



The UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund



India's Response to COVID-19: Inclusive and scalable social protection systems for immediate and sustained food, nutrition and livelihood security





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Background

This India's Response to COVID-19 under MPTF COVID response had two main goals of reaching those who are most in need with food and livelihoods assistance to enable them to cope, while also supporting the right to food and right to work as legislated in the National Food Security Act (2013) and the National Employment Guarantee Act (2005). This initiative supported National and State-level responses to COVID-19, facilitating collaboration between Government, civil society, private sector, UN and other development partners. Partnerships with the private sector helped to leverage additional financing for scale-up, and innovations and digital tools were applied to facilitate and expand reach of solutions to vulnerable and marginalized individuals, families and communities. These responses were aimed at reducing the immediate burden and will be complemented by sustained efforts to ensure that systems and policies are strengthened to enable citizens to build back better and live a life of fairness and dignity.

Solutions Provided

Although the Government systems have been successful in their outreach to eligible citizens, many people remained without access to safety nets and social protection services. Civil society organisations and frontline workers were doing their best to address immediate needs, mostly in major urban areas where large numbers of migrant workers have been stranded, and also in some rural areas. UNDP has been working with networks of civil society partners to reach the disenfranchised and link them to MGNREGA, entrepreneurship and training programmes and employment opportunities, both public and private. Leveraging their existing state-level partners and partnerships, the two agencies enhanced each other's work to address unmet needs at both the system and operational levels. The major outcome envisaged under the MPTF Project were :

1. Expand access to employment and social protection (SDG 1.5 and SDG 2.1)

- Provide technical support to State Governments to accelerate opening of public works through MGNREGA and expand registration of eligible households in vulnerable communities to access job cards and immediate employment opportunities.

2. Restore livelihoods opportunities (SDG 1.3, 1.5 and SDG 2.1)

- Facilitate linkage of farmers' and artisans' collectives with procurement centres, aid access to financial incentives and enable market linkages to enable direct purchases from procurement centers in the short term, including through e-markets
- Provide training on financial literacy and digital marketing and facilitate linkages to financial institutions to enable communities to build resilience to future shocks.

3. Expand access to job opportunities for vulnerable women and youth in urban areas (SDG 1.5 and SDG 5.4)

- Engage with district and state level industry and private sector associations to advise micro and small business on safely resuming production, in line with government requirements, and facilitate hiring of vulnerable women and youth including through mapping of local jobs.

- Convene multi-stakeholder platforms to facilitate linkages between employers and job seekers, support job placement specifically for vulnerable and displaced individuals and leverage online technologies and partnerships to support State Governments on skilling and employment campaigns and advise on appropriate policy response.

Stories of Hope

A) Expanding access to employment and social protection



UNDP's RESPONSE TO COVID-19 IN INDIA

The Economic Crisis for Women in the Informal Sector in MP

UNDP has engaged Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) to work for the social protection and livelihood recovery of women and children affected by COVID-19 in the State of Madhya Pradesh. For the immediate support for better preparedness for COVID 19, the partnership with the CSO is important for initiating the recovery programmes at the grassroots that shall focus on strengthening awareness, facilitating linkage to social security schemes and generating alternative livelihoods for the target group. Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is a community-based organization of poor self-employed women workers with a membership of over 1.7 million women across 18 states in India. SEWA has been working for over 4 decades with its rural members to help them improve their livelihood through various initiatives in fields like but not limited to technical training, microfinance, market linkages, natural resource management etc. across number of trades. SEWA MP started its work with beedi workers in 1985. It is supporting women from different sectors such as forest workers, incense stick roller, domestic workers, construction workers, agricultural workers, street vendors, small and marginalized farmers, etc.



Rural Madhya Pradesh, like so many other parts of India, is more familiar with COVID-19 for its financial rather than health impact. Home to some of the country's poorest families, mostly engaged in the informal sector — some also migrating to the neighbouring states of Gujarat and Maharashtra for work — this part of the country has seen some of the cruellest financial manifestations of COVID- 19 and Lockdown.

While urban India moved to the online medium as a substitute to physical work, their rural counterparts have faced a vastly different reality during the same period. Families of migrant labourers spending their limited resources on getting back home, have not had money left to feed their families — some have even lost their lives making the journey back home on foot. Daily-wage labourers have borrowed from neighbours to buy their rations. Businesses dealing in non-essential goods have been completely out of work, many of them clueless about online modes of continuing their business. Several of these families have also struggled to access government social security schemes, due to digital illiteracy, in access and administrative delays.

At the intersection of these multiple vulnerabilities of poverty, unemployment, rural-urban divide are the women, facing the additional layer of disenfranchisement of gender.

UNDP India's COVID-19 response designed its strategy specifically for this segment. In partnership with the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) Madhya Pradesh, it launched a slew of actions towards the social protection and livelihood recovery of women and children impacted by COVID-19 in the districts of Dhar, Dewas and Chattarpur, aimed at 20,000 women and 1500 children.

The programmes focused on the twin aspects of COVID-19 — medical and financial. The former meant disseminating supplies like masks, sanitisers, and information on symptoms, prevention methods like sanitising and social distancing. For children, this was done with the help of painting workshops. The latter, was more expansive. It involved facilitating linkages between groups and government social security schemes, to financial support such as loans for new and existing micro-enterprises, and also ordered commissions of their goods. It also involved generating alternative livelihoods through capacity-building exercises of informal sector workers, enabling them to new forms of working and building resilience in the changed scenario. The emphasis was on helping women use their existing skills and help them organise into collectives/micro-enterprises.

In the months since the programmes started, thousands of families have had their lives transformed. In Polai, Dewas district the family of Jagdish Kumawat has breathed a sigh of relief after several months, their accounts now linked to three government social security schemes, and a new buffalo bought with a UNDP-SEWA loan, giving them a regular income. In Labariya, Dhar district, tailor Archana Jain has been commissioned by SEWA for a massive job of making 600 masks. In another part of the same district, another tailor Sarika Minare has been given another similar commission. In the district of Dewas, a group of women farmers are having their goods procured by Rehwa, a sister concern of SEWA. Another group of women have been employed by Rehwa, to work on processing, packaging and retail of these goods. The children of Chattarpura, Dewas can describe concepts like social distancing, hand-washing and even the pink multi-forked Coronavirus through their drawings. In Chilkhil, Dewas, a group of women champions, go around disseminating COVID-19 concepts to their village and surrounding areas. Several groups of women in the state have now re-started their businesses mid-pandemic, after a training module linking livelihoods with technology, put forth by UNDP-SEWA. Their coach, Aarti Sharma, looks at the pandemic, as an opportunity to upgrade, "We used to have bullock carts once, and we transitioned to cars," she says. "Human beings have to constantly create new ways of working. As time changes, we have to evolve and so does our technology.

With UNDP and SEWA's intervention, it seems a certain segment of rural Madhya Pradesh, has indeed been able to evolve. And beat the pandemic.



▶ Girl with the Golden Dreams : Deepa Rajput, SEWA



Chapra, Dewas: Twenty-four-year old Deepa Rajput, SEWA employee holds the double distinction for simultaneously representing two major achievements of the organisation, short and long-term.

The Processing In-Charge at SEWA's newest enterprise, Rahwa, Rajput is one of the faces of the UNDP-SEWA's COVID-19 response. She is also a living example of SEWA's work in all its years of work with regard to women's empowerment.

In response to COVID-19 and its economic fallout, UNDP India along with SEWA Madhya Pradesh, had planned livelihood generation for at least 300 members as a critical tool to support the crumbling economic state of families. The idea was that these would be generated through existing skills using a combination of exercises like organizing them into their own collectives/micro-enterprises and piloting worker-owned and managed value-supply chains. SEWA's already-existing Rachna Mahila Griha Udyog scheme was ripe for expansion: it was scaled-up, moving to centres beyond Indore, and make it a bigger retail business, dealing with local produce, across seasons, and thus born was Rahwa.

Already working as Accounts Manager for three years, Deepa was the obvious choice to take on the newly-generated role of Processing In-Charge.

But Deepa's association with SEWA predates the years she has worked as an employee: it goes back to the time her mother's association with the organisation, which has had a significant bearing on the life that Deepa has gone on to lead. Despite belonging to the Rajput caste which is not known to educate its girls beyond Class 10-12, Deepa's parents decided to educate her beyond school, and ensured she completed her graduation. "Unlike my best friends from school who got engaged at age 14, and married soon after they turned 18, I was pursuing my graduation and thereafter, a professional life. My parents have been told they are not doing the right thing by making me study further and ignoring my marriage, but they have kept steadfast in their beliefs."

Thanks to the support provided by UNDP, Deepa's daily life is a stark contrast to that of her friends and contemporaries in rural Madhya Pradesh, who are not allowed to step out of their homes. Managing inventory and guiding newer entrants into the mechanism of the organisation, Deepa is fully independent, physically, and financially.

Chapda's Spice Warriors :



Chapda, Dewas: This year when COVID19 hit India, Manju Shyam Rathore, 35, of village Amarpuria, Dewas — like so many of her fellow residents in rural Madhya Pradesh — saw it more for its devastating financial rather than health impact. For the daily-wage labourer and occasional tailor, all income came to a standstill by the early summer. She approached SEWA for help.

UNDP India's COVID-19 response, in partnership with SEWA Madhya Pradesh, had started off focusing on a multitude of issues from awareness-building, facilitating linkages to social security schemes and generating alternative livelihoods. While the first two had taken priority at the initial stage, the third, livelihood generation, now came into focus. That is how Rehwa was born.

