Digital Adaptability Quotient during COVID-19:
Stories of Innovation from Indian CSOs

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                                                            Perspective

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABBREVIATIONS

CSO- Civil Society Organization

NGO- Non-Governmental Organisation

WFH- Work from Home

WFO- Work from Office

PFI- Population Foundation of India

AAA- Amhi Aamchya Arogyasathi

AFARM- Action for Agricultural Renewal in Maharashtra

IGSSS- Indo-Global Social Service Society

RSKS- Rajasthan Samgrah Kalyan Sansthan

NMCT- Native Medicare Charitable Trust

RCDC- Regional Centre for Development Cooperation

HDRC- Human Development and Research Centre

YRA- Yuva Rural Association

SINAM- Sadayanodai Ilaingar Narpani Mandram

DA- Development Alternatives

RDT- Rural Development Trust

HAI - Humanitarian Aid Foundation

DST- Development Support Team

SSS- Satya Special School

SOSCVI- SOS Children's Villages of India

CSJ- Centre for Social Justice

NBJK- Nav Bharat Jagriti Kendra

VANI- Voluntary Action Network India

ARV- Anti Retro Viral Therapy

HIV- Human Immunodeficiency Virus

AIDS- Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

PLHIV- People Living with HIV

OST- Opioid Substitution Therapy

EC- Executive Committee

FCRA- Foreign Contribution Regulation Act

PRI- Panchayati Raj Institutions

VCDC- Village Child Development Committee

VDP- Village Defence Parties

KVK- Krishi Vigyan Kendra

AES - Acute Encephalitis Syndrome

PwDb- People with Deafblindness

CCYDN- The Commonwealth Children and Youth Disability Network

HPLF- High- Level Political Forum

UNWDF- United Nations World Data Forum

COSP-13- Conference of State Parties 13

NGO- Non-Governmental Organisation

JLG- Joint Liability Group

WASH- Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

DRR- Disaster Risk Reduction

SXNFES- St. Xavier's Non-Formal Education Society

KBBL- Kaun Banega Business Leader

CSC- Common Service Centres

W4P- Work 4 Progress

MoMSME- Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises

UN- United Nations

A4EP- Alliance for Empowering Partnerships

WHAF- World Humanitarian Action Forum

ADRRN- Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network

CSR- Corporate Social Responsibility

IDT- Integrated Development Trust

DGP- Director General of Police

TARA- Technology and Action for Rural Advancement

SHG- Self Help Group

FFI- Foreign Financial Institution

CBO- Community Based Organisations

AAC- Augmentative and Alternative Communication

CV- Children's Village

VPN- Virtual Private Network

2FA- Two Factor Authentication

IT- Information Technology

OTP- One Time Password

BPL- Below Poverty Line

IDEAL- Institute for Development Education and Learning

DLSA- District Legal Services Authority

SLSA- State Legal Services Authority

PPE- Personal Protective Equipment

IFP- International Forum of National Platforms

AGNA- Affinity Group of National Associations

ICSC- International Civil Society Center

ADA- Asian Democratic Alliance

ADN- Asian Democracy Network

BRICS- Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa

CPDE- CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness

SDG- Sustainable Development Goals

PREFACE

Majority of the voluntary sector organisations, prior to the pandemic, were primarily dependent on traditional methods of communication and fuelling resource mobilisation activities like physical donation drives, fundraising evets, etc. However, since the pandemic hit us, and online platforms became dominant, traditional methods have now become redundant. Therefore, rethinking and redeveloping strategies from a digital lens became a prerequisite. A large number of voluntary organisations, especially in the grassroots, were unprepared, having to instantly accelerate their digital adaptability initiatives in blink of the eye. The same applied to all the other sectors. In addition, while gathering data, it was identified that there existed a technological gap within organisations, including the lack of a digital strategy, inability to use digital tools and lack of connectivity in their geographical locations.

Due to this shift to online storytelling and fundraising activities, such as social media marketing, brand building and online engagements via social media platforms, digital platforms, etc., voluntary sector was able to expand their reach and target larger audiences, while earlier their reach was limited. Importantly, this transportation to the digital space, will prove to be an equaliser for voluntary organisations. A well thought of and practical digital strategy will definitely help organisations in building their brands, showcase their individuality and highlight the impact.

In the post-pandemic world, it is imperative that voluntary organisations continue building their digital models. The COVID-19 voluntary sector impact weighing scale highlighted that in order to survive in the future, to build on the digital skills of employees is extremely necessary. In addition, organisations must invest in the right tools and training, to shatter glass ceilings and deliver greater results.

This study is a sincere effort towards measuring the digital adaptability quotient of the voluntary organisations and recognizing their innovative practices to overcome the impact of the pandemic on their work.

In the end, I would like to thank our research team at VANI, Dr. Pallavi Rekhi (Programme Officer) and Ms. Nivedita Dutta (Programme Manager) for successfully undertaking this study.

Harsh Jaitli
Chief Executive Officer,
VANI

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic caught the entire human race by surprise. It proved that how defenceless we are in the face of a natural calamity or disaster. The virus transcended over national borders and territories claiming the lives of millions of humans irrespective of caste, colour, creed, sex, religious and political ideologies.

During this phase, ensuring the livelihoods of people was of utmost importance. The pandemic, brought about a change in the way companies and various sectors carry out their daily functioning and activities. All the sectors underwent complete digitization, be it with their customers, beneficiaries, supply chains or their internal operations. Being digitally literate or tech-savvy became a necessity. In the current economic scenario, all companies have recognized the strategic importance of technology. Digital adaptation has taken a quantum leap both at the organizational and industrial levels (McKinsey, 2020). Most of the public had taken recourse to online media platforms and organizations or companies had, in turn, responded to it. Even World Health Organization (WHO) received overwhelming pro-bono support from various tech companies to take swift actions against the virus. "We need your commitment, so we can turn those ideas into reality and work with public health agencies and frontline health workers to put this pandemic to rest," said WHO Director-General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, in his welcoming remark. "We can only tackle this global threat - and get our economy back on track - by working together."

"Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next."- Arundhati Roy (The pandemic is a portal). The pandemic did teach us an important lesson that if people come and stand together, they can overcome any hurdles. Thereby, it was also during this time, that people gradually realized the importance of civil societies and their effective contributions. It showed that how resilient we are as a community even in the face of adversity. Reports from across the globe and recent research conducted by Nottingham Trent University, revealed a rise in digital volunteering services and how almost 90% of the voluntary organizations moved their operations online. This also increased the number of volunteering roles with different skill sets, who worked remotely.

For many years, there have been several advocates of digital transformation in the international humanitarian and development sector who have minutely analysed what technology has been able to achieve within industries, governments, economies, and societies. They advocate that with a comparable strategy and investment in digital capabilities, the non-profit sector stands to reap substantial benefits. It was the pandemic that provided a push to resort for them to use digital platforms (Bharania, 2020). "Instead of seeing digital investment and capacity building as taking away from service delivery in the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, the digital investment must be seen as fundamentally enabling the mission and impact to continue through a historic disruption." In April 2020, the U.S. Agency for International Development published its first digital strategy for the global development community that aimed to ensure that development action would "use the latest digital technology to push the development system to become more effective, transparent, and accountable."[1]

Shifting completely to a digital platform for running basic operations of an organization or sector is easier said than done. To truly adapt to digital platforms means that the organization has the responsibility to unify people, processes, culture, values, attitudes, behaviour and technology to function seamlessly. Therefore, this study has been undertaken by VANI, to understand the digital adaptability in the voluntary sector during the pandemic in India -to understand how they became digitally resilient, the effectiveness, their stories of innovation to combat the hurdles created by pandemic and how this shift or transition to digital platforms affected their working style. We have done this by collating data from our member organizations.

Population Foundation of India (PFI)

PFI is a national NGO, which promotes and advocates for the effective formulation and implementation of gender sensitive population, health and development strategies and policies. The organisation was founded in 1970 by a group of socially committed industrialists under the leadership of the late JRD Tata and Dr Bharat Ram.

PFI has been addressing population issues within the larger discourse of empowering women and men, so that they are able to make informed decisions related to their fertility, health and well-being. PFI works with the government, both at the national and state levels, and with NGOs, in the areas of family planning, reproductive and sexual health of adolescents, community action for health, scaling up of successful pilots and social and behaviour change communication. They are a pan India organization whose main offices are located in Delhi and regional offices in Bihar, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

domestic or international. The organisation majorly depended on its field visits and on-ground trainings. It was easier for them, at that time to collect stories and data from the field during the pre-COVID-19 days. There were organisational/project updates every fortnight to keep track of what each team was working on.

However, in the face of COVID-19 pandemic, the work style and nature of work got disrupted. A different work strategy was adopted which included shifting all the meetings online (internal as well as external), putting a hold

In the pre-COVID-19 times, the organisation's style of work did not include Zoom/Microsoft Teams Meetings or online webinars. Meetings took place face-to-face – they would usually travel for a big meeting/seminar whether

on on-ground visits, leaving field volunteers out of work, cancelling physical meetings, seminars, workshops and ceremonies like an Oration Ceremony to commemorate 50 years of PFI.

To cope up with the changing environment and to ensure sustainability during COVID-19, PFI, started using email and WhatsApp for sharing and reviewing information while, Microsoft Teams and Zoom for online meetings with the team and other stakeholders. In this way, all programmes and administrative staff were connected remotely. They were provided with laptops by the organisation and regular online team meetings were conducted. Remote working helped in continuing the work despite the lockdown. Check in calls, and daily work reporting helped colleagues to connect and keep working on targets.

For information sharing and management, infographics, video clips and short photo-based films were developed and shared with the stakeholders through WhatsApp and email. This helped spread information and fight fake news to some extent. However, PFI couldn't track the reach on WhatsApp or measure its qualitative impact. Nonetheless, ministries requested PFI for more content and reached out for other campaigns as well. For example, the Bihar government saw PFI's work on COVID-19 and requested them to create materials to talk about AES as well.

Financial approval systems were also moved online. PFI was able to roll out a national level COVID-19 campaign while working remotely. However, challenges were faced as service providers and stakeholders were not always available. Colleagues were also not technologically skilled and had to learn to work in new ways to adapt to new systems of reviewing and connecting. The organisation itself, provided technical support to those colleagues who required it.

In this process, however, they faced certain challenges like poor connectivity, lack of essential services, adaptability and time management. Nevertheless, PFI overcame these hurdles innovatively by putting in place systems for regular check-in calls, timings for official meetings and tech-support to colleagues who required it. Employees facing anxiety or personal difficulties were given support through Human Resources. As a result of which, employees were able to adapt quite seamlessly to the WFH. Once the lockdown was lifted, they were also able to move quickly back to a hybrid of WFH and WFO arrangement.

In order to continue with their efforts to control population in India, and not allow the pandemic to seize their activities and impact, reach out to the citizens of India with information on Family Planning, they adopted some very creative models:

- Ensuring that engaging and informative content was developed in English, Hindi and 8 regional languages to provide people with updated, reliable and verified content on a regular basis using social media platforms and tools.

- Tools like CrowdTangle were used to track media reports and data around COVID-19 daily to ensure that they shared authentic information on all social media platforms and with government agencies.

- A special film was also created to highlight the efforts and thank women frontline health workers.

- They also created short video clips using a mascot - 'Potliwala' to promote COVID-19 appropriate behaviour and overcome stigma around the pandemic.
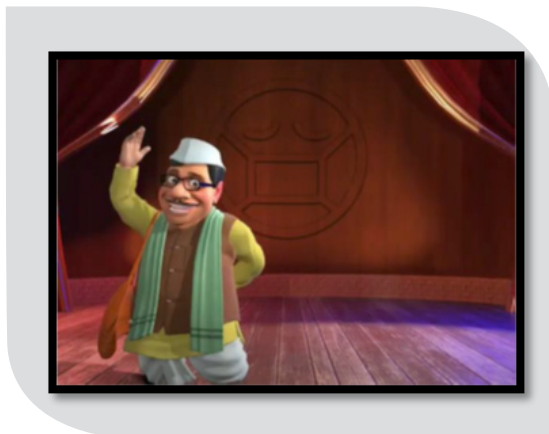
- Sentiment analysis and Facebook analytics were reviewed to target posts and tackle misinformation for more effective communication.

- On the request of the respective state governments short films were made highlighting the efforts made by the states of Odisha, Kerala, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand in tackling COVID-19.

- All their content was shared on various Government/ministry pages and with their professional networks via WhatsApp.

- A larger campaign on building hope during the pandemic – Himmat Hai Toh Jeet Hai was created, wherein individuals also shared their stories of victory when all hope was lost due to COVID-19.

- Since people were at home and some out of jobs, PFI used this opportunity to introduce and promote their free online

teacher training program on adolescent health and well-being - ARSH for You.

As an organization they developed their skills and attributes in order to continually improve, perform at a higher level and be better connected to the changing work environment.

Thereby, it is evident that collaboration, analytical thinking and outcome-driven decision-making were most essential during the COVID-19 pandemic.

DEEPALAYA

Deepalaya is a 42-year-old organization, working for the underprivileged people of the society in India. It was founded on 16th July 1979 in New Delhi and expanded its reach to the nine Indian states. The thematic areas where they work in is education, both urban-rural, formal, nonformal, remedial, early childhood education and care and government school interventions. They also work in five other sectors including community health, women empowerment, skill development, institutional care and rehabilitation of differently-abled. Most of their centres are in Delhi and northern states of India such as Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana and Uttarakhand. They also have a digital presence in the south Indian states such as Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Telangana.

In the pre-COVID-19 times, Deepalaya was operating just like any other organisation with its staff and beneficiaries visiting their premises daily. The schools and learning centres were all properly functioning. The staff at the centres were directly connected with beneficiaries and the community where they were working.

Due to the COVID-19 lockdown, all their centres and schools were closed as per the instructions received from the government authorities. A few of their centres which were running on to the rented locations were permanently closed. A few of the corporates stopped funding. So, they had to close those projects as well. Unfortunately, many of their staff lost their jobs due to this lack of funding. It was a huge loss on both sides.

During the crisis, as a known NGO that has created great impact, they shared a good relationship with all their stakeholders. To reach their beneficiaries during the lockdown, they used direct phone calls, WhatsApp, video calls, Zoom meetings, Google Meet, etc. For disseminating information and knowledge amongst staff and beneficiaries, voice calls, WhatsApp, and video calls were used. Zoom meetings, Google Meet, calls and emails were used for connecting regularly with their funders.

Initially, getting adapted to technology was problematic for their staff and beneficiaries but through constant communication and in-house experts, they were able to train and guide them in this area. Through these digital

platforms, they could regularly connect with all their stakeholders and map the challenges and problems they were facing in these difficult times. Based on their findings, they could deliver services as part of the COVID-19 relief work during the lockdown and post lockdown as well.

