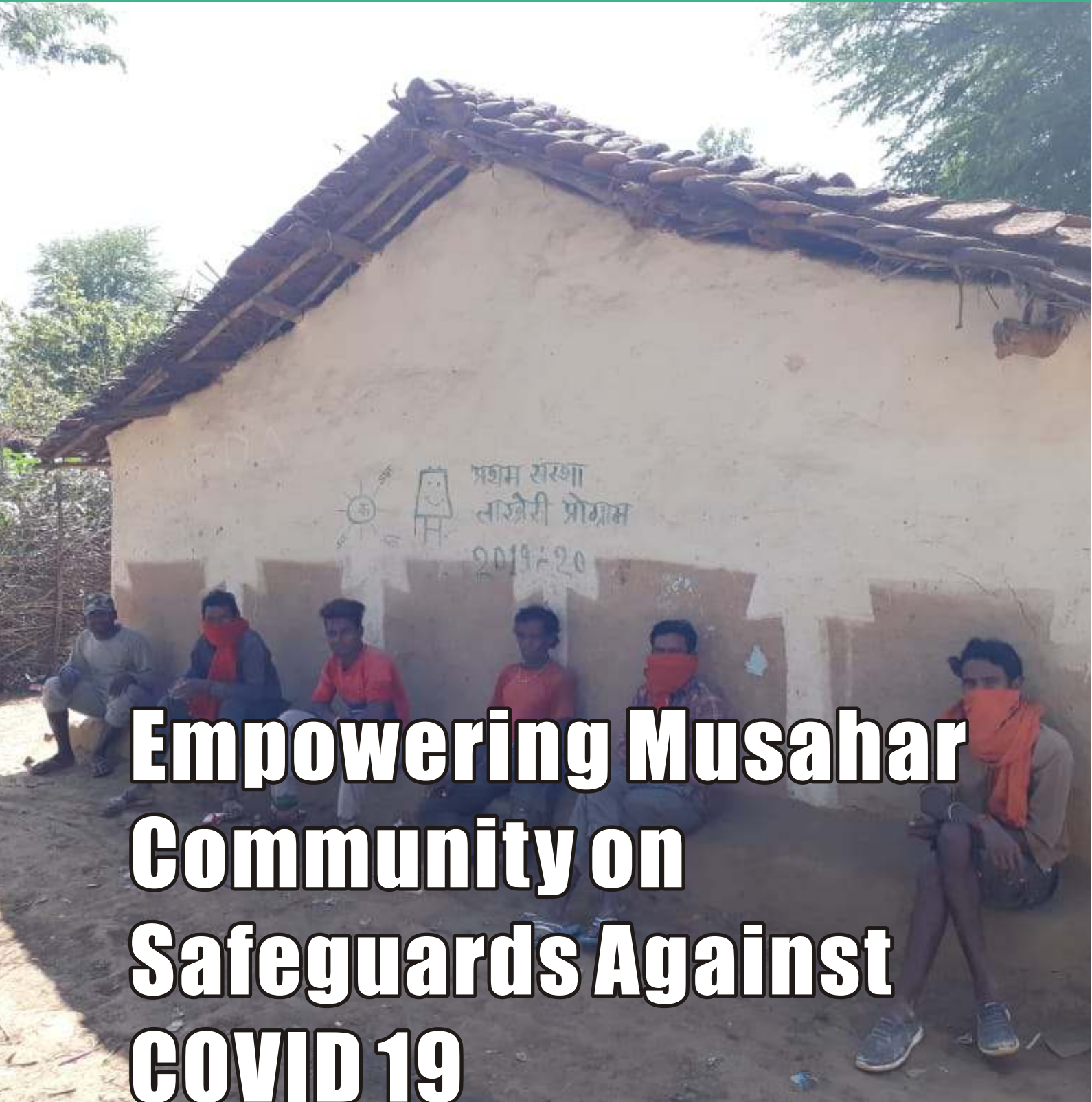
Local administration has been quite supportive in this whole relief operation. Support was received from the police and district office. Passes were made available for movement. The organization also received a 'thank-you' letter from the Delhi Child Line. The Delhi Child Protection Rights Commission also gave a lot of support. Police played a proactive role in maintaining physical / social distance during the delivery of food.

The experiences of relief work gain proves that the last mile person is still difficult to reach in times of need and remains deprived of government schemes. The government has no concrete support plan for construction workers in times of such crises.

"Our biggest challenge was to arrange ration cards for many people who did not have ration cards and therefore were ineligible for subsidized food items from PDS system," Jitendra Kumar Singh of the organization says.

8

Abhiyan
(Bihar)



Empowering Musahar Community on Safeguards Against COVID 19

Amidst nationwide lockdown, underprivileged communities such as Musahar in Bihar are suffering a lot of problems ranging from loss of livelihood to starvation.

However, the biggest problem is lack of awareness about the Novel Corona Virus (COVID19) that has rendered the community extremely vulnerable to the pandemic.

Abhiyan, an organisation based in Bihar, launched an awareness campaign and reached the community with safety kits. The campaign began soon after Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the 21-day lockdown on March 24.

“Our local volunteers informed us about the situation at the ground arising out of the corona effects. The Musahar community was acutely unaware of the reason behind the lockdown. Without wasting a second, we put out resources at our command to work for the community,” Swarn Prabhat, an Abhiyan volunteer, said.

According to the National Human Rights Commission, the Musahars are the poorest among the scheduled castes in India. They are found in parts of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Jharkhand. Very few Musahar families own or cultivate land. Their annual income is less than school fee of a standard one student of a reasonably good private school, the NHRC research said.

Most of the Musahar members work in others' farms or at brick factories. They have been provided with small houses by the government where around four to five families reside in clusters. In such congested homes, social distancing is just impossible.

The Abhiyan identified 10 villages of Jehanabad with around 25% population of Musahars to start work. “We worked with 3,000 Musahars during the lockdown,” said Prabhat.

In most of these villages, male members were stuck in different cities owing to the lockdown. They migrate after the cultivation of Rabi and come back before Holi.

When the lockdown was announced, villagers were forced to stop agriculture work. This deprived Musahar farm labourers of their source of income. The lockdown meant no work for them in brick factories too.

Abhiyan's first focus was to ensure food security for the Musahar families facing starvation. The organisation took the help of administration to provide them essential grocery items for free.

Organisation volunteers approached the administration to plead for food safety of the community. With cooperation from higher administrative officials, the volunteers made village level authorities to provide adequate food supply to the community members through the Public Distribution System.

Abhiyan volunteers prevailed over Panchayats to use their funds for food security and hygiene. The organization also created awareness about government schemes during lockdown such as grant of Rs 1000 for each family with the ration card, three months

lump sum pension and deposit of Rs 500 in Jandhan accounts. Volunteers approached competent authorities to provide help under these schemes.

The government later eased restrictions under the lockdown to enable farmers to start agriculture work. This helped Musahars also and they started getting some employment at farms. The Abhiyan also convinced farmers of the villages to start harvesting as the agriculture activities are exempted during the lockdown.

After food security for the poor community members was managed, Abhiyan started awareness campaign among them.

The volunteers are going door-to-door in villages to educate them about Novel Corona Virus, importance of social distancing and use of masks.

"We adopted local dialect in the campaign. Initially, we faced difficulties in convincing them to stay at home and not let children go outside. They were not ready to believe there does such an invisible virus exist," said a volunteer associated with Abhiyan.

"We persuaded them to stay home because there is no cure available for this disease and only staying at home can save all of us. Many volunteers from Musahar community proved to be a great help during the awareness drive," he added.

The organisation arranged passes for its volunteers so that they can roam around to carry on awareness work.

"We face some challenges at local level as some persons from dominant communities in the villages try to disrupt our work. However, the ground connection of volunteers and a network of Self-Help Groups of the villages help the volunteers to overcome this problem," said Swarn Prabhat.

Another problem was to arrange funds for the awareness work and to buy masks and soaps.

"We called our patrons and other fellow organisations based in Patna and in other part of India for help. Few organisations offered help, which was sufficient to buy hygiene kits," Prabhat added.

Volunteers of Abhiyan feel that life is going to be very difficult for landless Musahars as they face acute crisis of livelihood. After the pandemic subsides, they would need proper income and livelihood support to resume normal life.

They also fear that the income loss might lead to penury resulting in severe malnutrition in children and spike in mortality rate. Such a scenario may land them deeper into the clutches of usury.

Role of the civil society along with government becomes very important in such a scenario. The government must involve civil societies to tackle the problems that have arisen after the pandemic outbreak, the volunteers feel.

9

People's Union of
Civil Liberties (Gujarat)



**Activating State
Systems is also a
Crucial Role**

Gujarat's celebratory mode following the 'Namaste Trump' event in Ahmedabad on March 19 turned into worries soon after as Ahmedabad and other cities of the state turned increasingly vulnerable to spread of the COVID19.

Surat, a major city known for textiles, diamond and other industries, is under the grip of COVID19.

Krishna Kumar, a PUCL volunteer, describes plight of the workers in Surat in the wake of the corona virus outbreak. People's Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL) is an organization that fights for protection of citizens' human and constitutional rights.

Surat has more than 15 lakh migrant workers from various states of India employed in big and small-scale industries such as textile and diamond.

"As the Prime Minister announced sudden lockdown on March 24, most of the states including Gujarat were caught unawares and unprepared for possible impact of the announcement.

The states were left to face challenges emerging in the wake of the lockdown. Later, the Centre announced distribution of ration to poor families under the National Food Security Act and other schemes. However, there was no specific policy to address woes suffered by the migrant workers who did not possess ration cards in the state they work in.

As the Gujarat government appeared unwilling to resolve issues of the migrant workers, civil society organisations stepped in to provide food to the stranded and needy," Krishna Kumar says.

The state government took about two weeks to implement, that too partially, a ration distribution scheme for the migrants called 'Anna Brahmi Yojana'. Due to lack of proper guidelines, thousands of labours and their families were denied food grains on one pretext or the other. Some were turned away after they spent hours standing in queues for ration, other PUCL volunteers said.

Every time and in every area the assessment of requirement of food grains failed to gauge realistic number of eligible or needy. At some places when requirement was assessed for 500 kits, nearly 4000 needy persons lined up. Similar chaos was witnessed at food packet distribution centres set up by the Surat Municipal Corporation (SMC). Needy people queued up twice daily for hours to get a meal.

"The PUCL and National Alliance of People's Movement (NAPM) started receiving calls from voluntary and people's organisations in various states about plight of the labours from their respective states in Surat." Krishna Kumar shared. The PUCL and NAPM took up the task to coordinate with relief agencies and organizations. Volunteers also mediated between government departments and local administration to ensure that food and relief materials are accessible to the targeted people.

PUCL and NAPM are active for a long time in Surat. They have good contacts with civil society organisations.

Acting on the calls and messages from various states about fate of the migrant workers, volunteers got in touch with the aggrieved persons and understood their needs. They coordinated with local organizations to provide relief and also put the stranded people in touch with the organizations engaged in relief works.

Volunteers also corresponded with Surat Municipal Corporation and Surat collector about the scale and need of the stranded persons.

When the lockdown was announced, it was the last week of March. Migrant workers were expecting wages in the first week of April. Only a few of them had means to carry on without help for 10 days.

As days passed, more and more migrant workers were looking for relief. Soon enough demand for food packets surged to five lakhs.

“We feel had the civil society not intervened for relief to the needy in time, many workers may have either died of hunger or hit the streets in protest. Later, migrant workers did hit the streets in various areas as their patience ran out,” a volunteer said.

The advisory to provide wages for the period of lockdown to the workers did not seem to work. Only a miniscule percentage of labourers got their wages for the whole March month. The labourers were worried for family as there was no chance of getting wages in the upcoming month April either, he added.

The organisations wrote regularly to the administration suggesting ways for addressing problems of the distressed workers.

Post lock down, Surat and Gujarat will come up in a new shape, the organizations feel. Lifestyle will certainly change. Economic distress will be a huge issue. Daily wage earners, street vendors, women and children will be hit hardest by the economic meltdown.

They will also bear the brunt of the diversion of funds meant for health to fight against corona.

The city of diamond and textiles will have to find out ways. Major challenge is to bring back the labour force which is under severe trauma. Thousands of people have walked down to their states and villages barefoot with children, women and elderly people.

To restore trust among them that all is well is a tall order. Textile mill owners and diamond factory owners have not shown much concern to the plight of the workers.

The organizations are apprehensive that the governments at the Centre and states will try to curtail fundamental rights of the people in the name of tiding over economic downturn. They feel that more and more strong voices are needed on the issues of labourers along with physical support and relief to them.



10

'Mahfooz Bachpan
(Uttar Pradesh)



**A Barrier Came
In The Way and He
Crossed It!**

Agra, the city of Taj, is reeling under the deleterious impact of the corona virus as number of cases continues to rise amid the lockdown.

The sudden announcement of the lockdown- 1 massively disrupted supply chain in the city and caused scarcity of essential groceries, especially wheat flour.

The lockdown also halted economic activities. As a result, daily wagers have been rendered without any means of earning livelihood.

In such a gloomy scenario, a social worker, Naresh Paras, did a yeoman's service. He singlehandedly started helping the needy. Paras is associated with a non-profit group 'Mahfooz Bachpan'. He utilized all his resources and network to help poor families fight hunger during the lockdown.

"I found that daily wagers were the worst hit due to the pandemic. They usually buy essential items of grocery on day-to-day basis. After the announcement of lockdown, the middle class and upper-class income group people started storing groceries leading to a scarcity and price hike in the market," said Paras.

Gayatri, a slum dweller, was not able to breastfeed her newborn twins because she herself had not properly eaten for days. Flour was out of stock, and her family was not allowing her to eat rice due to an old tradition that prohibits lactating mothers from doing so.

"I felt that people are running out of groceries despite having money. They ran out of food stock because of the shortage in market," added Paras. He tried to get the needy help from the local administration but in vain.

"I contacted the administration officials and provided them with all the information about food scarcity I had on the helpline numbers released by authorities. But no help was forthcoming," Paras said.

Disappointed Paras decided to go at it alone. He roamed around market to market in search of flour which had vanished because of suspected hoarding.

Paras then went to the wholesale market situated far from the city to bring a huge consignment of flour. A friend helped him get the contacts of wholesalers. He purchased 100 kilos of flour. With the help of other volunteers, he prepared 5-kg packets of flour and started distributing them.

After a few days, however, the wholesale market also ran out of flour and other groceries. Paras sought the help of local MLA Chaudhary Udaybhan Singh.

The MLA put him in touch with his son Devendra Singh who was helping people in the same way. The MLA's son had maintained a supply chain of onion and flour on no profit- no loss basis.

With the help of the supply chain, Paras raised a fresh stock of flour. He commuted 40-km from the city to purchase the flour for five days and managed to provide 12 quintals wheat flour to 240 families. In the whole process, he got the help of police administration as well.

The police personnel would go to slum areas and announce about availability of flour. Paras delivered the food items to needy people at wholesale rate.

“Apart from this, I also distributed vegetables free to over 500 needy families who could not afford to buy green grocery at high price”, says Paras.

Paras worked day and night arranging grocery items and supplying them to needy people at affordable rates on no profit- no loss basis.

Food and essential supply situation improved after the government supplied free ration through public distribution system. The government also had money deposited directly into the beneficiaries' bank accounts.

Paras acknowledges that friends and professional network helped him reach out to nearly 600 families which were on the verge of starvation in several slums such as Jagdishpura, Panchkuiya, Indira Nagar, Marwari Basti, and Lalkila.

With the help of police, they distributed free food to over 400 families in the second phase of the initiative.

Paras leveraged social media platform to find information about people who had run out of food grains.

He learnt that a group of migrant labourers was stranded in the city. The workers had come from the Sagar district of Madhya Pradesh to work in a Smart City project. He and his friends provided immediate relief to the migrant labourers. Paras also intervened in the matter with the help of the police and approached their contractor. The contractor gave them an advance of Rs 2000 each against their salary to buy essential commodities.

The group also launched sanitization campaign in colonies to prevent further spread of the corona virus. “I raised the issue of sanitization of slums but the local administration was not ready to heed to our pleas. I collaborated with a non-profit Agra Vikas Manch to get at least 10 slums sanitized.” Paras said.

Paras feel that the fight with the COVID19 is a long haul.

“I fear an unemployment wave will surge after the lockdown is lifted”.

It will change structure of the society and the way of living. The relief provided by the government agencies is not reaching slums. Sanitization work is also limited to posh colonies. Social distancing is not possible in slums due to high population density. That means, the slums may be the next hotspot of COVID19 and the situation could be out of control.

The government must include civil society organisations in the relief work to help the administration win trust of the public and society at large, says Paras.



11

Prayaas
(Rajasthan)



**Responding to the
Plight of Migrant
Labourers**

Families of migrant labourers from Sitamata Van Abhyaranya (forest sanctuary) area in Rajasthan grew worried as they learnt about their kin returning home from far off places such as Ahmadabad. The migrant labourers had no other alternative but to return home, as the lockdown had rendered them jobless. The labourers from this area migrate to Gujarat to work on construction sites.

Nearly 200 migrant workers from eight villages of Sitamata Van Abhyaranya area including women, girls and children, started returning home from far off places on foot. They needed immediate assistance. Their wages had not been paid by the contractors.

Prayaas, a voluntary organization, contacted the district collectors of Chhittosgarh and Pratapgarh seeking help for the migrant workers. Prayaas is working for the last 40 years in the Chhitorgarh and Pratapgarh districts of Rajasthan on the issues of food, nutrition and rights of workers. At the national level, the organization has taken initiative in nine states towards ensuring rights of common people.

Prayaas urged the district collectors to arrange vehicles for the workers to return home. On March 25, the state government provided buses for the migrants coming back from Gujarat. By that time, many of them had covered considerable distance on foot. Some had even managed to reach home.

The organization started relief work for the most deprived sections in the tribal areas of Chittorgarh and Pratapgarh districts. A large section of the villagers here are migrant workers who are distressed due to sudden announcement of the lockdown.

Volunteers interacted with one another on phone and chalked out a strategy for help of the needy in the two districts.

"The migrant workers of Chittorgarh and Pratapgarh after returning to their villages faced scarcity of food items. Providing them relief and getting them tested for COVID19 was a big challenge for us". Team members say.

A Prayaas team of 20 volunteers contacted state government officials including district collector, chief medical and health officer of Pratapgarh in this regard. Subsequently, the health department sent a four-member team for health check-up of the migrant workers.

The organization decided to undertake relief work on community-based needs. And while implementing its decisions to provide support to families in distress, Prayaas provided support to 2000 families with food and reached to 15000 families with masks, safety kits etc.

Emergency food supply: Most deprived and poor families are being identified and provided dry ration kits inclusive of wheat, rice, beans, salt, edible oil, spices, sugar and tea leaves. One kit is enough to last for two weeks for an average family of five.

Hygiene kits' distribution: Hygiene and sanitation management is most important to

safeguard health and prevent diseases during any pandemic. Hygiene kits are being distributed to the families that are unable to afford them or unable to access them due to lockdown or due to poor supply chain.

One kit comprises one bathing soap, one detergent soap, one dish cleaning soap, a washer, a packet of detergent powder, a tooth-paste tube and a water strainer.

Supply and availability of sanitary napkins-- important for menstrual hygiene-- has been badly affected in rural areas. Prayaas started distributing sanitary napkins to girls and women in the villages.

Prayaas team members were also engaged in making cloth masks at home with help of community volunteers and women. These masks are later distributed to needy people in villages. Along with distribution, the community members are also trained for safe and proper use of the mask and how to clean and sanitise them.

COVID19 Resource Centre and helpline: Prayaas has set up two COVID19 centres one each at Chittorgarh and Pratapgarh district. These centres work as information centre for details, preventive measures, testing facilities and treatment routine of COVID19. The centres also disseminate information about relief packages announced by the government.

The organization has started identifying and enumerating the migrant workers who have returned to their native places. They are linked to the system for screening, testing, preventive measures and treatment. We are trying to ensure that these migrants are linked to the government relief packages and get assistance for shelter, food and treatment.

Due to suspension of outreach health services such as vaccination, ANC and others, numerous children and women are deprived of these essential services.

Prayaas team keeps a watch on health condition of children and pregnant women in 30 villages and tracks them regularly.

The high-risk pregnant women and those in last trimester are especially monitored so that they can get timely care. This is aimed at preventing maternal, newborn or infant deaths.

The organization volunteers had several painful experiences as our volunteers reached out to the needy.

On April 27, Jyoti, a resident of Chittorgarh, called up on the Prayaas helpline and said she had nothing to eat. She is a rag-picker. The lockdown has rendered her jobless.

Jyoti's family was provided with ration and hygiene kit by Prayaas. They will be helped to get financial aid under Jandhan accounts.

Goti Bai Meena, 33, stays in village Dagla ka Kheda of Chittorgarh district. Her

husband works at a marble factory in Andhra Pradesh. He is without job and money because he was not paid wages for three months.

Goti Bai, who works as a domestic help in houses of a colony of the Hindustan Zinc Factory, is bed ridden. She fractured her leg in an accident two weeks ahead of the announcement of the lockdown.