SEWA's sister concern Rachna Mahila Griha Udyog — an Indore-based women-led enterprise dealing with chips, spices, pickles and papad, sourced from within our communities itself — was scaled up. "Thus far this has been small scale. If potatoes are in season, they will make potato chips etc. But we decided to scale it up and produce goods annually. Production was decentralised out of Indore, and moved to SEWA's Dewas office where a new production unit is being set up with its own core team of women working on packaging and procurement. Lastly, these goods are then sold by the women themselves who pick up consignments and retail in their village," says Mohan Tomar, SEWA. The most important tool was: giving the goods to the retailers at a 15-day loan basis. "They pay us when they have sold the stock. Without this caveat, the already cash-strapped women would not be able to participate in this business.

Just a month old, Rehwa has given several of these women a new lease of life. "The response has been great. "In the first round, we were sold out in three days. Since the goods are purchased and sourced from the community itself. We buy it from our farmers sisters - we give competitive rates, it is pure stuff, we know. They give good rates, likewise, we get pure goods," says Usha Malviya, SEWA.

With UNDP-SEWA's intervention, the community's women are now involved at three levels - as farmers who sell their goods, as part of the processing and packaging on behalf of SEWA, and finally, as retailers. "This offers many women the opportunity to work and earn an income just by sitting at home," says Sheila Arjun Khatri, master trainer.

▶ Routine Health Check-Ups Keep COVID-19 Away : Shalu and Pinky Mewade

Chattarpura, Dewas: While rural India is well-acquainted with killers like Tuberculosis and Malaria or in recent years, even HIV/AIDS, COVID-19 has seemed like a strange mythical monster that has terrified many a rural Indian. Which is why, this summer when Shalu Mewade (45) of Chattarpura village got a common cold, terror was let loose in the Mewade home.

While the government had gone into the strictest Lockdown, several residents in remote parts of rural India were still unsure of how to tackle this virus if and when it came their way. Inside the Mewade home, this meant consuming repeated doses of home-made Ayurvedic concoctions (“kaada”) composed of Tulsi and ginger. And avoiding the government eye.

As part of its multi-pronged Covid 19 response, UNDP India in partnership with SEWA Madhya Pradesh, decided to prepare and disseminate in colloquial languages, a health awareness drive amongst the communities. The idea was to spread information about COVID-19 and not encourage fears and phobias.



As part of this, a survey was conducted in the villages they work in, to see how many residents have cold or other symptoms of COVID-19. Several families came up, including that of Mewade. “We found several of these families hiding in their homes, afraid that they have Covid and will be stigmatised by the community. They were also afraid of quarantine as they did not know what it was and how they would negotiate any such thing in their small homes,” said Usha Malviya.

“In case someone developed symptoms, we would ask them to go to the local hospital. In case they were positive, we would tell them not to be afraid, and recoveries are possible,” said Usha Malviya, SEWA facilitator. SEWA also went into a series of hygiene and cleanliness issues including sanitising vegetables, bathing regularly, mask distribution drives. People were also told that children, pregnant women, elderly, people with co-morbidities were to be protected at all costs. Most importantly, the emphasis was on inculcating a culture of no fear around the disease. “Fear and panic can worsen an issue much more than it is, it does not help making anything better,” added Malviya.

It took UNDP-SEWA’s intervention to get the Mewade family to discover that all they had was a common cold. Peace had finally returned to their lives.

► Painting the Monster Away :

Chattarpura, Dewas: Primary schoolers Sanjana, Sunaina and Sangeeta sit under the green canopy of a neighbour's tree reflecting on the bewildering year 2020 has been. Like every school-going child of the COVID-19 era, the girls have experienced the frustration, boredom and sheer havoc the pandemic has unleashed on their daily lives. "I love school because it's a place to study and do "masti" (fun) with friends," says Sanjana. "It is not nice to study all alone," says Sunaina.

But few months back, some of that joy returned to their lives, in the form of a drawing workshop.

As part of UNDP-SEWA COVID-19 response in Madhya Pradesh, the agenda of awareness generation tied in to another crucial issue: the social life and mental health of children. One of UNDP's key mandates towards this was incentivizing 1500 children to participate in Children Engagement program. These two goals were met with the series of drawing workshops they had with school-going children of these districts.

Perhaps one of the biggest socio-cultural casualties of the pandemic have been school-going children. Confined to their homes, away from friends or play, they have been stripped of their most basic and fundamental of needs. According to studies, several of them are also at the risk of not returning to school (Malala Fund 2020).

In several parts of rural Madhya Pradesh — in the districts UNDP works in partnership with SEWA — the physical settings are considerably better than those of their urban counterparts: many schools in these districts have also started school for primary children in alternate days; students can come in batches of 8. Many of these are COVID19-free villages, with much lower risk as compared to cities.

The children's workshops serve the dual purpose of educating children about COVID19 in a fun, engaging way. Over several sessions, children with the help of SEWA facilitator drew illustrations of their interpretations of the big COVID-19 concepts and catchphrases, like social distancing, hand-washing, hygiene, sanitising. Even the Coronavirus, pink and multi-forked, was represented in many of these artworks. But even better than spending time with colours and canvas, was to spend it in the company of friends and the now-rare conviviality. Their parents also got the much-needed reprieve from doing the double duty of managing their home-schooling children and the pressures of their own jobs.

UNDP's workshops gave the children a much-needed respite from the boredom of Lockdown. "It brought back the joy of being in school," says Sunaina.



Master of the Digital Dewas Universe : Building Capacities in Chattarpura

Chattarpura, Dewas: Shy and shrinking, 28-year-old Aarti Sharma's demeanour belies her tenacious work over the last few months. The Master Trainer of SEWA has helped scores of women in the neighbouring areas start and support their businesses, and tide over their COVID19-induced financial crisis.

With the online medium surfacing as the sole alternative almost globally through the pandemic, urban Indians have almost seamlessly moved their professional lives online. In rural India the story is different. While mobiles are a common visual in almost every village household — used for calls, Whatsapp or even phone banking — the idea of phones as a medium for driving livelihoods was rare.



When SEWA Madhya Pradesh in partnership with UNDP India was planning its COVID-19 response in the state, among the many aspects of financial support strategised, was that of capacity building. The target was to help 1500 informal workers' capacity to adapt and adopt new forms of working – thus building their resilience to changed working scenario. To that end a module was created on linking livelihoods with technology.

Daughter of SEWA volunteer, graduate with computer skills, and former primary school teacher, Sharma was recruited as a master trainer to take courses in livelihoods, mobile technology. "We acquaint students with mediums like Zoom, Whatsapp, which allows us to have meetings, chats, see each other. Tailors can share their clothing designs online, non-essential shop-keepers can share photos of goods on Whatsapp. For financial transactions, they can use digital banking, or UPI services. The idea is to explain to them that we can do everything online," she says.

Sharma reports that the courses have met with much success. Many women have started their businesses online. Some who did not have android phones, recognising the sheer potential of their use, now want to purchase one. "The higher cost of the phone they know is a moderate price to pay given that it will be the source of their income," she says.

"We used to have bullock carts once, and we transitioned to cars. Human beings have to constantly create new ways of working. As time changes, we have to evolve and so does our technology," she says.

The Pastoralists of Polai : Jagdish & Shantibai Kumawat

Polai, Dewas: The home of Shantibai (58) and Jagdish Kumawat (75) is an idyllic vision: three generations living together in a cottage atop a hill, a shed of farm animals in their backyard. Beyond it, a modest but lush green field growing food grains, fruit and vegetables. On a perfect day, the family will be eating their meals mainly from their own produce. But lived reality does not match this idyllic vision — such as failed crops, climate change or locusts. The pandemic makes everything even worse.

Households in the region are mostly farmers, dairy farmers and small shop-owners, and income levels are low, ranging between Rs 150-180. Although eligible for government social security schemes, several of these families are not linked to these schemes, often due to the rigorous paperwork involved.

When designing interventions for people with such a combination of criteria, UNDP India-SEWA Madhya Pradesh, had to use a host of tools — such as facilitating linkages to government social security schemes, and through loans. Surveys were conducted and based on those outcomes, the plan was to facilitate linking at least 1500 households across three districts in Madhya Pradesh, to any one government scheme.

Families such as the Kumawats, were among these. They were linked to government systems during the Lockdown, through phone and remote means. “We called the kiosk incharge directly, and brought the machines used for processing documents right to the homes of these families,” says Mistri. Within eight days, the Kumawats had their account linked and are now the beneficiary to three government social security schemes — Kisaan Samman (three instalments of Rs 2000 given to farmers in a year), Vridha Pension (Rs 600 given to elderly women) and Rs 2000 COVID-19 relief, as part of PM Gareeb Kalyan Yojana.



The Kumawats were also granted a loan of Rs 50,000 for their dairy business — they bought a buffalo, which will generate them a regular income, some of which they can save.

After months of tension, today the fields are full with produce, a healthy buffalo happily grazes in their backyard and a modest amount of savings has built up in their bank accounts. With help from the UNDP, the home of the Kumawat’s has returned to its idyllic days.

► The Reluctant Tailor of Labariya : Archana Jain



Labariya, Dhar: On the urban side of Labariya, 42-year old Archana Jain runs a small tailoring shop. Only, prior to 2020, she hated her job.

With her husband's tent-house business, Jain never had to work for basics like food and shelter. Financially comfortable and creatively unmotivated, Jain had always been slack in her duties as a tailor. Until this spring.

The first was a SEWA workshop. "At the workshop we saw stories of many categories of people who had started successful endeavours, one of them was physically challenged. It made me feel so ashamed: I thought if they can do it without limbs, how can I, able-bodied not do anything properly?," she says.

The epiphany was immediately followed up with a real life situation which would put Jain's new-found diligence to test. The Lockdown brought her husband's business to a complete standstill. "I immediately had to get to work, because at this point it became about survival."

