



GIRLS AND WOMEN ON THE FRONTLINES

COVID-19 Relief Work

COALITION NETWORK: NIRANTAR TRUST, ACTION INDIA, BAL
UMANG DRISHYA SANSTHA, SAKAR, SAHJANI SHIKSHA KENDER,
BIHAR WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE

[25th March to 13th April, 2020]

REPORT BY - NIRANTAR TRUST
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NEW DELHI -110017

Major Highlights:

Geographical coverage: (State and district wise coverage)	New Delhi- East Delhi, North East Delhi, South Delhi, North West Delhi Uttar Pradesh- Lalitpur and Bareilly Bihar- Gaya, Kaimur, Muzafarpur, Sitamarhi, Sasaram, West Champaran,
Distribution of cooked meals:	2000 individuals
Submission of online application for dry ration:	500 forms submitted
Distribution of dry ration:	700 families
Financial aid to families:	200 families
Medical aid:	36 volunteers
No of podcast:	One podcasts in 3 different language (Hindi, Awadhi and Bundeli)

Introduction

The spread of COVID-19 pandemic world over and efforts to contain it in India have meant an urgent lockdown by the government, both at the state and at the national level. On 22nd March, there was a “Janata Curfew” that was set in motion by the Prime Minister as a practice run for social distancing. This was later converted to a 21- day lockdown all over the country. Critical to the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, given the heightened public health risk, the lockdown adversely impacted the livelihoods and mobility of millions across the country. There have been several discussions around issues of migrant labourers who are leaving the cities across India to go back to their respective villages. People have raised questions around provision of food and ration to the migrants. However, their health concerns have been ignored by the government so far. Even if they reach their villages, migrant labourers have to face violence and discrimination by both local officials and the villagers. Apart from that, there are a huge proportion of daily wage labourers and unskilled workers who did not make it back home to their villages for various reasons. Their struggles in the city without any means of livelihood or income have been completely overlooked. There have not been enough measures taken to fulfil their basic needs, leading to further marginalization and invisibilization.

Majority of the people who were working as agricultural labourers are living hard lives with limited food and other basic necessities. People who are dependent on forests and local markets for their essentials are not able to move out of the village due to lockdown. Women and girls are the worst affected due to more controlled environment within their families. Cases of domestic violence have increased in the last three weeks, in both rural and urban areas. In many families, women are the sole earner of the family and with no other livelihood options; women are facing challenges to manage food for their families. They are compelled to bear the increased burden of the overall work load and anger of the male family members that result into increased domestic violence.



Nirantar, along with its coalition network has initiated the process of providing relief materials and support to people from marginalized communities across Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Nirantar, Action India, Bal Umang Drishya Sanstha, SAKAR and Peoples' Action for Change and Empowerment, Sahajani Shiksha Kendra and Women's collective in Bihar came together on a common platform for this cause. Nirantar started strategizing and facilitating the process of relief work and our coalition network has been working on the forefront for implementing relief work in communities since 25th March. While working with the marginalised groups, we have done focused intervention for people belonging to Dalit, Muslims and Tribal communities. It was emphasised to support other groups like single women, widow, disabled persons, and pregnant women who are mostly invisibilized.

Provide access to information and dissemination

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, a lot of the important information related to COVID-19 has been available online. However, a majority of the people from marginalized communities, from both rural and urban areas, were not much aware about the pandemic. Measures began to be taken for relief services, in order to address the emerging concerns of the various marginalized communities. Nonetheless, majority of them were not able to avail these services due to lack of information and skills to use the online facilities and even lack of access to internet in many cases.

Nirantar played a crucial role in collecting all the COVID -19 relief updates from different authentic sources and in disseminating this information to the coalition network members. During this process, regular inputs and support were also provided to the community level facilitators and volunteers. We have collaborated with Khabar Lahariya to prepare multiple podcasts around safety precautions for our entire team and volunteers. We have translated the podcasts in different regional languages and dialects to reach out to most marginalized groups and women. So far, they have been developed in Hindi, Awadhi and Bundeli, to reach out to people from different regions and communities. These podcasts can be easily downloaded for offline uses, which can be helpful for a larger circulation.

Leadership role of PACE teachers and learners

In the past few years, we have been working for empowerment of young girls and women from both urban and rural areas. In the last three weeks, women and young girls from all the field areas have

shown tremendous courage and leadership skills while carrying out the relief work. In both rural and urban areas, these volunteers are involved in front line work at the ground. These volunteers have identified the most vulnerable families and shared the list with local government officials to provide them with support on an urgent basis. Since there has been a curb in mobility because of the lockdown, they have handled all the on-ground distribution of relief materials by connecting with the community members on the phone and even stepping out themselves to reach those on the streets. The coordination activities on their level have shown great determination, problem-solving and negotiation skills. These young women and girls will continue to lead their fellow community members through these challenges in the coming months.