When the organization came to know about her plight, she was taken to hospital and treatment was made available to her.

Prayaas coordinated with and supported local administration and state government in all relief works. Needy families identified through resource centre and helpline were linked to relief network.

An action plan including the list of the needy and poor people, who were deprived of nutritious and basic food, was put before the administration. Also details of the problems faced by poor tribals were shared with media, so that the issues could reach the administration and common people.

After the COVID19 situation gets controlled, the biggest issue will be unemployment. A lot of misconceptions regarding health and diseases will likely trouble people.

Civil society organizations will have to maintain constant coordination among the communities, beneficiaries, people's representatives and the administration. The needy will have to be constantly given information on livelihood options. Steps will have to be taken in coordination with local administration to ensure generation of local livelihood options. The organization will make its plans and programmes keeping these situations in mind.

The fears regarding COVID19 will persist even after the pandemic abates, so efforts will have to be made about creating more awareness and handling the situations of social divide.

Due to COVID19 situation, government is ignoring several essential services like suspension of ante-natal checkups for pregnant women and vaccination of children in rural areas of Rajasthan.

Two volunteers Chhaya and Chhavi say that due to the relief and assistance work undertaken by the organization, it has earned credibility and respect in the community as well as the local administration. This will be helpful in future works.

Lots of misconceptions are prevalent among tribal communities regarding COVID19. The Prayaas team is constantly working to dispel these misconceptions. The organization had to constantly plead with the administration to secure passes for relief works.



12

Dharti Sanstha
(Madhya Pradesh)



**Reaching Out to
Sahariyas!**

Sahariya is a primitive tribe inhabiting parts of the Gwalior-Chambal division, predominantly in Sheopur district of Madhya Pradesh. Most members of the tribe subsist on daily wages as workers and farm labourers because they do not own land. Malnutrition is rampant in the tribe owing to poverty and their unhealthy dietary practices.

The outbreak of corona virus brought untold miseries for the Sahariyas, who are classified as one of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) in India.

They do not have money to buy ration. Small shops in villages from where they could get some credit have run out of stock.

Dharti Sanstha, a non-profit organization, is active among Sahariya families for many years.

Dharti's director Devendra Bhadoriya says "when the lockdown was announced on March 24, poor Sahariya people had no idea as to what troubles it is going to create for them. Many of them do not have mobile phone. Moreover, villages do not have network. So, they were ignorant about the lockdown".

However, volunteers of the Dharti sensed that the outbreak of the pandemic will spell troubles for the poor Sahariya families as they have neither adequate means for subsistence nor awareness to prevent themselves from its dangerous impact.

Children, in particular were major concern. Organisation volunteers have worked in field previously to document status of severe malnutrition in Sahariya children. They also have fair idea as to how and why pregnant and lactating women are vulnerable to food insecurity in Sahariya villages.

In the aftermath of the corona virus earning members of the families are without money and job.

After the lockdown, volunteers are regularly in touch with the community members. They regularly get phone calls from the field that the distressed families have run out of ration and options to feed family.

Dharti volunteers identified most deprived and vulnerable families in the community for providing help. Then the volunteers contacted local administration for support. Administration was provided with list of essential materials to be included in ration kits. Sanitization kits were also included.

Volunteers of Dharti distributed ration and sanitization kits to the identified families with support from the SDM office, PRI members and village institutions.

The organization got active support in the initiative from BRLF (Bharat Rural Livelihood Foundation) which provided ration for 1000 families living in Vijaypur block of Sheopur district. The IGSSS helped 205 families in Pahadgarh block of Morena district.

Mukesh Aadiwasi, a Dharti volunteer, said when he was preparing list of needy families with PRI members and villagers, he realized most families were on the verge of starvation.

The field area is Sahariya tribe dominated area. Most of them usually migrate to other cities for work. Constant intervention by Dharti Sanstha has helped in decreasing number of malnourished children and anemic women.

Organisation has also helped the villagers increase their agriculture production. Dharti volunteers encouraged farmers to form groups to reduce migration and increase collection of forest produces.

Women were motivated toward savings and children towards education.

During the relief work the organisation got support from the SDM, police department, PRI members and village institutions.

Administration helped in distribution of ration kits. The SDM Vijaypur sought Dharti's help to quarantine families. After discussion with the BRLF, support was provided to 300 families who were quarantined at homes and centers. Many of them were migrants who returned to the villages after lockdown.

Dharti team feels that in future, most challenging work will be to provide livelihood options at local level for community members to stop migration. It is also important to increase family income to help Sahariya workers to overcome food and health insecurity as soon as possible.




13

Samaan Sanstha
(Madhya Pradesh)



**Empowered
Women Drive the
Relief Work**



Samaan, a civil society organization in Indore, is a strong votary of woman empowerment and works to this end. It has not only encouraged but trained women for unconventional works such as motor mechanic. It also trained women to become professional drivers and they remain associated with the Samaan.

One such driver is Lalita Ujale whose initiative saved a newborn and her mother in the time of COVID19 induced distress.

Indore is the worst COVID19 hit city in Madhya Pradesh. Rising number of corona virus cases have caused extreme anxiety in Indore. Amid such a frightening situation, a full-term pregnant woman was referred from a government hospital for the MY Hospital. The woman was anaemic too and the family had no mode of transport to take her to the referred hospital. Ambulance of the hospital was also engaged in the service of the COVID19 patients. The family had no option but to start walking.

Lalita Ujale, who happened to be passing by in her Sakha cab (launched by Samaan in November 2018), learnt about the family's trauma, and offered to drop them to the hospital. She, of course, did this pro bono. She also waited till the baby was born the same night and two days later also dropped the newborn and the mother home.

The Samaan volunteers swung into action after getting distress calls from needy workers from many poor settlements. They initially tried to link the needy labourers to free ration scheme that the government announced in the wake of the lockdown. Samaan volunteers and workers from labour community called up on the helpline numbers provided by the administration, but there was no satisfactory response.

Samaan director Rajendra Bandhu sent a WhatsApp message to the Indore District Collector seeking ration support under the government scheme for needy. On the same day Bandhu also communicated through e-mail with the collector and municipal commissioner on the issue and provided names, residential addresses and phone numbers of needy people.

In return, only one person got a phone call from Indore Municipal Corporation. The municipal officer said they will first check whether the needy seeking help have enough food material at homes. This was just one example of the apathetic attitude of the administration.

"However, we decided that this was not a time for confrontation with the administration.

Our priority was to help out needy people because they did not have food even for a day. We paid special attention to the migrant workers who had come from other cities to Indore to eke out a living. They wanted to go back to their native places even on foot if no other option was left. They did not have anything to feed their children. We provided them ration and our decision put a brake on their plan to walk back," Bandhu says

The organization approached different people, companies, clubs and potential donors

soliciting support.

From the donation received ration was purchased and decision was taken to distribute one kit to each family. Each kit comprised 10 kg wheat flour, five kg of rice, two kg of tuar daal, one packet salt, two kg of sugar, two litres of edible oil, spices, soap and one packet of sanitary napkins.

Delivering the material to the needy families was a big challenge during the lockdown. In such situation, Samaan volunteers managed to get passes for four-woman drivers and three cars.

The drivers played crucial role in delivering ration kits in the poor settlements. They also helped in finding out problems of the people and evaluating their condition. Eight volunteers of the organization also supported this work of the women drivers.

When male drivers were apprehensive about venturing out in the city, the women associated with the organization showed rare grit and courage in helping our poor families.

Indore has approximately 750 poor settlements. The organization identified about 100 of them including those in Palda, Pipalyahana, Bangali Chouraha, Musakhedi, Malwa Mill and Banganga.

Talking about her experience, one of the volunteer recalls during ration distribution, she heard a girl of about one and half years crying inconsolably from a house. Distraught mother said the crying girl had not had milk for almost a week. The toddler was being fed watery soup of pulses (daal ka paani).

"We handed over the ration kit to the mother and asked if milk was available anywhere in the vicinity.

The mother said that the milkman had stopped coming to the locality as people did not have money to buy milk. We decided to purchase a milk powder carton for the family. But the mother did not know how to prepare milk out of the powder.

So, I decided to heat water at her place and showed her how to make the milk. Also, I used the sugar from the ration kit to sweeten it. The child was fed milk in our presence and she stopped crying as soon as she got the milk," recalls the volunteer.

Even after the menace of corona virus diminishes weaker sections of the society will continue to face the challenges of livelihood. People will not be in a position to earn money at least for six months after the lockdown is lifted. Therefore, strategy will have to be chalked out to provide relief to them in the long term, Samaan team feels.



14

Koshish
(Jammu and Kashmir)



**Developing Trust
With United
Efforts**

The lockdown is a double whammy for Kashmiris who were already confined to homes since August 5 following abrogation of the Article 370 and trifurcation of the Jammu and Kashmir state in three union territories. Economy of the state was already devastated. The lockdown in the wake of the COVID19 outbreak has further imperiled livelihood of thousands of Kashmiris who earn a little more than subsistence wage.

Koshish is a voluntary organization highlighting livelihood and hygienic issues of vulnerable communities in Kashmir, particularly in Budgam, Bandipora, Srinagar, Kulgam and Baramulla following the lockdown.

Women are particularly hit by the lockdown. Healthcare workers are also facing acute shortage of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) in the region, jeopardizing safety of frontline corona warriors. Koshish volunteers discussed effects of the lockdown and worked out a plan to provide help to the distressed people of the valley.

Unfortunately, lockdowns are not new situations in Kashmir. The Kashmiris have been enduring such situations for the last many decades. However, gravity of the situation arising out of the pandemic is different. This time round, there is internet as one of the most potent communication weapons in combat against the COVID19, Dr Rauf of Koshish says.

During the crisis, the organization has done in parts of the valley. Dr. Rauf Malik, Director of Koshish describes organisations intervention during COVID19 pandemic says "Team started door-to-door awareness drive through IEC, audio/ video in local languages. Social media groups and communication skills were also used to drive home significance of social distancing in public places such as banks, PHCs and vegetable markets. It was important to develop communication with religious institutions, so local Masjids were persuaded to relay audio messages on the pandemic prepared by our team. Village committees were set up to monitor child health and protection issues. Skill education related activities involving children were undertaken to encourage them to raise awareness about COVID19. Volunteers helped in distribution of Mid-Day Meal and nutrition in Anganwadi centres while observing safety protocols".

Since there have been learnings from the previous lockdowns, Koshish organisation also started focusing on Education and in this course of intervention small groups of children in neighborhoods were provided with solved assignments with support of our team, lessons prepared by our team were circulated among children, educational materials were supplied to ensure that children of vulnerable families are not deprived of learning.

The focus was clear - Protection of Children's Rights and that was the main reason Koshish started engaging children in the intervention. The organisation conducted sessions focusing on children's mental health and creative potentials are being conducted.

Koshish's team has created educational materials in video, audio forms to share with

children. Children given their feedback online and remain connected with the volunteers. 'Teach one neighbor child' campaign was started in order to reach out to maximum number of children. Young volunteers and teachers spare some time to mentor one child in the neighborhood. Koshish has received overwhelming response in the intervention areas.

- Child protection committees (CPC) formed by the organization are keeping a vigil on children to provide them a sense of security in this crisis.
- Koshish has persuaded the committees that collect funds for religious purposes (Baitul-mal) to divert their collection to provide dry ration and medicines to poor families.
- An initiative has been started to encourage community to adhere to hygiene at places such as ATMs, banks, and vegetable markets. Hand wash and water buckets are made available at public places.
- Donate a pad initiative was also launched to distribute sanitary pads among girls so that they are able to maintain menstrual hygiene.

The organization divided relief work in two teams - programme team comprising three members and the field team of 13 members. The first team operated from control room while field members fanned out in villages.

Owais Wani, a volunteer of organization, says Kashmir was already reeling under deleterious impact of the lockdown imposed since August. The COVID19 outbreak exacerbated the situation.

Koshish volunteers helped fear-stricken people to come out of trauma. Advocacy with administration in facilitating MDM, nutrition and emergency medical care also earned the organization people's confidence.

A major task was to mobilize local mosque managements. The organization persuaded local Masjid committees to act as emergency response team in the time of pandemic. In coordination with the committee members, list of families was prepared and relief materials distributed.

Reaching out to the distressed migrant daily wagers, who were stranded due to the lockdown, was another major task the organisation undertook with help of the mosque committees.

Dr. Rauf Malik says villages already have a social mechanism in place for helping each other and that came handy in this time of crisis. So far, the coordinated response to the COVID19 has resulted in supply of dry ration kits to 600 households.

Besides, 1200 delivery kits, 125 PPEs, 1400 sanitary napkin packets to hospitals have been supplied in Bandipora, Budgam and Baramulla and Srinagar. A coalition was formed to bring together various volunteers and organizations, which reached out to

over 10000 families across Kashmir region.

Dr.Malik says 'we are aware of the risk to our health in the relief works and taking utmost care to protect ourselves. Considering gravity of the situation the demand for relief materials is surging. We need more ration and hygiene kits for around 5000 families each in Budgam, Bandipora, Srinagar, Kulgam and Baramulla."

Also 50 sewing machines and raw material for bulk production of masks and sanitary napkins and 10000 PPEs for doctors and other healthcare workers are needed, he says.

The organisation's next level interventions would include restoring livelihoods, access to education and mental health of the affected in the aforementioned districts of the Valley.

During the pandemic children with medical conditions need more support.

Voluntary organizations have to continue to act as relief organizations for some time.

CSO's role will be very important in PostCOVID19 rehabilitation process. The real test would be to manage resources because even after the pandemic subsides economic recession will impact philanthropy works, the Koshish team feels.



15

Sampada Grameen Mahila
Sanstha - SANGRAM
(Maharashtra)



**Sex Workers'
Community and the
Pandemic**

As part of the government's relief scheme for the poor, the Prime Minister announced a financial package that will deposit Rs 500 monthly into the bank accounts of 200 million people. But those who are working as Sex Worker, many of whom lack government-approved documentation to access public distribution systems and relief schemes are not included.

For the last 30 years SANGRAM, an NGO, has been working in the field HIV/AIDS prevention, care and support to mostly marginalized communities in five districts of Maharashtra and Karnataka.

In the first week of March when corona virus began to spread in country, SANGRAM organized a discussion with all the core team members of the collectives that include Veshya Anyay Mukti Parishad (VAMP) -- a collective of women in sex work, Muskan collective of MSM (men who have sex with men) and transgenders, Mitra - a collective for children of sex workers, Vidrohi Mahila Manch, a group of rural women's collective and Muslim women's collective Nazariya. They decided to create awareness among all members of their community.

Together, they formed a WhatsApp group and started awareness activities. Through personal calls and door to door messaging about prevention, volunteers tried to reach out to the needy in the project area.

The sex workers group observed that before the lockdown many women had decided to go back to their hometowns to live with family members in the crisis but could not do so.

The lockdown was declared without notice and they were forced to stay put. Seeing this situation the members were assigned responsibility to keep a watch on distressed sex workers.

Due to the lockdown sex workers were deprived of income from their customers. As days passed, their plight worsened, impacting the livelihood of many of them in the region.

While their earnings stopped, there was no financial support from the government either.

In this critical situation the SANGRAM formed teams for area-wise survey of members in need of basic food supply.

Based on the survey, the organization decided to supply grocery kits to members. The teams also identified local resources for financial support for grocery kits and transportation facilities.

SANGRAM enlisted support of local community members for help in distribution of kits. Members contacted local government authorities including district collector, local civic body top executives, regional transport officers etc to get permission for transporting food materials in other districts. Media persons helped in accessing local

sources for various purposes.

SANGRAM with the help of the collective members has been working for men, women and transgenders in Sex Work since the lockdown. They identified more than 650 persons who were in need and supplied them food and ration.

"We prepared many messages and videos, counseling the community members to stay safe. There were no sanitizers. There was a huge shortage of hand wash and masks too. We encouraged and trained them to prepare masks at home. Later, they started using the masks widely. The sex workers motivated their customers to wash hands with soap. They kept buckets full of water at their places for this purpose.

We shifted all the children in the community and handed them over to the custody of their mothers. Regular follow up was being carried out through team members who were trained as counselors. SANGRAM and collective's members took responsibility for follow up such as use of preventive measures and hand wash in our project area." Meena Seshu of SANGRAM says.

From day one, SANGRAM and its collective members worked closely with the local administration, media and social workers. They maintained contacts on phone, emails, WhatsApp and through personal meetings. All of them helped in identifying vendors for food supply and transportation. Local administration helped SANGRAM and its teams by giving written permission to reach out to sex worker community members at all possible sites.

In Sangli , both male and female sex workers are hit too hard as number of their customers has dwindled owing to devastating impact of the Covid19 on agriculture, the chief source of income in the district. It is uncertain when the situation will improve and economic activities will resume. Till then, the sex workers will have harrowing time, Seshu says.

She adds that many sex workers have their wards in schools and colleges. The present crisis has reduced them to so much penury that arranging educational and hostel fees for the children is a big source of worry.

The pandemic is going to affect sex workers community longer than other communities. There is a need to prepare an alternative plan for these persons.

"During our relief work we came across a shocking incident of a sex worker who committed suicide owing to fear that she might have been infected by the pandemic. She was a mother of 6 years old child.

She was not tested positive for Covid19 but she had other health problems.

Before the suicide, she had talked to a member of the collective to seek medication. The incident happened a day before kits distribution began.

We focused on the health issues of people infected with HIV. There are members who

are on ART (AntiRetroviral Therapy) and undergoing medication for first, second and third line drugs regimes. We managed to get first and second line drugs from the local government hospital but, for third line drugs we had to move to a local court before the government agreed to do the needful," Seshu shares.

The collective members kept follow- ups in all the PLHIV cases who needed help in accessing treatment and getting medicines from health set- up.

Regular follow up helped those who shifted or migrated from other places to their hometowns. This chain of contact with the healthcare system has been created so that people could get ART medicines in time without fail.

Also a special survey has been carried out for the persons having blood pressure and sugar issues.

The COVID19 spread and resultant lockdown has hugely impacted livelihood of FSW and MSM communities and their family members. All income sources of the community members have dried up and it is impacting on their children as well.

Many of them don't have ration cards, so they are unable to get ration support provided by the government.

The collective's community level counselors are providing counseling to needy persons. It is also in talks with district authority for smooth ART drug distribution to the people having HIV.

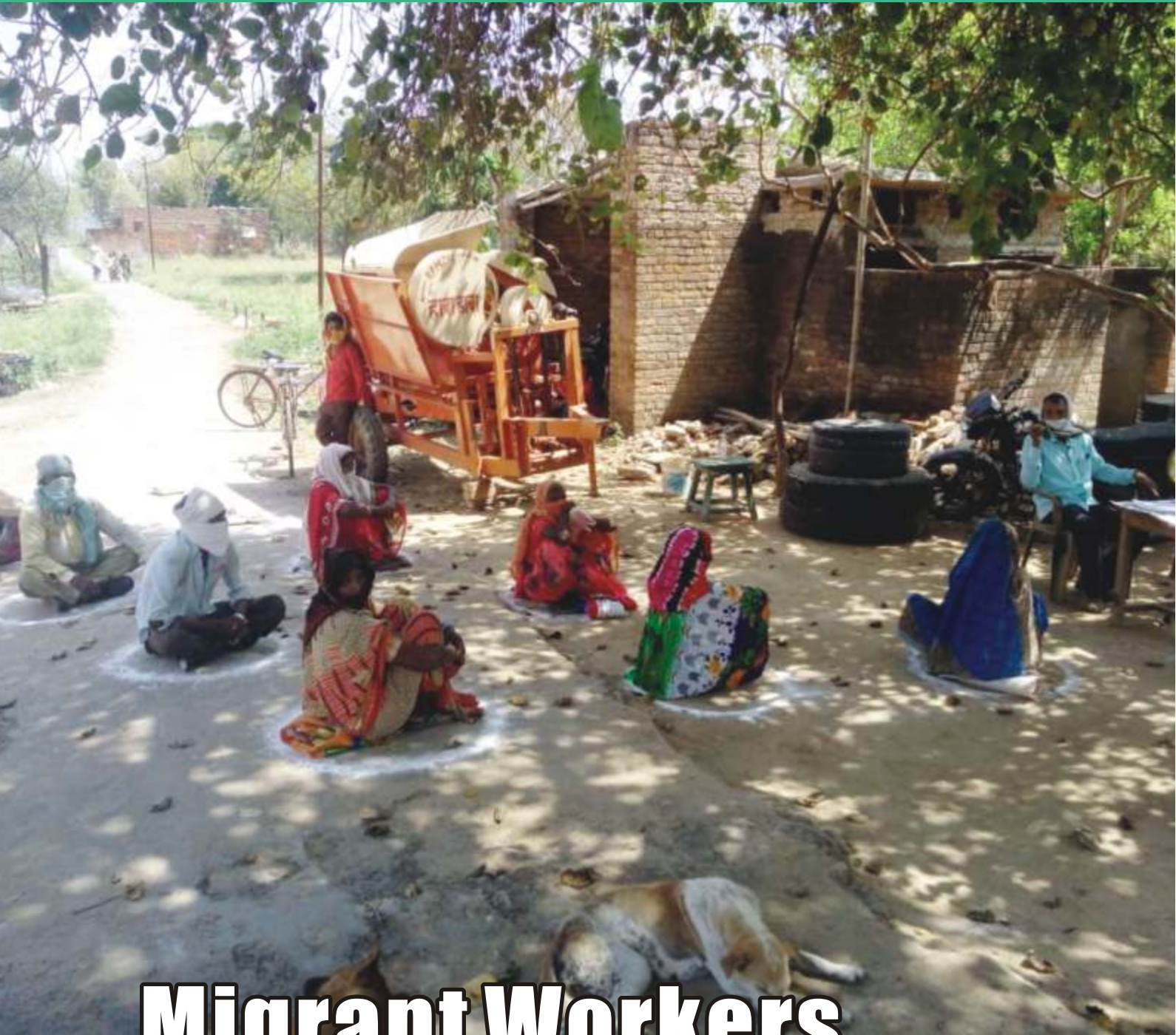
Government authorities have given passes to the organization members for free grocery distribution to sex workers community members in Sangli, Satara and Kolhapur districts.