In order to give her livelihood a push, UNDP India in partnership with SEWA Madhya Pradesh, gave her a task. As part of its COVID-19 response strategy to generate livelihoods for women given existing skills, in ways like micro-enterprises and worker-owned value-supply chains, Jain was commissioned to produce 600 masks. Suddenly, this once-reluctant tailor had turned superwoman, working at her machine tirelessly for 12-14 hours to produce these in one-and-a-half months. Her family doubled up as helpers, her husband cutting and measuring for her and her 19-year-old daughter, doing chores in the kitchen while her mother worked.

She has gone on to scale-up her business and make fancy designer wear. "Simple blouses earn me Rs 90 per piece. I decided to buy fancy garment from the neighbouring town and stitch blouses out of them, which I charge Rs 200 for. With this designer wear, I am getting more work and naturally more income," she says.

Jain is now training three women in the region, through SEWA. She has also been busy in the last wedding season, single-handedly stitching garments for seven weddings in the neighbourhood. "I was working till 2 am, some days not getting the time to even bathe. What a contrast to the days I would lie to my customers and not finish work on time," she says with a laugh.

Digital Dreams in Dasai : Raising the Barcode

Dasai, Dhar: Pushpa Patidar (42) and Narayan Patidar (45) worked for two decades just in order to save enough to open, as a side business, a garments shop. Selling t-shirts, undergarments, accessories like belts, sunglasses, the shop was set up in November 2018, a realisation of a long-sought after dream. They would work in their fields during the day, and in the free time, sit in the shop. The first year itself, it reaped rewards. The Patidars, thus far making an annual income of three lakhs from their farming, went on to earn an additional lakh from the shop.

But COVID-19 changed everything.

“With only ‘essential goods’ shops opened, our business was shut till July. Even when the partial lifting of Lockdown, the biggest issue became sales and purchases. Banks were open during limited hours, worse, most often, cash was not available in ATM machines. Customers were equally frustrated. Although clothing and accessories, although falling in ‘non-essential’ category, is very essential to the daily living of people. People wanted to buy goods, but there was no way they could purchase it,” says Narayan.

UNDP India in partnership with SEWA Madhya Pradesh, working in the region on several types of COVID-19 relief and response, came to the rescue. As part of their strategy to help strengthen capacity and resilience of communities and adapt to new forms of working, they enabled a bar code at the Patidar’s shop. The new system allowed customers to make digital payments through UPI and mobile wallets like Paytm.

“Once we realised there was a need for this, we put a small team in place simply to go around and help businesses in the area set up digital payments and enable bar codes in their ship. In this area itself, there are three people who roam around the area looking for businesses who need such help,” said Sunil Mistri, District Coordinator UNDP-SEWA.

UNDP’s barcode-enablement intervention has proved to be a game-changer for small businesses like the Patidars. Customers now regularly make purchases and pay via Paytm. Likewise, even for their procurement, the Patidars, use digital payment mechanisms. Even new orders are placed on Whatsapp, after viewing photos of samples. “You don’t need to worry about change. Digital wallets give exact amount,” says Pushpa.



▶ Home is a Hot Meal : Hari Singh, Noori Bai and Ajay

Mavdipura, Dhar: In March 2020, Hari Singh, 49, along with his sons were in Sevalia district in Gujarat this March (wife Noori, 47 was home alone), working with a construction company. Once Lockdown was declared, Hari Singh alone, walked five days till he reached Dhavat, and then got a free ride on a dumper. Once he reached home, the couple started collecting money, borrowed from relatives and neighbours to bring their sons back home. In the meanwhile, Ajay also hitchhiked his way back home. The family took the money collected — a precious Rs 8000 — booked a private vehicle and drove to Gujarat to rescue the rest of their stranded family. Everything was pricier than usual — the cab ride, the toll tax — as it all included a bribe. Any kind of movement was prohibited during Lockdown.



“The first two-three months were extremely tough. After we finished the little we had at home and what we had borrowed from neighbours, we didn’t know what we would eat,” says Ajay.

A major share of COVID-19 interventions have had to address the food and ration needs of India’s daily-wagers who survive on a monthly income averaging Rs 3000. For such families, not getting to work for over three months has been devastating, even fatal. UNDP India along with SEWA Madhya Pradesh, gave ration supplies to families such as the Singhs. While the financial package rolled out by India’s Finance Ministry over the pandemic allocated funds for food — under existing as well as new schemes - the local administrations along with development sector helped facilitated this exercise. Supplementing this with ‘COVID-19 supplies’ like sanitiser and mask distribution, lessons on physical distancing, SEWA’s teams scoured the region helping vulnerable families tackle the cruel pandemic.

The Singhs seasonally migrate to Maharashtra and Gujarat to work as construction labourers. During low season, the parents and their unmarried son Ajay, are back in their home cultivating their small patch of land. This has been their livelihood mechanism for a decade now. “We were due to get their salaries from their employers in Sevalia, who refused to pay. We were to repay the loans they borrowed for their cab fare to Gujarat and back,” says Hari Singh.

Not unlike the Singhs, the population in these parts comprise extremely poor farmers who survive cultivating wheat, many of them migrating seasonally to work outside. After exhausting all possible resources on just getting home have not been left with much to actually survive. Until July, no work was possible, only from July did the Lockdown relaxations start.

“The biggest lesson Coronavirus has taught so many of us is that there is no fear greater than hunger,” says Ajay.

▶ When Mother Courage is also a Masterchef : Jaya Dharmendra Tondar



Chilkhi, Dewas: When UNDP India in partnership with SEWA started working on the COVID-19 awareness campaign in MP early this summer, they ran into a lot of angry residents who thought COVID-19 was a piece of fiction and they were making a big deal out of nothing. “They got angry at concepts like social distancing; once I had a fight with a woman’s mother because I suggested quarantine for the daughter who had just come back into town,” says Jaya Dharmendra Tomar, one of SEWA volunteers here.

“They think we are making it up, so we have to be determined,” she says. Determination is not a quality 30-year-old Jaya is bereft of.

Born with a disability in her left foot, Jaya was married off early at the age of 16 years. Any older, her prospects of marriage would diminish, her parents hoping that youth would trump disability in the marriage market. She got married to a chef, who specialised in catering wedding parties. He turned out to be abusive. “He would beat me because I could not cook like him. I could make simple things like dal and saag,” she says.

After a few years of tolerating the abuse, one day Jaya took her two children and marched off to her parents, immediately seeking a divorce. The divorce eventually came through. Soon after, Jaya met Dharmendra Tondar, whom she went on to marry and has been with over ten years. It is also here that her association with SEWA began.

The first thing SEWA did, was helped Jaya get a disability certificate in order to link her to government’s social security schemes for disabled persons. But the contribution of SEWA has been much greater over the last decade. Being associated with the group helped her come to her own, mixing with strong women who were used to leading independent lives, just as the one she aspired to.

Divorce in conservative rural India was just the first step she had taken towards that life of independence and courage. The other big step, was professional. She decided to take up the very same profession as her ex-husband, and become a professional chef catering weddings. She can today do with great expertise — the very same thing she was once castigated for not being able to do.

Home is Where You Are Not a Migrant

Dasai, Dhar: Perhaps no story has gripped the collective imagination of India in recent times, as that of the heart-wrenching migrant crisis during the pandemic. The image of India's poor trudging home on foot with their belongings and families, over thousands of kilometres — many of them dying enroute — has received coverage and condemnation across the globe.

Cheni Singh Ganawat, 30 was working in Gujarat with her husband when Lockdown was declared. Working as a daily-wager earning about Rs 300 per day, the family of two adults and two children, had to find ways of coming back home to their home in Dasai when their factory shut down. With all resources dried up, the simple task of feeding her family seemed impossible.

One of the primary goals of the COVID-19 response designed UNDP India in collaboration with SEWA Madhya Pradesh, has been to address hunger of families like Ganawat's. Daily-wage labourers like theirs have been one of the worst affected demographics of the pandemic, their income struck down by the conditions of the Lockdown. "When we returned to our village, we had no money. Our contractor had paid us some money to hire a vehicle, but with that money gone, and no prospect of work through the Lockdown, there was nothing to feed my family," says Ganawat.

SEWA's ration kit consisting of basics food grains, spices, oil kept the family going through the pandemic. Also provided to them, was support along the health parameters, like COVID-19 check up (as is the norm for travelling families), information about the Coronavirus and distribution of masks and sanitiser.

Back home in her village, Ganawat's income has dropped to half — they pay Rs150-200 per day — but the support she has received, alongside the sheer sense of protection that home provides has made them resolve never to leave again. "Even if COVID-19 goes away, we don't want to leave home. We just don't feel like it," she says.



Support for Vision 2020 Kiran Minare

Dasai, Dhar: The Indian government provides a host of social security schemes for a range of vulnerable groups, but sometimes, poor education and awareness levels come in the way of groups accessing their own rights. As part of its COVID-19 response, UNDP India in partnership with SEWA Madhya Pradesh conducted a survey in order to facilitate linkages with 1500 households across three districts in Madhya Pradesh to any one government scheme.

Kiran Minare, 35 has less than 90% vision by birth. When UNDP India-SEWA Madhya Pradesh's team had told Kiran about getting her blind pension activated, her husband Ratan Lal did not entertain the idea. Although Kiran was associated with SEWA for 11 years prior to that, the suggestion seemed to have met with much skepticism by the family, in particular the husband. "He thought it was some scam and we would just get into trouble," she says.

The couple work in her husband's brick kiln business — Kiran helping out in processes like mixing, which mainly require her use of hands. This also means that Kiran's finances are tied up to her husband's, and she has no money of her own. Getting the blind pension would mean a monthly income of Rs 600 for Kiran, all in her name.



After six months of cajoling, SEWA's facilitators were able to convince the husband that the blind pension scheme was genuine and he took her to Dhar to get her certificate made. "The timing has been helpful: the pension started coming during the financially-strained months of the pandemic," says Kiran.