Provision of cooked meals and dry ration

There have been significant gaps among most disadvantaged groups in accessing the ration or cooked food due to lack of information and restricted mobility during lockdown. The relief work started with identification of people who required food and monetary aid on an urgent basis. It was emphasised to identify the most marginalised groups like single woman, widow, disabled persons, and pregnant women from the field areas. While working on the relief work, we focused more on Dalit, Muslims and Tribal communities who are living at the margins. By 26th March, a list of 83 families from Delhi, with their names, contact details and number of family members, was handed over to local authorities. With guidance and constant sharing of authentic information regarding food distribution and contact details of all the concerned officials in the Delhi Government, the teachers and community mobilizers were able to ensure that these families were able to get food.



After initial few days of struggle with the administration and other local organizations, we were able to provide dry ration to almost 700 families; and cooked and dry meals to almost 2,000 individuals. The organizations have facilitated provision of ration and financial aid by filling over 500 forms across the communities. So far, around 500 packets of food and ration have been distributed directly in these communities. In UP, the coalition has reached 200 villages and provided basic support and continuously monitored the ration shops under PDS. In 8 tribal villages, they have distributed soaps, detergent, mustard oil, etc. In Bihar, a support of Rs 500 has been provided to each woman leader in villages to facilitate connectivity with local people. In urban areas of Bareilly, most vulnerable groups were informed about community kitchen and food distribution points at the police stations.

Apart from the ration, we are also ensuring that people who are not covered by the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana receive supply of cooking gas.

Facilitating people to avail monetary aid

In Delhi, PACE team teachers along with learners are there on the frontline making all-out efforts to support their communities. Almost 200 forms to seek financial aid have already been filled. Apart from rigorous follow-up with the families needing support on a priority basis, the team is also figuring out families who might need our support during the lockdown, to enable a better follow-up on issues in the community. As already witnessed, people are being harassed by their landlords and will inevitably face difficulties in earning their livelihoods even when the effects of the lock-down and social distancing subside. We have provided financial aid to almost 50 individuals. We are also helping people to get support under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana or Ujjwala Yojana.



Monitoring of rights and entitlements

During the lockdown period, local team members of the coalition network have helped to resolve issues of non-availability of ration, and groceries being sold at higher rates in the market, by contacting DARC Fellows working under various District Magistrates of Delhi Weights and Measurement officials. The Fellows have also been an important point of contact for delivering cooked meals to the families in need. The teams have also facilitated the residents to reach the right schools and shelters where they could get meals. Other than this, PACE girls are constantly in touch with local authorities to act as mediators between the government and communities, ensuring that services and entitlements reach people, and their demands and complaints reach the authorities. In rural parts of Bihar, Mahila Samakhya volunteers are closely working with the government and local body officials to provide correct information and services which the community members are entitled to.



Spreading awareness about COVID-19

After several rounds of initial discussions with our coalition members, we analyzed the needs of the communities and took several initiatives to spread awareness about COVID-19 and basic precautions to be taken to contain the spread. This was done with the help of a medical team from BUDS and local team members from the network. In some areas, a few staff members from AIIMS distributed sanitized supplies, demonstrated the proper way of hand washing and also clarified doubts and myths related to COVID-19.

Provisions of essential hygiene products

Our coalition network has been reaching out to different organizations for their support, in order to provide essential hygiene products in the communities. With the help of our coalition network, BUDS has helped us in providing prevention kits to 36 volunteers in Delhi to provide relief materials. In UP, we have been able to give sanitizers and masks to 20 Samiti women. We are in the process to provide our entire on-ground team and the community members with protective masks and gloves. In some of the field areas, our coalition network members have made local masks and distributed them in their communities.

Challenges

- Most of the relief related information and details of the schemes are available online. Majority of the most vulnerable people have no access to internet or skills to fill the online forms. Thus, many of them are still not able to avail the government services. In many cases, even when we try to link people to local service providers, the helpline numbers for providing the due services are not reachable or appear busy.
- In the last one week, many people have received financial support under different schemes. However, despite receiving the money in their account, people are not allowed to move out of their colony to withdraw money from banks. Many people are not able to withdraw money due to long waiting lines at the banks. Many of them do not have ATM cards.
- Large numbers of migrant labourers have gone back to their respective villages. Health concerns of these people have been ignored by the government and many of the migrants who came from different cities across India have not undergone any health check up for COVID-19 before reaching their villages. Even if they reach their villages, migrant labourers have to face violence and discrimination by both local officials and the villagers.