As part of innovatively continuing their efforts and reaching out to beneficiaries, Deepalaya made infographics based on their experiences during the lockdown. These infographics were available for the general public to implement Deepalaya's learnings for their own education drive programmes. In addition, Deepalaya's teachers created a video playlist based on the subjects that were being taught in their schools and centres which was then shared with the beneficiaries and their parents through WhatsApp and SMS. They created a teacher's group on WhatsApp and Skype where anyone could post anything related to the subjects and topics that were being taught. The group was an open forum for discussion, problem sharing and finding the right solutions to their issues. They collaborated with various NGOs and volunteers who helped in building the capacities of their staff as virtual classes were an entirely new space for our teachers.

Staff members from certain departments were already working on remote devices. They were identified and were given work from home facility. For some people whose nature of work did not allow work from home, the organization requested them to come to office on alternative days and do their work from the office. They even purchased laptops for the other staff members who were interested in working from home. They set up a virtual private network on the devices which the staff was using from their homes so that they could have access to official communication without any hurdles. All of them were connected via various Google Apps. Some of the staff members worked more productively than the usual office hours. This passion helped the organization in getting the required funds for providing support to the needy. Through all these efforts they were able to support more than 20000 families.

As far as supply chain was concerned, all the related issues were actively handled by the administration and finance team at Deepalaya. They used whatever resources that they had at their disposal. Some funders were kind enough to provide transportation facility to their corporate office - the main point of distribution for all their locations. The staff of Deepalaya arranged raw material for the dry ration kits, packed them properly and distributed them as per the request from all our centres. The volunteers supported them in the smooth distribution of the ration to the right beneficiaries. The teachers and community mobilisers arranged the data of needy people by calling them directly, listening to their problems and confirming the details well in advance before the distribution took place. All the records were maintained in a digital sheet which was accessible to all the decision-makers in the organization. To maintain social distancing and avoid the crowd at the ration distribution points, a system of sending SMSs to the beneficiaries was developed, which had a unique token with the time and location of the distribution.

The most difficult task for any technology enthusiast is teaching technology to people who have never used a computer and a laptop in their lives. Many of Deepalaya's staff members had limited access to electricity and internet facilities in interior rural India. Deepalaya took up this challenge in a positive way, and one of their staff members taught the teachers and staff, the use of free online tools to make their work easier and efficient. They arranged trainings on using free Google applications for the staff members. Sessions were conducted on Google Docs, Sheets, Slides, Meet and Skype so that the staff could remain connected with each other and work easily by using their smartphones and laptops. Deepalaya considers itself fortunate that most of the staff members incorporated these tools in their daily work which helped the organization in achieving what they wanted. Deepalaya had never imagined that they would be able to conduct so many capacity building training sessions for their staff in a year, but the digital platforms made it possible, by using tools like Skype, Zoom and Google Meet.

The organization feels proud that all their staff members were able to attend these sessions, including those from remote regions who gathered at one place and attended the training from one mobile phone.

This shows where there is a will,
there is always a way.

AMHI AAMCHYA AROGYASATHI (AAA)

AAA, founded in the year 1984, was conceptualized as a platform based on the notion of the youth movement principle - "let us strive to find our way and direction." The thematic areas that the organization works around include strengthening community-based institutions to improve the health system, strengthening the sustainable livelihood of scheduled tribes and other traditional forest dwellers, empowering youth through education, community-based rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, empowering women through strengthening community-based institutions.

Their major aim is to apply this principle to help the marginalized sections of the society-women, children, Dalit, tribals and people with disabilities, mainly in the far corners of Maharashtra and Kurkheda block of Gadchiroli district bordering Chhattisgarh. They are currently working in rural and urban areas of Gadchiroli, Chandrapur, Bhandara, Gondia & Nagpur District in Maharashtra.

With the sudden imposition of the lockdown, there was a complete disruption in working with the communities in terms of livelihood, education, rights, PwDs etc. The entire annual planning for these projects or initiatives collapsed. Many such staff and community training programs were also disrupted.

As the schools were closed, parents had to be counselled a lot about continuing classes of their children at home in the presence of fewer children. The organization took the initiative of helping them getting equipped with the digital world by teaching them how to use Google Forms, Google Meet, Zoom etc.

It gradually became impossible for the workers to go to the village. However, the organization overcame all these challenges, by looking for different alternatives.

During the initial stages of COVID-19, the organization tried to analyse the situation of the virus in the villages they were working in across the country.

At the same time, to implement COVID-19 mitigation activities, it became difficult to get a government pass for the distribution of ration kits to these vulnerable communities.

They were able to segregate people into different categories like single women, persons with disabilities, small and marginal farmers, endangered pregnant mothers,

malnourished children, and poor urban families living on daily wages and were able to provide people with masks, ration kits etc. with the help of donations from several individuals, organizations and trusts.

Barring the healthcare workers, they experienced difficulties working in the field of education, livelihood, etc. due to the pandemic. There were fewer means to communicate with the people in the village, but they came up with a brilliant idea to monitor the situation on the ground, (in the villages) by assigning field staff from among the residents of the village.

Due to the pandemic situation, they were forced to work remotely at different villages

that they hadn't even previously visited. However, with a little help from the local authorities, the organization was able to work in those villages and render services during these tough times.

They went through a complete digitization. This was possible because of the skill training sessions, in regard to the usage of digital platforms, that had been conducted physically since 2015. All the important meetings, pitch presentations to funders, review meetings etc. all took place through the medium of online video conferencing.

One of the greatest achievements of the organization was that even in such a dire situation, they were able to complete the survey of 200+ villages using technology. It was difficult for the workers to use the Google form for this, but a PDF file was sent across through zoom and Google Meet, explaining the entire process of using it. The same was done for all the surveyors involved with the survey work.

The story of AAA is one of inculcating and learning certain skills and values which can come in handy during a crisis.

It is all about learning,
unlearning and relearning.

ALLIANCE INDIA

Founded in 1999, India HIV/AIDS Alliance (Alliance India) is a non-governmental organisation operating in partnership with civil society, government and communities to support sustained responses to HIV in India that protect rights and improve health. Complementing the Indian national programme, we build capacity, provide technical support and advocate to strengthen the delivery of effective, innovative, community-based HIV programmes to vulnerable populations affected by the epidemic. Alliance India is currently working with the governments and communities of seven countries that include India, Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Nepal and Indonesia.

In pre-COVID-19 times, through community-led and technology-based outreach, Care & Support Centres (CSCs) of the Vihaan programme of the organization which was mainly linked with all functional antiretroviral therapy (ART) centres across India, provided treatment preparedness, adherence and retention support services, reduced stigma and discrimination, and improved the quality of life of People Living with HIV. Vihaan Care & Support programme of Alliance India was committed to enhancing treatment adherence and retention in HIV care for people living with HIV in India.

The programme was implemented nationwide in a diverse partnership with the government, civil society, and the networks of people living with HIV. The programme served nearly 1.6 million PLHIV through its 319 Care and Support Centres spread across 28 states and 4 union territories in India.

In these uncertain times, they remained steadfast in their resolve to strengthen the resilience of communities to mitigate the challenges of the COVID-19 outbreak. They also solicited support from several corporate entities to provide safety items for their field staff. Alliance India even worked with civil society partners and government agencies to ensure access to antiretroviral (ARV) medication. In partnership with State AIDS Control Societies across India, they had around 1574 outreach workers who put their own lives on the line to supply antiretroviral medication to those who weren't able to access it due to the non-availability of transport services.

Their 320 CSCs across India took various steps to support communities, including the supply of essential food provisions. The announcement of a nationwide lockdown made things difficult for people who used drugs to access Opioid substitution therapy (OST) services.

As an organization, they were able to connect with their stakeholders with the help of digital platforms such as Google Meet, Zoom, WhatsApp, etc, just like all the other organisations. They were active on all their social media handles and website which allowed them to stay in touch with the people and help them out during these tough times by responding to their resources/medicines requests that they received via Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other social media collaterals. Alliance India is a perfect example of how to look out for an opportunity even in the time of a worldwide crisis, involve larger audiences in your cause through various online platforms, which remains limited if we continue using traditional methods of stakeholder engagement.

Although, initially the staff of the organization faced difficulties to adapt to the WFH culture but with patience and acceptance they were finally able to pull it off. Their field representatives were ever ready to help people in need and this has been one of their strengths that has helped them as an organization and also a major reason for being one of the most active NGOs in the sector.

They remind us to turn even a crisis into an opportunity.

Alliance India

ACTION FOR AGRICULTURAL RENEWAL IN MAHARASHTRA (AFARM)

AFARM is an association of Voluntary Organizations working in the field of Rural Development in Maharashtra. Our work revolves around Community Institutions and Capacity Development Integrated Water Resources Development, Sustainable and Climate Resilient Agriculture, Skills Development and Livelihoods, Networking & Advocacy, Monitoring and Evaluations.

They basically function at three levels, namely: Organizational level, Stakeholder level, Community level.

In pre- COVID-19 times, they used to have physical bi-monthly Executive Committee (EC) meetings, in-person discussions, physical monthly reviews, etc. at the organizational level. Physical workshops & training, monitoring visits, site visits, etc. at the stakeholder level and group discussions, weekly kiosk, exposure visits, etc. at the community level, used to take place.

With the introduction of COVID-19 and lockdown, all the levels of the organization went through a technological and digital transformation, as that became a prerequisite for survival.

The important meetings which used to happen physically were shifted to online video conferencing applications which included everything from executive committee members meeting at the organizational level to the hand-holding support meetings.

Digital modes were adopted for all levels of communication:

1. **Organisational Level**
   a. EC Members – Bimonthly EC meetings, review meetings and consultations for organisational decadal strategy planning.
   b. AFARM Staff – Planning meetings, administrative functions, webinars, etc

2. **Stakeholder Level**
   a. AFARM Members – Annual General Body meeting, project review workshops, webinars, etc.
   b. Funding Agencies – Progress reviews, field e-verification, virtual visits, etc.

3. **Community Level**
   a. Operational teams – Project planning & review meetings
   b. Community members – Awareness, online surveys, feedbacks, trainings, etc

Initially, the staff, beneficiaries and the members faced technical challenges in

using digital applications, internet bandwidth issues, etc. However, with their due diligence and determination, every member was able to overcome these hurdles and adapt to the WFH situation.

Even during the lockdown period, AFARM takes pride in the fact that they were able to conduct a detailed study of the 7,574 migrant workers from 948 villages spread across 28 districts of Maharashtra, covering five regions of the State. Those migrant households who lost their means of livelihood in the cities & as a result decided to stay back in their native villages, looking for alternative livelihoods were the target group of the study. This study started in June 2020. More than 68 AFARM members/ associates took part in the study.

Digital tools like Epicollect App, Google Meet/ Zoom, etc were used for conducting this survey during the lockdown. Virtual interviews were scheduled on a conference call and the data was shared through Google.

An application called "Epicollect" was used for data collection. Google Meet and Hangout were used for discussions and finalization of the study. Orientation of surveyors and pilot testing was conducted through Zoom calls. All these digital platforms came in handy for AFARM and their activities were continued successfully.

However, a significant hurdle that the team faced was that majority of the members involved in survey work were not very familiar with mobile application-based data collection. After the initial testing period, the surveyors did get accustomed to the survey format and the use of the mobile application. However, in certain cases, some small issues did persist. Despite having a lack of direct communication, unfamiliarity with mobile apps, fear and anxiety among the stakeholders, it was an inspiring experience of successfully conducting a livelihood scoping study in Maharashtra.

The sheer dedication of the members of AFARM teaches us that a will to learn and determination to do things can help us overcome any difficult situations that our life throws at us.

INDO-GLOBAL SOCIAL SERVICE SOCIETY-NORTH EAST INDIA (IGSSS)

IGSSS is a non-profit organization established in 1960 which works for the development, capacity building and entitlement of the vulnerable communities across the country to achieve a positive transformation in their quality of life. Our major focus or thematic areas include - sustainable livelihood, disaster risk reduction, youth development, urban poverty reduction, climate change adaptation, and gender equity.

Before the pandemic and the implementation of the FCRA Amendment Act, they implemented projects either directly or through partner organizations. The project teams were directly responsible for the implementation and management of the project. This was majorly based on the geographical context of the project locations in adherence to IGSSS policies and guidelines. The field teams were always in direct contact with the community through field visits and communication.

With the unprecedented pandemic, the situation became really tricky, which slowed down the activities. With the imposition of the lockdown, as everyone started working from home, Direct Action Plans of all the projects were reviewed to chalk out new strategies. Moreover, as the government imposed total restrictions on movement and any public gathering, many activities got postponed till the guidelines in this regard were relaxed.

However, they took the opportunity, during this period to focus on research and documentation. They also undertook several studies on the impact of COVID-19 and subsequent lockdown on marginalized groups.

As was the need of the hour, they explored the many possibilities of digital platforms to stay connected with stakeholders more consistently - the village headman, PRI/VCDC members, VDP, teachers, health workers, community resource persons(volunteers) and community leaders. Across their several projects, they had village level committees, trained task force groups and community resource persons. Digital platforms such as WhatsApp, audio conference call, Zoom and Google Meet were used for disseminating important messages via existing village level committees and task force members to the target community. The staff had also undergone many trainings to enhance their own understanding of the subject, before further passing on the messages to the community. In few instances where there were no smart phones, communication was done directly through a basic phone call. A little virtual orientation was provided to the stakeholders about platforms like Zoom and Google Meet to help them attend various sessions aimed towards responding to unprecedented circumstances arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic, be it on health, WASH, parenting, livestock management,

and agriculture practices. Depending on the topic of the awareness, resource persons were invited from Health Department, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary, KVK, Agriculture etc.

These initiatives strengthened the capacities of stakeholders to take up necessary actions at their own level, particularly, in regulating the movement of people, maintaining quarantine centres, manage diseases in livestock and crops and so on. Having learned to deal with their situations with minimum external support, the community, therefore, felt empowered. With due permission from district authority, voice messages on dos' and don'ts' on COVID-19 were recorded in vernacular languages and disseminated through milking in intervention areas.

Remote working passed through different phases from redesigning of the project activities to involving the community more in implementation of the ongoing work and shifting towards online transactions with local vendors. For specific tasks, conference call was preferred to communicate with team members. However, there were regular coordination meetings within the organization through Microsoft Teams to update and discuss strategies to accomplish planned activities following the government guidelines. Moreover, to keep the morale of the employees high, the human resource department regularly organized many fun games and other creative activities through online platforms. Remote working also helped in strengthening the network with stakeholders, improving interpersonal and communication skills, online accounting/ distribution and many more.