The district hospital accepted our plan to distribute PLHIV ART drugs directly to home through our volunteers, says Shashikant Mane of SANGRAM.



16

Sonbhadra Vikas Samiti
(Uttar Pradesh)



**Migrant Workers
find a Helping Hand**

Sonbhadra Vikas Samiti (SVS), a voluntary group, is active among downtrodden people in Sonbhadra, one of the most backward districts in Uttar Pradesh. The Samiti works in 28 villages of Sonbhadra district. We have provided support to about 10,000 families over the years.

Like in rest of India, migrant workers in the district landed in livelihood crisis as the sudden announcement of lockdown on March 24 rendered them jobless. A sizeable number of them from Sonbhadra got stranded with no money in hands in various parts of India.

Left with no other options, the migrant workers along with women and children started walking back to their homes. They had not gotten their wages. As they started returning, some were left behind in various places without shelter or food. Those who returned did not have provisions of food and medicines. Women and children were hit particularly hard.

Worsening plight of the migrant workers led the organisation to start relief work. The team drew up a plan and contacted the district collector to apprise the administration about the problems being faced by the people.

The administration issued special passes to them to reach out to poor people in need of food and other help.

The Samiti is connected with a network of civil society organizations. These CSOs were contacted to ascertain who can support and to what extent. The district administration also supported the idea of us working in coordination. All the organizations shared contact numbers with one another.

Also, organizations working at panchayat level were contacted and face masks were procured from those who could prepare them and distributed them to needy. Also, wall writings was done for creating awareness of the pandemic. Some organizations helped the Samiti in procuring food packets.

The team was also in contact with the local child protection committee and managed to coordinate with the administration to get the state government's instructions for welfare of the people implemented.

“Our intervention ensured that there was no corruption in relief works. Earlier, we used to focus on advocacy, but, during this crisis, we focused on coordinated work with other organizations along with officers of the local administration,” director of SVS, Rajesh Choubey says.

Gond, Baiga, Agaria and other tribal communities form a large section of the inhabitants in most parts of Sonbhadra district. They are mainly engaged as mine workers.

The sudden lockdown has brought a crisis of livelihood upon them. Government schemes such as distribution of cooked meal in anganwadis and schools were also

stopped, impacting small kids, pregnant and lactating mothers badly. Threat of starvation loomed large and number of malnourished children started increasing.

Most families in these communities are landless and not everyone has a ration card. This issue was taken up in a meeting with the district collector. It was decided that ration cards will be made for all those who were hitherto not included.

Some people were engaged in distribution of masks, sanitisers and soaps in villages. About 12 volunteers of the organization participated in this activity.

In Badhuari Panchayat, which is work area of the organization, people were getting ration less than the allotted quota. As the people of the village were aware about their rights due to their links with the organization, they decided to oppose this irregularity.

Led by Kiran, Sunita, Indra Dev and Ramlakhan Gond, community members protested, forcing police and civil supplies officers to reach the villages and conduct inquiries.

It transpired that people were being given about 1.5 kg less ration on each card. A case was registered against two ration distributors. The SDM informed that Show Cause notices have been issued to them in the matter.

Annapura kitchen facility was opened at the panchayat level with the help of village pradhans (sarpanchs) and other stakeholders. Organisation's volunteers took up awareness activities by preparing posters, banners and writing graffitis on village walls to create awareness in the community regarding COVID19 pandemic.

Help of the pradhan was sought for sanitizing the village. Financial support was sought from well to do people to distribute ration kits to the needy.

The organizations helped various sections including migrant workers, domestic helps, children, women, elderly, disabled people, farmers, LGBTQ community, destitute and commercial sex workers through ration/food distribution, health services, counseling, shelter arrangements and so on.

Local level meetings were held with the administration to ensure supply of essential services in the villages. The Samiti remained in regular contact with media persons and updated them about the scenario.

Due to unavailability of adequate number of passes, transport and conveyance was a big issue. Phones were not working in many areas and this led to communication problem. Household essential items were not available for many families, Samiti volunteers say.

Given the current situation, Samiti members feel that people will have to face a lot of challenges even when COVID19 situation is controlled. Livelihood and economic crises are feared to peak. This might lead to situation of starvation. Pregnant/ lactating women and children will become more vulnerable to malnutrition.

“We feel that the role of our organization is only set to increase in the future. Our volunteers will be required for creating awareness about government schemes and ensuring their implementation. Vigil has to be maintained to see that every needy family has a ration card, the public distribution system (PDS) shops are operational and regular distribution of ration is on,” Choubey says.

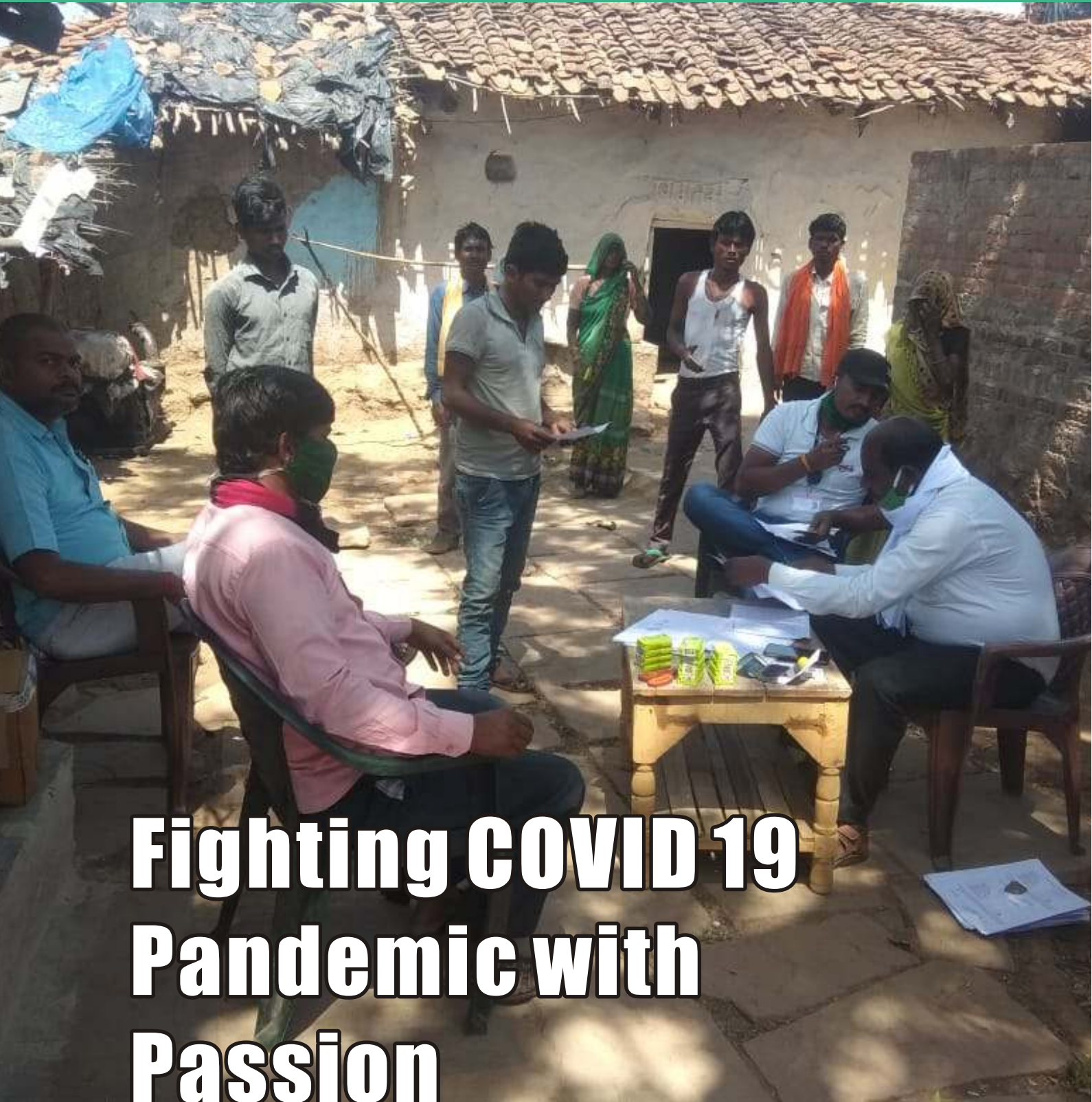
Livelihood crisis will lead to increase in number of unemployed people. Health, education and nutrition will be badly impacted. Malnourished children, who have been pulled to normal condition through sustained efforts, might slip back to malnourished state.

To prevent this, the administration will have to draw up concrete strategy and ensure availability of food, clean drinking water, education and health facilities along with other essential services even after COVID19 situation is over. That is a way to make sure people live with dignity, the Samiti members say.



17

Bahujan Samajik Trust
(Gujarat)



**Fighting COVID 19
Pandemic with
Passion**

Rajkot, one of the largest and most industrialized cities of Gujarat, has about 50,000 industrial units spread over Rajkot, Jetpur, and recently, Jasdan. It has 12 clusters, ranging from diesel engines to foundry to jams and jewellery.

Lakhs of migrant workers from Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar come to work in the industries and contribute in other economic activities of the city every year. The lockdown to fight COVID19 proved to be a disaster for these people. With transport suspended, economic activities on hold, shops shuttered and food supply halted, some families ran out of food. The sudden announcement of lockdown affected not just the cities, but also people in the villages as they did not have adequate food grains in store.

Poor, especially from rural area, suffered most in Rajkot as BPL population in the district (based on deprivation criteria) in rural area is estimated at 6.7 percent (extremely poor) and 13.90 percent (poor).

Total number of extremely poor rural BPL families was 41,952 and that of poor families 87,026 as on 31.3.2016. Rajkot taluka has the highest concentration of extremely poor families at 11.34 percent. The tribes such as Lodhika, Paddhari, Kotda, Sangani and Upleta have the highest percentage of poor, exceeding 25 percent.

As the tribals faced trouble owing to the lockdown, social organisations like Bahujan Samajik Trust (BST) came forward to serve the people in need. Bahujan Samajik Trust works with vulnerable communities and farmers and its volunteers know the area well.

The people, who had little money, started stocking groceries for a few days, but the poorer among them faced trouble doing so. The local administration was waiting for orders from the government on relief measures. For 10 days the people somehow managed their food but gradually scarcity of essentials started hitting them.

Jayanti Bhai Nathabhai Rathod, president of BST, says since they had the latest data from the economic survey of the area they work in, they knew that the situation of at least 1000 families was very pathetic. "Our main task was to get food to the children of poor families in accordance with policy and rules of the government," he says.

The organisation focused on mobilizing government resources towards the needy people.

It worked to expedite process of distribution of food grains by the government in the Integrated Child Development Schemes (ICDS) and Mid-day Meal (MDM) served in schools. We had 30 volunteers involved in this work.

The organisation continuously stayed in touch with government officials. Its volunteers gathered information about the government provision of food grains and shared this information with local cadres. It made a list of needy families with the help of the cadres. The cadres also helped authorities in preparing grocery packets.

The volunteers of the organisation informed the authorities about 350 families who did not have ration cards. They were not able to get food grains. Our cadres distributed food to 253 families with the help of Anganwadi workers and delivered MDM to 950 schoolchildren.

The organisation also played a major role in awareness of people about the food distribution scheme announced by the government through social media. The NGO's volunteers were in constant touch with authorities including ICDS workers and village sarpanch. The cadres also assisted 320 teenagers in distribution of PURNA SHAKTI packets from the ICDS.

Experience of working with government departments has been good, says Rathore. However, the approach of government towards civil society leaves a lot to be desired.

“We wanted to intervene in some areas with our own resources. Many organisations wanted to help poor families with groceries and other essentials. But the administration in all the districts of Gujarat discouraged this practice. They instead asked social organisations to donate the essentials to the government for distribution among the poor,” Rathore adds.

As a result, organisations like BST decided to help the government in identifying the needy people, instead of providing relief directly. The authorities were supportive in providing passes for movement of cadres of the NGOs.

The NGOs also trained children about the COVID19 pandemic. They used masks to warn children against going in crowded places and asked them to wash their hands frequently with soap.

The children were also trained to maintain social distance once schools reopen. A total of 190 families from outside Veraval Shapar area of Kotda Sangani taluka were found without ration cards in survey conducted by our cadres.

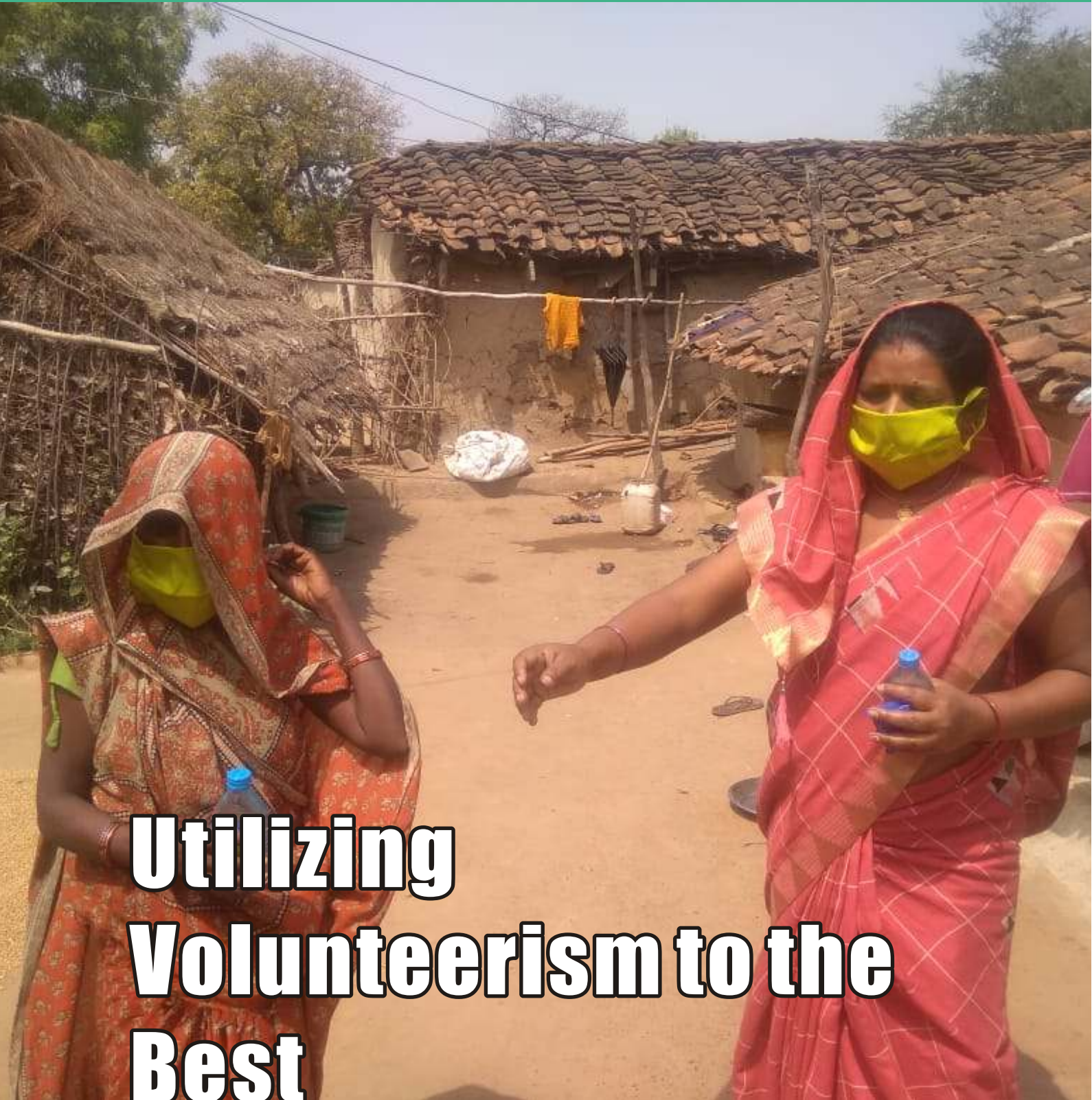
BST members say that in the Post- COVID19 scenario, poor families will find it difficult to make ends meet if they do not start their small retail work early. Civil society organizations have moral responsibility of saving the people they have been working with all these years.

People never forget those who arrange food for them at the time of crisis. It will improve the goodwill of CSOs and improve our relations with communities, they say.



18

Bhavya Bharat Foundation
(Gujarat)



**Utilizing
Volunteerism to the
Best**

Rangam Trivedi, founder of Bhavya Bharat foundation, shares his experience of helping out the needy amid the lockdown that was announced on March 24 as Corona virus began to spread in India.

o; jk"V\$ tkx; kei jkfggrk% That is the motto of the organisation. And this was what was at the topmost statement in the mind of Rangam when they started planning on the strategies to provide relief to the needy ones who became helpless because of the COVID19 outbreak.

But to begin with, a concrete plan is required. Thus, a web meeting was held with the teammates. In the first phase, the team identified geographical area of work, budgeted planning and gathered monetary contribution from society. Responsibilities were distributed among the team members and they were mobilised for the task ahead.

The decision was to work on delivering food packets to people moving back to villages from highways as well as raw food material kits to daily wage labourers. It was also decided to provide milk to the children belonging to the underprivileged families. The team worked in tandem with some NGOs to provide the relief material. A channel of volunteers was made from city level to cluster level by dividing Vadodara into 8 clusters and Surat into 14 clusters.

During this period, the number of volunteers rose from 26 to 64. Vadodara and Surat both fall on National Highway No. 68 connecting Ahmedabad and Mumbai. There were thousands of daily wage labourers moving to their villages on foot or in vehicles. Laborers from construction sites, who were left to fend for themselves by their contractors, were amongst the migrants with two options: either to walk on their own or die by hunger.

Also, some people were engaged in panic buying without regard to social distancing.

When this violation was noticed, the volunteers of the foundation started marking circles and boxes at distance of 3 ft. at the shops selling essential goods and materials. Also, markings were done at places where slums and housing board colonies were there, and people were rushing to receive donations/food supplies.

In total, almost 100 shops were covered for physical distance marking across Vadodara and 60 shops in Surat city in initial days of the lockdown. Food packets were distributed to over 400 migrants and poor families. Raw food material kits assuring food security for 20 days were distributed to 735+ plus families. The relief works are still going on. Milk was distributed to 130 children and the work is still on. Similarly, 25000 facemasks were distributed in Vadodara to police department, doctors, interns and persons from social organisations and public representatives etc.

The organization also equipped Vadodara city police with two “drones” together with 5 flashlights of high capacity to perform aerial surveillance so as to remain updated about the situation and prevent gathering.

Local authorities (both the Municipal Corporation and Police Department),

recognising the services of the foundation volunteers, gave the required permission and passes to enable them to reach the needy across an array of places.

During the entire process of providing relief works, the organisation got financial support not only from the locals or Suratis but also from Indian students studying in USA, Canada and Australia. The Asian American student association and its president Mr. Vipul Patel also supported our initiatives.

CSOs play a crucial role in the society, though often left unrecognized. There have also been times when the functioning of the organization has been questioned. However, the fight against COVID19 has taught everyone that the NGOs not only exist, but they can address the issues and deal with them promptly and humanely.

