



COVID-19 RESPONSE FROM ASHA

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The COVID-19 pandemic and its associated lockdowns over the last year have caused great devastation amongst underprivileged and underserved populations across India. Many in these groups had their lives upended as they faced the loss of wages and food, supply shortages, the inability to access basic resources and much more. In 2020, with survival having become a paramount goal amongst many in rural and migrant communities, Asha for Education and its project partners pivoted to focus their efforts on helping meet the most basic needs of its community members by providing dry food rations and medical supplies. Padmanava Sen, director of the Asha Central Projects Team, provides an overview of Asha for Education's COVID-19 relief efforts.

Where Did Asha for Education Primarily Focus Its Support?

Asha for Education provided dry rations, especially in the form of rice, in rural communities in India. In special cases, hygiene-related items and emergency medical supplies were also provided.

Asha project partners had to become more proactive in their relief efforts since there were ration supply shortages caused by a broken supply chain.

Our Liason With the Local Government

Dry rations were provided to stranded migrant communities who did not have local ration cards and could not obtain food supplies. They were also provided in instances where the rations provided by the Government were not sufficient. Asha project partners had to become more proactive in their relief efforts since there were ration supply shortages caused by a broken supply chain (due to the public transport system no longer being operational during the pandemic). Asha partners worked to support the Government as well as the local police department while practicing adequate social distancing measures. In some cases, project partners even offered their own facilities for emergency preparedness.

How Were Project Areas With Migrant Worker Families Impacted?

The migrant workers in many areas did not have savings, any stock of food or cooking facilities to survive the long lockdown periods. Additionally, their daily wages had stopped from day 1 of the lockdown. In rural communities, the breakdown of the supply chain caused shortages of food and, in some cases, the shortage of state funds hindered the procurement of supplies

from the Central Government food storage facilities.

Where is Help Needed in the Long Run?

In the long run, depending on the spread of COVID-19 across India, gaps in food distribution need to be taken up by governmental bodies. A 'One Nation, One Ration Card' principle should be effectively followed. The supply chain should be reconstituted. Awareness campaigns for hygiene and social distancing, containing accurate facts about COVID-19, should be used to reduce panic and discrimination against people infected with the virus. The migrant workers who have returned to their homes must be effectively integrated into the rural economy. The reverse migration can be utilized effectively to strengthen rural economies by using the existing skills of these migrant workers.



Post-Relief Education Strategy

For a year since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools were closed. Most Asha projects work with students going to government schools. Different project partners tackled the issue of school closures differently. While some started mini schools (locally), some resumed limited operations and others focused on components that could be managed over the Internet. Maintaining hygiene and health safety awareness were key to running limited operations. For some projects, teachers had to extend hours of operations to accommodate distancing measures. Where possible, communications were conducted over phone calls. All events and communications involving big groups were canceled. Post-October, some level of normalcy was reached for a few projects. For an example, please refer to the Mini Schools article in this annual report.

Learnings from COVID-19

Most students with whom we work have no access to digital education or the Internet. They are also mostly first generation learners with no support at

home. In rural and urban setups, school closures have very different outcomes. In an urban setup, the schools and after-school centers act as a safe haven for most students with whom we work. They do not have a conducive environment to concentrate on studies in their homes (urban slums). Also, at home, they can be victims of domestic violence or forced labour. In rural settings, schools provide the nutrition needed in struggling rural communities. School attendance also acts as a tool to stop early marriage or girl trafficking. To summarize, without schools, students not only miss their mid-day meals but they also go without having a place where they can study and be happy. Relevant observations from the Asha Chennai team is documented [here](#).

The after-school programs of Asha played a vital role here during the pandemic and will continue to do so in the days to come. We have to continue to be very proactive to fill the gaps created by a year of closure. The digitization of education is not possible for all of the 300,000+ students with whom we work. However, classroom digital literacy may give the needed exposure to all students for future preparedness. Offline content distribution can also go a long way for students whose families can afford a second-hand smartphone. Preparedness and the adoption of working models will be the way to go to deal with future waves of COVID-19.

COVID-19: BY THE NUMBERS

Projects supported:

- Asha Darshan Trust
- Asha Mumbai Center
- Asha Trust - COVID-19 Relief
- Ashray Akruiti
- Baikunthapur Tarun Sangha
- Bharathi Trust - COVID-19 Relief
- Bharathi Trust - Senchiamma School
- Bhumi
- Borderless World Foundation
- Champa Mahila Society
- Chehak Trust
- Chhotanagpur Adivasi Harijan Uthan Samiti
- Digambarpur Angikar
- Diksha Foundation - Khel Project
- Etasha Society - Prerna
- Ganjam District Orthopaedically Handicapped Welfare Association
- Gramin Vikas Vigyan Samiti
- Gramya Sansthan
- Human Uplift Trust - AIDS Orphans Edu Project
- India Sponsorship Committee
- Institute of Social Work
- Jagriti Bal Vikas Samiti
- Joint Operation for Social Help - COVID-19 Relief
- Kumarappa Institute of Gram Swaraj
- Mandra Lions Club
- Mukti
- Muskaan
- Parivaar Education Society
- Pneuma Trust - Home for Children
- Puvudham Rural Development Trust
- Rawa Academy of Art, Music and Dance - Adruta Children's Home
- Rural Development Trust
- Sabuj Sangha
- Sankalp Ek Prayas Society Bhilai
- Sirisha Rehabilitation Center
- Sivasri Charitable Trust - Sikshana
- Society for Education and Economic Development
- Society for Women in Rural Development
- Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement
- Vijay Foundation Trust - Aarti Home
- Vikasana Org for Education and Social Development
- Voluntary Association for Rural Upliftment and Networking - VARUN

Chapters involved:

- Austin
- Bangalore
- Chennai
- Chicago
- Cornell
- Danbury
- Delaware
- Houston
- Kansas City
- London
- Mumbai
- Purdue
- San Francisco
- Seattle
- Stanford
- Silicon Valley

Our impact:

20,000+ Families Supported

\$213K Disbursed

42 Projects

16 Chapters

Did you know?

In 2020, Asha for Education was ranked on [Charity Navigator](#) as a 'Top 6' Nonprofit organization for COVID-19 'Relief Supplies: Community Support & Services.'