However, there were some minor hiccups. One major challenge in north-eastern states like Assam was that people were also hit by the monsoon flood leaving many of them stranded at the relief camps for shelter and safety. Under such circumstances, the trained task-force members and community volunteers managed to stay in touch while providing regular updates from the ground enabling them to undertake timely emergency responses in these intervention areas. Those who did not have internet access or an android phone to attend the virtual awareness sessions contacted the community volunteers either to join through their phone or get an update on the same from them. In the initial period, there were uncertainties over the extension of lockdown, and everything came to a standstill that impacted the organization's ongoing activities but as restrictions were relaxed the organization explored ways to gain momentum with the support of community volunteers and resorted to online accounting.

The whole process from online transaction to distribution to documentation and everything else, during the COVID-19 humanitarian response, was digitized. Generation of QR Codes for each beneficiary was scanned to authenticate the identity before distribution. Details of each of the beneficiaries were later updated onto Kobo Collect App.

IGSSS's story of digital innovation teaches us that "Resilience is knowing that you are the only one that has the power to pick yourself up, when required".

IIFL FOUNDATION

IIFL Foundation is the CSR arm of the IIFL Group, a financial service conglomerate. IIFL Foundation was established in 2015 to contribute towards addressing the most pressing problems faced by our country.

The major focus areas include:

HEALTH	*Aarogya*, COVID- 19 prevention, Mega health camps and distribution of oxygen concentrators
EDUCATION	*Sakhiyon Ki Baadi*, volunteering, *Maa Baadi* centers, Construction of schools, mobile schools and scholarships
LIVELIHOOD	Livestock Development, employment for women and *e-Mela*
POVERTY ALLEVIATION	Financial literacy and micro- finance

In addition to this, they contribute to disaster relief measures of state and central governments. They worked pro-actively during the pandemic by donating to the PM Cares Fund, extending help to hospitals and non-government organizations and distributing essentials to the marginalized sections of the community. They are currently working actively in the states of Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh.

In the pre-COVID-19 times, they were working pro-actively to eradicate female illiteracy from the chosen districts of Rajasthan through their

Sakhiyon Ki Baadi initiative - a community based non-formal learning centre for girls. Each Sakhiyon Ki Baadi operated for 4 hours a day and 6 six days a week. Sessions were conducted by a Daksha (learning facilitator), preferably a female from the same or the nearest village. Each Sakhiyon Ki Baadi ran in a place allotted by the community viz. someone's house, veranda, community hall or a common open area. Learnings usually happened through interactive sessions based on the play-way method. They used music and drama to engage the students. The subjects covered included Hindi,

English, Maths and Moral Sciences which were drawn from the curriculum followed by the government schools in Rajasthan. In the primary stages of cognitive development, the focus was to develop the speaking, listening, reading, writing and thinking abilities of the students. Girls at par with boys were encouraged to become curious learners and keen observers.

Each Sakhiyon Ki Baadi was an independent unit, as it was set up in a village that exudes a distinct culture, language and belongs to a distinct tribal community. Overall, through this initiative, they engaged directly with the scheduled tribes of Rajasthan *viz a viz* Bhil, Meena, Garasiya, Kalbeliya, Gameti, Vagari and Rebari.

The distinctive characteristics of this initiative were:
A) Covertly contributed to the conservation of indigenous languages
B) Employed 1,000+ tribal women (as a Teacher - Daksha)
C) Promoted adult education among women.

The primary objective of the initiative was to create happy, confident, educated girls and offer them an equitable opportunity to grow in society. Since 2016, they covered 1,218 villages across 11 districts of Rajasthan, empowering over 35,964 girls.

However, with the declaration of lockdown by the central government, they were left with no choice but to shut down those learning centres. The field staff had to stop visits to the centres and withhold home visits and meetings with the community members. Interaction and engagement with the children came to a complete halt for 40-45 days. During the pandemic, they focused on turning

The initiative helped achieving 3 key UN's Sustainable Development Goals – Quality Education (SDG 4), Gender Equality (SDG 5) and Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10)

challenges into opportunities. They revisited their vision by staying true to their values of integrity and discipline. Their response to COVID-19 can be summarized as follows:

*Challenges *Opportunities *Vision *Integrity *Discipline

The women from the community (teachers) being native to tribal hamlets, did not have access to technology and hence were not adept at using it. At first, they were brought together over WhatsApp, establishing a two-way communication channel. Through these WhatsApp groups, they were taught to interact and participate in online training (subjective) over virtual platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet.

The absence of gadgets (android phone), poor network connectivity and lack of technical knowledge were the key challenges they faced. They overcame these challenges by working together with community members. For instance, a community member lent his android phone to the teacher, so she could attend trainings, another community member educated them about the usage of mobile application for attending online trainings and so on.


Consequently, 500+ teachers became technically sound to use the mobile phone (Android), to communicate and learn (connect with online training) and thus continued to learn and in return educate the girls at Sakhiyon Ki Baadi. With the newly built digital connect, they prepared video tutorials and PDF documents, images that facilitated the teaching activities. These study materials were shared over WhatsApp with the teachers. The

organization conducted live training sessions over Zoom and Google Meet. The teachers started taking classes in small batches of 5 children instead of 30 following the social distancing protocols along with masks and sanitizers - SMS strategy. It was ensured that masks were worn properly and that the classes were conducted in open ground to reduce any chances of close contact.

Thus, even during the lockdown, the stakeholders didn't feel cut-off or isolated. We engaged them with their peers and teams over online platforms. This period allowed them to grow their understanding of gadgets (Android phones) and technology.

Another challenge was to understand and read PDF documents, watch videos and links shared over WhatsApp. We overcame this through online support and peer learning.
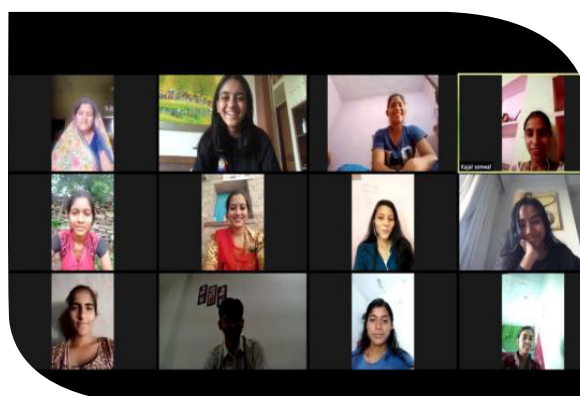
Remote working was facilitated by using phone calls, WhatsApp communication and video calls (Zoom, Google Meet). This enabled the training team to coordinate with the on-field team. Similarly, Block Managers, District Managers, Trainers and Program Managers were connected remotely through these mediums. Working remotely allowed the team to define new objectives of the program (building awareness around the pandemic, ensuring continuity of the literacy programs) and staying connected. Our team assisted the local government machinery *viz a viz* Anganwadi workers, Primary Healthcare

Centers and Gram Panchayats, to spread awareness and mobilize resources from within the community.

Despite the trying times, they were still able to engage with the community and address their needs. In times of pandemic, the need was high to spread awareness in the rural hamlets, especially the ones that are cut-off from the Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, hence lack in a spread of genuine information.

Women from the community sewed cloth masks for mass distribution. Donors were sought and persuaded to donate essentials as hand wash liquids and sanitisers. Through home visits (maintaining social distancing norms), community members were taught best practices towards hygiene and self-care during the pandemic.
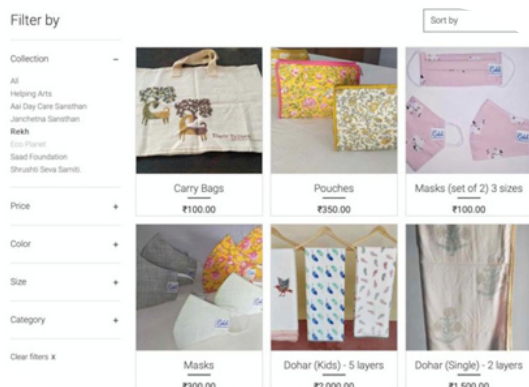
The elder generation from the community was looked after with intensive care. As the government lifted lockdown and allowed movement between the blocks, the study material and monthly magazines (compiled) were sent to the *Sakhiyon ki Baadi* centres, to engage the children who were deprived of learning over the past few months.

They also hosted an online celebration - Anand Utsav in January 2021. This event marked the successful completion of four years of fulfilling the mission to spread literacy among out-of-school girls. Bringing 30,000+ girls together for a celebration was an impossible task to achieve. It was a problem that they sought a solution for, over the past 2 years. The online connectivity with dakshas (teachers) during the lockdown phase, proved to be a boon to bring together (virtually) thousands of stakeholders. Mrs. Sangeeta Ji Beniwal (Chairperson – Rajasthan State Commission for Protection of Child Rights) graced the program by motivating the children, as a guest. The event was also celebrated to commemorate the achievements of the team members, who did some exemplary work within the community during the pandemic.

Their story of innovation reminds us to find opportunities even during the time of crisis.
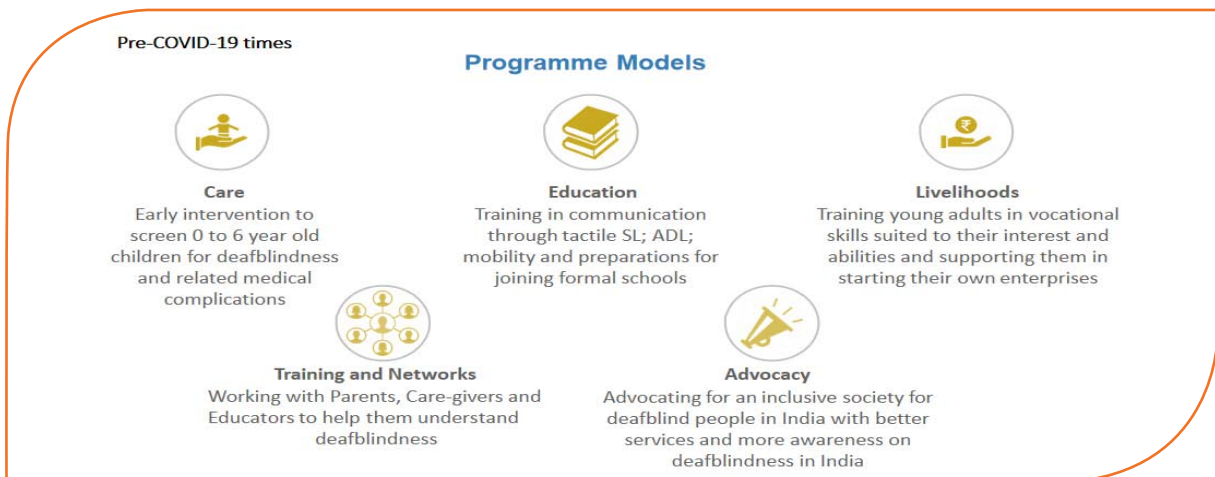
SENSE INDIA INTERNATIONAL

Founded in 1997, Sense International India, which started with a mere 25 children has now reached over 78,000 Deafblind Children and Adults. The organization has enabled access to education for 63,500 children through collaboration with Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. They have covered 23 states, 96 districts, and have 61 partners. They have also established 4 Deafblind Regional Centres and 6 Deafblind State Centres. They have partnerships with leading organisations in Nepal, Bangladesh, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Malaysia.

In the pre-COVID-19 times, their work modes were as follows:

nutrition support. However, due to the pandemic induced lockdown, most of their service users lost their income sources. During this time of emergency, the special needs of PwDb created an additional financial and emotional burden for their survival. The lack of therapeutic support led to their deterioration and de-learning. On 9th March 2020, they decided to cancel/ postpone all the upcoming events- state-level training, national events, M&E visits, onsite training and monitoring. An advisory was shared with all their partner organisations to act as

Pre-COVID-19 times

Programme Models

Care
Early intervention to screen 0 to 6 year old children for deafblindness and related medical complications

Education
Training in communication through tactile SL; ADL; mobility and preparations for joining formal schools

Livelihoods
Training young adults in vocational skills suited to their interest and abilities and supporting them in starting their own enterprises

Training and Networks
Working with Parents, Care-givers and Educators to help them understand deafblindness

Advocacy
Advocating for an inclusive society for deafblind people in India with better services and more awareness on deafblindness in India

Most of their service users came from poor families with only one or two earning members in the family. Due to co-morbid conditions, people with Deafblindness (PwDb) need adequate medicinal and

per the state rules and regulations issued on COVID-19. All deafblind units, as well as home-based services by field staff, were kept on hold till further advisory from the government.

Soon they shifted to 'Work from Home'. They introduced an online training mechanism both at Sense India and at the partner level. They started using available resources & technology (handsets, smartphone, laptop, different meeting apps which has audio and video conferencing, internet etc.) to stay connected with persons with deaf blindness, parents and educators, but non-availability of smartphone and reliable network was a challenge.

There were several follow-ups, monitoring and evaluation through both online and offline mechanisms (depending on the permission of the local government approval). WhatsApp groups were created for "Parents", "Co-ordinators", "Educators" and "Head of the Organisation" for regular sharing of updated information, training modules and follow-up. They conducted two surveys to understand the situation of parents and adults with deafblindness during COVID-19. The survey focused on- "Understanding COVID-19, Safeguarding, and Psychosocial impact".

They ensured online engagement of adults with deafblindness, their family members and support persons. They participated in webinars, round table discussions, RTI workshops and policy consultations. All the projects and planned activities were conducted online. Several networks' members of various states came together through online state and regional meetings to share their experiences and strengthen their local groups.

State advocacy meetings were attended by disability commissioners and directors from state departments of education, health and social welfare. Family network members started interacting with officials to resolve issues related to disability pension, ration and medicine support during the lockdown. Members supported each other as well through online meetings.

They ensured deafblind inclusion in the CCYDN global statement and recommendations for PwDb and the National Human Rights Commission state-level experiences of India advisory. They have also successfully leveraged their special consultative status at United Nations to get visibility for persons with deafblindness at HPLF, UNWDF and COSP13.

The vision of Sense International India reminds us
the worth of all Individuals and embracing diversity
and inclusion for all.

RAJASTHAN SAMGRAH KALYAN SANSTHAN (RSKS INDIA)

RSKS India is a grassroots Indian Non-Profit organization, situated at the foot-hill of Aravalli Range in the holy city of Ajmer District of Rajasthan. The organization was founded on 2nd December 1992 by a group of young sensitive youths in the interest of society. RSKS is a pioneer organization helping marginalized women & girls in India. RSKS is a pioneer in the promotion of Women Empowerment, Sustainable Livelihood, Girls Education, Disability, Gender Equality, Child Rights & Welfare, Agriculture, Environmental and Water Issues for the Marginalized & deprived sections of the community. RSKS India is currently working in the rural and semi-rural areas of Ajmer.