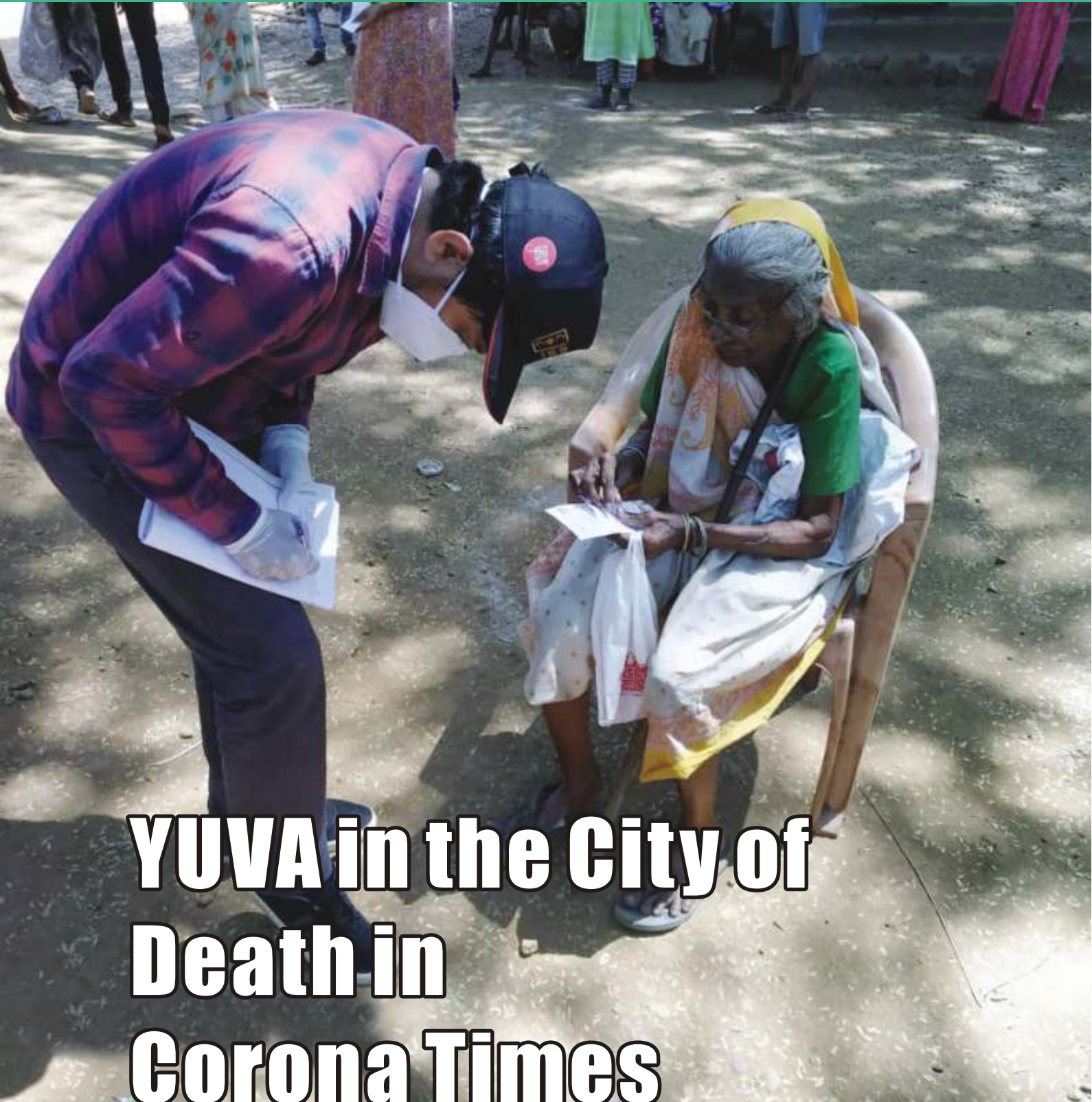
The way Bhavya Bharat Foundation tackled this pandemic and provided relief measures at ground level, especially in the past few weeks, has changed perception of the people about us. Now they treat us with respect.

Once lockdown is over, the NGOs will have to reach out to people at large and ensure constant compliance to the guidelines issued by the Government of India, so that normalcy is restored soon enough. There is also a need to look for new ways to make the institutions' functioning more efficacious whilst maintaining the new norm of social distancing, the foundation members feel.



19

Youth for Unity and
Voluntary Action (Maharashtra)



**YUVA in the City of
Death in
Corona Times**

Sachin Nachanekar, a young social worker, lives in Mumbai – the City of Death in the present Corona times, as he calls it.

He has been working with the youth and adolescents for 5 years in slums of Mumbai. TDH - Germany has been assisting him in his project comprising relief works (during the rains), food distribution, grassroots communication, and securing health services to the community, amongst others.

For Sachin and his team, this is the first time that they have had to confront a calamity of this magnitude arising out of the Corona- 19 pandemic. The catastrophic pandemic coupled with sudden lockdown has shaken the lives of population at large.

Whilst they do a lot of relief work during the rainy season, but this Corona phenomenon has spoiled the lives of many, and Mumbai has turned out to be the worst city across the country in the wake of the ongoing pandemic.

Sachin has come across huge population wherein he saw the fear, pathos, and stress amongst the masses. Lockdown was necessary. But due to the sudden announcement, millions of daily wage workers – those from Dalit and tribal communities and other socially marginalized groups – living in hand- to- mouth conditions have been severely affected. The immediate crisis ahead of them is unemployment and starvation.

For the past several days, the non- profit organisation “Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action” (YUVA) has extended support to those in need by providing essential food supplies to them (rice, pulses, wheat, oil, etc.). This has been possible with the support received from the people via the 'Together We Can initiative'.

YUVA staff and community leaders have gone from door-to-door to provide support to the homeless and daily-wage workers, especially those working in the informal sector. This has been done in the cities of Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Vasai Virar and Palghar taluka. Putting their life and health on the line and knowing well that they may be exposed to the virus even with safety precautions the team has been working voluntarily to safeguard families against starvation.

There was a ban on public gatherings, and therefore, it has been a huge struggle to reach families in need. Sachin and team visited the area with all precautions and saw anxiety and distress about the current and future situation writ large on the faces of the people.

“In one pocket of the community resides the Pardhi tribe. Their situation was devastating. From women to small children, the whole community sells small wares on the streets. But now, given the current situation, where would they go when the streets are deserted? While distributing the food grains and ration, we met an old woman. I told her to take good care of herself. In response she said, son, today you bring us food grains. What about tomorrow? If this situation continues, we do not know about the disease, but we will definitely die of starvation,” Sachin shares.

Wasim from Sai Shraddha Society, who is a bangle-seller and goes house-to-house

selling bangles to women, said, 'Bhaiya, how will I make a living during this lockdown? I have lost my customers. I have been sitting at home for the past 2 weeks'. There is an inexplicable anxiety about the future in the minds and hearts of the people, says Sachin.

About 80% of the work opportunities for the community come from the community itself. Many are also involved in home-based work for which they receive a per-piece rate, which they say has also completely stopped in the wake of the lockdown as no products and raw materials reach them.

Those involved in waste-picking and scrap dealers have also lost their source of income ever since their shops have been asked to shut down. They have come to the point of begging for their daily needs. Several communities, like that in Ambujwadi where residents faced eviction in 2005 on count on being illegal settlement, there is no drinking water availability, let alone water to keep their hands and face clean.

“Amidst numerous phone calls for help, I received a call from Asif a youth group member who said, 'Dada, the situation here is getting worse by the day'. I told him, 'Yes, that is the condition of most places; we will try our best and reach all communities slowly and steadily'.

But today I feel that the time is now! We cannot stop. There are so many homeless people, those living in Adivasi padas (tribal hamlets), migrant workers and their families out there who need our support,” Sachin concludes.

There was also some learning from young volunteers of YUVA. Ajay, Anita and Laxman are youth volunteers of YUVA and they work in slums of Mumbai on a project supported by TDH Germany. They have been struggling hard to bring best to the people in this pathetic time, but the efforts seem small as the toll rate of death and Corona positives are increasing per day.

Corona virus has not only touched Multistoried habitations in Mumbai but also affected the densely populated slums across the city, large number of people of all age, gender and class has been trapped in its lap small vendors, rag pickers, slum dwellers, labour class who earn their bread butter every day and live life, says one of the volunteers Ajay.

Lockdown, though necessary, brought lot of misery to many. Thousands of migrants were forced to decide to walk back to their homes hundreds of kilometers away and this brought a lot of lot of experiences to the YUVA team, Ajay says.

The truck drivers were stuck in Panvel Kamoth and forced to live in zero facility area due to lockdown. No food and no toilets, no water for last 21 days nobody was there to help them out. YUVA started a campaign in the name of #TogetherWeCan #spreadlove_notcorona.

In this campaign, YUVA started relief works like distribution of grains, sanitizers, sanitary pads for women and nutritious food for children. This campaign has covered

Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Panvel, Vasai, Virar and supported 7794 families and 38970 persons directly till date. In addition, YUVA supported Police and various employees of Maha Nagar Palik Nigam, Mumbai and health officials on duty. In all, the team covered more than one lakh persons by providing cooked food and other material.

There were several experiences during the work. “We get satisfaction but at the same time, we feel ashamed and helpless when someone asks for food and food grains and we do not have adequate supply available in stock,” Ajay says.

“We met an old lady of 65 years who is living with her grandson who is 17. This grandson earns on daily basis but due to the lockdown, he was not able to earn any money, and both were locked in home. When we gave her food ration for a month in this scary time, she was so overwhelmed started crying and showered her blessings as if we were almost like boon in her life.

On the contrary, when we were distributing food in Sivud, a 6-year-old girl came and asked for ration. We said we will come to your home and give it to your parents she yelled at us and said, you don't give us and keep distributing among Muslims only, we will die by that time and went away we were stunned by her remark. How come a 6-year-old girl thought like that! We all know as to how this trauma is being created and who all are responsible for it? Where are we leading to? The environment of slums and city is being made poisonous. We realized that we not only have to fight with CORONA alone but also with all such communal issues and forces which are dividing us in the guise of language, caste, culture, and religion. One day we will be on No Man's land,” Ajay shares his experience emotionally.

YUVA is committed for services and sacrifices in the upcoming time and to reach more and more people who are in need. They have to face constraints and challenges, barriers and hurdles. This is really a crucial time and the mental health of people especially of marginalized community, workers and small vendors is gone down and handhold support is essential in coming days without which this may turn in a big chaos, the team members feel.



20

Prasoon
(Madhya Pradesh)



**Multilayered
Burdon for Mine
Workers and
Silicosis, TB Patients**

Non-profit organisation 'Prasoon' has been creating awareness about the health issues of mine workers who are highly vulnerable to fatal diseases such as TB and silicosis.

When corona virus spread and brought nationwide lockdown in its wake, the organization shifted its focus on helping mine workers who have lost their source of livelihood due to suspension of mining activities in Ganj Basoda block in Vidisha district of Madhya Pradesh. A sizeable number of them are suffering from silicosis. The organisation has broadened its working scope during the COVID19 crisis to include educating people about the lethal effects of the pandemic.

Around 10,000 mine workers from 40 villages in the district are estimated to be exposed to the risk of the respiratory disease.

Sudhir Bhargav of Prasoon says they work in 25 villages of this area at the grassroots.

After announcement of the lockdown, the initial concern was about the break in continuity of treatment of TB patients. It is very necessary for TB patients to take regular medicines.

“We feel that government agencies are also serious about the issue and there was no shortage of medicine supply. However, a week after the lockdown we witnessed sharp decline in food supply and, as a result, increase in malnutrition among children in the area.

The organization started identifying families who were running out of food. We were also concerned about paucity of funds as the emerging situation called for more money to help poor workers in the area where we work.

We approached our patrons and requested them to allow doing some social work. The organisation continued its awareness drive and made wall paintings about effects of the COVID19,” Bhargav says.

Prasoon volunteers are closely connected with the villages and their residents in the organization's field work. They could easily identify the needy families as they interact with them on a regular basis.

“We found a number of pregnant women, single women, TB and silicosis patients in dire need of help,” Bhargav says.

The organisation utilised its fund to buy essentials such as rice, flour, pulses, tea leaves, mustard oil, spices, vegetables, soaps and other groceries besides masks and sanitizers. In first phase of distribution the organisation distributed the essentials to 750 families in 25 villages.

The organization works closely work with the administration all year round, therefore the officials at local level extended support. They did not stop the volunteers from commuting and distributing the essentials.

However, the organisation faced challenges such as scarcity of essentials in market. So, to ensure judicious use of available resources, it chose to cater to the neediest people first.

In some villages, apart from those in need, other villagers also demanded relief. It was very tough to convince them that it is for those who are facing acute crisis of food. They also distributed nutrition powder among malnourished children.

Prasoon volunteers faced issues in transportation of groceries. Most villages are remote and situated in forest areas. Transport facilities were on hold during the lockdown. A team of volunteers would pack essentials in morning and, at 9 am, only one vehicle would take them to the destination village. Sometimes, they worked at night to provide relief. In the second phase of relief work that is at the end of first lockdown of 21- days, the organisation distributed groceries to less needy families.

“Even after the lockdown is lifted, relief works must continue. Unlike the urban middle class, villagers and labourers are content with stocking essentials for a week. Their needs must be attended to for long.

We tracked down families and tried to provide them with enough items that can last till end of the lockdown. However, if the economic slowdown continues, even if not worsens, a large number of people are going to lose their jobs. There will be need of more such relief works in rural area. We have to work until September to support people.

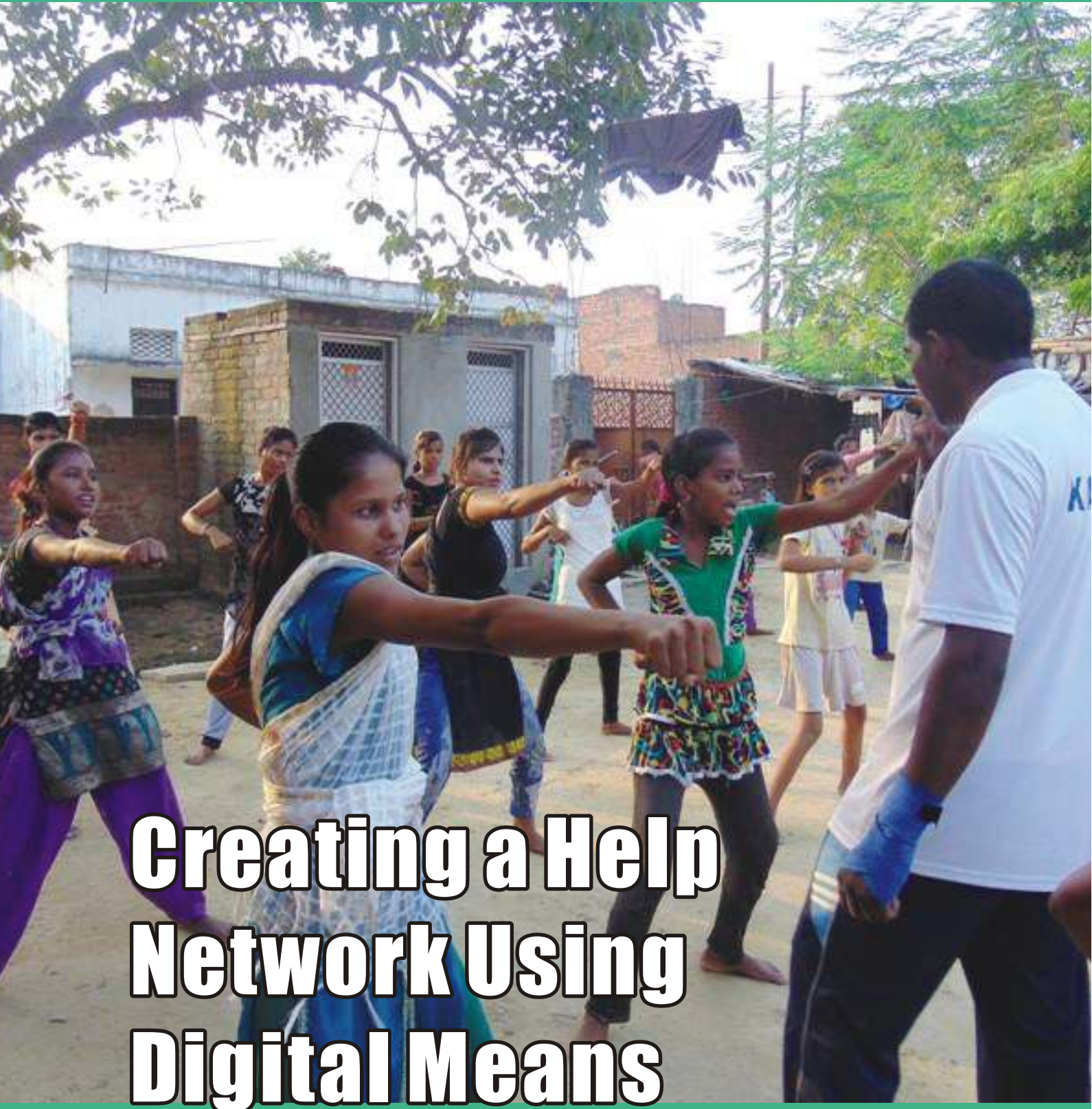
At this point people need food more than anything. Prasoon is essentially known for creating awareness about deadly diseases caused by mining. However, hunger is the deadliest disease at this time, and that is why we changed our focus from awareness to extending help to the rural poor,” Bhargav says.

In the Vidisha district where stone mining is a major source of livelihood, villagers are forced to take up unregulated jobs in the mines. Due to the hazardous work, they fall prey to diseases like silicosis. It is more prevalent among miners who are exposed to dust containing crystallized silica. Over time, it builds up in lungs, causes bloody coughing and breathlessness. COVID19 lockdown proved to be disastrous for such labourers, the organization team feels.



21

Bal Paharua and SRF
(Uttar Pradesh)



This is a story about girls of Varanasi, who used digital medium to spread awareness about the COVID19 during the lockdown. Shambhunath Singh Research Foundation (SRF) is a Varanasi-based organization working with the deprived sections of the society for several years.

The SRF has involved children and adolescents in an initiative by preparing them as e-volunteers in their project areas. These volunteers, mostly hailing from backward settlements, were trained in use of digital media. About 120 such children have been digitally trained by now.

When training was being imparted to them, there was an apprehension that it might go waste because educational status of these children was not very high. Such a short-term training could not get them jobs. But the training came handy for them during the COVID19 crisis.

During the lockdown, the trained girls called up SRF and said they were getting tired of the lockdown situation. Before the lockdown they had conducted meetings, shared experiences and found solutions too. But in the lockdown, there was no way to share problems with each other or to anyone else.

We asked the girls how many of them had undergone digital training and how many could train other persons in resolving issues arising during the lockdown?

This discussion encouraged the girls to connect with the Bal Paharua groups.

Next day, Kajal of Pulkohna settlement in Varanasi called up to inform that 70 members of the group from nine settlements had talked to one another through video conferencing and shared their experiences.

The group that initiated this activity was 'Shaktipari'. After this the process rolled on.

About 70 girls in the poor settlements are not only mutually sharing experiences and resolving issues, but also helping out others using different helplines and online portals.

Several instances of their fruitful activities have come to light.

Akash, a resident of Daniyalpur Sil had fractured his leg. He got treatment using training he had in the digitally connected group. The group helped resolve a case of domestic violence in Manikarnika. Food and shelter for migrant workers from Chhattisgarh in Garahia was arranged. Ration was provided to beneficiaries in Rupanpur.

The adolescent girls brought to the notice of the authorities and others these problems and ensured help to the needy. They also initiated the process of using Aadhar card to get benefit of schemes for poor in case the needy did not have ration cards.

The girls connected to the programme are helping out themselves, their families and

their community. Video conferencing is held every two days to discuss challenges and the success stories are shared.

Daniyalpur, a settlement on the embankment of river Varuna was sealed after a COVID19 positive case was detected there. The lockdown had already restricted daily routine and after the area was converted into a containment zone, life in the settlement came to a standstill.

Kajal of Bal Paharua group says that when the group was formed, parents of most of the girls were against their attending meetings, saying that it would be mere waste of time.

But the girls remained connected to the groups. Now when the entire world is facing the pandemic crisis, the adolescents linked to the programme launched a 'Shaktipari WhatsApp group' using their digital training.

About 70 girls of nine poor settlements are connected to the group. One of them, Aqlima, was trying to continue with her education despite facing challenges of child labour, economic constraints and social pressure.

She says that she would constantly hear barbs like 'will you become a collector after studying?'

“But now I am able to help others when everyone is confined to home. The programme of digital connectivity has both inspired and empowered me. I got to know that some migrant workers from other states and other districts in UP were stranded in our locality. I helped them by getting e-passes that could help them go back home. Our inherent capacity and strength has made us true shaktiparis (power-angles).”

Sonu Qureshi and his wife Tasleema Begum had come from Chhattisgarh in search of livelihood in the Garahia basti along with their three children Fitain Raza (6), Mujassif (4) and Tausifa (15 months). When the lockdown was announced, they became desperate to go back to their home. Aqlima helped the distressed family get online passes issued.

Arti, also a member of the group, says that when lockdown happened, they heard that people will now work from home, but could not understand how this was possible. “Now we participate in video conferencing and use this to reach out to others and seek suggestions and solutions,” she says.

Akash, another active member of the Bal Paharua group, got his leg fractured. He leg was put in a temporary plaster and the doctor advised him to revisit after a week to get a permanent healing cast.

But before his turn was to come, the locality was sealed totally. After a week, he had unbearable pain in the leg. It was time to put it in a permanent cast, but no one was hearing him out, as all medical problems except COVID19 were being ignored.