▶ Making Masks, Selling Stars : Designing Dreams in Dasai Sarika Minare, Designer Mask Maker



Dasai, Dhar: The big designer mask on the face of Sarika Minare cannot conceal her eyes sparkling with new ideas. When COVID-19 arrived in the country this February, Minare was an ordinary 35-year-old woman in Dasai who had just learnt a bit of tailoring. But the few months of the pandemic have changed so much.

It started with SEWA's training with a group of women. As part of UNDP-SEWA's COVID-19 response, towards capacity building and facilitate income generation through existing skills, they held sewing workshops. Over a nine-day training, the young women were taken through the basics of tailoring, which gave upgraded their skills. "I used to stitch basic items, and my finish was not that great," she says. In nine days, Sarika had grown remarkably. Almost immediately, SEWA commissioned her to make 600 masks. They also supplied her with machine supplies and a power motor for her sewing machine, which makes the machine work faster with less effort from the tailor. ("I can do more work on the machine in less time. I can also do housework, because I am less exhausted.")

She then decided to add a little element of creativity to her mask-making work. With the mask becoming a ubiquitous accessory, it was time she decided, to make it an attractive one. Women are tired of looking drab, with their faces covered. I decided to make their lives a little fun by adding some coloured brocade, some sparkles to the fabric.

The twist has been met with much appreciation in Sarika's clientele, attracting newer ones. "Earlier I used to make 2000 per month, and now, it has gone up to 3500," she says. Under SEWA's facilitation, she also has two students. Stitching up a storm and brimming with new ideas, UNDP's intervention has helped Sarika transform her life.

Administering a Pandemic Sukhram Damor

Mavdipura, Dhar: Few people would envy the job of administrators during the COVID-19 pandemic. But if you have been assigned the task, stepping back is not an option. Only marching ahead is.

Forty-year-old Sukhram Damor, member of Panchayat in Mavdipura, saw the pandemic in its cruellest manifestations. There were people across four villages — the area under Damor's jurisdiction — who had no income, there were people scared of going to hospital when they fell sick. "Incomes, lives, everything had come to a standstill," he recalls.



Residents of the area are all in agriculture, mostly working as labourers in other people's farms. This area also sees a lot of seasonal migration - during crop or harvest season, over 50% of residents go out to other places for work. Gujarat is one of the preferred destinations.

During the Lockdown, they all started trickling back in. They came in trucks, they walked, hitchhiked, some came in tempos. At that time, Damor's task was to help whoever was stuck: we helped people get their Aadhar cards, we transferred money to some.

UNDP-SEWA's COVID-19 response was premised on multiple areas, including ration, awareness building around Covid (social distancing, mask distribution etc). "The government also gave Rs 30,000 to every Panchayat as part of COVID-19 relief. This was to include sanitiser, mask, soap distribution. This is also for us to disburse ration supplies to vulnerable families."

As part of the strategy designed by UNDP, households were surveyed to find missing gaps in documentation vis-a-vis social security schemes. In this, partnering with SEWA along with Panchayat members, went around homes in villages asking to see if they had documents so that they could access the government's schemes during the pandemic. In the absence of identity documents, if a Panchayat identifies a person as belonging to a village, that counts as ID proof. "They would immediately get their ration," said Damor.

► Relief through the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana



The son of Minsail and Taso Kerketta, Praveen is a 21-year-old youth from the Oraon caste, and he is a resident of gram panchayat Kharwatoli. Belonging to a very poor family, his father Minsail works as a labourer and does agricultural work for a livelihood.

There is a lot of tension and anxiety in the family about how they will make a living, and they are unable to take up farming because they do not own land. Praveen went to Mumbai to operate a paddy harvesting machine for a company with his friends Pawan, Situ and Ajit. He used to earn INR 8000 per month, of which he used to send INR

6000 to his family. After the lockdown, Praveen got to Raigad from Mumbai by train. He had some trouble getting a bus in Raigad, but somehow he managed to reach Kunkuri. From here, he took an auto to gram panchayat Kharwatoli and returned home after 14 days of quarantine.

Samarthan workers were on a field visit to Kharwatoli, where they met Praveen. He described his family's economic situation, and the workers urged him to find work nearby so that he could support his family by living in his own village. The Samarthan workers talked to the sarpanch and sachiv of the gram panchayat Kharwatoli regarding a job for Praveen. Along with the Samarthan field workers, Praveen went to meet the rojgar sahayak for the gram panchayat and applied for and got a job in Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana as a construction worker. Praveen now earns INR 6000 a month and is currently engaged in construction work.

► A loss of job in lockdown that led to a family enterprise

Thirty-four-year-old Anasena Lakda is a tribal from Dhodibhar, a gram panchayat under the Kunkuri development block. Anasena has been disabled since childhood. To support the family and finance the education of his younger siblings, in 2012, Anasena went to Mishan Parsada Sansthan in Naya Raipur for welding-related work. He had been working in a welding shop for eight years, he used to earn a monthly salary of INR 5000. He was also being given accommodation, food and other amenities by the institution.

During the pandemic, Samarthan workers from Kunkuri were contacting the sarpanch and villagers of various panchayats for information about returning migrant laborers. They were providing assistance to keep the migrant laborers who came back during the lockdown in quarantine centre. While helping Anasena Lakra, who came back during the lockdown, at the quarantine centre, his scope for livelihood was discussed. It was found that his family wanted to open their own welding shop in the village, but because they did not have the funds, they were not able to open their own business.

Anasena Lakra's wife was added to the panchayat's self-help group by a Samarthan worker. During this time, his wife's



group was helped in opening a shop granting them a loan of INR 50,000.

Anasena's whole family is now working in the shop and earning INR 5000–10000. Thus, the Mishan Parsada Sansthan is helping people to connect with small schemes to raise their standard of living and empower their livelihoods.

► Benefits to migrant laborers under the UNDP Workers Resource Scheme



Since there are no factories or industries of any kind in the hilly Jashpur district, people do not have employment throughout the year. However, many people need employment to alleviate their poverty, sickness, illiteracy, etc. As a result, people leave the area to search for a livelihood. In addition, many people in the village did not know about any government schemes – they are unable to benefit from these schemes because they did not know about their eligibility status. Another problem is that though some people are eligible for various schemes, but they cannot benefit from these due to a lack of documents. As a result, these people face many troubles including financial problems.

Under Covid-19 Response Programme – Access to social Protection Schemes in Chhattisgarh, community animators enabled migrant laborers and vulnerable communities to access benefits such as social protection schemes for widowed women, pension

schemes, pension schemes for disabled persons, ration cards, job cards, Aadhaar card, bank account, etc. As a result, these people can now benefit from various government schemes. Samarthan's workers in the UNDP program met with government officials from the Horticulture Department of Jashpur district and obtained information about the financial support that the villagers could receive to grow their own vegetables. Samarthan's workers then passed on this information to the people of Belsonga village, a dependent village of the gram panchayat Chiraikhara. Samarthan workers also identified 10 poor families who could avail this scheme for their livelihood. They made the application for all 10 families and submitted it to the Horticulture Department. In coordination with the sarpanch, sachiv, Aanganwadi workers, Mitanin, and other villagers, the Samarthan workers created awareness about other government schemes so that more people could benefit. After taking these steps, people were more aware and were ready to register with the Labour Department. This awareness initiative helped relevant and important information reach economically and socially backward families.

Of the 10 families who applied to the Horticulture Department, each family received seeds of vegetables like potato, brinjal, and tomato worth 3000 INR. On 31 March 2020 at the Janpad Panchayat premises, the material was distributed by Horticulture Department officials, the district panchayat president, and sub-divisional revenue officer.

▶ **Payment of pension provides relief**

The village and gram panchayat of Joratarai is situated 9 km from the A Chowki Block in the Rajnandgaon district. The total number of families in the village is 162, and the scheduled caste in the village is followed by the scheduled tribes. The number of other backward classes is negligible.

In this village, there are seven members in the family of 76-year-old Ganesha Bai Kalar. For the last 16 years, Ganesha Bai had been getting INR 350 per month under the Sunder Sahara Pension Scheme. However, she had not received her pension for eight months due to the closure of her bank account. She is unable to walk due her old age and is not able to go to the bank. As a result, the family's economic situation was getting worse, and they were not even able to buy even essential items.

A Samarthan worker found out about the non-receipt of Ganesha Bai's pension during a field survey under UNDP supported Covid-19 Response Programme – Access to social Protection Schemes in Chhattisgarh. The worker contacted the old lady and got all the information. She was then taken to the bank with the help of her family. On receipt of account closure, the process of reapplication was begun, and after all the papers were submitted and re-verified, the account was activated by the Chhattisgarh Rajya Gramin Bank Hurdhazar. After this process, funds were regularly deposited in Ganesha Bai's account. She began to receive her monthly pension two days after applying for it again. She is now very happy with this intervention and is able to meet her daily needs.

▶ **Solving the problem of Ujjwala gas connection with the Shramik Mitra initiative**

The gram panchayat of Mirche is located 20 km from the block headquarter, A Chowki. This village is located at a distance of five km from the forest region of Chilhati. The population of the village is 1685 and is mainly made up of tribal families, and the second-highest population is made up of other backward classes and scheduled caste families. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood for the village, and there are a large number of middle and small families with many of them living below the poverty line. Under the Prime Minister Ujjwala Gas Scheme, gas connections and stove tanks have been provided to families living below the poverty line for 200 rupees. In Gram Panchayat Mirache, a total of 146 families have received gas connections and materials under this scheme. Ninety connections were received from Indian Gas Agency, 50 from Bharat Gas Agency, and 6 from HP Gas Agency. Of these, gas is being used regularly only by some families. Most families have not had gas refilled even once in the last one year.