The pre-COVID-19 times were extremely intensive for RSKS India as they worked on 10 focus areas mentioned above.

Face to face workshops were conducted with mass gatherings, focusing on their key areas of work. They used to run vocational skill education schools for the young women and girls living in rural and marginalized areas. Their field staff was not digitally sound, but it never impacted their work as they used flip charts, story sessions, puppet shows, video lessons etc. for creating awareness and did home-based activities with the disabled children. They successfully operated three schools which majorly enrolled street children, i.e., poor girls who were 6-14 years of age and women who were school drop-outs. The villages in which they worked were very far away and the team used to go there by public transport.

However, when the COVID-19 pandemic struck, all these practices became impossible. COVID-19 wreaked a havoc on all their programs. Due to the COVID-19 imposed lockdown, there were many travel restrictions. Public transport was also stopped, which hindered the access of their field workers to the area. Their schools were immediately shut down. Along with these schools their vocational training schools were also closed which were providing skill training to the rural and marginalized young women and girls. Their team was unable to do home-based activities with the children with disabilities due to the COVID-19 safety protocols and safety restrictions. In short, all their programs were deeply impacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Gradually, they moved their work to the digital medium, despite the team and stakeholders (most of their stakeholders belong to the marginalized and deprived community), not being comfortable with digital platforms, at the beginning. Therefore, they provided the stakeholders' trainings, via video calls to motivate them and reduce stress, WhatsApp was used to be in touch with the beneficiaries whenever they were in need, constantly updated the website for awareness and showcasing their campaign

"Together We Can", and social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter etc. for awareness creation on COVID-19. The campaign was launched on 15th April 2020, after which a large number of people digitally became part of this campaign.


Fortunately, their experience with supply chain management was very good. In the first week of the lockdown they were stressed about the continuity of their activities. However, they started engaging and motivating their beneficiaries. RSKS India formed a group of people for the sustainability of the program and they proved to be were very helpful in these trying times. People from their self-help groups, community-based organizations, skill net groups, JLG's, farmer clubs, disabled people organizations etc., were encouraged to work remotely and the team also motivated local people to work as local volunteers. All these initiatives helped them to sail through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Everyone who participated in the "Together We Can" campaign, got a chance to win exciting rewards. The aim of this campaign was to spread awareness about COVID-19. The main objectives of this campaign were as follows:

*. To spread awareness on COVID-19 and to make people conscious about the situation.

*. Working in solidarity in the hour of crisis.

*. To make people realise their fundamental and moral duty.

*. To promote creative art.

*. Promoting digital use.

*. Providing people with a golden opportunity to become a Corona warrior from home.

*. To involve beneficiaries by giving prizes, e-certificates, and other attractive gifts through various competitions.

*. Honouring social warriors who helped in mitigating COVID-19.
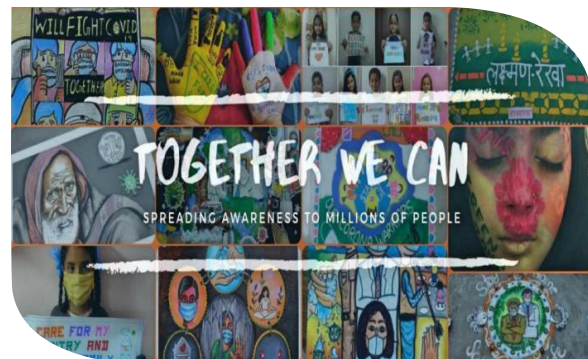
The campaign also included the following competitions: - 1. Poster / Painting competition 2. Video Making Competition 3. My Selfie 4. Rangoli Competition 5. COVID-19 Warrior Award. Through this campaign, they were able to reach out to an audience of approximately 34,00,000 people.

In today's scenario, when the COVID-19 pandemic is wreaking havoc across the globe, it becomes pertinent that we face it together and perform our fundamental and moral duty just as RSKS did.

NATIVE MEDICARE CHARITABLE TRUST (NMCT)

NMCT is a non-profit organization registered as a Public Charitable Trust in 1988, under the Indian Trusts Act 1882. Over the last 32 years, NMCT has been working among the underprivileged and marginalized communities. NMCT focuses on Education, Health, Sustainable Livelihood Development and Environment as long-term commitments with an integral approach to address social and economic issues.

In the pe-COVID-19 times, they would conduct mass meetings with the beneficiaries and stakeholders on the thematic issues. Awareness, training, camps, regular testing was directly conducted for the migrants at the industrial sites by the outreach workers along with health care workers. There were several awareness programs on 'Health and Hygiene' for government school students. Tribal beneficiaries used to be contacted directly for agricultural implements.

However, with the pandemic, most of the staff were asked to work from home. At the beginning of the lockdown, people infected by HIV/AIDS could not be contacted for sensitization on self-care, counselling and provision of nutrition supplements. Agriculture inputs could not be supplied to tribal farmers. Along with these, awareness programs for the industrial migrants also could no longer be conducted. There was a lack of effective coordination between personnel of various projects. Gradually they shifted to using digital platforms like - Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Team, Webinar, WebEx for staying connected. Remote work helped in reaching out to the beneficiaries and stakeholders through these online media. The management and stakeholders were grouped into teams and any important information was shared through these platforms.

All sorts of issues and problems faced by the stakeholders were shared on these platforms and the groups would come together to solve them. Some corporates even offered training on the usage of digital platforms which helped them to overcome technical problems. They managed to arrange an additional fund for COVID-19 relief work through their existing donors. Grocery kits were distributed to the poor, daily wage earners and migrants by maintaining COVID-19 safety measures. The funds collected through donations were directly transferred to the bank accounts of individual beneficiaries.

Since June 2020, they have conducted monthly and fortnightly reviews cum monitory meetings of the project activities through Google Meet. Necessary instructions were issued to the field staff to continue the interventions by following safety measures. Training on self-care, career counselling was conducted with the project children through digital learning. Data was collected from the field level using *Tablets* provided to the field workers.

They believe that digital innovation is a
pre-requisite for the sustainability of the organisation.

NMCT

REGIONAL CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (RCDC)

RCDC was registered on 17th September 1993. The major thematic area where they work is Community Based Natural Resource Management for Sustainable Livelihoods, WASH and Nutrition, Climate - Resilient Development and DRR and Investing in future for sustainability. Most of the interventions of RCDC are limited to the state of Odisha – a state in the eastern part of the Indian Federation. For research, documentation, advocacy and networking, RCDC are also operating in the central Indian states. The field demonstration projects are located in 9 districts of the state of Odisha.

In the pre-COVID-19 times, their contact with the community and stakeholders was either physical or over the phone. They used to physically go to their office for their daily functioning and corresponded via emails. They had the traditional system of communicating and running projects.

With the introduction of the pandemic, they were unable to attend office, just like the rest of India. In particular, their dealing with banks and vendors got disrupted. For urgent work, the staffs had to take personal risk to come to the office. Their dealings with the community got affected and projects came to a standstill. Community members became depressed as their income generation activities came to a halt. As officials became busy with COVID-19 they were unable to engage them in convergence activities. Their staff decided to help the district administration with COVID-19 related work. The in-migrants had to be attended to and thereby they had to deviate from their plans. They also had to arrange relief for community members and provide them with authentic information and raise awareness.

Gradually, in order to navigate through these tough times, they shifted to using digital platforms. Zoom and Google Meet was used for office meetings, connecting with donors, and for conferences. WhatsApp was majorly used for communication among staff and with the community. Emails were used to communicate with banks, vendors, staff and donors. It was a challenge but with great determination they did overcome all their hurdles through constant innovation and creativity.

Their story reiterated the fact that constant innovation is the key for success.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND RESEARCH CENTRE (HDRC)

HDRC is a secular voluntary organization which works to empower marginalized communities, particularly Dalits, tribals, minorities, youth, children, women and other marginalised groups. Established in 1969, HDRC was formally registered as an NGO in 1977 under the aegis of St. Xavier's Non-Formal Education Society (SXNFES). They have been working over five decades for the marginalized in Gujarat. They are currently working in 12 districts of Gujarat - 41 talukas and 41 slums in Ahmedabad city.

All their project activities, planning and review meetings, trainings took place through an offline mode, when COVID-19 was not a known phenomenon. They had a Skill Development program especially for the youths belonging to the marginalized communities. This programme focused majorly to improve their employability and enable them to live a life with dignity. There were three key components in the program: Mobilizing the youth, Training and Placement.

Mobilizing:

They used to mobilize interested youth for the training through door to door visits, meetings with youth and their families, campaigns, career talk. Interested candidates were provided counselling by the trainers.

Training:

240 hours of training was provided by qualified trainers using blended learning methods that is, using both digital and non-digital platforms. Training included classroom sessions on basic English, basic computers, life skills, work skills and career guidance and outdoor activities like exposure visits, market scan and on job training. Understanding on gender, good values, constitutional education was also inculcated through guest lectures. Alumni visited the centres to share their thoughts and experiences. Assessments were conducted to understand their progress.

Placement:

After successful completion of the course, the organization supported them to find the appropriate jobs. The employers provided them information on possible vacancies through job talks at the centre or visit to

the workplace. Thereafter, they attended interviews. During the certification, parents visited the centres which was an opportunity to discuss with the parent about work and career. An excel sheet was used to keep information of employers and vacancies and WhatsApp group was used to share about vacancies. Students were also motivated to pursue higher studies or write exams for the better future.


However, with the pandemic, they had to stop the training according to government guidelines. All schools, training and tuition centers had to be closed. As a result, learning of the youths got disrupted They had to move to virtual training which was a completely new concept.

For few months mobilization process had to be stopped since the team could not make field visits. Many of the alumni who were placed, lost their jobs and went back from the cities to their villages. Post placement, tracking work got disrupted because many of their alumni had no money to recharge their phones and they could not be contacted. There was no physical contact with students, parents, co-workers, employers etc. which had a negative impact on the continuity of the program.

While they were trying to provide immediate relief to the families affected by COVID-19, especially migrants and daily wage labour, they soon felt a shortage of such provisions. It was later informed that there was a

disruption in the supply chain. Through team efforts, they contacted all the employers who were having retail outlets and managed to get grocery and hygiene kits. To provide masks the SHGs in the local area were motivated and supported to make masks and sell them to the organization, the government offices and the local community. Through the village collectives and the local leaders, almost around 21000 plus grocery and hygiene kits were distributed.
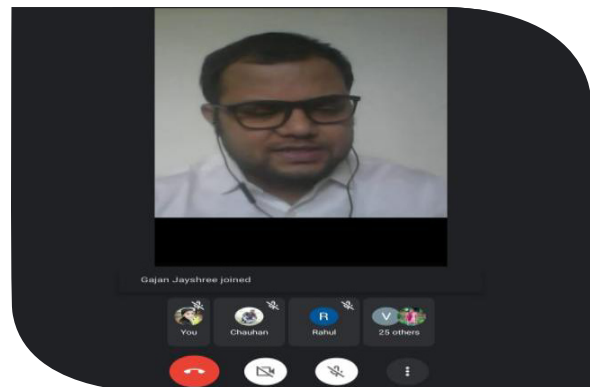
They gradually opted for digital platforms - WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, Google Meet, Zoom, Google Classroom etc. They generally used Google Meet and Zoom for the virtual training sessions for the students, meeting with the co-workers, partners and others. WhatsApp was used for routine updates like sharing links of the meet and Google Classroom to give the lessons. The major challenges that they faced in this regard were - less student engagement, lack of technical knowledge among trainers and trainees, lack of interest to learn online, poor network connections in some remote areas, and a constant fear of the pandemic.
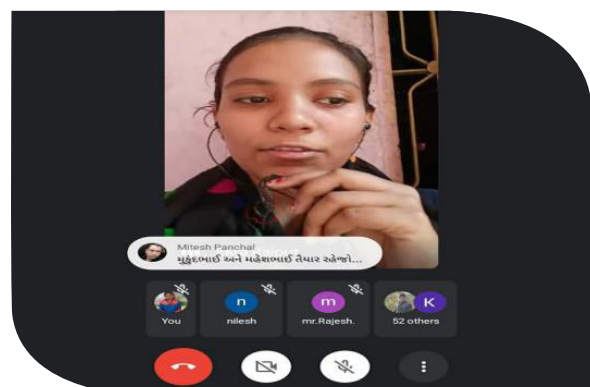
They started using online small games like riddles and puzzles, which bolstered the interests of the students. For those having low network, they were guided to sit wherever they had stable network and connectivity. The enthusiastic and motivated trainers made small presentations on various subjects for the online training. They introduced the concept of mobile library where every centre was provided with mobiles to be given to students who wanted to enrol and learn but did not have a smart phone.

Really needy students were supported with mobile recharge. Students from remote areas were able to develop their skills even during the lockdown. Their learning continued. Their family members got oriented on various skill programs as well. The facilitators adapted to the new method of training and made it a part of the pedagogy. One of their major achievement was that they had successfully provided 392 virtual trainings and almost around 269 students got placed through direct or indirect support from them.

This a classic example of the famous saying,
"Learning knows no boundaries".

YUVA RURAL ASSOCIATION (YRA)

YRA is a CSO working in Vidarbha since 2002 on various issues with a focus on empowering vulnerable sections of rural and tribal communities through interventions in the areas of livelihoods, gender, natural resource management, and advocacy, to achieve its goals for the betterment of the constituencies.

YRA is intervening in more than 525 villages from around 18 blocks of 8 districts in Vidarbha region and Parbhani district from Marathwada region of Maharashtra. All these interventions address various development issues of the constituency groups- small and marginal farmers, women, youth, tribal and children. The core of YRA has been to mobilize communities and facilitate change through all the intervention processes in the various domains. A major strength of YRA has always been its inclusive and democratic style of working. To maintain this strength, communication channels were always kept open.

YRA's main office is in Nagpur city, while most of its interventions are in rural communities, scattered over 9 districts in Eastern Maharashtra. In the pre-COVID-19 era, there was a great deal of face-to-face connect: within the main office itself, travel by upper management, as well as the field staff, to reach the rural beneficiaries.

When the first lockdown was called on, there was no provision in place for staff to work from home. Access to field was disrupted and field staff could no longer continue to carry out their regular tasks. Implementation of many programs was halted as contractors could not deliver or install equipment or carry out any construction activities.

Before the first lockdown, YRA had never used any online or digital communication platform. In the first few days of the lockdown, senior management supported a few staff members with time and resources to learn and familiarise themselves with Zoom. These staff members then guided the core staff over the phone on how to download, install and log in. Then training sessions were held over Zoom itself. This process was then repeated for the field staff. Using this technology soon became routine within the organization, and now most meetings and orientations / trainings are held online. In fact, for the first time in YRA's history, the AGM was held online.