Akash's parents were dejected. When a team of doctor visited home after repeated requests made to a police patrol, they just gave him painkillers. Akash knew that if his leg was not put in a permanent cast, it might get disfigured for life. So, even as his guardians had given up hope, he remained positive.

He then remembered that he had been provided with certain helpline numbers during personality development training conducted by SRF-CRY. He immediately asked for the cell phone from his mother and called up the helpline 108, saying that he wanted to go to the district hospital to get a permanent plaster for his broken leg.

The helpline answered that it was an emergency service and ambulance could be sent out only in case of emergency need. A desperate Akash then resorted to subterfuge by telling that a boy in the locality had broken his leg and needed emergency service. The ambulance reached the locality within seven to eight minutes. Buoyed by the success of his training and his own sense of using it, Akash left for the district hospital with a smile. He got his plaster cast, came back home and shared with his family how his training helped him at a crucial juncture of his life.



22

Sahaja Trust
(Karnataka)



**Relief with
Messaging and
Communication**

Social welfare organization, Sahaja Trust, is spreading awareness about the menace of corona virus and importance of hygiene in Koppal district of Karnataka, employing creative means. Its volunteers are also engaged in providing food to needy in this time of unprecedented crisis.

Koppal is a historic place noted for its forts and artificial hair processing industry. However, in terms of education it is a backward area. Poor people engaged in hair-industry suffer from several respiratory diseases such as tuberculosis and bronchitis.

Around 7 to 10 members of each family are employed in the industry that makes wigs, toupees and hair extensions out of the huge mass of hair donated at the Tirupathi temple each year. Clumps of half-burnt hair in processing pose grave danger to health of the workers. Discarded hair is dumped on the banks of Hirehalla, a tributary of the Tungabhadra River, a major source of drinking water in North Karnataka.

The lockdown has exacerbated their miseries. Lowly-paid workers in the industry have lost their means of livelihood in the wake of the lockdown. Health hazards being faced by the people coupled with unhygienic condition have multiplied with corona virus attack.

Sheela B, founder of Sahaja Trust that works for child welfare, took an innovative initiative towards spreading the message of social distancing, washing hands with soap for 20 seconds and wear masks while stepping out of the house.

The trust also helped in providing food to the needy people who have lost their livelihood in making wigs.

People do not have access to information about the pandemic. The Sahaja Trust decided to create awareness by telling people to keep their hands clean and maintain social distancing in villages to prevent spread of corona virus.

Sheela wrote and directed several plays and street-plays for the students associated with the trust. The plays were performed and live streamed for the people to watch.

"We tried not to go out for performance as we also had to adhere to the strict guidelines of the government during the lockdown," said Sheela.

The students learning acting skills at the trust presented a drama wherein they explained about spread of the corona virus in Kannad. They emphasized that everyone should wash their hands frequently, especially before having food, and avoid touching their faces.

The trust also organised a painting competition and story-writing competition for children to express their thoughts about corona virus.

Several women, who work in the hair processing industry and are the sole breadwinners of the family, have been rendered jobless. The trust came to their rescue and provided them with grocery kits containing rice, pulses, vegetables, salt, cooking

oil and a bar of soap to last them for a few days.

A woman in Kinnal village, who had accidentally sustained burn injuries a few months ago, had run out of food and medicines. Her husband is a drunkard and does not support the family. Trust volunteers arranged for the medicines and food for the woman and her children.

Another woman, Lakshmi, who sells hairpins and hair elastic bands in her village, was in deep trouble after the lockdown. She has two children and there was hardly anything to eat in the house. She was having a hard time getting groceries from the market as there was a shortage of supply and prices of basic commodities had gone up.

The organization provided groceries to her family. There are many more such women who are the sole breadwinners and have no one else to turn to. The team decided to help them by donating grocery items.

The organization also opened study centres for children as they had stopped going to schools. Many other organizations were helping the people by supplying food and other essential goods

Sheela says main focus of the trust is on educating children and spreading awareness about cleanliness and hygiene.



23

Gram Mitra
(Chhattisgarh)



**When Unknown
Join Hands!**

Although Chhattisgarh is far less affected by the corona virus compared to other states, one of its districts, Korba turned into a hotspot, primarily due to infection in migrant workers who returned to the home state from other states.

Korba's Katghora town, around 200km away from the state capital Raipur, reported 27 positive cases by April end. The first case came to the fore after a 16-year-old boy returned from Delhi after attending a religious gathering. He was detected COVID19 positive on April 4. Within few days 27 more confirmed cases were reported in the same locality. The affected area was sealed, and strict enforcement of lockdown was ensured in the district. This has caused huge loss of livelihood and panic in the area.

A group of 15 volunteers called 'Gram Mitra - Chhattisgarh' decided to provide help to the needy during the lockdown.

Muniv Shukla, one of the volunteers, said, "The area where we work, Korba district, has a majority of tribal population. Poor people have limited sources of livelihood. They have little access to information. It was necessary to provide them with correct information about corona virus. It was also important that we supply them groceries and food without hurting their sentiments and self-respect."

Because of the lockdown movement was restricted. The team decided to work from home. Fifteen volunteers of the organization took up the task of distributing non-perishable and grocery items to the villagers in their villages.

Korba district is home to several scheduled tribes. There is a dire need to spread awareness among them about the prevention measures of the pandemic.

Volunteers of the Gram Mitra organization not only provided food and groceries to the tribal communities, but also created awareness about the importance of maintaining a two-arm distance and washing hands with soap.

They supplied grocery packets that included rice, grams, pulses, cooking oil, jaggery (gur), spices and salt to around 200 families. We also provided information about the government helplines and other schemes besides educating about proper hygiene families of Pahadi Korba tribe, Virhor tribe, Majhwar tribes and others.

The volunteers also helped the government agencies in supply of home-made masks and groceries for the people who did not have a ration card.

Several families were unable to get rice, flour and pulses from the Public Distribution System (PDS) shops as they did not have ration cards.

The volunteers spoke to the government agencies to provide them with groceries, and they helped us out. They also arranged for groceries for migrant labourers and their families who neither have any documents, nor any means of livelihood left.

It is important to encourage local farming and give employment to workers under

MNREGA for construction of dams, canals, etc.

Due to heavy rainfall and hailstorms, crops were extensively damaged in the district. The lockdown further added to the farmers' woes, causing a shortage of food grains and vegetables in the villages. This might give rise to cases of malnutrition in the coming days.

"The government should provide help to the farmers and other underprivileged people for at least the next 6 months to bring things back on track," Shukla said.

One positive effect of the lockdown has been a marked reduction in consumption of liquor. Due to non-availability of booze, women in poor families were happy as their husbands realised that they could manage without it. Thus, families saved some money that would otherwise have gone into buying liquor. Cases of domestic violence due to consumption of alcohol also reduced.

People have made temporary fences on the village boundaries, not allowing any outsider to enter the village.

"This is the time when we got to see unity and spirit of equality among the village people. They distributed groceries with honesty and each one took his/her share, leaving the rest for others, instead of selfishly hoarding the supplies. Many a time, when people saw someone walking on the road, they would inquire about food provision and groceries at home for the families. If they came to know that the other persons were hungry, they offered them food and extended a helping hand.

At many places, we also saw that people put aside their caste differences and helped each other, something they might have not done if the situation were normal," Shukla says.

The volunteers say that acknowledging hard work of the NGOs in providing food and other groceries to the needy, the government also provided them with the necessary passes, transport, masks and other things to carry on distribution drives.

Work done by CSOs is sure to earn them more respect in the society after the pandemic passes.



24

Vikas Samvad and Collective (Madhya Pradesh)



**When the Most
Deprived Share their
Resources!**

During this challenging time of the COVID19 pandemic, food security has emerged as one of the most challenging aspects in the deprived peoples' lives.

We get to see myriad inspiring stories in various media platforms including social media about public-spirited individuals across the world selflessly helping the needy in this unprecedented crisis.

Yet, many times more inspiring stories remain uncovered in the social media forums.

These are stories about poor people from rural areas helping others like them. They have not let their own limited resources become a constraint while reaching out to other deprived families that include malnourished children, pregnant or lactating women and senior citizens.

During the current COVID19, crisis of nutritional deficit is menacingly stalking poor children below five years and the pregnant women & lactating mothers.

CSO Vikas Samvad took a novel initiative to help poor families cope with malnutrition. Under its community-based malnutrition management programme, 232 families in six districts of Madhya Pradesh have developed kitchen gardens. The NGO helped create a network by which 37.25 quintals of vegetables grown in kitchen gardens were shared among 425 families around them. This meant that each beneficiary family received 16 kg of vegetables each. The beneficiaries included 217 malnutrition- hit children, 140 pregnant and lactating mothers and 68 elderly persons.

Siyadulari Adiwasi, who has been working on nutrition issues of women and children for a long time in Rewa district, says that when the COVID19 outbreak struck, she discussed with woman and youth volunteers of Dastak possible ways to help children and pregnant/lactating women with food and nutrition in this situation. Dastak is a malnutrition management programme for vulnerable children and women. Task before the volunteers was tough because for the villages, which Dastak identified for its programme, local weekly market is normally 20 km away. Owing to the lockdown restrictions, the villagers are unable to go to the weekly market to buy grocery items including food grains.

“Our volunteers went village to village and tried to ensure two things availability of maximum possible food grain to the people through the PDS shops and nutritious food for children below five years of age and pregnant women and lactating mothers.

This was important as the anganwadis had closed down after March 15. For about a month there was no system in place of distribution of supplementary nutritious food.

In Rewa district, where we work (in Java block), we had supported 1100 families in developing kitchen gardens under the community-based malnutrition management programme four years ago.

After talking with villagers, it was decided that the families having kitchen gardens

should help children and women as much as possible. We could easily persuade the families as we also encourage spirit of co-existence in our project area,” Siyadulari says.

■ STORY - 1

Two daughters of Rajji Bai Mawasi of Dadin village of Satna district Krishna and Sukanti are afflicted with severe malnutrition. Their condition would improve temporarily when they were admitted to nutrition rehabilitation centre, but they slip back into malnourished state once taken off the centre.

Since 2016, Rajji Bai's family started growing vegetables in their kitchen garden. This resulted in availability of vegetables with the family for nine months in a year. The family also managed to sell extra vegetables from the kitchen garden in the market.

When COVID19 struck and lockdown was announced suddenly for the entire country, this kitchen garden helped Rajji Bai's family to sustain. The family also shared about 25 kg vegetables with the families of Acche Lal, Ram Lakhan, Anuj, Sampatia and Buti Mawasi of the same village, sharing twice or thrice a week.

Rajji's husband Ramkhilawan Mawasi says, “We knew that the economic condition of Acche Lal was poor and his daughter was malnourished too. We thought that we should help this family. If we will not help our neighbours during such crisis time, who would?”

■ STORY - 2

The kitchen garden of Rajbhan Gond in Murkhoha village of Satna district is bountiful with as many as 280 plants and creepers. The family also owns trees of jackfruit, guava and mangoes. Rajbhan's family is providing vegetables to those seven families in the village that have malnourished children or pregnant women. “We are anxious about the pandemic, but we also have to take care of the needs of children and women of the village,” Rajbhan says.

■ STORY - 3

Lalta Adiwasi, member of the Dastak's women's group in Deolaha village in Satna district is engaged in growing vegetables in her kitchen garden since 2016. She grows tomatoes, gourd, ladies finger, beans, spinach and marigold flowers and earns about Rs 2000 per month selling extra vegetables and flowers from this garden.

After the lockdown, Lalta is providing vegetables regularly and free of cost to 11 families of her village that do not have regular source of income or savings.

■ STORY - 4

Kasturi Bai of Vikrampur village in Panna district ate just chapatti and salt for two to three days after the lockdown because she did not have anything else at her home. She is disabled too. When Tulsia Bai of village came to know about this, she sent vegetables from her kitchen garden to Kasturi. For the past six weeks, Tulsia has been regularly

sending tomatoes, ladies finger, brinjal and other vegetables from her kitchen garden to Kasturi Bai.

A study suggests that 41 families from 14 villages in Panna district have shared 573 kg of vegetables with other families during the past six weeks. Ravi Pathak, a social worker active in these villages says that COVID19 pandemic had caused panic in the village initially but soon people started thinking of finding ways to survive.

“Notwithstanding existence caste-based structure, poverty and gender discriminations, we saw unusual energy among those women of the villages who have been connected to the process of health, nutrition and leadership development since past three to four years,” Pathak says.

■ STORY - 5

Bitti Bai of Pati village has been visiting the homes of the malnourished children through the women's Dastak group.

When lockdown was announced and all daily wage works got halted, Bitti went to home of daily wage worker Harishankar whose son Himanshu was malnourished.

Bitti Bai has resolved to ensure that Harishankar's family gets regular supply of vegetables from her kitchen garden till the lockdown is over.

■ STORY - 6

Ravita Ahirwar of Gandhi Gram village is helping out the family of Haribai that has returned following the lockdown. The family has no local source of income. When they returned, they did not have any savings or any food material either. They ate chapatti with salt on the first day after return.

Ravita discussed with the women's group and it was decided that those families that had kitchen gardens at their homes will help the deprived families of the village.

■ STORY - 7

Krishna Mawasi of Kailhora village in Majhgawan block of Satna district shared vegetables grown on his one bigha land with 15 families of the village during the COVID19 situation.

When Vikas Samvad member Vijay Yaduwanshi shared this noble gesture on his Twitter, chief minister of Madhya Pradesh took notice and appreciated the initiative. Next day, the local MP Ganesh Singh reached Kailhora village and announced development works worth Rs 15 lakh to honour the initiative of Krishna Mawasi.

■ STORY - 8

Neeru Kol is a resident of village Tilou of Ghuman panchayat in Rewa district and her husband Mohit Lal Kol is an auto driver.

Neeru does farming on the family land. She also grows vegetables on a part of the land and shares the yield with villagers.

“If vegetables are used for good purpose, the production increases”, she quipped when asked about her large-heartedness.

She says today entire world is facing a crisis. There is no importance of money and property now. Only important thing is to share whatever we have with others.

Since the crisis started, she decided to regularly share vegetables with 13 families from hers as well as neighbouring villages.

“This is not a donation or alms. If somebody else has to starve or eat dry chapatti while we have something to share, it will be a sin not to share that” she says.

■ STORY - 9

Sampati Sahu of Ansara village in Chataini panchayat of Rewa district has been sharing vegetables from her kitchen garden (spinach, bottle gourd, tomatoes, pumpkin, ladies finger, potatoes and onions with 15 families of the village, three days a week. The sharing is with such families that that children, pregnant/lactating women and those that do not have any resources. Sampati had shared more than a quintal of vegetables with others till May 7.

■ STORY - 10

Kesri Bai of Magarghara village in Umari district says “Initially we thought if we shared our vegetables with others, how will manage our own needs? Then we remembered the discussions we had at the women's Dastak group about keeping the children of the village healthy. That inspired us to share our vegetables with needy people as much as possible.”

Till now, Kesri Bai's family has shared 90 kg vegetables with others in the village.

■ STORY - 11

Babi Bai of Manmani Panchayat says that earlier her neighbours would purchase vegetables grown in her 2.5-acre agriculture land. But after the lockdown, sale stopped as people were left with no money following the lockdown.

“When people do not have any source of livelihood, everything is closed and we have vegetables available, how could we think of not helping the neighbours who always stood with us? We can grow vegetables again, but if we can't help our own people in crisis situation, there is no point of our existence,” Babi Bai says.

Malnutrition is rampant in Madhya Pradesh and stories related to the serious situation have been told again and again.

Families of about 11 lakh severely acute malnourished children are struggling hard to

sustain themselves.

When COVID19 crisis struck, plight of these families, especially pregnant and lactating women and malnourished children turned more pathetic. In such as time of crisis, 5867 kitchen gardens played a crucial role in improve the situation of nutrition deficiency.

The women's groups formed in 100 villages under the community-based malnutrition management programme of the Vikas Samvad have left a positive impact during the crisis.

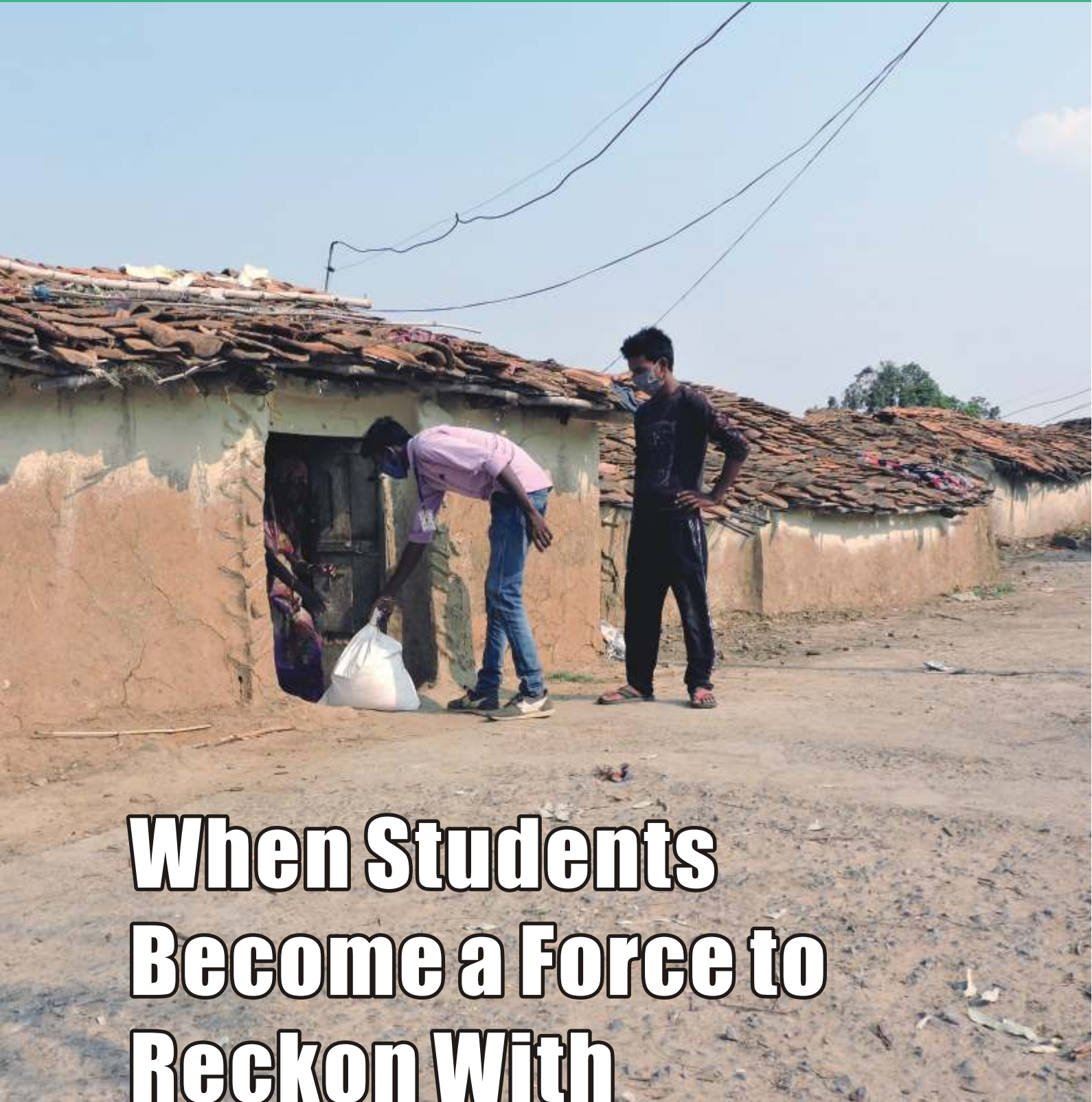
Water conservation structures were also constructed under the programme Aimed at eradicating hunger and malnutrition among the Mawasi, Gond, Baiga and other tribal and dalit communities of the state.

Vikas Samvad is studying the impact of COVID19 on children in these project areas as well.



25

Joint Forum against
Corona Crisis (West Bengal)



**When Students
Become a Force to
Reckon With**

About 20-30 students studying in the Agriculture University, Kalyani, near Kolkata, along with some organization stood by some distressed people of the villages in the vicinity of the university campus.

Julekha Parveen, as student, has reported that soon after the lockdown was announced, a group of general students of the university reached out to people in nearby villages and stood by them during the critical situation of lockdown.

The students assisted the villagers through phone call and informed them about actual scenario of the nature and effects of the COVID19. Gradually, they opened up about their financial troubles and food scarcity.

“ We, the students of third year and as we did not have much money with us, we solicited support from many organizations in West Bengal”, said by Julekha Parveen.

As the students were receiving phone calls from far off places, Parveen circulated her cell phone number to assist the distressed people. One of her classmates, named by Tamonash Roy and a friend named, Chandan Bhattacharya also soulfully joined in the social work.

Situation was getting worsen day by day and calls began to come from far off places from the tragic stricken, hailing from West Bengal who had migrated for work to other parts of the country. We realized the gravity of the situations of different places.

What emerged as common problem though in the discussion was that they had run out of the food stock and did not have proper place to live. People started falling ill and don't have any single medical support to survive. The most shocking fact was the migrants were unable to return homes and were stranded in places without basic facilities.