Due to COVID-19, the central government provided the assistance of INR 825 per connection to refill gas for three months into the bank accounts of Ujjwala gas beneficiaries. Even after receiving this assistance from the government, many beneficiaries did not refill their gas tanks. So Bharat Gas Agency from A Chowki block has collected all its gas tanks from the people in May 2020 and kept them in the warehouse. During the household survey, Samarthan's worker got the information that some Gas Agency has refilled the gas tank of 50 families and have returned them back. Filled tanks from several families were also seized by the gas agency. When the Samarthan worker found out about this, the worker went to the Bharat Gas Agency to get more information and directed the information friend to help the poor families. As a result, the Bharat Gas Agency in A Chowki informed the Samarthan workers that they had brought 50 gas tanks from Mirche. On making further inquiries with the gas agency, it was found that the tanks had been confiscated from families who did not refill them even once.

This information was communicated to all the families in the village, and as a result, 10 families including Preeti Sahu and Kaleshwari Nirmalkar have received their refilled tanks back from the Bharat Gas Agency after in the intervention of the Samarathan workers, who also suggested that the other families in the village also bring their gas tanks back from the agency.

► Supply of ration started with the Aadhaar card

The gram panchayat of Mirche is located 22 km from block A Chowki. The village is located in the forest area of the development block, the villagers do not get information about the government schemes. They also have to go to the block headquarters to avail many services like hospitals. In this village, four people did not have an Aadhaar card and were not receiving rations under the public distribution system.

When the support worker found out about the problem, the concerned people were informed about process of applying for an Aadhaar card. After preparing the necessary documents for Heena Netam, daughter of Chowan Ram (19 years); Pukhya Kumar son of Tikeshwar (2.5 years); Jaideep Kumar, son of Daniram (3 years); and Homesh Kumar son of Daniram (1 year) were sent to the Aadhaar centre in Hurdabazar. Here, the process of their Aadhaar card application was completed in one day and was submitted for further processing.

All of them received a copy of their Aadhaar cards within one month. After the Aadhaar was received, they were registered with the ration shop, and they started getting rations according to the prescribed quantity.

► Rural background benefits from social assistance program

The tribal majority village Shikaritola, a dependent village of the gram panchayat Jadutola, is situated in the A Chowki block of Rajnandgaon district. The total population of the gram panchayat Jadutola is about 1000 people. Approximately 110 families reside in the Jadutola village and 60 families in Shikaritola. Some of these families were destitute and affected by financial constraints, and they did not have a livelihood. The elderly in the village were facing many difficulties due to a lack of pension.



Samarthan workers from the UNDP supported Covid-19 Response Programme – Access to Social Protection Schemes, visited the gram panchayat Jadutola. The beneficiaries of social security schemes were visited at home during this visit, and they were told about social assistance schemes and other information was also given. The sarpanch of the gram panchayat, Smt. Sukwaro Netam, was informed that the economic situation of the people deprived of their pension was worse during COVID-19.

As a result, the sarpanch was now aware of the problems of the beneficiaries and ensured advance action after the Gram Sabha proceedings. After this effort, pending pensions were approved by the government in October 2020, and seven people benefitted from this initiative. With the approval of social assistance amount, all eligible beneficiaries are getting assistance of INR 350 every month.

Approval in the application of seven beneficiaries

The gram panchayat of Bital is situated 20 km from Ambagarh Chowki, Vanachal block in the Rajnandgaon district, and the dependent village Manjhi Tola is 18 km away. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, registered beneficiaries of the pension scheme were facing financial difficulties as they could not go to the fields for their bread and butter.

The gram panchayat's attention was drawn to this situation by a support worker for the benefit of the pension scheme to the beneficiaries identified with the social assistance pension under the UNDP Workers Resource Scheme. At a meeting of the villagers and Samarthan workers at the gram panchayat level, the workers made and submitted applications for all eligible candidates for the pension scheme. This was also discussed with the sarpanch, Smt Reshma Parateti. Keeping in the situation of the beneficiaries in mind, the sarpanch forwarded application to the district.

As a result of these efforts, all seven applicants registered and accepted to receive pensions. These include:

- 1. Beautiful Brother Husband Dharam Manjhi Tola Other Backward Class**
- 2. Firangi Ram Kallu Ram Ajja Majhi Tola**
- 3. Nirmala Pati Parikshaita Other Backward Class Majhi Tola**
- 4. Beduka Husband Mehtar Other Backward Class Manjhi Tola**
- 5. Bhagwati Pati India Other Backward Class Bital,**
- 6. Ans Ram Father Mehtar Other Backward Class Bital**
- 7. Kanhaiya Lal Dad Pannalal Scheduled Tribe Bital.**

In this way, with the approval of pension to a total of seven beneficiaries, financial assistance of Rs 350 per beneficiary will be available.



▶ Villager get benefits under the Old Age Pension Scheme



The village of Dhanapayali of the gram panchayat Semharbandha is located three km west of the block Abagarh chowk. There are a total of 152 families residing in this village, the majority of whom are tribals.

Gagaram, who is 71 years old was eligible for pension scheme. He had previously applied for pension payments to the Gram Panchayat, but because the gram panchayat had not taken appropriate action, he was not getting any benefits from the pension scheme.

The support worker contacted Gangaram and inquired about the status of application process. Gangaram had various problems due to his age, and the family were given necessary guidance after the support worker became aware of his problems. The necessary documents including the application were submitted, and the

application was sent to a higher office through the sarpanch and sachiv for appropriate action.

After this effort, Gangaram's pension has been approved since October 2020.

▶ Approval of pension

The gram panchayat Kekititola is located five km west of Ambagarh Chowki. There are 167 families in this village, the majority of whom are Scheduled Tribes. Eligible pension beneficiaries in Kekititola were facing a lot of difficulties because they were not receiving their pension.

During a survey of the UNDP supported Covid-19 Response Programme – Access to social Protection Schemes in Chhattisgarh, Samarthan workers created awareness about the pension scheme and suggested villagers fill up the form for this scheme and submit it to the gram panchayat. Four potential beneficiaries from village Kekititola provided their information, and their pension forms were filled and submitted to the gram panchayat.

Approval to begin their pension payments was given in the general assembly meeting of the gram panchayat on 15 September 2020, and the application of the four beneficiaries was sent to the district panchayat for appropriate action by the gram panchayat secretary. ***The beneficiaries are as follows.***

- 1. Gangabai Pati Chaitram Aja Widow Pensions**
- 2. Phoolmat Bai Pati Budharam Aja Widow Pensions**
- 3. Budharam Aa. Anjarsingh Ajay Vriddhapension**
- 4. Budharam and Anjarsingh Ajaja Vrihapeshpan**

► Benefit of Kisan Samman Nidhi

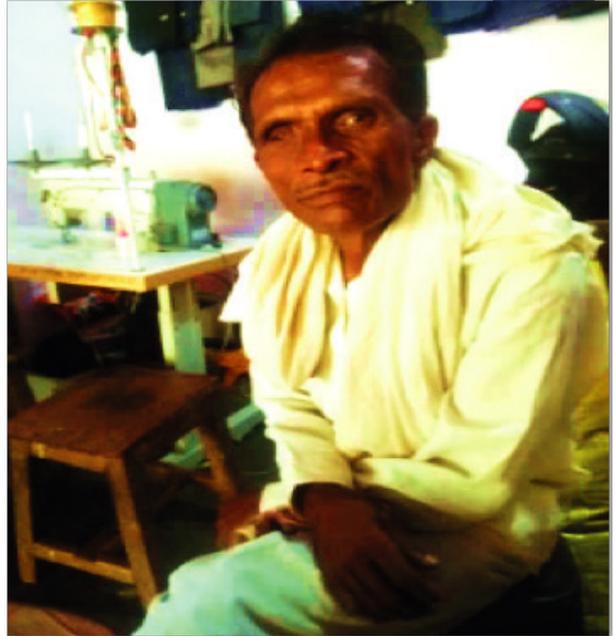
Prakash, son of the late Surit was from the nai or barber caste, and he is a farmer by occupation. He lives in the village of Khadkhadi, and after the death of his father, Prakash was very worried as his agricultural land was in the name of his late father. As a result of this, he was not able to avail any scheme related to farming.

During a survey of the UNDP supported Covid-19 Response Programme – Access to social Protection Schemes in Chhattisgarh to track all the people unable to avail different government schemes, Samarthan workers helped villagers apply for and obtain the necessary documents. During the survey, Samarthan workers visited the gram panchayat, and villagers shared their issues. The workers then raised the concerns of the people at the gram panchayat's development meeting and asked them to add various people's names into the list of beneficiaries in the village.

In this process, 15 days later, Prakash was able to have his agricultural land transferred to his name. In order to get the benefit of the Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme, Prakash's documents were first submitted and the application was processed successfully. According to the information, the first instalment of the Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme was received by Prakash, and his family thanked Samarthan workers for their support and help.

► Access to COVID Welfare Package - PM Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana

Ram Prasad Jhariya is a farmer based out of Delwara village of Gughari, Mandla. The major source of income to his family is through farming and labour work. During the awareness meeting in this village, the coordinator informed people about the COVID 19 preventive measures and social security schemes wherein he emphasized upon the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana. He explained in detail about the entitlement, the documents needed and the application process. After the meeting ended, Ram Prasad approached the coordinator and shared that he has already submitted the form but didn't receive the amount yet. So, the coordinator approached the patwari and came to know that this happened due of lack of documents. Then the coordinator collected all the required documents of beneficiary and requested Patwari to update the form. After multiple follow ups, Ram Prasad has received the entitled money on 27th October 2020.



► Access to COVID Welfare Package Mukhya Mantri Kalyani Pension Yojana



Durga Bai, a 31-year old widow, resides at Hapsikhedi village in Dhar. Their family is dependent on the wages earned by her two sons. During the community awareness meeting, the coordinator gave information on social security schemes. During this conversation, he met Durga bai and came to know that she is not yet linked with widow pension scheme. The coordinator initiated and facilitated the process of linking her with Mukhyamantri Kalyani Yojana. The scheme stated that widow aged between 18 to 79 years are eligible to receive Rs. 300 per month. For availing the benefit of the scheme, one should have bank account. So firstly, the coordinator has helped her in opening a saving account and then got her registered for the Kalyani Yojana. Now, she has been able to avail the benefit of the scheme.