Phone calls were always a common way to communicate, but the use of WhatsApp increased greatly. Various groups were formed – by location/region; by function (i.e. purchasing, information-sharing, etc); by roles/responsibilities (e.g. Core staff; cluster facilitators and their supervisors etc). WhatsApp allowed the sharing of images also, so that there was quick input from all concerned stakeholders without the need to physically see something. Within the organization, the staff started using Zoom to conduct internal meetings. A lot of communication and information-sharing occurred over WhatsApp. Because this happened in groups, there was maximum

transparency and real-time communication. All stakeholders could see the level of management involvement. This indeed was a great morale-booster, in addition to streamlining interventions. The Nagpur-based core team, all worked from home via laptops, desktops, and mobile phones. The existing digital connectivity with the field staff became stronger. Decision-making was streamlined and ramped up.

This attitude of embracing technology had also spilled over into other areas. Pre-COVID-19, all field staff used to submit any paperwork (bills, reports, etc) as hard copies. Now all reports are submitted on Google Drive, and all images via WhatsApp.

The adoption of digital communication is still being continued to this day, by the organization as it demonstrated a greater degree of efficiency as compared to just phone calls and emails.

For Voluntary Organisations to survive and strive for sustainability, digital literacy is a must!

CanSupport

CanSupport is India's largest free home-based Palliative Care programme for cancer patients. At any given point in time, their palliative care teams are caring for 2600 cancer patients and their families. They also run Outpatient clinics, Day Care centres and training programs. CanSupport was set up in 1996 by Harmala Gupta, a cancer survivor. Apart from Delhi, they have centres in UP, Punjab and Haryana.

They carry out their services under the following four broad categories namely,

- HOME CARE: Their teams of doctors, nurses and counsellors trained in palliative care make weekly visits to homes of patients too sick to travel.

- CLINICS: Their outpatient pain management and palliative care clinics provide essential supportive care and ensure better outcomes for patients.

- DAY CARE: Their Day Care programme for cancer patients and caregivers is where feelings are expressed, and experiences are shared in a safe and loving environment.

- COUNSELLING: Patients and family members develop fear, anxiety, stress and worries as they face an uncertain future. Their counsellors help them cope with that.

Their services are majorly aimed at the less privileged and are entirely 'free of cost'.

While COVID-19 did pose a lot of challenges for them but their commitment to their patients' care wasn't one of them. Nothing could stop their teams from reaching out to their patients and supporting them with psycho-social, emotional, spiritual and compassionate care. Thanks to the internet, digital format and apps like Zoom, Facebook Live, and messaging apps like WhatsApp, they could continue with their work without much disruption because of the pandemic. However, the biggest credit goes to their dedicated staff, sponsors and donors. Their staff remained connected, continued to share ideas and work together while holding virtual meetings on Zoom. Above all, their home care teams of committed doctors, nurses and counsellors worked relentlessly during these trying times. They also adapted to remote working to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

The team embraced new technologies— including video conferencing, WhatsApp calls—that allowed social distancing while staying connected with patients so that they could continue to offer counselling and guidance. Their helpline counsellors received extensive training with access to the directory of networks to offer COVID-19 related information to callers. The helpline also received calls from healthcare workers and other workplace employees facing mental health challenges for support from their senior counselling experts.

During this lockdown period, more than 1900 home visits were made in Delhi, UP and Punjab. About 1500 teleconsultation calls were made weekly to help families tide over the COVID-19 crises. Nearly 600 destitute families were distributed dry food ration donated by OXFAM India. Supplies of essential ongoing medicines and nursing items, hygiene kits (masks, gloves, soap cakes, sanitisers, sanitary pads, etc) and nutritional supplements for boosting immunity continued to be provided throughout the lockdown.

Their Outpatient clinics continued to operate on all five days (Monday to Friday) to extend medical, nursing and counselling support to patients under cancer treatment from government hospitals. In addition, they also continued with activities such as visiting patients at their homes and educating the caregivers on preventive measures against COVID-19 and supplying them with hygiene kits. Due to the community's generosity, they continued to receive much-needed supplies like surgical and N-95 masks, gloves, and hand sanitisers. Their day care volunteers continued to mobilize in-kind items to extend as much humanitarian support as possible to people staying at Dharamshalas (shelters) near cancer hospitals in Delhi, (Safdarjung Hospital, Institute Rotary Cancer Hospital and Delhi State Cancer Institute). These included home-cooked meals, general medicines, masks, soaps and sanitisers.

They formed a mentoring team that was conducting regular webinars for the staff and volunteers, healthcare communities and the general public to:

- Keep them updated on the latest information and prevention.

- Measures around COVID-19.

- Cope with stress related to patient care and handling all sorts of difficulties.

- Communication around mortality and bereavement.

- Adjusting to the "new normal" of living with COVID-19.

*"Commitment is what transforms
a promise into reality."*

SADAYANODAI ILAINGAR
NARPANI MANDRAM (SINAM)

SINAM is a registered non-profit organization, operating in Tiruvannamalai District since 1986. The major objectives of SINAM are to work for the development of poor women and children and destitute, promote the welfare of differently-abled people, underprivileged women, marginalized labour force, widows and people with HIV / AIDS. Dalits and empower them for their own development. The target community includes – working children/child labour/orphan children disaster victims. Over the years various programmes have been carried out in Tiruvannamalai District, Tamil Nadu, India.

In the pre -COVID-19 times, they were engaged in building community capacities in the areas of Education, Health, Habitat, Resource Conservation and Livelihood support through participatory interventions and synergetic alliances with various Developmental Agencies. Service included capacity building for women, skill development/employable training for rural deprived youths, issue-based campaigns, environmental protection, natural resources conservation and management, formation and management of cohesive women Self Help Groups, social forestry, rural education and life skill education for women and adolescent girls and awareness creation on girl child education, etc.

However, with the pandemic, they mainly got disconnected from the field visits and direct spot interventions in the ongoing projects implemented during the COVID-19 and lockdown. They had implemented a project on "Construction of Eco-friendly houses for Lambadies women" through the assistance of the SELAVIP – USA Project. It was in regard to this project that, they faced a lot of difficulties - in terms of visits to the project site. However, they were connected with local volunteers, and field staff who were working on this project via digital platforms. Mobility to reach the beneficiaries especially the physically handicapped was much hindered during COVID-19 and lockdown but they were connected through video calls, chatting with their staff, beneficiaries and local stakeholder community. They shared their experience videos through email chats.

They work in about 16 villages including 4 tribal hamlets that were completed disconnected during COVID-19. They managed to operate those projects remotely through telephonic conversations with staff, local youth volunteers and community tribal women. Certainly, the way of telephonic conversation, WhatsApp and video calls were highly helpful to them in order to manage the projects in remote areas. But in the areas which were located near hills and hinterlands, internet connectivity was a serious problem. So, they fixed a proper time to connect to each other and overcome this major challenge.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, they successfully implemented their "Construction of Houses" project for Lambadies women. However, they did face their own set of challenges. One of their beneficiaries, Mrs S. Radha encountered a problem. She was unable to purchase the construction materials at the right time. Thus, their staff along with community volunteers mobilized the locally available resources to the beneficiary to complete the construction at the right time. This was indeed a remarkable achievement for them during the pandemic.

All of this was possible because of their strategic digital innovation.

DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES (DA)

Development Alternatives

DA Group is a premier social enterprise working in the field of sustainable development. Established in 1983, and headquartered in New Delhi, they have built up a global presence in the fields of economic development, social empowerment and environment management. They have also built up a strong reputation as a major innovator of clean technologies and delivery systems for sustainable livelihoods in the developing world. The DA-Group, often referred to as Development Alternatives, comprises the Society for Development Alternatives, Technology and Action for Rural Advancement (TARA), and its affiliates. They have been working in India and across the Global South.

Our Footprint in Global South
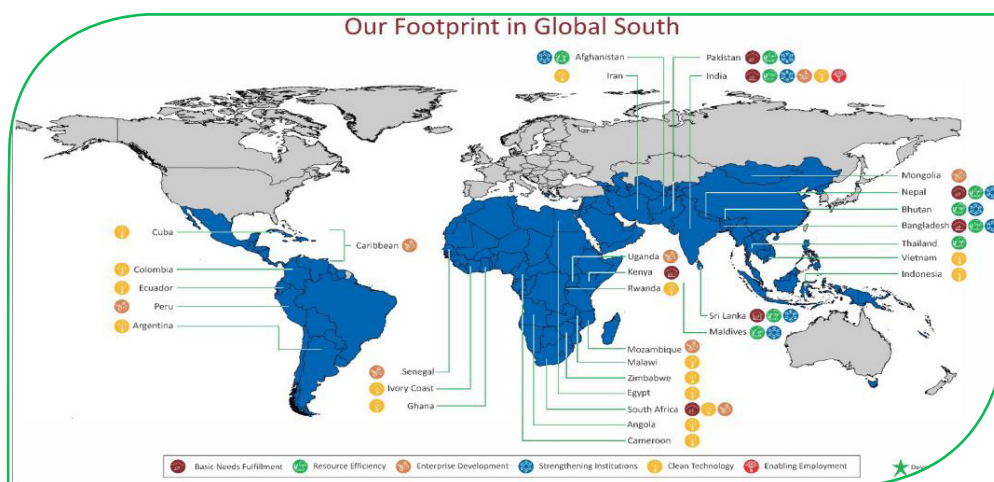
Using the principles of Universality, System Integrity, Efficiency, Sufficiency and Harmony, their work has been guided by the mantra – People, the Planet and Prosperity. This means enabling and empowering people and strengthening institutions and partnerships, using clean technology for regeneration and management of natural resources, and ensuring prosperity through green and sustainable livelihoods, and small enterprises.

Their activities broadly cover the three primary areas underlining sustainable development processes:

1. The design and large-scale dissemination of appropriate technologies,

2. Rational environmental management systems, and

3. Equitable people-oriented institutions and policies.

Working with local governments and supported by financing from various national and international sources, these initiatives aim at bringing cutting-edge science, technology and management methods to raise the capacity and confidence of people, particularly women and youth, to articulate their problems and devise solutions for themselves and lead inclusive and resilient development. The DA-Group focuses on empowering communities through strengthening people's institutions and facilitating their access to basic needs;

enabling economic opportunities through skill development for green jobs and enterprise creation; promoting low carbon pathways for development through natural resources management models and clean technology solutions.

They work at local, national and global levels. So far, through their work across various geographies, have touched 18 million lives.

They, for a long time now, have been working closely with the communities to build their capacity to enable them to take charge of their local affairs, for the last four decades. Through the strengthening of local institutions such as Panchayats, Farmers' Producer Organisations, Self-Help Groups and Karigar Mandals, they have been able to demonstrate significant results in improving the ability of local communities to evolve a self-reliant, growing economy.

While working with various partners, Development Alternatives has been moving forward with its efforts to create enterprises and jobs, to help communities to manage their resources better and to contribute to global thinking on various aspects of sustainable models for development.

Radio Bundelkhand 90.4 FM, community radio was an initiative of Development Alternatives. Established on 23rd October 2008, it is the first Community Radio Station in Madhya Pradesh and second in India. It provides a voice to the community in the region and has emerged as a people's radio station that provides them with a platform to air their aspirations, concerns and showcase their talent. Its participatory and collaborative approach empowers and builds consensus for change.


However, all this changed with the pandemic. There was limited physical interaction which inhibited the process of capturing the perspective of the communities and stakeholders. The transference of knowledge also became limited in the initial stages of the lockdown owing to COVID-19. Restricted norms for gatherings resulted in restricted training delivery and also affected the execution of field interventions. Programmes focused on capacity building and training of farmers, entrepreneurs, home-stay owners, guides etc, came to a halt. The shrinking base of job opportunities affected the placements of job seekers who were undergoing training. During the lockdown, the transference of resources also became a challenge for most of their programmes.

The primary challenge faced in the research was gaps in data (both primary and secondary), which was further exacerbated by the inability to travel and collect quantitative and qualitative data from the field due to the ongoing pandemic. The pandemic adversely affected primary data collection as well as physical consultations

with experts required to enrich their policy research. Working with their partners and collaborators on various projects became difficult due to a lack of physical and face to face interactions. They responded to the crisis by leveraging digital platforms to form partnerships to assist transference for scale and to develop programmes to enhance sustainable livelihood outcomes. Toolkits, regular publications, DA Newsletters and DA Digest were utilised to share perspectives and update stakeholders on all activities. Social media outreach, tweet chats and regular webinars with experts helped them to build synergies and co-create solutions with their stakeholders through online mediums. A special campaign was created on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter - 'Together We Can' which was focused on sharing snippets of DA's relief work from the ground such as distribution of food and essentials to over 35,000 people in the lockdown and raising awareness on COVID-19 precautions to over 200,000 through training and Radio Bundelkhand. The 'JobsWeMake' campaign was created to share stories from the ground which has resulted in collaboration with six

media platforms. Through this platform, DA has imparted information on inclusive entrepreneurship practices with an outreach to over 30,000 individuals. The use of digital mediums like Zoom, Google Meet, Cisco WebEx and WhatsApp enabled them to constantly stay connected to partners and other stakeholders. To continue on-ground activities and fieldwork to build entrepreneurial studies in rural areas, virtual meetings helped in planning and operations during and in the post lockdown period.