We formed a group of 30 students from BCKV as well as from other universities, organization and individuals in West Bengal.

We enhanced our knowledge about the pandemic through reading, mostly on internet and created some awareness posters and pamphlets. We also created two Google Pay accounts for aid to the distressed people and asking for supports to friends, relatives and our teachers.

From the contribution of our teachers and relatives we collected about Rs 60,000 to create a relief fund for the distressed people.

Primarily, we took the initiative to distribute rations to the people, but in request of someone, running out of cash, we transferred money to them through Google Pay or bank accounts. We also started talking to the stranded migrant workers of West Bengal working in different parts of the country and began to help them out.

As our Google Pay account became more widely known, other people also started helping us. Some contributed small while others big amounts. The money flow was

constant and this was encouraging for us.

But the big challenge was to help the migrants who had decided to walk back home from various parts of the country. They were facing a lot of difficulties in their barefoot journey. They were with children, elderly and women. Looking at their plight, we found links with other civil society organizations outside West Bengal and reached out to them for support.

In the second phase of the lockdown, the West Bengal government launched a mobile application named 'Sneherparash'. There was an application form available in the app, by filling in the beneficiary could get Rs 1000 transferred to their accounts. We explained people about this app over the telephone, helped them in downloading it and in filling up the form.

In order to reach out to needy people with ease, we created a small video by collating screenshots of the app to explain its functioning. We sent it to the people so that they could fill up the forms easily and avail benefit of the Rs 1000 cash transfer.

From May 1, the Union government allowed migrants to move back home. We started teaching out to the returnees by fetching them with e-passes issued and helping them to get connected to the government websites of different states.

We have lot of stories to share but narrating two or three out of them should suffice to illustrate our experience.

A family of West Bengal resides in the Dharavi slum of Mumbai. Both the husband and wife are engaged as manual labour. The youngest of their kids is a thalassemia patient. He requires blood transfusion every month and also nutritious food. But the couple had lost livelihood due to the lockdown. Moreover, the landlord was harassing them for rent of the room they stayed in. They were unable to even provide food to the thalassemia-stricken child, not a single necessary medicines.

As soon as they got to know about our helpline, they contacted us and narrated their woes. We contributed as much fund as we could effort for their help. We helped them to get connected with an organization, working in Mumbai, so that they could at least get cooked food twice a day.

Several women and children were still stranded in Jaipur and were barely able to get food once a day. They neither had any source of livelihood nor familiar with Hindi to communicate with the local people. The contractor, who had taken them for work, had abandoned them.

We got to know that a train will leave from Ajmer for Kolkata on May 4. But the provision was announced suddenly and the migrants, who were stranded in Jaipur, could not reach Ajmer in time to catch the trains there was no availability of local transport. This group neither have enough money to hire a vehicle to go to Ajmer nor have a single rupee paying for train fare up to Kolkata.

Another example is more poignant. Salimullah, a migrant labour from West Bengal worked at a tailoring shop in Bengaluru. When lockdown was announced, the shop eventually shut down and Salim ullah lost his job. He and some of his colleagues of the tailor purchased some cloths, stitched masks and decided to sell it in local markets. But when they attempted to sell the masks, local people created a ruckus calling them Rohigyas and accused them to trying to spread COVID19 through the masks.

Due to the ruckus, the local administration stopped them from selling the masks and they were left with no money and work.

When we got to know about them, we helped to connect them with an organization in Bengaluru, which would assist them by taking help from our raised fund .

We enthusiastically do all these works and enjoying to do it . But it was undoubtedly an eye opener for us about serious problems facing India.

Working for the people through the pandemic crisis, we have realized that local administrations are careless about the plight of poor people. The authorities work in an ad hoc manner and are just interested in paper works.

Tamonash Roy says that in West Bengal, adequate number of PPE kits are not available for doctors and medical staffs.

In Hoogly, nurses were given raincoats instead of PPE kit. They were forced to wear these while working in hot and humid weather.

“Saluting the medical staff or showering flower petals on them are unnecessary, the real help will be to provide them with necessary preventive kits,” Tamonash says.

The students reported that the role of civil society is very crucial in these time. They are doing very important work.

We intend to work with poor and rural people after finishing our studies. We feel that rural people and migrant workers should learn the basics of communication technology, so that whenever they are forced to migrate for serve outside their home states, they are able to use it for self help.

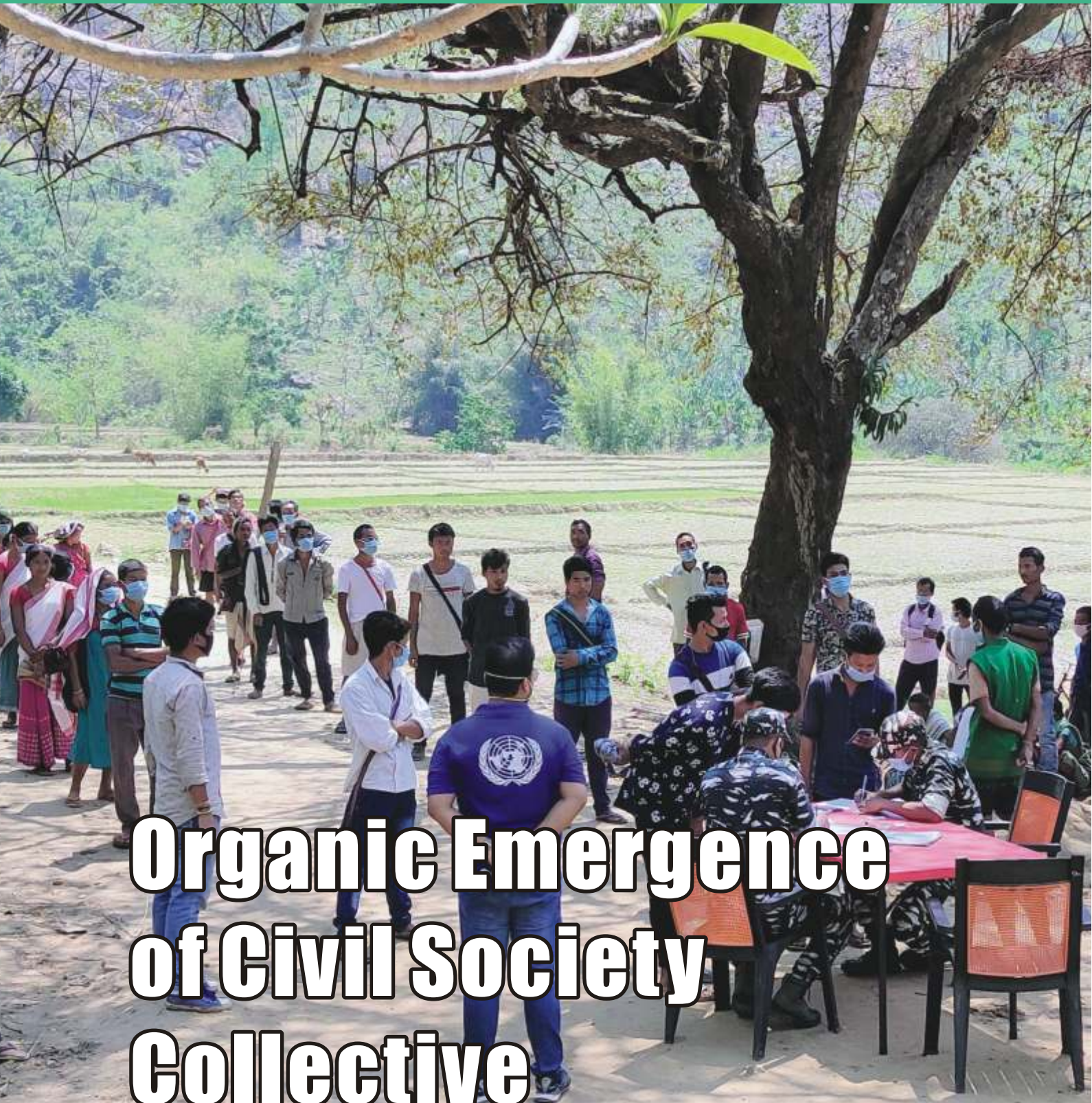
COVID19 may go away sooner or later but the social problems will gradually finished our society.

Arming our population with information technology is important for their survival with dignity.



26

Support During
Pandemic-SDP (Assam)



**Organic Emergence
of Civil Society
Collective**

The COVID19 crisis induced lockdown has brought forward a very limited prospect of income for several hundreds of families in northeast and the national data is even graver. Waging a desperate battle for survival, the daily wage earners and migrant labourers are the invisible millions who seek out living as construction workers, painters, food vendors and a host of other jobs suddenly rendered redundant in these COVID19 days. Understanding the need of the communities in despair within the slum areas of Guwahati City, some individuals collaborated without any banner. They created a group 'Support during Pandemic (SDP)' and the drive reached out 1000 households with a vision of dissemination of awareness with regards to the importance of physical distancing and the need to stay indoors during the lockdown along with basic grocery kits.

A member of SDP said that the move was spontaneous. When they come to know about the presence of the virus within the northeastern region, they initiated a 5-day long awareness and sensitization program. The program was carried out at Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport (LGBI), Guwahati, Assam with support from the Airports Authority of India, NER and UNDP, NE, starting from 19 March to 23 March 2020.

This camp focused on spreading awareness on hand-washing techniques, hygiene behaviours, physical distancing, symptoms of the virus within a person and information on and about government helplines. The drive, which was called 'Basics during Pandemic', reached out to arriving passengers, maintenance staff, security personals, Assam Police personals and a huge community of taxi drivers. And it was during this drive, when a strong feeling of discomfort and a possible crisis was felt by the team. During commuting periods from Guwahati City to the Airport, a sense of fear, panic and unnecessary rush was seen across the streets and highways of Guwahati.

And during the last day of the BDP drive, which was on 23 March 2020, the fear materialised in the form of the Lockdown! All activities just stopped! All movements nullified! The city froze! The people of the state were not even over with the nightmare of the recent political turmoil in the state due to CAA/NRC when this sudden development struck them. And amidst the series of crucial decisions announced by the government, the constant flashing of pictures, videos and news of migrant workers and daily wage earners across the nation struggling to return home made, the team was faced with a grave question what next?

The initiative that began with a WhatsApp group that had initially 7 members has now grown to 27. The name of the group was "Call of Duty". Without losing any time, the team immediately rolled out the crowd-funding drive through social media and personal contacts. Within a day's time, fund sufficient enough to reach-out to 100 families with grocery kits that would suffice for at least 15 days, was mobilized and immediately rolled out in a slum area at Gandhi Basti, Guwahati.

Through crowdfunding, SDP has till date reached out to 861 households within a period of 8 days. Understanding the impact of SDP over the vulnerable pockets within the urban belts of Guwahati, AAI and UNDP supported the drive to be extended in the rural hill-locked villages of Rani, Kamrup, a rural border belt between Assam and

Meghalaya. This phase of SDP reached out to 1000 households.

The members chose their work based on their strengths, available resources and availability within Guwahati. Around 10 members out of 27 chose to mobilize funds, 6 members worked on grocery arrangement, some of them chose distribution part and few were interested in handling social media and documenting the drive.

“In terms of support, the entire team of SDP on behalf of all those families who were fed during this on-going lockdown, extends their heartfelt gratitude to each and every funder who have supported and more importantly trusted the cause. Without the banner of any registered NGO, or an allied bank account, the crowd-funded SDP raised almost Rs. 3,12,764 to procure grocery kits. We would also render our gratitude to Assam Police and 175 BN CRPF, Rani who helped us with all the on-field logistics, mobility during the lockdown and security arrangements,” a team member added Plabon Phukan of the organisation says.

The grocery kit supplied by the volunteers contained 7 kg Rice, 2 kg Lentils, 2 kg Potato, 1 kg Salt, 1-liter oil and a bar of soap. The distribution drive targeted daily wage earners, migrant workers, rickshaw pullers, construction workers, hill-locked tribal villages and street dwellers. In future, they have decided to focus on the Adivasi and Bodo communities of Chirang District, Bodoland, residing across the very vulnerable border of India and Bhutan. The SDP will further conduct its activities across Rani Block.

The group members also foresee several challenges, several of them not pleasing. “An experience, where shortage of grocery kits almost led to a mob attack highlighted the possibility of a food riot in the near future. The economic lockdown will be further prolonged, and one section of the society will be at the receiving end of all the unfavorable conditions post the lockdown. There is also going to be a huge shift in the direction of the global market in terms of market demand and purchasing capacity. In short, things are not going to be back to same for a long time to come! However, on a brighter side we foresee a greener surrounding, a cleaner environment!”, the team members say.

Based on their field experience, the group member also suggested some future course of action. In terms of post-lockdown engagement, the collective is planning to focus on the lines of developing alternate modalities of livelihood especially within the existing eco-tourism, poultry, weaving clusters with special emphasis on the migrant workers. They plan to reach out to agencies like UNDP for mechanizing and monitoring the activities. The cottage industry through the networks of Anganwadi workers, SHGs and mother groups will be another focused area of intervention. Psychosocial support and care is planned as an integral activity post the lockdown.

“The need at the community level is immense and a long-time intervention model in terms of sustaining livelihoods of the vulnerable communities is the call of the hour. Moreover, the need to constantly maintain physical distancing and practicing hygienic behaviours is a must. Intensive sensitization has to be an on-going process,” the team members feel.

27

Aas
(Madhya Pradesh)



**Ray of Hope Amidst
Hatred and
Disease**

Indore does not only have the highest numbers of COVID19 cases and deaths in Madhya Pradesh, but also facing a serious issue is the way an atmosphere of hatred and disgust has been created against a particular community. This attempt started even before lockdown and as the Tabhligi Jamaat incident unfolded, Indore was plotted in a way as if one particular community were totally responsible for the entire problem. Of course, there was this incident at Tatpatti Bakhal locality where a team of doctors was attacked by a mob of a particular community after refusing to get tested. But this incident was condemned widely, and strict action was also initiated on the accused.

Director of organization 'AAs', Wasim Iqbal says “when we started our work, the maximum calls we received were from migrant labourers and children, because Aas works with children and adolescents through the Child Line. During two initial days people required ration (food essentials), because the sudden announcement and the unpreparedness of the lockdown was quite terrifying. The ruckus at the grocery and other shops at 8.00pm on March 24 (when lockdown was announced) was enough to show the total unpreparedness of the administration.

He says that the Aas volunteers received almost 600 calls and the first thing we did was to connect this calls to the helpline numbers provided by the administration. But large number of them called back to inform that none of the helplines were working. No one was picking up the calls and no one was helping out. Aas organization then contacted its sources in Indore and made arrangements of raw food grains. Packets of these raw food items were given to about 300-400 families. Later the team also tried to reach cooked food to needy people, but then then they felt that it was time to sit down, discuss and decide as to what should be the exact role of the organisation during this time of crisis.

Wasim says that after discussing with entire team, they decided that the main role should be to listen to people's problems and connect them to proper platform so that they could get help. Till then, AAs had provided raw food material to about 5000 people. The team created a database and started recording the needs of the people. It was found that there was not much preparedness on the part of the government and administration to deal with the COVID19 pandemic situation. The team also felt that certain political parties had started making noises targeting a particular community on the COVID19 issue.

The areas where the team started working has about 10,000 labourers hailing from Bihar and Bengal, engaged in daily wage works. When the volunteers contacted them, they found that the conditions in the area they were residing in were awfully bad. So, the team felt that the work of distributing ration should continue simultaneously. Also, there was need to work in tandem with the administration, particularly for that community that was being targeted and deprived of help and benefits.

These people did not seem have trust on the government machinery, so Aas started the work of counseling and providing guidance to the people of a particular community, so that they could go for the COVID19 testing if necessary, not confront the administration and get rid of the infection. Awareness materials were also distributed.

While working in these localities, the volunteers found that several hospitals had stopped medical services to patients of other diseases, and this was leading to increase in deaths due to other ailments. AAs then contacted several doctors and prepared a list of about a dozen doctors who could provide treatment guidance to people over telephone. Team members went to the homes of these ailing people, linked them to the doctors over telephone and then took family members to medical shops to provide them medicines.

Later the volunteers got information from nearby districts that children of several families from these districts were enrolled in madarsas of Indore and their parents were worried as children could not go home because of the lockdown. "With our efforts, we could send some kids back to their home in Mandsaur and Jaora, but we could not help the other children help behind. But we ensured that none of the kids left behind in the madarsas would remain hungry and also get essential things. We also started engaging them in creative activities over mobile phone including painting, making toys out of paper, writing poetry and songs and so on. The best thing was that we did not get any complaint about any major misbehavior with the kids. Of the 380 phone calls that we received about these children, only four were about misbehavior with them. We talked to the officials and found that 7% cases were of guidance while 92% were complaints regarding food," Wasim says.

Later, the organisation almost totally stopped the work of distributing ration and focused on the issues faced by migrant workers and ensuring their return home. Also, they started creative activities at the shelter home of the women and child development department. The team is using Zoom App to teach yoga, dance and read out stories and undertake other such activities with the children at the shelter home. Meanwhile, about 150 youth and adolescents in Dhar district, with whom AAs had earlier worked on awareness regarding Constitution of India offered to become volunteers and helped the labourers there. They are finding the needy labourers, linking them to the administration and trying to ensure that they get the help that they need.

As for the post-lockdown scenario, AAs is worried about the future of the 20,000 labourers with whom they engaged during the relief work of over 40 days. According to the organisation, it will take at least six months' time period to bring the economic activities back on track in cities like Indore. The team feels that they would have to work with these groups for at least two years. Also, there is need to work with such people and people's representatives who are engaged in spreading rumors and creating an atmosphere of hatred against a particular community. The team also concedes that there are some uncouth elements in the particular community who try to break social norms and disregard government rules and orders, create bad atmosphere and disrepute the entire community. The team has started using teachings from the religious texts of this community to create awareness posters. For examples teachings like 'if your neighbor is hungry, God will not accept your prayers', or 'if you do not help the needy, God will not accept your prayers', are used on the awareness material.

AAs volunteers had certain sweet and bitter experiences during this work. After

hearing about their work, farmer Sachin Patidar and his friends from Mandleshwar sent across about 8- 10 quintals of vegetables from their fields to the team. A part of this horde of vegetables was handed over free of cost to police mess and also distributed among the needy in the community. Once, the team who work basically as Child Line, got information that a family was trying to get their minor child married, thinking that no one would pay attention during this time of crisis. But they informed the women and child development department and with help of police this underage marriage was stopped.

The team says that there are a lot of challenges associated with this work. The team moved out to field at 8.00am in the morning and there was no fixed time to get back in the night. They carried food and also a bottle of sanitizer. Wherever we get chance, we wash our hands and also carry masks and scarves always. “During the crisis, lives of several people have changed and post crisis, we will see a new society within the society. But the level of preparations that we need to handle this change, the role that the government, administration and society needs to play in this remains half-baked at present,” Wasim says.



28

Nazariya
(Delhi)



Nazariya is a Delhi based queer feminist resource group that works towards affirming the rights of queer women and trans persons [Trans - persons are people who are assigned a gender at birth and identify as another gender] by making their lives visible. The organisation believes that queer women and trans persons have the innate capacity to understand, demand, and access their rights. Nazariya tries to create an enabling environment where their lived realities are non-negotiable. The team includes 5 full time staff and 3 part time people.

Given the disproportionate impact of the Covid19 pandemic on the trans population Nazariya team identified 11 transmen and their families from north India who have lost their jobs due to the crisis. They cannot go back to their natal families because they were subjected to violence because of their chosen gender identity and / or their sexual orientation.

Nazariya has been running a peer helpline and face to face counselling services by a professional MHP since September 2019. Since the lockdown the team has been getting many calls for appointments with the MHP, but has been unable to cater to this demand because of lack of time and resources. However, there is plan to hire one more counselor for 3 months to cater to this demand during the pandemic.

When the Lock down was declared, Nazariya thought of people with whom they were working, got some phone calls that they were in need. The team talked among themselves first then decided to work in. The roles and responsibilities were fixed in such a way that help could be provided to the needy at optimum level.

As of now, one of the team members is handling the helpline and doing peer counseling. One person is a psychologist who is providing therapy to the clients. Two members made a list of people who need financial support in this crisis situation. Two members are conducting zoom hangout sessions every week. Three members are representing online awareness building panels, sessions, facebook-instagram lives and discussions. A part time person, who is a lawyer, has been providing legal help to the team and to those in need.

A little about the trans community : All of us are assigned a gender at birth. For instance, someone was assigned gender female at birth and now identify as a woman. There are people who were assigned female at birth and identify as a man and there are people who were assigned male at birth and identify as women. The word Trans is used to indicate an inclusive way to address all non-cisgender identities in one simple term. Cisgender denotes or relates to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their gender assigned at birth.

Though Nazariya is a resource group based in Delhi, but during the lockdown they are doing pan India work. They are receiving calls from pan India for peer counseling, domestic violence and therapy. In the zoom hangout sessions, people from other countries have also been joining. One of the therapy clients is also from out of the country. This all is challenging in the time of Covid. But the team is fighting with constraints and accepted the challenges.