In response to COVID-19 and its economic fallout, UNDP India along with SEWA Madhya Pradesh

► Access to COVID Welfare Package on Full subsidy under Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana

In Silghiti village of Mandla District, four tribal families had gas connection but were using kerosene stove because they were not aware about full subsidy for the month of September. In response to COVID-19 and its economic fallout, UNDP India along with SEWA Madhya Pradesh. Image 4 One of the beneficiaries of PM Ujjwala Yojana During awareness meeting, when they came to know about it, they approached the coordinator. Then coordinator explained them about the PM Ujjwala Yojana in detail and informed that as per the scheme, linked people will receive full subsidy from the month of April-September 2020 under the COVID relief schemes announced in April 2020.

or this, they will have to get their cylinders refilled, pay charges and then based on the receipt, the amount will be credited to their bank account. So, the coordinator requested gas agency to send their member to the village so that left out families can get their cylinder refilled and avail the benefit. In this manner, 4 families were able to enjoy the benefit of this scheme.

► Registration of migrant families' children in Anganwadi Centre For Distribution of Ready to Eat Food distribution scheme



During and post the lockdown, many migrant families have returned to their home village. This story is about two villages – Girala and Bhavri in Girala panchayat of Alirajpur block, Alirajpur. Children of many of these migrant families, belonging to tribal community, were not registered with Anganwadi Center.

During awareness meetings, the coordinator came to know about these families and initiated the process of linking them with Anganwadi Centre For Distribution of Ready to Eat Food scheme. For this, he had a word with the Anganwadi workers of these villages but the Anganwadi worker refused. She said that she cannot register them until she receives information from her supervisors. So, the coordinator prepared the list of these children and met the supervisors. He explained to them the situation and the supervisors assured to resolve this issue in a few days' period.

After multiple follow-ups, the 102 children were enrolled and started receiving take home ration packets under the Ready to Eat Food scheme from the respective Anganwadi centers.

► A move towards healthy life

The month of September 2020 was observed as Poshan Maah all over India. This year the emphasis of Poshan Maah activities was to provide free seeds of vegetables to the community and encourage them to do kitchen gardening so that they can fulfil their nutritional needs with it. During a community awareness meeting in Khermal and Talawali villages of Jhabua, the community was made aware on the preventive measures of COVID 19 and the social protection schemes. In addition to this, Mr. Rakesh Bhuriya, from horticulture department of Jhabua, and Anganwadi workers explained the importance of nutritional food and encouraged the community members to do kitchen gardening at their home. The situation of COVID 19 has resulted in lack of livelihood opportunities which has made it difficult to fulfil the nutritional need with the limited income in hand. So, if they can start the practice of kitchen gardening, they will not be



required to pay hefty prices to buy vegetables from the market and will also be able to consume organic and healthy vegetables. This motivated 46 rural tribal women and the coordinator facilitated their linkage to Sabji Vikas Vistar Yojana wherein they received free seeds. These women had sown these seeds and started enjoying the consumption of healthy organic food. Thus, this scheme has not only provided them with monetary benefit but also helped them improve their health.

► The importance of awareness



Jamna bai, a 62-year-old woman, is a resident of Sirsouda village of Dhar. During the community awareness meeting, she came to know about the Annapurna Yojana. After the meeting got over, she approached the coordinator and informed him that she is eligible for the scheme and has ration card also but didn't know about the eligibility slip and hence could not take the benefit of this scheme. So, the coordinator collected all her documents and approached Panchayat Secretary to get her registered at online portal of Annapurna Yojana. Panchayat secretary assured him for her registration and after a few follow ups, Jamna bai received the eligibility slip and is receiving free ration and Rs1/kg ration under the scheme.

► Importance of immunization to migrated families

In Semlaya village of Alirajpur district, many villagers migrated to the nearby districts or states in search of work and they were usually accompanied by their young ones. Because of lack of proper documents with these families and improper facilities in the migrated places, these families are not able to take the benefits of government schemes and due to this, health of these children is adversely affected. They are usually not able to receive timely vaccinations and proper nutritious diet which leads to malnourishment or serious illness. Due to COVID 19, many such families returned to their home village Semlaya. During a community awareness meeting on COVID 19 preventive measures and social security schemes, ASHA and Anganwadi worker shared the plight of these children with the coordinator. They shared that there are five such migrant families, including two pregnant women and 3 children, who haven't been vaccinated inspite of repeated attempts by ASHA and Anganwadi workers to convince them. So the coordinator approached these families and tried to understand their perspective. During their conversation, the family members shared that children get irritated and are not able to sleep because of vaccination and hence they didn't go for it. The coordinator had a detailed discussion with these families and explained them the importance of vaccination and the repercussions of ignoring it. They understood it and got the children and women members vaccinated.



► Facilitating document for availing the benefits of the ration related schemes

Phulibai Bhuriya is a 70-year-old resident of Nadh village in Ranapur, Jhabua. There are nine members in her family including her and their major source of income is wages. During the community awareness meeting, she shared her ordeal with the coordinator that her family had been trying to get the eligibility slip under their ration card for the last two years but in vain. All their family income is spent in fulfilling the ration needs of the family and they are hardly able to save anything for their future. Upon hearing this, the coordinator approached the relevant authority and came to know that the family was not having caste certificate because of which they were not able to get the slip. So the coordinator approached the officials at Janpad panchayat and initiated the process of preparing her caste certificate. After she received her caste certificate, the family received the eligibility slip in the end of September and has been receiving free ration under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana and Rs.1 per kg ration under Annapurna Yojana.



► Attending awareness meeting helped in getting free medical treatment for COVID-19



The story is about a beneficiary of Pipliya village, Jhabua block, Jhabua. A community awareness meeting was organized on 10th September with the motive to aware the community about the coronavirus, its causes and precautions. The coordinator also shared that under the scheme of COVID treatment for Free, if a person is infected from corona, his/her treatment will be free of cost and all the expenses incurred would be taken care by the government.

After few days of the meeting, Bhundari, a 42-years-old woman of the same village tested corona positive and was immediately hospitalized at corona dedicated hospital at Jhabua wherein she received all the medical facilities and treatment free of cost. On 3rd October 2020, her report came negative. Now, Bhundari is doing fine. Bhundari and her family shared that since they knew

that the facilities will be provided free of cost, so they didn't hesitate in getting treatment at hospital which could have been a costly affair otherwise.

The coordinator has also linked her with the PM Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana. He collected all the required information along with her documents and approached Panchayat Secretary to get her registered under the scheme and she has received free ration under the scheme.

Restore livelihoods opportunities (SDG 1.3, 1.5 and SDG 2.1)

► **Determined to Succeed**



Pratibha - a 24-year-old girl lives in Waluj village in Aurangabad, Maharashtra. She has completed her B. Com. In her family, she lives with her mother and elder brother. Her father passed away a few years ago. Pratibha's mother was working as domestic help, and her brother was doing a private job. The sustenance of the family was challenging. After completion of her graduation, Pratibha started working with I Mech Technology as a Computer operator. However, unfortunately, due to lockdown, she lost her job.

Her family's financial situation was very critical since her mother and brother were both out of work due to lockdown. They had no other means to run their family. Pratibha was looking for a job desperately and spread the word about the same in her network. Soon she came to know about the Connect to Work program by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) being implemented by Magic Bus through one of her friends and contacted the Magic Bus team immediately. She was oriented about the program, and a counseling session took place.

Pratibha could see a ray of hope that her family's misery will finally end. She was briefed about the vacancy of a Line Operator at Forres Elestomac India Pvt. Ltd. She was selected and immediately joined. Today, Pratibha is working as a Line Operator and earning a salary of INR 9000 per month. Pratibha is grateful to UNDP and Magic Bus for this initiative. She feels secure now that she has her means of livelihood restored. She is positive to come out of the challenges posed by Covid and the subsequent lockdown with flying colors.

► **Sindhu Devi - Farmer, cadre and Board of Director of FPO from Deepapur village, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh**

Sindhu Devi is a simple village woman from Deepapur Village, Araziline block, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. She is a perfect example of strong determination and will power who stood against several odds to empower herself and is now guiding other neighbourhood women to strengthen their livelihood and live a prosperous life.

Before joining Brahma Baba SHG in 2017, Sindhu like most of the women in her village spent her day doing household chores and helping her family with farming. She was soon assigned to render her services as Samoooh Sakhi. By that time there were only 6 SHGs in her village which she increased to 14 in next 3 years. She further works as FL-CRP (financial literacy resource person) where she educates rural women about banking services and products. When asked about her journey from a simple homemaker to FL-CRP, she said, "Earlier I was dependent upon my husband for he even the smallest amount of money. Having joined the SHG I started my own savings. As samoooh sakhi, I started earning Rs.800/ month.

Now as FL-CRP, I get Rs.4000 per month. Now, with additional income, I not only support my family but also help others in need. My mother-in-law who was firstly not happy with me becoming sakhi, now supports me in my decisions."



Apart from this, she is also a progressive farmer who tries and tests innovative agricultural practices and also encourages other farmers to adopt such methods. Her exposure has helped her gain confidence. Through the UNDP's COVID response work, Sindhu received training from Arya Collateral Warehousing Pvt Ltd, on FPO formation and management, post-harvest crop management and procurement. She is now a cadre as well as one of the Board of Directors of newly formed Farmer Producer Organization (FPO) in her block under UNDP project. She has been working tirelessly since the inception of the idea. She has been instrumental in mobilizing other women in her area. Any day, she can be seen organizing meetings, educating farmers for mobilization into FPO, mapping crop quantities etc. She believes that with the producer company, farmers in her village will have a greater bargaining power to sell their produce.