A virtual peer-to-peer network built around information kiosks, a WhatsApp community chat group and udyaME, a digital platform was adapted to form a network of digital solutions to ease the communication and information gap between entrepreneurs. More than 2000 rural micro-entrepreneurs were registered, and a network was formed among entrepreneurs and service providers, helping them in reaching out to customers. 'Bridge2naukri' was launched as an online platform for connecting employers with entry-level job-seeking youth. A multi-touch-point 24X7 counselling support system was also launched.
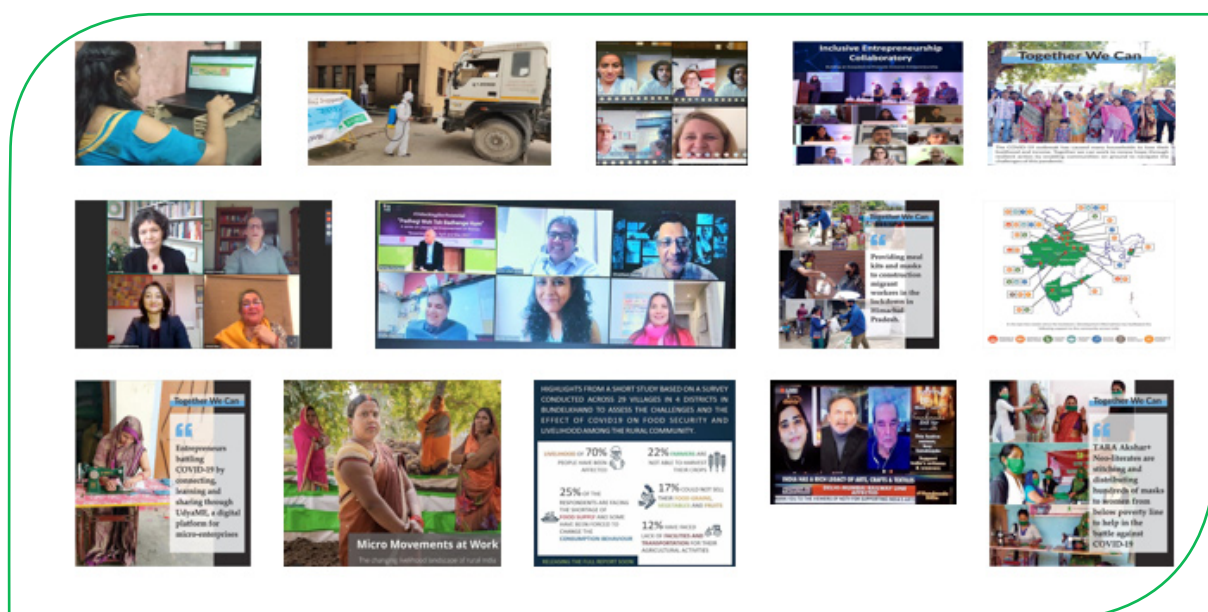
With the aim of creating livelihoods, they have been also imparting training in various sectors. Due to the lockdown, training centres had to be shut, but their team took up the challenge head-on. Online mediums were leveraged for regular follow-up, teaching, career counselling and registration of new candidates. Additionally, a unique platform was leveraged, created by their partners - ODK Collect App, which also enabled them to track the well-being of trainees and alumni amidst the pandemic.

DA achieved a significant breakthrough to achieve greater gender diversity in technology-driven enterprises such as information kiosks, decentralized IT-enabled hubs to deliver enterprise support services. "Kaun Banega Business Leader" (KBBL) is an entrepreneurship promotion festival of Work 4 Progress (W4P) programme for enabling entrepreneurial energies among rural populations in Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bundelkhand. This was conducted in various geographies and applications were analysed digitally.

Kajal, the winner of this competition was imparted with further training and was enabled to set up the first women-led 'information kiosk' across 80 villages of Uttar Pradesh. Her information kiosk is a centre that provides digital and computer services through which communities can avail services such as government schemes and apply for insurance. This enhanced and added value to regular Common Service Centers (CSCs) models and also acted as local points of contact and information dissemination on employment and self-employment opportunities.

This was extremely significant since as of December 2017, only 16.96% of Common Service Centers in Uttar Pradesh were owned by women. As of today, 33% of the W4P enterprises are women-owned, vis-a-vis the India average of 20.44% as per MoMSME annual report 2019.

A participatory and collaborative approach empowers and builds consensus for change.

Development Alternatives
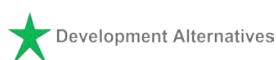
HUMANITARIAN AID INTERNATIONAL (HAI)

HAI was founded in May 2016 with the overall mission of creating a global Indian brand, based on traditional Indian altruism and informed by western humanitarian architecture, to synergise the efforts and desire of Indian communities, mobilize resources from within and without including Indian diaspora, to ameliorate the effects of poverty, hunger and violence. HAI has been founded by a team of Indian humanitarian and development professionals with a collective national and global experience of over 30 years. While as of now, HAI's activities are exclusively confined to India, it strives to expands its work outside India too, particularly to complement our government's bilateral support to developing and least developing countries on poverty alleviation and humanitarian programs.

HAI is just over five-year-old organization but has left its footprints both nationally and globally. At the global level, it is engaged in the UN-led Agenda for Humanity and Grand Bargain processes. It hosts the international secretariat of 'Charter4Change' - it is one of the founders and international coordinator of Alliance for Empowering Partnerships (A4EP), member of the Membership Committee of Start Network, Member of ADRRN, steering group member of World Humanitarian Action Forum (WHAF) and member of United Against Inhumanity. In India, HAI works on four thematic areas, i.e., 1) humanitarian response, 2) disaster risk reduction, 3) climate change & adaptation and 4) humanitarian advocacy. It has three pillars to work on them, i.e., 1) a national platform of grassroots organisations, 2) a national pooled fund, 3) a national roster of professionals. Furthermore, to integrate technology in disaster management, HAI has also established a Drone for Humanity platform.

Prior to the pandemic, they either worked directly with their target communities or through member organisations. The interaction was through personal face-to-face contact or group meetings. The field team visited programme areas on daily basis to ensure the smooth running of activities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a global humanitarian challenge. Unlike various other organisations, HAI, being a frontline organisation, continued working directly with the community and the people affected by COVID-19, while trying to reduce the direct contact wherever possible. This adaptation also required shifting to remote management and delivery of programmes in unavoidable cases. Nevertheless, they took the challenge as an opportunity to extend support towards COVID-19 response, while at the same time making great efforts to keep existing programming going. While some staff, following the humanitarian imperative, continued working on field, some other started working from home using alternative ways of supporting the colleagues on-ground engaged in service delivery. It led to the incorporation of new ways of working to enhance productivity and health. One interesting way that was adopted during the massive spread of COVID-19 was recruitment

of a few interns through online interviews who were inducted online and assigned separate functions. They didn't experience any problems in this process. Regular online meetings were organised to keep everyone up to date.

As they are an advocacy organization too, they participated in different activities nationally and internationally. Most of such activities were moved online. Regular stakeholder engagement was ensured through the usage of digital platforms like - Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Zoho/ Microsoft Teams. All these social platforms were used to regularly share unbeatable efforts of HAI's COVID-19 response through daily digital bulletins. Twitter was used to cater to the request appeals received from social media platforms and address distress phone calls. Microsoft teams were used as an official operational platform for both internal and external communications.

However, in the face of adversity, they had to overcome a set of their own challenges primarily, the complete un-preparedness in regard to switching to digital platforms.

The lockdown made it evident that limited digital skills and capacities may pose a major operational challenge. Realizing the critical need for digital technology adoption in the post-COVID-19 world, they started investing in digital skills. They paid special attention to this by encouraging on-ground volunteers/ staff to learn basic digital skills. One of the disadvantages of service delivery, mainly while addressing distress calls from all over the country, was the inability to verify the authenticity of such calls during the period of the nationwide lockdown. They also faced a sort of financial stress which had a massive impact on their budgets. Thereby, many existing programmes came to a halt.

Fortunately, they overcame the challenge by crafting an internal communications strategy: encouraged leadership and/or management to schedule informal video conferencing with their team members to maintain team morale and cohesiveness. They encouraged their staff to invest in learning digital skills. They assessed and adjusted expectations and deadlines on projects that may be impacted by the lack of in-person engagement or by a disruption in schedules.

They came up with innovative approaches to reach out to people worse affected, to provide support to needy families specifically to underprivileged migrant workers in different parts of the country while having restrictions on staff mobility. In this way, they reached the needs of desperate people/families across the country.

An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.

THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT TRUST (RDT)

VicenteFerrer
Rural Development Trust

RDT is a non-religious, non-political development NGO working since 1969 to improve the quality of life amongst rural communities in India. With a special emphasis on children, women and people with disabilities, they implement integrated development programmes designed to ensure access to quality education, primary healthcare and hospitals, housing and infrastructure, ecology and sustainable livelihoods. It also supports the empowerment of tribal communities and aims to hone the potential of children and youth through sports and cultural activities. They work in over 3,755 villages spread across four districts of Andhra Pradesh and two districts of Telangana. Among them are 276 villages of Chenchu tribes in the Nallamala forest areas spread across 29 Mandals.

They are a grassroots organization that acts as a 'facilitator' between different stakeholders. They engage with the stakeholders in the following ways:

1. Supporting the government in implementing different schemes and policies and assisting the communities to access them.

2. Facilitating the formation of community-based organisations to enable the community to be the driving force in their development.

3. Engaging with citizens and institutions in India and abroad to promote solidarity and thereby supplement the efforts of RDT.

4. Developing strategies to align the needs of the communities with the CSR objectives of our corporate partners to leverage impact.

In the pre- COVID-19 times, a majority of their staff used to work at the field level to implement the projects at the grassroots. The activities pertaining to the respective sectors were overlooked by the staff at the central office level where there were supporting departments like monitoring and evaluation, communications, finance, etc. All activities and functions of the organization were governed by the Board of Trustees, Senior Core Team which is the executive decision-making body, and the General Core Team which guided and monitored the work in all sectors across different regions.

Due to the pandemic, all the projects and activities at the field level which were a part of their eight programme sectors were suspended. All the schools and residential centres were closed and children and adults living there left-back for their homes. A major section of the employees working in the offices were asked to stay at home due to the lockdown. They revamped themselves to work as a single unit since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak in India, using all their resources and expertise to contain and fight the pandemic.

Following the guidelines and requests of the Government and local authorities as well as keeping people's needs in mind, they started working in four main areas as soon as the outbreak began in India:

A) Awareness at the grassroots

B) Healthcare through our Hospitals network (For COVID-19 and non COVID-19 patients)

C) Food distribution for migrants and daily wagers,

D) Production and distribution of preventive materials such as face masks

They used social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube to spread awareness and disseminate authentic information to the communities, answer their queries and make them aware of our ongoing relief work. They produced videos on how to make your own fabric mask in Telugu, which became one of the most-watched videos on our YouTube channel as well as awareness and information about COVID-19 in sign language so people with hearing and speech impairment can have access to resourceful and accurate information. Due to the keen interest, their social media pages became an important tool for people to know about their relief action in Anantapur in real-time. This led to a wider reach and engagement from newer audiences, especially corporates and other civil society groups. Many came forward to donate resources that were needed by the organisation, especially in kind. One example of this was many small and local farmers donating their produce for the food distribution programme which at one point was serving 10,000 cooked meals per day. Over 75% of the food products needed for this programme was donated by the local communities.

With the government, tools like Google Hangout, Zoom and other video-calling applications were used to coordinate the healthcare interventions. RDT Bathalapalli Hospital was designated as a COVID-19 Healthcare centre and some of the organisation buildings became quarantine centres.

The challenge, as in any part of rural India, was the digital gap and lack of access to technology. Given the fact that they are an organisation that implements programmes at the grassroots in rural development, remote working was not a feasible option as a majority of the work involves holding meetings with the communities, working together in the centres, visiting project areas, conducting surveys and other kinds of fieldwork.

However, some staff in departments like Monitoring and Evaluation as well Communications co-ordinated with the field staff working on COVID-19 relief to get information about ongoing work, update supporters and donors about the work to maintain transparency and assist the field staff in implementation. So, while most of the regular work was stalled, the determination of the staff working on COVID-19 relief ensured that the harsh consequences of the pandemic were mitigated, especially for disadvantaged communities. Besides, wherever possible though, the work was handled through online meetings.

They worked closely with Integrated Development Trust (IDT), a local fair-trade organisation that works with artisans with disabilities. These artisans started working full-time on producing fabric masks for the people. With the increasing demand, for these masks, the coordinators of this project travelled to different regions to train out-of-work tailors and women who wanted to be involved. The materials were provided and when these tailors produced the masks, they were supplied and distributed to different regions to the public and even some institutions like the schools, municipality, etc. The staff also presented 1.5 lakh fabric masks to the DGP of the Andhra Pradesh police, Mr. Damodar Gautam Sawang, for usage by the staff of the Andhra Pradesh government.

In some sectors where trainers and teachers were involved, this period was used to increase capacity and skills through online training and workshops. One of the highlights of adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic was their work in the field of education for children with disabilities. The tabs, headphones, SIM card and data recharge were provided to more than 400 children studying at RDT Inclusive High School and High School for Children with Hearing impairment. They were not only free of cost, but also ensured that these children did not miss out on their education but also helped in building the digital gap and letting children explore and learn from the digital space where there were many resources available.

Their success story makes us believe that "the biggest part of digital transformation is changing the way we think".

DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT TEAM (DST)

DST was established in 1984 in "response" to the need of the development sector especially for the very small NGOs/Community Based Organisations (CBOs). DST has grown into a multifaceted organisation responding to the needs of the sector and proactively initiating "Building Bridges and Enabling Partnerships" through processes/programmes to build an improved understanding of the current challenges. They believe and practice the ideology of people's participation in self-development and moving to the sustainable development of the community at large. DST emphasizes women's active participation and involvement in the development processes in Maharashtra. Working towards strengthening the organisational structure of the weaker sections of the society with a special focus on women for over three decades, through SHG-Federations. Since 2018 they have included Digital Empowerment as an important intervention towards sustainability. DST empowered community women by enabling a digital strategy to overcome inequalities and vulnerabilities amplified due to the pandemic in response to the pandemic.

Their major focus areas are -

- Socio-Economic Empowerment of Women,
- Capacity building of grassroots NGOs/ CBOs,
- Building Bridges
- Enabling partnerships in both Voluntary Sector and Corporate Sector.

DigiShakti is their flagship program for the digital empowerment of women is conducted for rural and urban community women. Special sessions on cyber security, trolling and staying safe on the internet was conducted for NGOs across Maharashtra with Stree Aadhar Kendra, Pune. Digital opportunities for 300+ 1st generation rural, tribal and urban entrepreneurs to equip them with skills to explore a digital presence for their business was conducted at the YES Summit. Impact studies conducted by DST indicate a marked transition of women from 39% to 73% as earning members. Some of them became entrepreneurs while others began contributing financially to their family income. 52% of the members availed loans through the SHGs for setting up a new business or expansion of the existing business. 100% of the members were brought under the Financial Inclusion program and linked to at least one of the FFIs and availed banking services. This was a major milestone in the socio-economic empowerment of women.

Before the pandemic, the monthly staff meeting with community workers, federation directors, Self Help Group Leaders and members was a platform for monitoring and evaluation, capacity building and sharing challenges and best practices. The year

2020, marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, was intended to be ground-breaking for gender equality. Instead, with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, even the limited gains made in the past decades were at risk of being rolled back. The pandemic was deepening pre-existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems which were, in turn, amplifying the impacts of the pandemic. Across every sphere, from health to the economy, security to social protection, the impacts of COVID-19 were exacerbated for women and girls simply by virtue of their gender.

During the ongoing COVID-19 19 pandemic and the two successive lockdowns in 2020 and 2021, no physical visits were possible to the urban or rural communities. Without any routine 'physical' meeting every month, all SHGs or federation or Group Leaders could not function normally. Consequently, regular financial transactions came to a complete standstill due to loss of wages especially the daily wage earners, domestic workers and closure of small businesses.