While discussing the initiatives, the team put in lot of thought, saw the limitations and then finally came up with a strategy to address the issues being faced by the community. Following measures were taken:-

Fund raising : From friends, well wishers and civil society partners using social media and personal contacts, the team was able to raise a sum of INR 218,700. APPI provided them a grant of 168500 to provide monetary support to 50 transpersons and hire a part time counsellor for a month.

Financial relief : Money was provided to families of Trans men living together with their partners. Some of the transmen to whom relief was provided were people who were already in touch with Nazariya with regard to necessary police and legal intervention following disputes with their family owing to their gender identity. They have also been struggling to find jobs or sustained means of livelihood prior to Covid19 as well. Following the Lockdown the team received distress calls from them and provided Rs. 9000 each to 11 Transmen and their families. Till date the team have helped 70 transpersons with money and ration.

Psychosocial counselling support: Nazariya has been providing psycho social counselling support to young LGBTQIA+ identified persons prior to Covid19. Earlier it was face to face operating from organisation's office. During lockdown the service was moved online. During the lockdown the frequency of sessions and support needed by previous list of clients increased and also the number of new clients increased. The team has hired another part time counsellor to meet the needs. That said, the demand has still superseded the supply. The triggers for psychosocial distress during the pandemic and lockdown were - increased surveillance from the family, inability to access even online spaces of them such as social media, WhatsApp or simply watching LGBTQIA+ related online content due to above and claustrophobia due to above. For those living alone, isolation was overwhelming and physical and mental violence by husband on queer women among others.

Peer counselling through helpline : Earlier the team used to get two to three calls per week on our helpline. Since the lockdown there have been more than 50 calls on the helpline with an average of 10- 12 calls per week, last week (April 22nd to 28 th) the team recorded 17 phone calls, the highest till date).

Online support through zoom meeting : Nazariya has been conducting online zoom hangout once a week for lesbian, bisexual and/or queer women and trans persons. Open mic, chat sessions with musicians and their music, general discussion on queerness and art, poetries, films on lesbian identity etc have been organised. Film screenings were also planned. In the wake of the increasing mental distress among the LGBTQIA+ community and the decreasing safe and civic spaces for them, Nazariya is making effort to create online safe and civic spaces for lesbian, bisexual and/or queer women and trans persons. In this zoom hangout people are continuously participating and giving feedback that it is really helping them at least to hangout virtually with queer community.

Developing online content : Content was developed for trans and queer people on self

care guidelines during Covid19 with other civil society organisations and people collectives working on LGBTQIA+.

[\(http://www.tarshi.net/inplainspeak/locked-down-in-the-time-of-Covid19-safety-and-self-care-for-queer-and-trans-persons/\)](http://www.tarshi.net/inplainspeak/locked-down-in-the-time-of-Covid19-safety-and-self-care-for-queer-and-trans-persons/)

Spreading and raising awareness : Awareness on domestic violence and other related distress arising due to Covid19 was spread through online webinars and other forums and platforms for domestic violence, like Instagram live, Facebook live and others.

Rituparna of Nazariya says “During this long period of pandemic, our team really worked hard and made a mark. Our members were panelists on discussion on Gender and sexuality under lockdown challenges and mitigation by Martha Farell Foundation, discussion on Abortion in the time of corona by ASAP, for creating safe civic spaces for LGBTIQ+ community post Covid19 by Hackergram, discussion on LGBTQIA during Covid19 by APPI and participant in discussion by UNWOMEN on COVID19 and EVAW.

“The organisation does not do any direct work with local administration, religious groups and media as such because the target of our work is entirely different, and in view of administration and others, this is a very minor group where services are not required we believe. Hence, we are working with this community,” Rituparna says. The team received calls from the media regarding domestic violence cases. Through the help of the media the helpline number was publicised so that people can reach out and some of the online platforms helped by giving space to the fundraising efforts.

“Many friends and well wishers have been contacting us through our fundraising calls and generally as well checking in on us with regard to any help and support that we might need in order to carry out our work. We wish that more of these will pour in so that we can sustain and expand our scope of outreach as well as chart out necessary infrastructure within the organisation,” Rituparna adds.

The team feels that post corona it will be a little difficult to provide all these services in the same way. It will take some time to resume all the activities as similar to the previous. While some work can continue virtually, they might not be able to create the necessary impact due to lack of face to face and more intimate mode of engagement. Also the reach of the advocacy work might become limited and might hamper the momentum of impact that we have been able to sustain over the last four or five years.

Going ahead, the team feels that it might experience a certain pressing need to focus in crisis intervention and relief work specifically due to the consequences of Covid19. The work on documenting and generating general resources and raising awareness might be adversely impacted. One of the pressing concerns would be to generate the necessary funds and resources to be able to sustain it or cater to rising needs and demands. The challenge is how to sustain the relief work for those - who are in touch with the organisation and those who might reach out in future for help.

One of the major needs prior to Covid19 was a source of sustained livelihood and a safe

working space for LGBTQIA+ community specifically for trans persons. Post Covid19 and the onset of the expected economic recession, this will emerge as one pressing concern and crisis, Rituparna says.

The organisation had several experiences during the lockdown period. There are some that were really striking like that of a couple (transmen and his partner) who have been staying together almost for one year. They ran away from their native state to Delhi, due to violence faced by their partner's family. Before lockdown they went back to the transman's natal house for his sister's wedding. The transman's family is supportive. After the sister's wedding both of them stayed back and lockdown began. The partner's family who stayed nearby started visiting the transman's house in order to find the partner. The couple ran away from their home because of threat to their lives from the partner's family. Due to lockdown they could not cross the border to Delhi and they were stuck in their State. The team then contacted 181 and the SP of the district. 181 agreed to help them with the help of the police but the couple refused to take the help of the police as the police in their place are friends with the family. They are still in their State with the transman's family.

The team members say that the impact of their work is difficult to assess as they work with very small and different groups, but still at the wake of pressing mental distress to the situation and tension for future, their work helped the LGBTQIA+ community in different ways. For example, community members were able to access free mental health services/ therapy in this tough time, they were able to meet new people and are able to have virtual hangouts which are becoming a support system for them in these times, fundraising helped 11 transmen and their families and the helpline peer counselling helped queer people to cope up in their family situation.

Rituparna says “As for engaging ourselves with local and state administration but it all was on case to case basis and not as regular one, we took various sort of small helps from agencies. We took the help of 181 helpline and the local police in a State in the case of the transman and his partner as mentioned above. Apart from that we have been approached by a lot of civil society organisations, individuals and humanitarian and Covid_19 concern relief works to assess or for possible collaborations and contribution with regard to the intervention work we are doing. So far no government agencies have reached out.”

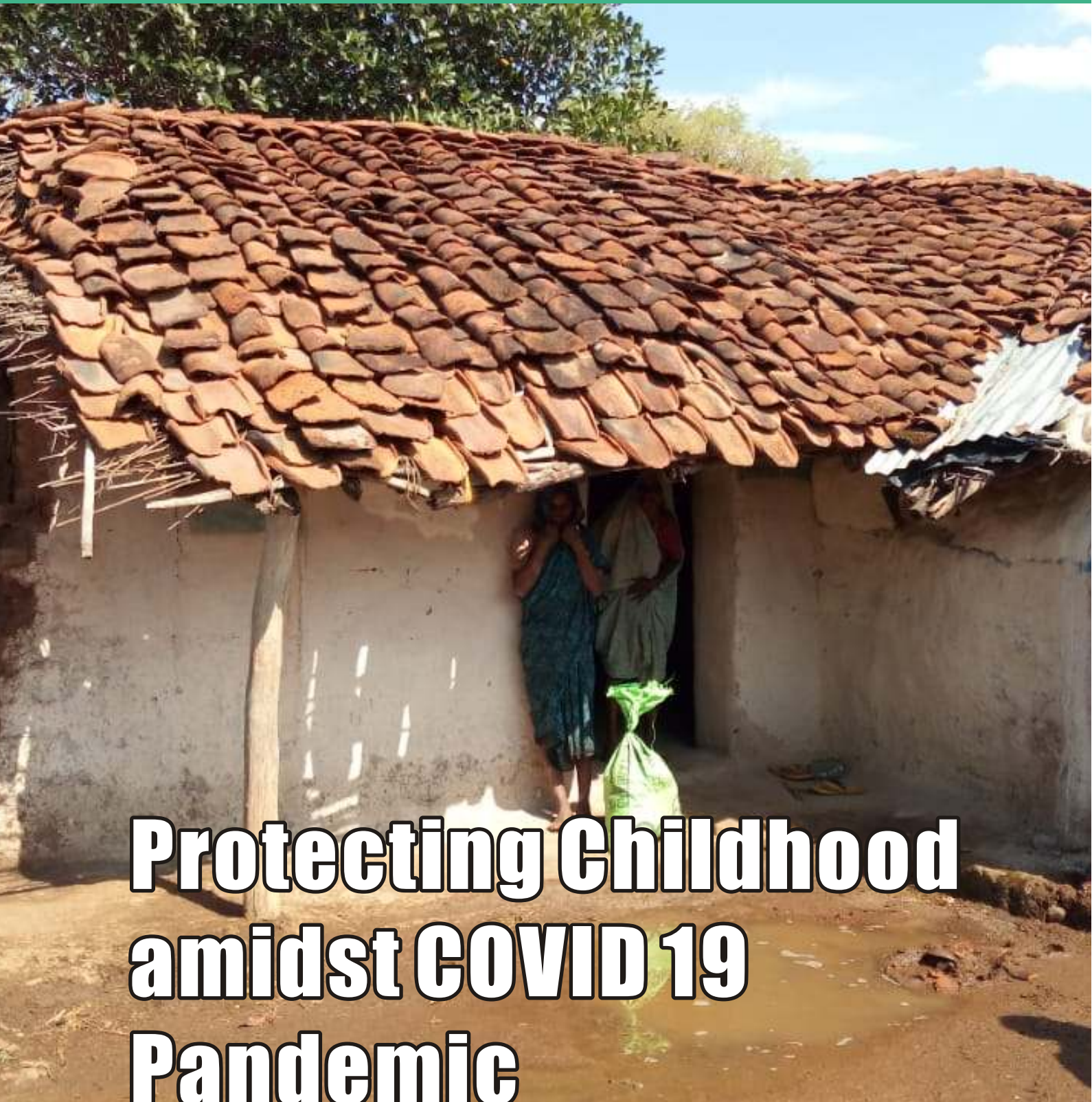
There is acute lack of support system accessible and easily available to LGBTQIA+ community. Be it government funded shelter homes or helpline and one stop crisis intervention centre for homophobic and transphobic violence such as that available for GBV (in terms of quantity and general focus and attention from concerned authorities).


Stranded migrant populations are being sent home. It could be mentioned that LGBTQIA+ community represent a major part of migrant workers as they run away from home due to violence and threat to life from their own family, the team members say.



29

Praajak
(West Bengal)





Praajak, a West-Bengal based NGO that has been working with vulnerable children and adolescents, especially those living on railway platforms. But even before the COVID19 pandemic induced lockdown, the organisation has started working for awareness, relief and psychological counseling of the communities that they have been associated with.

Work was carried out mainly in eight districts of West Bengal – Malda, Uttar Dinajpur, Pashchim Bardhaman, Murshidabad, Jalpaiguri, North 24 Parganas, Coochbehar and South 24 Parganas. Praajak had got into work from home and social distancing mode from the 17th March 2020, before the state and national lockdowns were announced.

In the eight districts mentioned above, Praajak reached out to over 15,800 children and over 17,000 adults with relief and counseling aid. The relief included food, hygiene material like soap/ sanitiser/ menstrual pads, medicines, online psychosocial support, psychosocial support kits and other immediate help.

In the early days, people in the communities that Praajak works with, in the urban areas of Dum Dum, Malda, Siliguri, Behrampur and rural areas of Murshidabad and South 24 Parganas, were unable to maintain social distancing and home isolation directives of the Government due to a variety of reasons including small home spaces, lack of activities in the home, usual gender roles which sees women and girls more confined to their homes with men and boys continuing to go out onto the streets and tea shops. Children and adolescents felt bored though many felt relieved that the pressure to study has eased. However, this has given way to increased anxiety and stress with the lockdown getting extended and no certainty when a semblance of normality will be restored.

While relative lack of mobility was identified as an important stressor in general, there was a lingering uncertainty about food in spite of the government rations reaching the most marginalised communities. Additionally, instances of discord and quarrels over food and cooking had started to be raised by husbands/ male household heads. It was reported that in some places the lack of access to liquor is also creating some rough behavior by men dependent on alcohol.

“Frontline workers of the organisation feared this could lead to increased community unrest in the future. However, the flow of rations got regularized since 1st April 2020 and many women have started receiving Rs 500 in two installments vis-à-vis the PMGKY. There is less anxiety in these communities though many mobile phones have become inoperative due to lack of disposable cash among the people, so it is becoming difficult to reach out to many giving restricted movement allowed by the police,” Deep Purkayastha said.

However, the major difficulties were faced by nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes, itinerant communities who migrate from place to place selling their folk remedies or offering seasonal work in mango orchards and folk artistes who perform during religious ceremonies and marriages, especially those who are female impersonators, the team members of Praajak say.

Additionally, single women, persons with disabilities, the elderly and pregnant and lactating mothers faced a wide variety of problems. In villages across the Western tribal belt of Bengal daily wage-earning tribal communities were also in distress. While some had ration cards, many others had no connection with any of the government social security systems. The major challenge continues to be food supply to these communities and forcible eviction of many of these communities by the government authorities with the ostensible reason of “sending them back”.

The organisation swung into specific action mode to deal with the different aspects of the situation and kept children and adolescents in special focus.

Every Field Worker/Social Worker was made responsible to contact each and every child and adolescent in our programmes who have access to a mobile on a regular basis. It was also made mandatory that other children were contacted through those who had access to mobiles. Depending on the number of children that and Animator is in touch with, every child and adolescent was spoken to every 2 days or 3 days.

The animators were required to enquire about the feeling of children and adolescents about the lockdown whether it made them happy or distressed, whether the time available due to lockdown improved relationships within the family, have they worsened or is it the same as before, how did the children plan to spend the coming days of the lock-down, were they aware of the Corona virus and how it spreads, prevention and were they able to take these preventive steps?

For those who say they do not know any of this, the Animator explained the preventive measures thoroughly. They discreetly enquired about any violence or anxiety being faced by the child or a family member. Any indication of stress and trauma was referred to the Counselors within the organisation who took the matter up or escalated it to other Counselors and psycho-social services set up by the State CPCR and other mental health organisations.

To ensure that children do not go out onto the streets and do not assemble in the playgrounds, art materials, indoor games like ludo, Chinese checkers, dominoes etc. and modeling clay/play dough were distributed. Art and modeling clay are also effective therapeutic tools which can help reduce anxiety and distress among children and adolescents.

Also, wherever funds permitted, regular hand washing by distributing soap and sanitizers were ensured.

For those youth who have access to smart phones with WhatsApp, selected project team members undertook various creative activities including art, story-building, photography etc. to keep them involved in positive activities.

The team also mulled what could be and should be done, given limited resources, for the families and children/adolescents in the communities who were not included in Praajak programmes.

“These were huge numbers and ethics required that we do not discriminate in a time of emergency. It was felt that all such relief work will have to be conducted via the Councilors or Panchayat Members. Praajak formulated a COVID19 Response Protocol arising from our experiences in the month of April 2020 which has now been operationalised, said Purkayastha.

“Praajak will continue to reach food to those community members who may have had difficulty accessing government relief. Animators will get a list of such persons. However, Praajak will in all instances put them in touch with the government systems at the same time providing relief till such links are established. Praajak will use its Railway Childline services in Asansol and Malda to the maximum extent possible to ensure outreach to nomadic and semi-nomadic communities and itinerant groups,” Purkayastha added.




30

Savitaben from the
Katodiya Village of Bhavnagar
(Gujrat)



**A Role Model in
Pandemic Chaos**



Government, Non-government Organizations, Gram Panchayats and Voluntary organizations are playing active role to fight with Corona Pandemic all over India. Mahila Swaraj Manch inspired by ANANDI is also playing active role in Shihor taluka of Bhavnagar district, Gujarat.

Mahila Swaraj Manch is a collective of elected women representatives (EWR), women leaders of village level committees and women community leaders. Often women Panchayat members are prohibited when they start any work in Panchayat, they are neither accepted as administrators in the Panchayats nor are their efforts counted. They are not consulted during the important decision-making process. However, in this area, women of Mahila Swaraj Manch have done exemplary work. They are exhibiting their skills and wisdom to come together as leaders in their village as the Gram Panchayat Ward member, Community Leader, Talati (Panchayat Secretary), ASHA, Health Volunteer and so on to prevent the spread of COVID 19 Pandemic and impact of the lock down on vulnerable communities.

Savitaben Rathod, a dalit leader and President of Mahila Swaraj Manch; a former Sarpanch; is a Gram Panchayat member of village Katodiya in Bhavnagar district of Gujarat. Her exemplary work during her tenure as the Sarpanch of the village amplifies her identity as fearless leader even today. She provides handholding support to women leaders, EWRs and women Sarpanches of other surrounding villages. This continues telephonically, to maintain the physical distancing norms during COVID 19.

Being an ASHA, she continues to ensure that the people of the other surrounding villages too follow the rules of lockdown made mandatory by the district administration. She also ensures that all the vulnerable families and needy people in these villages get the entitled quantities of ration through the Public Distribution System announced by the State and the Central government since the lockdown. She remains present to observe that the norms of physical distance during ration distribution are maintained, uncooked ration as part of Mid-Day Meals is reaching to children and that the senior citizens or widow women are not denied pension benefits following the govt circular in COVID 19 times.

She proactively made a list of physically challenged people and supported them to access their entitlements. She called for a meeting of Dalit residents and Panchayat members and suggested that the cremation ground of the village be cleared off “baval” tree (botanical name-Acacia Nilotika) under the MGNREGA. On this the village leaders said, “The sarpanch of our village has resigned and the talati is not coming, so how should we start the work? Why don't you become Sarpanch?” Savitaben replied, “How can I become a Sarpanch, it calls for a democratic process of election nonetheless, the law give Deputy Sarpanch all the power in such times, he will have to take responsibility and call a meeting to act further.” It takes to have a leader like Savitaben to give such an answer and honest advice as a truly selfless person whose goal is service to people.

She took the initiative to call for the Talati for work related to job cards of villagers under MGNREGA and asked him to act as other Panchayat members were unable to meet due to the resignation of the Sarpanch.

After speaking to the Talati, she visited deputy Sarpanch's house and persuaded him to call for a meeting. She told the Deputy Sarpanch that the govt order encourages the GP to use the grant under the 14th Finance Commission for stitching 1000 face masks. She immediately called the Sarpanch of the neighboring village to seek guidance and reassure the Deputy Sarpanch on the resolution process on COVID expenses. She offered to write a letter to Taluka Panchayat on GP's behalf seeking approval for the same and give stitching work to the women members of Sakhi Mandal under the Gujarat Livelihoods Promotion Company.

Referring to the govt order, Savitaben and other community members asked the Deputy Sarpanch to start the pond deepening work as one of the worksites under the MGNREGA. Currently, the pond needs clearing of "baval" tree for water harvesting. She also suggested that similar water conservation work of cleaning of wells could be prioritized. Savitaben gave example of the water conservation work done during her tenure as Village Sarpanch in 1997 to encourage the Deputy Sarpanch to take on the responsibility as village Sarpanch.

In this time of economic distress, she says, "in our village 45 people have job cards to go to work at MGNREGA site. Others who do not have, are listed for the same and would soon get their job card". Reflecting on the current situation Savitaben said "I know that the Gram Panchayat is slightly passive, but we have to take lead to stabilize and activate the governance when our people need it most."

Like other ASHAs in the country, Savitaben is on her toes arranging for ante natal check of pregnant women with facilities for proper sanitization of weigh machine and physical distancing and advised by the WHO. She makes home visits for cleanliness in the village and to sanitize the village through the tractor of the Deputy Sarpanch. The GP arranged for 50 liters of sanitizer.