She says, "No one in the village thought that women could carry out this task of procurement. But we women were determined to do this. Earlier the middlemen used to give us not more than Rs.12-13/ kg of paddy, but since we offered Rs.14.50/kg to farmers, they also started offering Rs.14-15/kg. We have already sent 1 truck of 25 MT and are now in process of sending next one, while much more quantities are in pipeline. It wasn't easy as no one believed us and there were so many other challenges but now we are confident. My journey from being SHG member to CRP and now BoD has given me recognition and self-confidence and I want to continue with this."

► **Shruti Rathod: Swimming against the odds- a brow beating success**

Shruti Rathod, 26, an young entrepreneur from Bilagi, District Baglkot is PUC passed. An orphan at the child hood, married at her childhood, deserted by her husband, she stays with her brother in a small house with her 12 year old daughter. Not able to continue education and search for a job elsewhere, she decided to learn tailoring and start her own enterprise. Joined the local SHG, borrowed loan and started a tailoring shop for women at Bilagi, a small block place primarily with agrarian families in the town. She could not run the enterprises due to lowfoot falls, unable to pay the shop rent, take care of her daughters' educational needs, undeterred, decides to shift the enterprise to her own dwelling place two years back.



COVID 19 period was the hardest in her journey as her lone brother who was working in a restaurant as cook, lost his job. The footfall fell drastically as many local festival celebrations were banned and hardly any tailoring income for Shruti, only ensured miseries to the family. UNDP's COVID project tried to support her with training in finer fashion designing for women. She picked up the skills and started focussing on pre wedding suits for ladies, modern blouses for wedding occasions and designer frocks for girls. With the improvements in pandemic situation, the enterprise started positive curve. When the project suggested

her to engage in bridal make ups in the existing facility, she agreed. Taking cues from parlours based in Bagalkot town with the help from Future Greens, now she has set up a small kit containing necessary gadgets for the job. She now visits make up calls for bridals in nearby localities.

▶ **Aalambana App**

Aalambana (meaning support) application provides skills training and create market linkages and new business opportunities for the handloom weavers and artisans who are amongst the worst hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. It aims to digitally connect the weavers/artisan communities to upskill, give new design ideas for product diversification based on the emerging market demand of health & hygiene products. Besides, it builds capacity for digital and financial literacy and creates market linkages with WhatsApp business support.



The application allows its users to access the learning modules, create and update the online catalogue and send automated order alerts to weavers on WhatsApp. It connects the producers directly with the buyers. The weavers/artisans are also trained on new design skills to reach out to new markets with less dependency on intermediaries. Modules on financial literacy help the weavers with the fundamentals of finance for managing a business.

► **Impact as of December 2020**

- **5000** weavers/artisans impacted
- **2000+** artisans/weavers trained on Aalambana app
- **INR 23 Lakhs** additional business done through the app
- **250** users registered on the Aalambana app so far
- **50+** orders received from customers (individual and organizations)
- **35** weavers have set up WhatsApp business accounts
- **TWO** online exhibitions organized to promote the hand-crafted products

► **Sustainable livelihoods for the tribals of Dindori, Madhya Pradesh: Strengthening Market linkages for Minor Millets and Minor Forest Produce**

Madhya Pradesh has the largest Tribal population in the country. Dindori, Mandla and Balaghat districts have significant tribal population largely dependent on traditional agriculture (they grow minor millets), minor forest produce and daily wage jobs. Men also move to nearby districts and cities in search for daily wage. Department of Women and Child Development and its entity Mahila Vitt Evam Vikas Nigam (Women Finance and Development Corporation) has been working with women, mostly from tribal communities through its Tejasvini Programme in 6 districts across the State including Dindori, Mandla and Balaghat. The Tejasvini programme involved mobilizing women through SHGs and help them undertake a wide range of economic activities in groups and derive certain income from such economic activities. It is one of the most successful flagship programmes of Govt of Madhya Pradesh focused on economic empowerment of women mainly from tribal communities. As on date, there are 60 SHG Federations with more than 200,000 women (65-70% tribal women) in 6 districts.

Dindori, Mandla and Balaghat are among very few districts in India where minor millets (Kodo and Kutki) are widely cultivated and consumed by tribal communities. They are one of the most climate resilient crops which require very little water for growth and can be grown in hilly terrains with very thin upper-soil. These minor millets possess very high nutritional value and have the potential to become next 'Quinoa' or 'Oats'.

The Assumption is that if these tribal women led SHG Federations are supported to (a) enhance their processing capabilities through machines and equipment, (b) branding and promotion (c) create market linkages with buyers in market, government institutions and retail stores/online stores.

► **UNDP's role and contribution**

What was the need for UNDP's support: Tribal communities have been one of the severely affected population due to COVID- 19. Most of them are small and marginal farmers with substantial dependence on agriculture, and minor forest produce. They cultivate and sell their produce in the local markets. Due the lockdown induced by COVID 19 they could not sell their produce in the local market, nor could earn any daily wages.

Mahila Vitt Evam Vikas Nigam -MVVN (translated into English as Women Finance and Development Corporation), an entity under Department of Women and Child Development, Govt of Madhya Pradesh has been working with tribal women since 2007. It has mobilized these women into SHGs and helped them form SHG Federations engaged in various economic activities over the years. However, given the plight of the COVID 19 lockdown, it sought UNDP's support in restoration of livelihoods for tribal women led SHG Federations in enhancing their processing capacities and help in market linkages.

UNDP has been providing technical and implementation support to Mahila Vitt Evam Vikas Nigam (Women Finance and Development Corporation), an entity under Department of Women and Child Development, Govt of Madhya Pradesh. The Support was designed as part of UNDP's COVID 19 Response Support to vulnerable sections of the society who have lost their livelihoods and have been severely hit in terms of loss of income generating opportunities and sources. Specifically, UNDP's support has been in the following key areas:

- Procurement and installation of processing machines as described earlier
- Deploy a specialized marketing firm to prepare a marketing strategy for minor millets based processed food products
- Developing Branding and promotion strategy for the products
- Create initial market linkages for the Federations with buyers, wholesalers, Online platforms, under the B2B, B2C, B2G contractual agreements with wholesalers/dealers, Retail Stores, and Government agencies.
- Training and capacity building of Federation women in operating the machines
- Preparing a roadmap for One Block One Product
- Preparing a strategy for financial management, dividend sharing,
- Preparing an online database of Federations business, revolving funds, group loaning, stock management system, sales and profit related modules

Some of the processed products made of minor millets are already being supplied to Anganwadi Centres as supplementary nutrition food for children between 0-6 years of age in Dindori and nearby districts.

► **Expected benefit of these interventions**

The machines installed will help more than 10,000 tribal women and as many families to restore their livelihoods and enhance their income by taking their produce to the market. It will enhance competitiveness of their products by establishing a new brand for Kodo and Kutki. Market linkages created will further encourage farmers and tribal communities to enhance their production of Kodo Kutki which otherwise has been going down due to lack of access to market.

► **Key activities and achievements during the reporting period**

Establishing 8 food processing machines for SHG Federations to help them process their raw harvested minor millets (Kodo and Kutaki) with a purpose to help them sell in the market and generate higher incomes with processed food products. A marketing agency has been which will facilitate marketing of products, develop branding and positioning strategy and collaterals for marketing of processed products, engage with influencers (bloggers, celebrated Chefs, food writers, etc) and undertake promotion of the

processed products. A completely new brand name called Andayi has been developed and finalized under which all processed products will be sold. Market linkages with potential buyers (B2B, B2G and B2C) is underway with advanced level of negotiations with an Export Agency, apart from registering the brand on online platform such as Flipkart (and Amazon and other online retail outlets in future). Market linkages will be facilitated through seller-buyer agreements with potential buyers locally, regionally, country wide and if possible internationally, preparations for which are underway such as obtaining necessary food safety certifications.



Expand access to job opportunities for vulnerable women and youth in urban areas (SDG 1.5 and SDG 5.4)

► Technical Support to the Districts for Crisis Management of the COVID-19 pandemic

Based on a suggestion made by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), UNDP has been supporting the district administration in 14 districts across 7 states of India for a planned period of six months. UNDP has recruited UN Volunteers for this position. The UNVs have been embedded with the District Administration and have been supporting the District Disaster Management Authority.

The key responsibilities of these Crisis Managers are to:

- Support the District officials in monitoring the responses to the pandemic.
- Coordinate the activities of the various stakeholders responsible for the pandemic management.
- Collect and compile data on materials received at the District for social protection, rehabilitation and livelihoods.
- Establish linkages with government agencies at GP, Block and District level for addressing the needs of communities.
- Facilitate the efforts of NGOs engaged in the District by establishing a mechanism for sharing and avoiding duplication of efforts.
- Suggest the district administration on replicable successful models from other States and countries.
- Liaise with communities to understand and identify the need for providing appropriate assistance and flag them to the district administration.
- Facilitate and ensure knowledge management, documentation and communication of ongoing COVID -19 related interventions in the field.

► The details of the recruited UNVs in the 14 districts are as follows:

S. No.	Name	District
1	Ms. Rashmita Behera	Bhadrak
2	Mr. Gopal Barik	Ballasore
3	Mr. Arjun Narzari	Udalguri
4	Ms. Jyotika Deka	Darrang
5	Ms. Deepika Chandra	Rudraprayag
6	Mr. Deepak Kumar	Dehradun
7	Mr. Vinay Soni	Nagpur
8	Mr. Swapnil Sardar	Aurangabad
9	Mr. Nitish Barole	Indore
10	Mr. Shailendra Gour	Bhopal
11	Mr. Om Prakash Raja	Pilibhit
12	Ms. Maitreyee Misra	Deoria
13	Mr. Tashi Chopel Bhutia	West Sikkim
14	Ms. Manisha Chettri	East Sikkim

District Disaster Management Authority UNV Coordinators' Best Practices

► Udalguri

The month of December, 2020 was full of great exploration and learning for the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) team in Udalguri. Policy advocacy and consultation with many local gatekeepers/stakeholders such as NGOs, SHGs, village council bodies, youth clubs and concerned government departments brought many factors together. The departments which are specifically responsible for key elements were consulted, including: community development and practices such as agriculture, veterinary practices, vocational training institutes like the Rural Self Employment Training Institute and handloom production centres, etc. The main purpose was to connect the rural community towards various kinds of feasible intervention generating and rejuvenating alternative livelihood sources, following the immediate repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Details of major activities in December, 2020 are as given below.