The lockdown did not allow another significant function of SHG's to take place. Women could not come out of their homes and use the platform of regular meetings to share their experiences and get community support which was a natural outcome and had a large-scale impact on the SHG movement across India.

DST as a network organization provides support to NGOs/CBOs through periodic events/workshops all of which came to a halt. All planned activities in the organization came to a complete standstill with Pune under strict lockdown and police permissions being required for mobility. However, the internal processes of DST did not come to a halt. They became active members of the COVID-19 response team to provide support to the vulnerable communities and played the role of connecting with individuals and like-minded organisations for support.

DST adopted online tools, developed in-house with a primary objective of bridging the gap for continuity in their regular work and facilitating regular monthly meetings to be held at the SHG level. The main purpose of this 'Digital strategy' was to engage with the communities, provide support and continue the activity of financial monitoring, to strengthen an efficient and transparent system for SHGs and Federations.

The community women used innovative forms of online communication adopted the tools such as WhatsApp, calls etc. with the handholding support provided by DST to help tide over this difficult phase. Regular Community Workers and Group Leaders meetings were conducted using Zoom calls. They overcame the initial challenges of access to technology, connectivity and of course the fear of joining the Zoom meeting through the support provided by the team.

The women were "trained" by the children in the community who had no fear of adopting technology. For monitoring the performance of the SHGs/ Federations, Google forms were created and shared using WhatsApp groups. These interactions helped document the status in the local communities and also to identify the areas of support.

An important decision to waive off interest on loans was taken, which were applicable for 3 months April, May and June 2020. Since a majority of the SHG members worked as domestic workers, daily labour or managed small businesses they suffered a complete loss of income during this time. Community workers used digital technology for various activities such as conducting a needs assessment, for distribution of the food kits, information dissemination on the relief measures announced by the government, for free ration and deposit of Rs. 500 to the Jan Dhan accounts of the community women. Tracking bank transactions was a challenge during the lockdown. Digitally trained community workers and SHG members helped community women track their bank accounts since their employers transferred their salaries online for the months of April and May.

As part of MAHAVAN, DST brought on board our learnings and experience in digital tools and platforms. The first step was to conduct Zoom calls to connect with all the CBO/NGOs working in Maharashtra in April 2020. In this crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, CSOs played an important role in providing relief and support to the grass-root communities both in urban and rural Maharashtra.

MAHAVAN conducted a rapid online survey of the MAHAVAN member organizations. 25 CSO's involved in providing support during the pandemic responded online via Google forms and the quantitative data was collated and analysed further. With this basic data,

a Zoom call was arranged to discuss online challenges faced by the communities and CSOs.
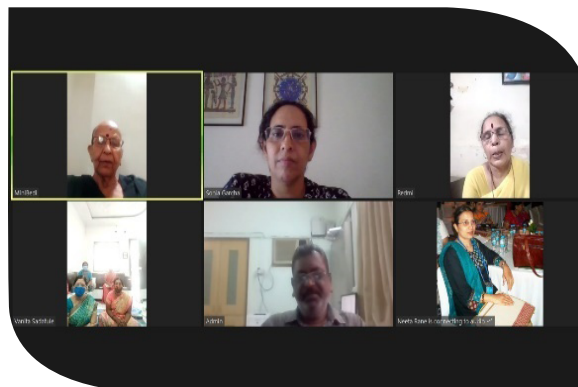
Owing to the rise in the number of COVID-19 cases DST continued in its efforts in building capacities of the community workers and in creating awareness on the spread of the novel coronavirus. Sessions were conducted by Dr. Mutatkar, Trustee, DST, Medha Ranade, Trustee, DST and Dr. Renu Mahtani to explain the difference between the infection of the coronavirus with other ailments and also the importance of preventive measures to control its spread.

They also conducted a rapid assessment of the urban women entrepreneurs which indicated that close to 70% of businesses were closed during the lockdown. Based on these findings, DST partnered with Parama Naturals (a for-profit) for designing suitable products and enabling a digital presence to provide market linkages.

Through online Zoom meetings and calls with Prerna Mahila Vikas Sangh, a Federation, we

identified women entrepreneurs and mapped their existing skillset with the current market needs, we provided livelihood opportunities for 10 women for:

- Hand-painted diyas
- Making cloth bags, chemical-free, microbial free, hand-dyed using waste turmeric after oil extraction

Women entrepreneurs used WhatsApp to share images of the designs for diyas, pricing and share flyers to explore local markets. DST enabled women to use Dunzo (an online application) to deliver finished products and receive orders through WhatsApp and digital payments.

Micro-enterprises led by women required interventions that included digital and financial literacy programmes, handholding support for market linkages, and a community-based network of Self Help Groups (SHGs).

DST is an exemplary of how more for-profit businesses can explore ways of engaging with community women-owned enterprises so that they can provide pathways for higher business turnover and sustainable growth.

SATYA SPECIAL SCHOOL (SSS)

SSS was set up in 2003 which works with disabilities, primarily intellectual and developmental disabilities. It works in Pondicherry, and a few districts of Tamil Nadu. They run a centre for children with special needs within Pondicherry city, as well as three rural centres. Their work primarily consists of therapy and learning for children with special needs. Their work is highly personalized and depends on personal/physical connect, especially their physical therapy, occupational therapy and alternative therapy work.

When COVID-19 hit, they had to close the school and centres down indefinitely. They could no longer conduct any therapy sessions, and while their school had used Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) for learning, it had never been used in isolation, and the children did not have the electronic devices at home either. In the initial days, their work came to a complete standstill. They were focused on relief measures and ensuring that their students and their communities had full and complete access to their medication and groceries.

They knew that they had to continue the services for their children, but they did not know how efficient it would be. In the beginning there were several sets of problems:

- Not all the teachers were tech-savvy.
- Not all the parents had smart phones.
- Some children were not responding the online/ telephonic mode as well.
- One phone and multiple siblings vying for the same.
- Although the hours were flexible the teachers were working at all hours to ensure no child is left out.
- Connectivity issues were faced from both ends.
- Physio-therapy was limited to what the parents could do without harming the child with online instructions.

So, they started with the easiest accessibility tool, webinars. Multiple webinars for both the parents and the technical team (teachers, therapist and incharges), more so the technical team. Internal webinars and training sessions ensuring each had at least done 5-6 webinars in the first month itself. The training process was more or less similar for all staff. First a document would be provided with step-by-step manual followed by a webinar to explain the process and exercises during the webinar to ensure learning. For the less technically savvy staff, they conducted separate one-on-one sessions to ensure their comfort with the new processes. All 100 odd technical and non-technical staff (except drivers and helpers) were connected online. Drivers too were connected due to relief work. WhatsApp groups, various meeting platforms (Zoom, Google Meet etc.), conference calls for meeting and discussions were used. For data collection and storage, they used to google drive products, i.e. Google Forms and Google Sheets.

Children and families stayed connected with the organization. Children continued their learning and had outside interactions beyond their homes. Group classes became a hit as it helped children understand that they were not the only ones not going to school, and they also got to speak to their friends / peers.

Your Adaptability – Remote Working and Connectivity
## आपकी अनुकूलन क्षमता - ऑफिस से दूर काम करने और संपर्क बनाये रखने की क्षमता

What was the impact – आपकी ऑफिस से दूर रहकर या वर्क फ्रॉम होम से काम करने से क्या प्रभाव पड़ा

Classes (Tracking before July was not as formal) across 428 children across all centers of Satya

98 Webinars across staff and parents
300+ case conferences online

	Total - Classes	Individual classes	Group classes	
August	6346	5465	881	
September	5953	5092	861	
October	5321	4560	761	
November	4474	3874	600	Diwali holidays
December	4765	4163	602	Christmas
January	4761	4187	574	Pongal
February	5560	4844	716	
March	2930	2584	346	School started
Average (rounded)	5300	4600	700	
Total	40110	34769	5341	

Some children were however, not responding the online/ telephonic mode. For these children, Satya special School brought them within the tablet library project, so children could access pre-loaded lessons and activities, interspersed with offline worksheet activities. They also had weekly meeting for sharing issues where teachers could help each other with different ways to engage the child.
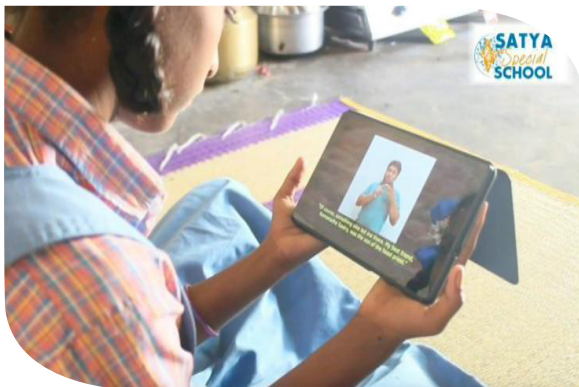
Rajesh, son of Kumar, who worked in a petrol bunk, had trouble adjusting to life without school. Rajesh, who is on the autism spectrum, could not attend online class either, as the parents could not afford a smart phone, he would just sit idle, or try to go out of the house. After an e-tablet was given to him, there are a lot of changes in him, says his mother, K. Kavitha. "Now we could see lot of changes after e-tab was given to him. With interest, he is watching the activities and tries to imitate what is visualized. We can also see that he is learning quickly. Also, he has reduced watching television. Now his younger brothers also like to watch the lessons taught in the tab, and they are now playing together. That's a good sign to us," she says.

Due to the digital innovation, Rajesh was able to continue his developmental journey. He was also able to play with his siblings, something that might not have happened otherwise.

SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGE INDIA (SOSCVI)

The first SOS Children's Village was founded by Hermann Gmeiner, an Austrian philanthropist, in 1949 in Imst, Austria. Since then, the organization has been active and expanding throughout the world. At present, SOS is active in over 136 countries and territories with over 500 SOS Children's Villages and 400 SOS Youth Facilities striving for the welfare of the children in need of care and protection. SOSCVI has served for over 56 years in INDIA. With the inauguration of the first Children's Village at Greenfields, Faridabad by Indira Gandhi, the organization has now spread across the country. They are an independent, non-governmental and non-profit organization working for the holistic development of children without parental care and those at the risk of losing it. They are a self-implementing organization providing a basket of care solutions for every child in need. Currently, through their basket of care solutions, more than 7000 children are being supported in 445 family homes inside and outside 32 SOS Children's Villages in 22 states/UTs, additionally, they directly touch the lives of around 28,500 children, and thousands more indirectly every year through our community interventions,

Your Organisation's style of work in Pre-COVID-19 times
कोविड से पहले आपकी संस्था के कार्य करने का तरीक़ा

SOSCVI has been taking care of over 6500 children in 32 Children's Villages in 22 states. These children who once lacked parental care. During the pre-COVID-19 period they were meeting people physically, communicating over emails etc. Children were going to schools and were able to attend classes. They were participating in different events being organized by the schools/colleges etc. They would interact with other children, play outdoor games and participate in a range of extra-curricular activities.

During the pandemic it was very difficult for them to manage children. COVID-19 restrictions made life very dull for home bound children. Children were not able to attend their classes since the number of computers available were not sufficient.

SOS provided IT training to all the co-workers on how to use virtual platforms like Microsoft Teams and Zoom for virtual meetings, teleconference etc. People were also trained on how to connect to these platforms using their smart-phones. Since these platforms are very intuitive and user friendly, co-workers could connect to these platforms with little hand-holding. They used virtual platforms like Microsoft Teams and Zoom,

for interacting with co-workers, mothers and children from our villages/project sites across the country.

- They installed hundreds of computers for family homes at various CVs, as well as procured Tablets for youths, procured desktops for co-workers and laptops for key positions.

- Repaired old laptops and made them functional for the co-workers and sent desktops to the homes of co-workers who did not have computers at home. Configured internet as per local settings.

- Created Virtual Private Network (VPN) for users with sensitive data, facilitated all the co-workers with WFH environment based on their requirements. Implemented Two Factor Authentication (2FA) on users' accounts safety and security. Implemented OneDrive for easy data access and data backup.

- They had also implemented additional security measures for all applications that were accessed over internet so that people were able to access them online and users received OTP to access the organizational resources. All the co-workers were able to work remotely. Co-workers were connected through internet and they could communicate using emails, access applications over cloud and were enabled to do their work.

Virtual platforms like Microsoft Teams and Zoom were provided to 700+ children from their villages/project sites across the country, including differently abled Children from Children's Village Khajuri Kalan, Bhopal.

At some of the locations they were able to get second hand computers in the Family Homes. They had also ordered for Samsung Tablets (2 per family homes) and were working with online learning platform BYJU's to provide their learning content on these tablets so that children can continue with their classes virtually. They also equipped their family homes with wireless access points so that children can access internet over these tablets. They also procured 123 tablets and helped children that belong to vulnerable communities served by our Family Strengthening Programme.

Tarang is the annual cultural festival celebrated by SOS Children's Villages of India. Children under their care from across the country come forward to demonstrate their skills and expertise to commemorate "Universal Children's Day" on 20th November every year. In 2020, Tarang was organized virtually; Tarang reflected the collaborative efforts of SOS co-workers, who brought together children from marginalized/BPL families, who were currently not going to school, nor did they have devices to attend online classes. These children found participating in the virtual festival very exciting. In these trying times, emotional wellbeing of children was at stake and eTarang helped in engaging children culturally with the use of interactive platforms like Microsoft-Teams and Zoom. Children were engaged in preparing for these events for over a month.

There is no doubt that creativity is the most important human resource of all. Without creativity there would be no progress, and one would be repeating the same patterns.

CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE (CSJ)

CSJ is a socio-legal, NGO initiated by the Institute for Development Education and Learning (IDEAL) in the year 1993. CSJ is one of the first organisations of its kind in India that uses the judicial system to fight for the rights of marginalised people. Their thematic areas of work include- Minority Rights; Strengthening and holding accountable Justice Delivery Mechanisms (DLSA, SLSA, Prisons); Women's Rights (including Witchcraft and Victim Compensation) Litigants' Forum; Farmers' Rights; Disaster Rights; Children Rights; Labourer's Rights and Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Alongside, all of these, they are also working on a Paralegal Model- A Demonstration of the Law and Governance model through Paralegals / creating a space for paralegals through Law and Governance and Institutionalising their role. CSJ is functioning in Chhattisgarh, Gujarat and Jharkhand.