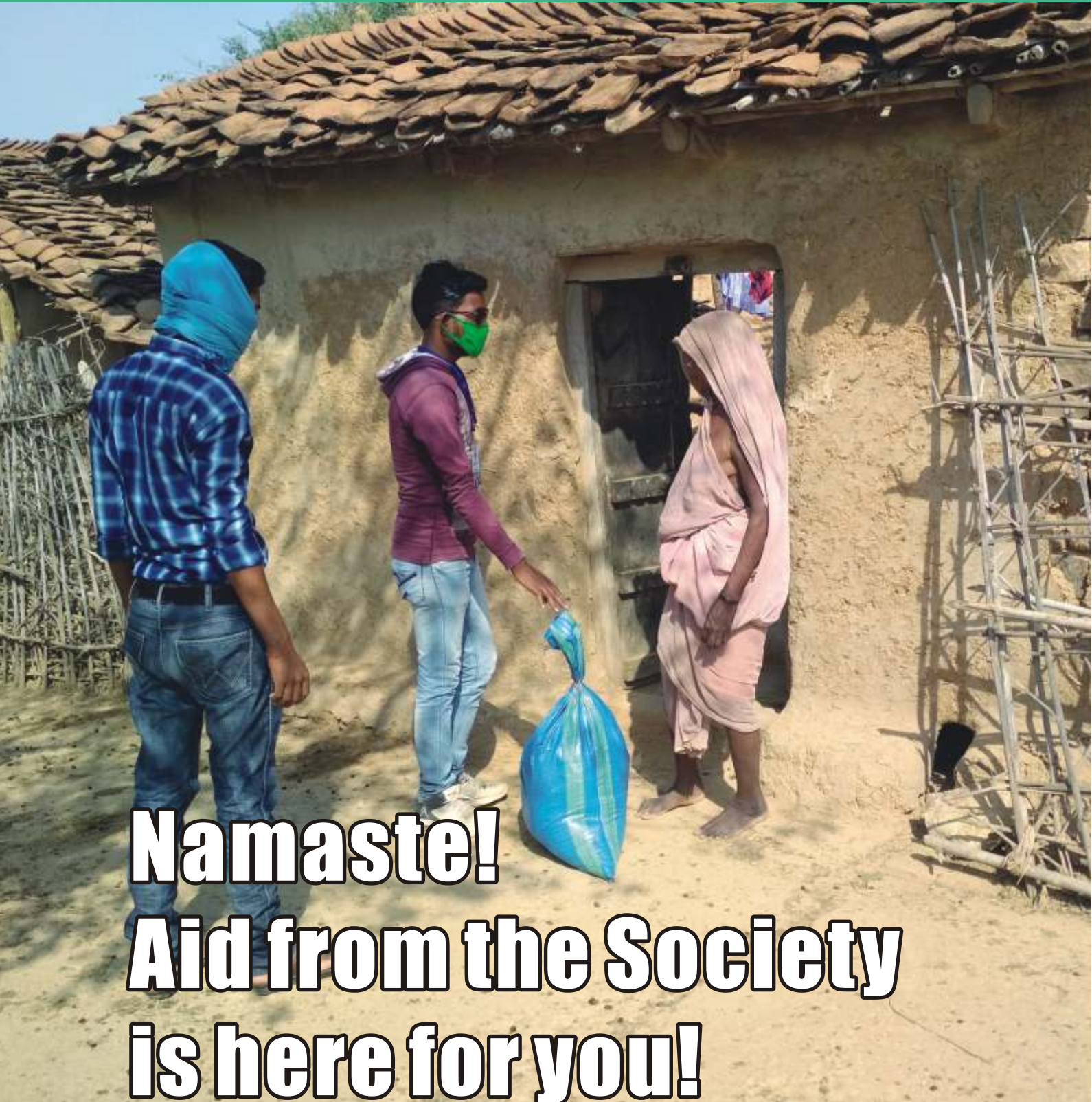
Savitaben continues to encourage other Gram Panchayat members to perform their responsibilities as an aware and sensitive leader by keeping the GP and the villagers informed on different schemes and programs during COVID 19 pandemic.

Gram Panchayat leaders of this talent and concern set norms for people centric governance at the village level. Savitaben inspires and strengthens women leaders for their active participation in political processes.



31

Vikas Samvad Samiti
(Madhya Pradesh)



Namaste!
Aid from the Society
is here for you!

People fought a commendable battle against COVID-19 crisis and all Indians seemed standing with each other during the tough times. Every caring soul carried the pure thought of helping out the needy in the hour of crisis. But it is also equally true that every individual has her/his own dignity. When one has to seek or accept help, one should not be made to feel that s/he is compromising with her/his personal worth.

When times are challenging and people cannot find a way out, if in such circumstances the society stands with the needy keeping in mind the dignity of the latter and thinking of the task as its own need, responsibility and duty towards all fellow beings, then this action assumes greater and novel significance. Relief is not a charity; it is a matter of justice and also of right. Upholding the dignity of a citizen in a civilized society is very important and this sensitive point was consciously pursued by Vikas Samvas Samiti while extending helping hand to the needy.

This was indeed a tough call, because the situation was unprecedented. Director of Vikas Samvad Samiti, Sachin Kumar Jain says, "The initial days were full of dilemma. It was difficult to sit at home, because the field experiences of two decades had taught us that the ground situations were not effective in dealing with such crisis without hand-on support. We had to decide that we must take up our responsibility in the situation and our team was ready for this."

Consequently, the organization, which works in seven districts of the state, made 'relief with dignity' its core theme during the COVID-19 induced crisis. Within a week of lockdown, the volunteers of VSS and its supporting organizations got on to relief work. The main point was that none of those in need of aid will form a queue, come to a specific point or stretch their hands to get the aid. Rather, the volunteers will go to doorsteps and hand over the aid on behalf of the society.

VSS has been working since year 2006 for rights of deprived and marginalized people and on issues of food, nutrition, education, agriculture, communication, education and others. The objective of the society is to empower the people and the community in a way that they become aware of their rights and could work collectively to achieve them. The VSS partners with Prithvi Trust in Panna, Adiwasi Adhikar Manch in Satna, Rewanchal Dalit Adiwasi Seva Sanstha in Rewa, Zenith Youth Foundation in Umaria, Social Change Foundation in Niwari and Badlav Sanstha in Shivpuri to work on initiatives aimed at socio-economic changes.

Lockdown brought in various challenges in lives of people like food, nutrition, livelihood, water crisis and the most severely impacted were food and nutrition security of children, senior citizens, pregnant and lactating mothers. All efforts were made by the organizations to prevent people from starvation and local people, administration and other organizations were also encouraged to lend a supporting hand.

Most important was to ensure the benefits of all those schemes to the rightful people and then to advocate additional assistance. VSS urged the government to pay attention towards food security of deprived people and labourers. E-mails were sent out to all

district collectors. Long field experiences were suggesting that the times would be extremely challenging for people already fighting the food security crisis.

On May 3, 2020, suggestions were given and appeal was made to the Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan for ensuring nutrition security of children, pregnant women and lactating mothers during the COVID-19 crisis. Focus was on converting Supplementary Nutrition Programme in to Complete Nutrition Programme. Effective campaigns were conducted on the social media too.

Inter-state to local-level sustained efforts were made to ensure safe return of migrant labourers to respective homes. A ground study was also conducted to bring forth the condition of the migrant workers. This report was shared online on May 26 with the media. In Niwari, MNREGS works were opened for only 1600 workers. This issue was taken up with the administration that agreed to include 400 returned migrants in MNREGS works.

Rakesh Malviya of VSS says “The organization used writing and documentation as powerful tools of social change. It was important for the organization to come out with more such material that could help people. Therefore, documentation and research-analysis work continued all through crisis period and the VSS was successful in bringing out 10 info-packs related to the crisis.”

Information on role of community workers in management of COVID-19 pandemic, history of pandemics, community rumors during COVID-19 crisis, case studies of migrant labourers, different government orders on COVID-19, condition of children during the crisis and others were compiled and disseminated. State government was urged to compile all documents related to COVID-19 on one platform and this suggestion was accepted by the government. Also films were developed on the ground situation and publicized.

Awareness campaign was launched in 123 villages of six districts and this included wall writing and door to door survey of deprived people, counseling needy people and using public announcement system to spread information on prevention of the infection. As many as 23251 persons were counseled with help of Anganwadi workers, assistants, ASHA workers and health supervisors. About 4790 masks and sanitizers were distributed.

Lockdown had left deprived and the poor people staring at grocery crisis. As all shops were closed, prices had soared and there was economic crunch due to lack of livelihood options, the situation was grave. There were several people who sustained on daily wages and some who only had few days worth of stored food material. Wherever help was available, long queues and massive crowds were surging.

In such situation, several senior citizens, disabled people and pregnant/lactating mother could not access the aid despite being needy. VSS and other organizations took up distribution of grocery kits in such situation and decided to deliver them to doorsteps of needy with a message 'here is aid from the society for you'.

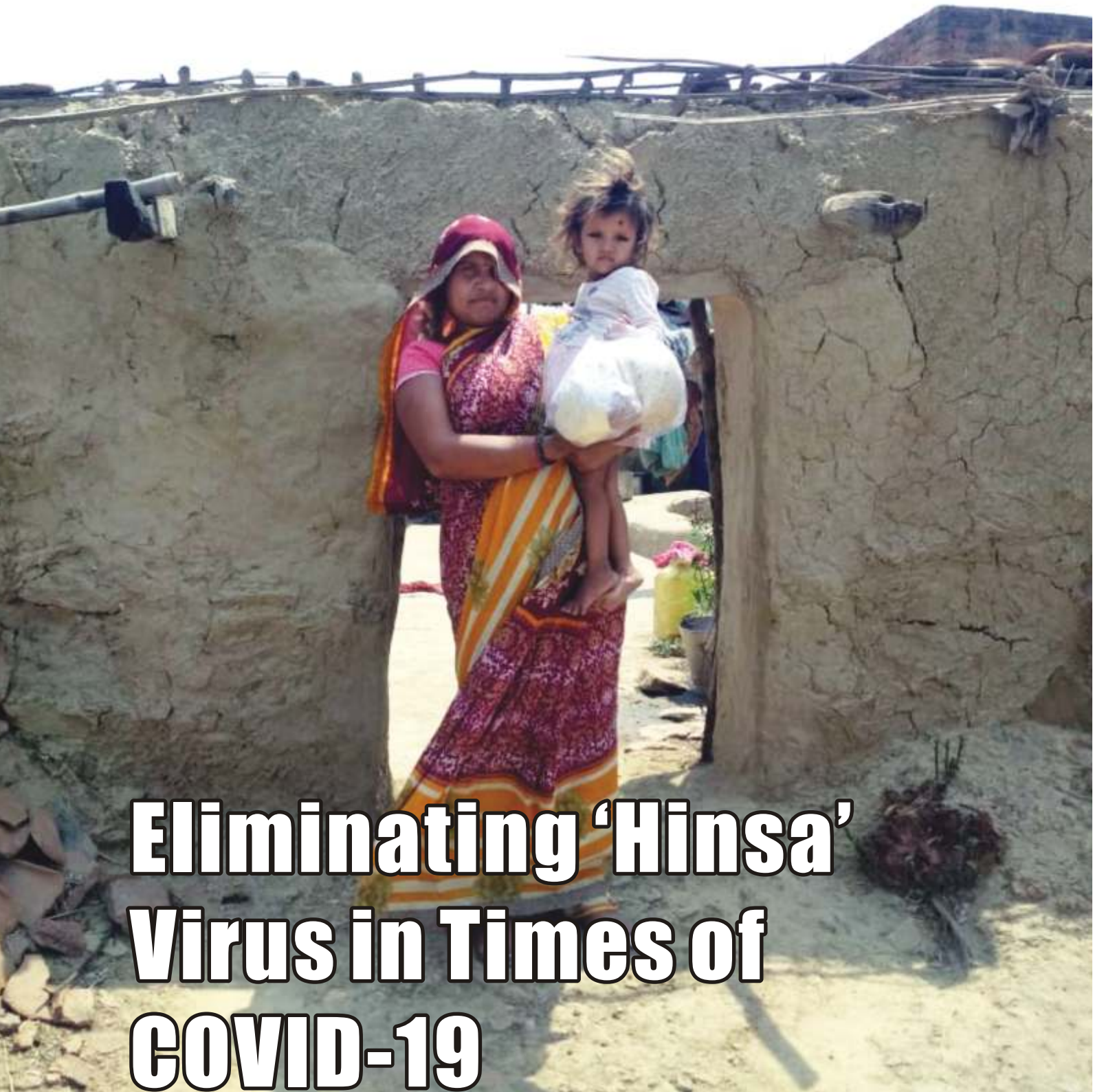
VSS normally does not do field work in Bhopal, but in the given condition it got linked to a public-support group to get directly into support mode. The community kitchens run in Bhopal were supported. The VSS did not have budget for this, for aid came from the community. Bhaskar Foundation helped VSS with grocery that led to distribution of dry ration kit to 2270 families in six districts. Also cooked food packets were distributed to about 4744 people with help from local community, traders and other supporters.

When the migrants started getting back home, they too needed support. The volunteers of the VSS network helped in health check-up, food needs and ensuring facilities at quarantine centres. About 9318 migrant workers were helped with support of administration and volunteers of the network organizations.



32

**ANANDI & Partners
Organisations' (Gujarat)**



**Eliminating 'Hinsa'
Virus in Times of
COVID-19**

Various sections of society have suffered and are facing the worst low due to the massive of COVID-19 pandemic. Among those whose lives have taken a sharp dip-a very large number comprises women. In India, the socio-economic conditions of women have worsened over the period of lockdown and the situation is continuing and cases of physical, emotional and sexual violence have been rising at equivalent (or even faster) pace as the cases of COVID-19. The National Commission for Women (NCW) has pointed out that there is a significant increase in cases of gender based violence across the country. In the four districts of Gujarat, where ANANDI and partner organisations have been actively working in with tribal, dalit, OBC and DNT communities, the trend of violence against women are in line with the national picture.


ANANDI and partner organisations have been directly working towards prevention of violence against women and also responding to instances of violence for over 20 years. Structures like Nyay Samiti and Gender Justice Centres are in place to provide psycho-socio-legal support to survivors of violence- with continuous advocacy with the local community, families and the state being an integral part of the actions. In this lockdown period, on one hand the organizations faced some physical limitations in providing support to survivors, while on the other hand the instances of cases are on rise.

The symptoms of 'Hinsa' virus...

On 24th March, 2020 , 8:00 pm The Indian prime minister addressed the nation to announce the nationwide lockdown. In Maliya, the Sangathan leader Najmaben was just processing this news when a 22-year-old woman walked in her house, worried and confused. Midway into the conversation, this woman started getting concerned that now her husband will be in the house 'all the time'. She told her that she was planning to go to the district hospital with Najma in the coming days but she doesn't want her husband to find out. Najma enquired about her health and if everything was ok! The reluctant and worried woman confided that she wanted to get an abortion done. She had conceived for the fourth time in 5 years. She was facing mental, physical and sexual abuse from her husband and wanted to abort the pregnancy before anyone in her family got to know about this. She said, "He doesn't respect me, doesn't give me money and doesn't even talk to me properly. I don't want to have the burden of taking care of one more child. Can you help in the abortion process?" This was just the first interaction and it was impossible for them to leave the house without the husband knowing.

Najma contacted the doctor in the CHC and got some medical advice. She made the woman talk to the doctor and he advised her an abortion pill as it was early stages of pregnancy. Najma got her the pills and is continuing to be in touch with her. The pregnancy was aborted but the woman was scared if ever her husband finds out what would happen to her. They have yet not told the husband but Najmaben calls her every single day to make her feel supported and counsels her if needed about how they could break the news to her husband ensuring her safety.

This story is a reflection of the growing complexities for women in the lockdown to



make decisions about their lives and bodies in face of the violence that they are facing. Women in these times, are more vulnerable to physical and sexual violence which result in injuries and serious physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health problems, including sexually transmitted infections and unplanned pregnancies. Single women, women with psychiatric mental health issues and women who are displaced are also highly vulnerable to violence and are at higher risk. Older women and women with disabilities are facing more challenges in getting regular services and are subjected to physical violence and economic vulnerability. Restriction to mobility of women– virtual and real– has increased with more surveillance within households leading to increase in emotional abuse. Women bear the brunt of increased care work during this pandemic. School closures and closure of the workplace further exacerbate this burden and place more stress on them. The economic vulnerability of women has increased with lesser access to cash and hence lesser access to basic food and medical requirements. The disruption of livelihoods and ability to earn a living for women (many of whom are informal wage workers), have decreased their access to basic needs and services, increasing stress on families, with increase in conflicts and violence. As resources become scarcer, women are exceedingly experiencing economic abuse. With restrictions on usage of mobile phones and minimal possibility of meeting trusted ones, safe spaces for women are shrinking. Due to increased isolation of single women they are at high risk of losing land and property as they are being attacked by powerful men in the family and community. Single women are kept hungry or under-nourished citing the situation of economic distress within households. Forced marriages are being organised by the families and local religious leaders. Many young women are subjected to emotional, mental and physical abuse within their natal families in the wake of the lockdown.

Till April 8, 5 Unnatural deaths, 1 case of rape and 1 case of abduction have been reported in Devgarh Baria, 5 cases of domestic violence reported in Shahera, 4 cases of domestic abuse has been reported in Ghoghamba and 2 cases of domestic violence have been reported in Maliya, Also 3 cases of community violence and 3 cases of unwanted pregnancies have been reported in a period of 10 days in Maliya. A case of land grab from single women has been reported in Devgarh Baria.

In face of these numbers and trends, ANANDI and supporting organisations have been drawing the best out of the given situation and working towards building newer mechanisms. The women leaders are consistently providing psycho-social support through individual and family counseling via phone calls.

Regular follow up calls are being made by women leaders, to women survivors and their partners in order to ensure that no new episodes of violence have happened and to also establish that the woman is not alone and beware the perpetrator. Conversations with community members are held through phone calls and small informal meet ups (following the social distancing norm) to fizz out tensions created due to lockdown and ensure that women are staying in touch. Women leaders are also seeking out administration and police help in order to immediately report cases of severe violence. They are also providing possible support to women with unwanted pregnancy to get proper medical support. Conversations with community/religious leaders are being held in order to make them responsive agents to counter

and prevent violence against women. Assistance is also provided by local teams and Sangathan leaders to social justice committee members in maintaining information channels to administration/ police to take immediate action in cases of violence and moving women to safer spaces. Women leaders are regularly staying in touch with each other to provide psycho-social support and are building each other up to collectively cope with the emotional fallouts of the lockdown.

In Khilodi village of Ghoghamba Taluka, a woman was subjected to severe physical violence from her husband. Shondiben. Organisation leader, who lives 30 km away from the village came to know of the situation and counselled the woman survivor to inform the police and file a complaint. She coordinated with Lilaben from the nearby village (Khanpatla) to assist the woman. Damavav police called both perpetrator (husband) and the survivor (wife) to the police station and the man was charged 25,000 fine to be given to the woman. The woman went to her father's place and is living there now. Sangathan leaders are in constant touch with village leaders and the survivor.

In an attempt to reach out to survivors of violence, the organisation is designing a multilayered structure with at least one point person in each of the villages who can identify and support survivors of violence in their vicinity. The sangathan leaders, Umang fellows, Gram Sathis and ANANDI team are closely following up on every single case and working towards building awareness of this shadow pandemic by actively involving in conversations with families, communities, religious leaders and local communities.

Young women leaders in our villages have developed a mechanism of constantly checking in with girls living in violent conditions in their natal family. They are organizing conference calls and small but frequent meet ups with young girls in order to prevent violence.

In Mota Dahisara, a village of Morbi district, a 24 year old woman was facing physical and mental abuse by her father and her brother. They would beat her up and not give her proper food to eat. She was forced to sleep in the godown because the father would have his friend circle in the house every day and they would have alcohol till late night. She is a part of a group of young women in the village. One of the group members met her one day and after knowing her situation called up the rest of the girls. Our Umang fellows, Payal and Rajal, started going to her house every single day. They would stay at her house till late night so as to ensure a safe space for the survivor. They talked to the brother and told him that legal action could be taken against both of them and they must stop this harassment immediately. They keep checking in with the survivor till date and have been able to prevent any further violence from happening.

The team is also closely monitoring the dissemination of the announced relief plans and their reach to the women survivors of violence so as to ensure some financial stability in these highly unstable times. Priority is given to women survivors of violence, while distributing ration/ food kits.

As the lockdown reaches its maturity, and with hopes that COVID-19 is contained, the

organisations are looking forward to a bleak reality with major socio-economic fallouts in the country and trying to be prepared for the mental, social and physical impacts these fallouts will have on women – their identities, bodies, resources and rights. The livelihoods of women have to be ensured at the earliest and their resources secured in-order to prevent more increase in violence. The local administration, civil society organizations and women's networks have to actively prevent early and forced marriages, dropout of girls from schools, forced labour among young girls to prevent more women from falling into the vicious cycle of poverty and violence.

Prevention of violence and safe space for all are among the essentials for dignified life; as the governments, state and central, are striving to ensure essential services for all citizens this 'Psycho-socio-legal services for survivors of violence', 'ensuring safe spaces' and 'prevention of violence against women' should be placed in bold among all priorities. Gender based violence is the longest lasting pandemic in history of pandemics and is as lethal as any other pandemic. Civil society organizations, women's rights groups, women led sangathans and many more are playing their part very significantly as frontline warriors against this pandemic- ensuring safety of survivors and creating a conducive environment. Women tend to take the sharper end of all crises and this one is no different. Women are under attack within their households when globally women are taking a lead as health workers, as analysts, as scientists and as political leaders in fighting against COVID-19.

Civil Society Organisations are elemental in analyzing this crisis in its multi-faceted forms, creating and implementing response mechanisms and rebuilding the society. CSOs will remain elemental to advocacy and ensuring good-governance and building reliable coping mechanisms post this pandemic. How will these efforts impact the larger imagery of CSOs remain to be seen!