Dragon Fruit Cultivation Training:

A community-based training programme on dragon fruit cultivation in a scientific manner was jointly organized by the local NGO Aaranyak and the UNDP. A total of 30 participants—including progressive farmers—from remotely located provinces of Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam's foothill villages, totally disconnected in terms of proper transportation and communication services, took part.



Handloom Department, Udalguri:

Each year, Udalguri's handloom department imparts one-year certified diploma weaving courses. But the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted departmental works tremendously as a sufficient number of trainees did not join its courses due to fear of the virus. Even in a post-lockdown situation, trainees are not willing to join these courses due to fear and stigmatization.

From the district coordinator: 'The main purpose was to retain the trainees and bring all of them back. There are many school students and college dropouts who have always remained unemployed due to a lack of training and specialized skillsets. They are always vulnerable to human trafficking. My major intention of intervention in the sector was to advocate for unemployed youths to attain certain skills free of cost and gain a livelihood, and prevent them from falling prey to human trafficking.'

The department also has a handloom production center where trained or skilled weavers can come and weave and earn their livelihoods. Production centers are an institutional set-up. A weaver can earn according to how much they can weave, as per individual capacity. All raw materials are provided by departments. Unfortunately, not a single weaver comes to the production center, thus, this policy advocates as follows: 'Through a joint consultation and advocacy, we will develop a mechanism of forming cluster levels of weaving groups in open community settings. All raw materials will be provided by the department, and production will be marketed by the department. There are many untrained, skilled weavers in villages who are not fortunate and not aware of such government schemes and facilities. Sometimes, these unskilled labourers migrate to other places in search of jobs, where they always face the vulnerability of human trafficking. So, through this UNDP initiative, I tried this policy advocacy to retain these vulnerable groups at home and trained them and connected them with alternative means of livelihood.'

The district coordinator suggested that RSETI conduct the programmes off campus.

He notes that he tried these advocacies because of the following reasons, additionally:

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, ASF (African Swine Fever) had suddenly erupted and killed many pigs in Assam. Due to this, many progressive pig farmers lost their faith and courage in the sector. 'I wanted them to connect their learning and expertise in the sector scientifically,' he says.
- RSETI training provides certification to trainees which helps in gaining subsidy loans.

- Many villagers can't afford to get the travelling and dearness allowances to RSETI in Udalguri Town.
- Maximum villagers are not qualified to get registered under RSETI. However, when the training is conducted off campus, literate and non-literate can both take part and learn.

His understanding is that these sorts of livelihood interventions might result in the following:

Stop migration: Due to migration to other places from native towns and villages, many migrant laborers never returned home. Native migrants are not qualified enough to be familiar with the sociocultural environment outside home.

Stop Human Trafficking: Due to unemployment, many youngsters are more vulnerable and may be lured by false promises of employment; this can be avoided.

Boost Local Economy: Once the local farmers adopt the commercial method, it will boost the family and local economy.

Employment Generation: Slowly and gradually, the commercial piggery will generate employment, to a certain extent.

Banner and Foster Campaign:

Bhairabkunda is a tri-junction picnic hotspot located at the Bhutan – Arunachal Pradesh – Udalguri border in Assam. It has a scenic natural beauty which attracts hundred and thousands of tourists annually. During the busiest months, at the height of picnic season, temporary market stalls/shops/exhibitions of many varieties are installed; indirectly generated revenue for many seasonal shopkeepers, vendors and the government. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, tourist footfall was supposed to be halted, as per the instructions of the government of Assam; meanwhile, the UNDP and Aaranyak, together with the Picnic Committee, held a joint consultation. They decided to implement a policy to disseminate the general message of cleanliness and environmentally-friendly practices, incorporated into instructions regarding the COVID-19 pandemic for all tourists to strictly abide by.



Mushroom Cultivation Training:

This initiative was the joint effort of Aaranyak and the UNDP. The district coordinator tried to bring advocacy to a field-level mass mushroom cultivation training programme with RSETI. This was at a very preliminary stage, and then, due to technical challenges, a joint collaboration with the department of Biotechnology in Bodoland University, Kokrajhar was established. The training was conducted in Sikaridanga, on 30th December, 2020, with more than 100 participants.

The main purpose of organizing mushroom training at the community or field level are as follows, in these observations.

1. To train and engage the mother groups (SHGs) in alternative livelihood sources.
2. To connect/link the community with the networks or government departments.
3. The mother groups can't travel to Udalguri town, far away from home, as most can't afford TA/DA and they are always bound by domestic work. Also, most of them are not qualified to get enrolled in government vocational training institutes; when the training is conducted off campus, literate and

on-literate can both take part and learn.

4. Large chunks of the female labor force remained untrained, therefore, they are neither employed nor self-employed. Thus, it was planned to impart training to mother groups so that they are encouraged and start some initiatives.

5. Married women generally stay at home and are delegated with all the domestic work, leaving them with some free time. If they are motivated and encouraged to work together as a group, they will definitely start something.



Future Planning: In response to the situation post COVID-19, these actions are recommended:

1. Formation of weavers clusters at the community level
2. Advocacy for the agriculture department to provide training in beekeeping at the community level
3. Conducting poultry and piggery training at the community/village level
4. Advocacy work to provide mushroom spawn from the agriculture department

► **Aurangabad**

During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Aurangabad district of Maharashtra has witnessed a massive surge of cases over the past few months. As of 31st December 2020, 45,877 confirmed cases and 1210 deaths have been reported across all nine blocks in Aurangabad. After—and apart from—the nationwide lockdown, this district has increased its testing rate and markedly strengthened healthcare centers to combat COVID-19. The lack of universal access to clean water and overall poor socioeconomic status have posed a major challenge in the fight against COVID-19. Here, we have summarized the present scenario of the pandemic in Aurangabad district and the myriad challenges being faced by the district administration in its fight against COVID-19.

Disaster risk management is the only key to contain the deep impacts of the pandemic. As countries race to implement measures to confront the current crisis, there remains much uncertainty regarding how the situation will progress in the coming months. Alongside direct effects of disease on health and mortality,

widespread social and economic disruptions had deep impacts on human well-being.



The uncertainty, in addition to rumours about the pandemic and its diagnosis and treatment among the rural masses, all posed a big challenge for local government bodies working towards disaster risk mitigation. A few social groups were resisting quarantine and treatment.

In disaster risk management, the right information at the right time in the right place is the solution. Considering all the anomalies, the district authority established a control room or COVID-19 war room for facilitation. The war room has dedicated working groups, aided by statistical data updates which helped the district authorities to make the decisions. A help desk was created to facilitate the rural population's access to COVID-19 healthcare facilities; provide testing and treatment counselling for patients and their family members; offer hot spot analysis of the number of patients in total, active patients, and recovery rate maintenance; provide Asha and A&M worker their training and capacity building, information dissemination in rural area.

A full time call center helps citizens with information regarding bed availability in nearby DHCs and CCCs in order to avoid unnecessary delays in COVID treatment. The online help desk was useful for rural populations to stay informed as to the number of available beds, treatment, nearby testing facilities, nearby COVID care centers, dedicated COVID hospitals and care centers, and quarantine center information. During and post the lockdown, the help desk provided assistance for more than 2000 people for COVID-19 management.

A timely response from the public and the local government is the key factor which improves the situation.

► West Sikkim

West Sikkim is a sparsely populated, mountainous district of the state of Sikkim. The Sikkim State Disaster Management Authority (SSDMA) is a part of the state government. It is a nodal institution for planning, co-ordination and monitoring towards disaster prevention, mitigation, preparedness and management. The SSDMA lays down policies on disaster management for the state. It approves disaster management plans in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the national authorities and coordinates implementation. It provides guidelines and reviews the measures being taken for mitigation, capacity-building and preparedness by the government, issuing guidelines as necessary. Importantly, the SSDMA recommends provision of funds for mitigation and preparedness measures.

► Intervention Areas

UNV District Coordinators in DDMA West Sikkim perform various levels of intervention, from the grass-root level to the District Authority level in close coordination with the District Administration of West Sikkim. The maximum level of interventions was made during the pandemic. Various relief materials were distributed to the needy, along with awareness generation. Facemasks and hand sanitizer distribution among the communities and community-led institutions were part of this.

Close coordination between the departments and national and state sponsored schemes and institutions was managed at a large level. The District NYKS volunteers and the youth leaders were also involved in the COVID-19 intervention. Altogether, a total of 45 containment zones were handled and sanitized under their supervision.



Awareness at 30 public locations on COVID-19 in collaboration with District Health Department at Kyongsa, West Sikkim



COVID-19 awareness through IEC material at Mangalbaria, West Sikkim (village-level intervention)



Public awareness at Arigoan, West Sikkim.



Distribution of 4500 face masks and 3000 hand sanitizers to the elderly in West Sikkim, in collaboration with NYK West Sikkim



▲ Sanitization programme conducted in various community-led institutions such as SHGs, youth clubs and NGO members in Lunzick, West Sikkim; around 50 youths have been mobilized and trained to handle the COVID-19 pandemic



Sanitization of those coming from outside the state; around 45 containment zones have been sanitized with the help of QRTs and volunteers from different departments of the Sikkim government