CSJ has been focusing on grassroots lawyering since its inception. This is successful due to our 'Leader Lawyers' working with their communities and providing legal aid. During the pre-COVID-19 time, CSJ spent a majority of its time on field and in interacting with their community members, building rapport through face to face interactions or *gaon mulakat*. This would include meeting the villagers and trying to understand what their issues and problems were and how they could be collectively solved through the means of law. Other aspect of these village visits included: fact finding, legal awareness and campaigns to reach even the remotest of the villages and work towards creating community leaders and promoting justice, peace and harmony. The functioning within the organisation focused on a system of, frequent meetings and in-person sessions which allowed team members from different regions to meet, re-strategize and conceptualise on their work. They frequently also undertook capacity building sessions of various NGOs, organisations and government bodies on socio-legal issues. Though in preview of the recent times, they have continued to work in the same manner but only everything has now shifted to the online mode.

Due to the lockdown, the human touch, their physical presence in their areas initially reduced. The pandemic was restricting their previous outreach strategies and became a significant factor in controlling their movement in villages. Since courts were closed as well during the period, the legal battles being fought, also came to a small halt. Livelihood of affiliated members working on cases and court was under threat as court processes stopped. They were not acquainted with E-courts, neither the advocates nor the clients, it therefore took some time to understand functioning of different state's systems.

CSJ, through its field teams, collaboration with other NGOs and village volunteers, conducted a needs assessment in South Gujarat (Adivasi areas), Amreli and Bhavnagar (coastal belt), North Gujarat, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. Engagement with the community led to identification of problems being faced by people due to the lockdown and challenges in implementation of various entitlements announced by the

Government from time to time. These were frequently fed to various stakeholders as demands. Issues identified were both generic and area specific. Engaging with stakeholders online became an essential step to continue spreading legal awareness, for networking and linking different parties for amenable solutions. They also engaged with government machineries at different levels and reached out to civil servants, local authorities, police, para-legal volunteers, panchayat members and *anganwadi* workers. They used Twitter and emails to contact government authorities and nodal officers of different states in cases where personal contact was not established. CSJ used Facebook to connect with other NGOs and Instagram to connect with students and a larger audience to spread awareness about the grass-root realities.

One of the major challenges that they faced were activating DLSA under Disaster Management Scheme, to provide immediate relief to stranded labours. Many government websites had old contact details of the authorities or the email ids were not functional. This further became an initial block for them in contacting Government authorities outside their regions. To overcome the problem, they partnered with other organisations who had contacts with local authorities and used the social media platform 'Twitter' to tweet respective authorities and reached out to them.

Gujarat State Legal Services Authority asked all their DLSAs to implement Disaster Management Scheme after CSJ intervention. Surat Collector has distributed food under the Food Basket Scheme to stranded laborers after CSJ's intervention. This was an achievement as Food Basket Scheme had rarely been implemented. Government authorities provided phone numbers of local CSJ Law Centres to stranded laborers in need of food and shelter. CSJ Trainee Lawyers from Jharkhand was appointed as relief work committee member. NITI Aayog also reached out to CSJ to contact nodal officer and collaborate with the government. A Committee was formed to inquire into irregularities in PDS system on complaint by CSJ Trainee Lawyer in Aravali, Gujarat.

Along with all of the above mentioned ventures, they also carried out several other activities:

- CSJ invested in applications like Zoom and tried to digitise their existing materials. They further activated their accounts on various social media sites to widen engagement.

- They simplified and translated the COVID-19 19 related schemes/policies into local languages (Hindi and Gujarati).

- Created a mobile data base with the help of CSJ team members and volunteers.

- Widely circulated the schemes/policies in the form of SMS with the help of the organization named Awwaz.De, a mobile solution.

- Created and shared a toolkit with other organisations. The toolkit contains a targeted set of action steps, questionnaires and monitoring tools for all relevant Central Schemes and State schemes of Gujarat and Chhattisgarh.
- Compiled all relevant schemes/policies and widely circulated the same in various WhatsApp groups.
- CSJ team used creative methods like converting schemes into songs, sharing it through apps like 'My Talking Tom'.
- Built capacities of field volunteers (associated with CSJ and other organisations) to understand and monitor COVID-19 schemes.
- Circulated phone numbers of relevant officials District Legal Services Authority Member Secretaries, Mamlatdar (Revenue Official), Nodal Officers, helplines etc.

CSJ had additionally developed a tracking system for people who directly approached CSJ for any kind of assistance. They were further kept in loop in case of any scheme/ policy change. One of the challenges faced was the massive incoming response from these channels for facilitation of food, travel and stay of the migrants. Another challenge was the misinformation that was initially spreading against the Muslim community and their role in spreading the virus. To overcome the first issue, they created a database of different organisations working in various parts of the countries to make local response more rapid and also allow on-ground vision of the scenario. For the second challenge, they created several visuals on fake news and shared them across various apps, allowing people to make better judgment on the issue. The information sharing resulted in:

1. Facilitating travel of approximately 15,000 migrants.

2. 1000 fishermen stuck at sea (Veraval, Mangrol, Jhafrabad and Porbandar) were linked to boat owners and Fisheries Department for provision of food and medicines.

3. Ration and wages provided to a family from Bihar stuck in Mundra, Gujarat on CSJ's engagement with the Mamlatdar. CSJ Chhattisgarh team members arranged food and shelter 40 people, including 2 pregnant women, stuck in Ranitalab, Chandidongri National Highway, Chhattisgarh.

4. Distributed 500 sanitary napkins and 700 Clothing pieces for women in shelter homes and quarantine centres.

5. Provided food and shelter for 30 labours of Jharkhand, stuck in Bharuch, we were also successful in securing their 30 day's pay.

6. Along with food and shelter, separate toilets were arranged for 22 female and 40 male workers of MP stuck in Bharuch with the help of DLSA.

All their employees were working remotely. In order to remove logistic difficulties, members were given high speed internet connections. Almost all centres had one laptop initially which were used during outreach, four Centres (Namely, Bilaspur, Raipur, Gumla and Mandvi), received one laptop each for the coordinators to continue with remote learning. There was an intense engagement with field volunteers through WhatsApp and conference-calling. Many volunteers who didn't have a phone, used another villager's phone and we would recharge it. Members were connected through WhatsApp groups, zoom meetings and reflection meetings as well. They also organised sessions for recreational activities. Remote working allowed their members to continue to reach out to their community members and further led to digital empowerment of the volunteers. In many villages, entitlements were

processed based on information circulated, this further increased the interaction between the volunteers and the state machinery.

Another issue was that many entitlements came through postmen, which were all at a halt due to lockdown. The entitlements which were not based on direct benefit transfer also became an issue as travelling became very restricted and only private vehicles could be used. This further became a problem for villagers with no vehicles of their own. For this, many organisation including CSJ came up with the concept of Bank Mitra in Dang area, where volunteers helped people in remote areas. It was initially difficult to get in touch with many volunteers as they had no device and we used to meet them face to face. So, they created a huge network of volunteers encompassing their own physical presence. They received more information from the grassroots and subsequently shared with them, knowledge on their legal rights. They were able to link grassroot volunteers with state machineries which further empowered them.

Every problem has a solution. You just have to be creative enough to find it.

NAV BHARAT JAGRITI KENDRA (NBJK)

Established in 1974, NBJK works in the thematic areas of- Education, Health, Livelihood Promotion, Support to Small Initiatives, Advocacy and Networking. The organization works in Hazaribagh, Koderma, Ramgarh, Ranchi, Khunti, Dumka, Dhanbad, Bokaro, Pakur, Chatra, Giridih, East Singhbhum, Saraikela Kharsawan districts in Jharkhand and Gaya, Patna, Nalanda, and Nawada districts of Bihar.

During pre-COVID-19 times everything was normal, and they were working together with their stakeholders, meeting and interacting on a regular basis.

However, during the COVID-19 caused lockdown, the organization suffered a lot as field activities were interrupted and offices closed. The employees were instructed to work from home, but this was not always possible due to shortage of laptops & lack of a stable internet connection. Many donor agencies stopped their funding which forced them to retrench their workers. NBJK run schools, education centers, eye hospitals, skill training centers – all of which were affected badly as people had to stay at home.

During the initial phase of the crisis, NBJK was engaged in relief activities for migrant workers coming to their villages and distributed edibles & medical utilities among weaker sections, challenged people and government run health centres/hospitals. It ran community kitchens, provided masks by engaging women SHGs and trainees of tailoring centres. They performed these activities with mutual cooperation. They even helped poor families in remote areas by providing some monetary benefits. They used social media to update people about their daily activities related to distribution of relief materials, awareness building and through NEFT, they could transfer support amount to their target groups. They used WhatsApp groups, Facebook, Twitter, website pages to let people know about their interventions and ensured most of the transaction through bank.

The management sent out instructions to the field staff, while those who had procured a laptop, were allowed to WFH. Their management was in contact with the government officers, beneficiaries in villages and with workers in the field. This was possible through mobile phones, e-mail or video conferencing. Since, this

mode of communication was new for NBJK officials, certain issues like initial hesitation, communication gap and misunderstandings were a common scenario. However, with curiosity, sincere efforts and trials, they overcame such problems and adapted to new ways to working.

Shri Satish Girija Ji, visited Patna himself to contact wholesalers of required items. In collaboration with government officials and PRI members, NBJK had put all its effort to provide poor people with food, sanitizers, PPE kits, surgical masks, gloves, soaps, oxygen cylinders, oximeters etc.

For supply chain management, they assessed their preparation based on available relief materials, number of consumers and time estimate to reach them. With available human resources, they made teams for different geographical locations and engaged with the affairs right from early morning to late evening. Also, the local shopkeepers supported them a lot and they supplied required materials on time. For medical utilities, their secretary

The COVID-19 pandemic provided them with a similar opportunity to go digital. This also encouraged a new trend of working from home. Their daily/monthly work plan-reports were made digitally available and all the documentation was stored digitally. Their field workers were linked with base offices through video conferencing and they could show real time images and videos.

NBJK believes in innovation and does not hesitate from using newer techniques for smoother operations.

VOLUNTARY ACTION NETWORK INDIA (VANI)

VANI was set up in 1988 with a vision to build a society where voluntarism and voluntary organisations play a dominant and constructive role in social cohesion, economic empowerment and nation building. It is an apex body of Voluntary Organizations in India. For long now, VANI has been the voice of the sector. Their main aim is to facilitate the growth of the voluntary sector in India, be a catalyst for change through leadership, research and membership engagement. They have worked with the government to shape policy on areas governing the space of voluntary organizations and have provided platforms for members and other stakeholders to interact and network. They also provide a platform for open dialogue and communications within the sector in order to strengthen it. They have also tried to create a positive narrative of the sector over the years.

VANI has played a key role in advocating and widely disseminating Model Bill for Society Registration at State level networks and had also proposed the historic alternative national budget which was later acknowledged by PV Narisimah Rao.
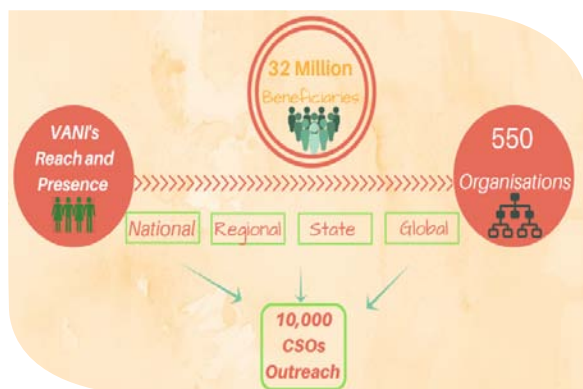
In its endeavour to link Indian Voluntary Sector with the world VANI has created fraternal relations with CIVICUS, International Forum of National Platforms (IFP), Affinity Group of National Associations (AGNA), International Civil Society Center (ICSC), Asian Democracy Network (ADN), Asian Democratic Alliance (ADA), CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE) and work in congruence with International development bodies such as G20, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, BRICS grouping, World Bank etc. Additionally, it extensively pursued SDG 16 and 17 for searching effective instruments of partnerships. VANI organized 5 multi-stakeholder development conclaves across different states with an objective to promote discussions around SDG 17 and convergence of different sectors.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the workings of the organization were offline, and all employees were physically present in the offices on a daily basis. However, all this came to a complete halt with the pandemic induced lock-downs. All activities and initiatives undertaken by VANI had to be stopped for a while as such a situation was unprecedented. Gradually, the staff and employees were asked to work from home and all meetings, workshops, seminars were conducted online. There were even training sessions and workshops conducted to make employees adjust to the digital platforms. VANI was not only able to adapt to the new normal of communicating through remote mediums quickly but was also amongst the first few organisations to communicate about the changed work-style requirements to its stakeholders, informing them about the

Government Guidelines, travelling restrictions and work place preparation. Digital Meetings and communication were organized for sector on crucial topics including Finance Bill 2020 and proposed CSR Amendments. For the first time in history, even the Annual General Body meeting of VANI was conducted online.

Despite, some minor problems in the beginning, the digital platforms were adapted by all quite seamlessly. VANI had undertaken several social media campaigns and newsletters in regard to COVID-19. They had also published several research papers and studies during these times to provide glimpse of the ground reality and provided solutions to the voluntary sectors to overcome hurdles that they were facing during these times. However, the mode of conducting research changed. It was mostly through virtual modes and at times questionnaires were circulated to the concerned organizations and people.

Various capacity building sessions were also conducted through online modes. Seminars regarding the importance of digital marketing and making data driven decisions helped understand why and how they can be pertinent for the voluntary sector to take actions and implement policies and strategies on field.

The story of VANI is one of resilience, transparency and making the most even during difficult situations.

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About Voluntary Action Network India (VANI)

VANI is a national network of Indian Voluntary Development Organisations (VDOs). Currently VANI has 624 members with an outreach to around 10,000 VDOs across India. The membership of VANI ranges from grass roots to the national organizations. The members work an a range of priority development issues of the government including education, health, nutrition, integrated child development, livelihood, skill development, environment, natural resource management, climate change, water and sanitation, emergency response and preparedness, agriculture, poverty and so on, in some of the most remote areas of the country. In the year 2017-18 our network collectively reached out to over 32 million people belonging to vulnerable and marginalized groups including children, disabled people, women, elderly, farmers, dalit, tribals, disaster survivors, unemployed, youth, LGBT, sex workers etc. VANI through its efforts and strategies aims to build a strong civil society sector not only at national but regional and local level as well.

VANI was set up with the mission to promote voluntarism, create space for the sector by fostering value based voluntary action. VANI's interventions are focused to strengthen the external and internal enabling environment. To ensure the external enabling environment, VANI conducts evidence-based advocacy which includes regulatory frameworks and resource generation. In order to achieve this VANI works with the government, private sector, bilateral, multilaterals and other stakeholders. For strengthening the internal enabling environment, VANI works towards building resilience and promoting accountability, transparency and compliance through the interactive educational events and information dissemination. VANI strives to become a resource centre by conducting evidence-based research; publishing studies, articles and reports not only at state level but national and global level as well.