

COVID-19 Response-Brief Report

#MISSIONRAHAT: HELPING THOSE RENDERED HELPLESS

The Outbreak of COVID-19 in India and our response

No part of the world, India included, was prepared for the multiple fallout of COVID-19. Atmashakti members too were locked down in March 2020, wherever we were in India, unable to pursue our usual rights-based work in Odisha.

But as usual, we just had to respond to the visible crisis all around us. The complete lockdown for containing the virus left lakhs of industrial, domestic and daily wagers everywhere in the country without work, money and even access to food. Their future employment was in doldrums, and their presence was teetering on the edge of life and death.

Those of us in Noida and Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh and Gurgaon, Haryana, stepped up to draw from our limited resources and nil exposure to epidemic response, to save affected families around us from sure starvation. We called it "MissionRahat", and we aimed to support them with dry rations and cooked food to tide over the worst phase of the lockdown and pandemic side-effect.

About us

Atmashakti Trust has been working in Odisha and Uttar Pradesh with the broad objectives of creating awareness of constitutional rights and entitlements amongst the most marginalized rural communities with an emphasis on Tribals and Dalits. We facilitate the formation of local level Sangathan who then take up various issues related to their circumstances with the local administration.

Our experience with the disaster response

Cyclone FANI response 2019: Post-disaster rehab, livelihood restoration and education intervention in 5 villages of Puri district in Odisha covering approximately 1300 families.

Cyclone Phailin Response 2013-14:

- Providing rations to around 50 widowed/destitute women
- Construction of over 500 homes under "Food for Work" programme
- Providing seeds to over 3500 farmers to enable immediate restoration of their livelihood, and linking them with various govt. Schemes and other benefits



Distribution of Dry rations in Noida, Ghaziabad, Shahibad, Delhi, Loni and Gurgaon



Distribution of cooked food for migrant workers and ragpickers returnees in road side of Noida and Greater Noida,

Modus operandi/ challenges

Initiating COVID relief response in a non-operational area: The first challenge of #missionrahat was that we were totally fish out of water: outside our usual operational area, with no local network to carry out even the most basic tasks. Each of us had to work in isolation, with minimal or nil backup or team support in the office or field. Further, we were severely constrained by in movement and operations with the threat of viral contamination and lockdown laws norms.

Even our rich experience of working in Odisha and Sonbhadra district of Uttar Pradesh in engaging communities had not prepared us for the complex issues and difficulties presented by this singularly unusual situation.

Call for Action to help more families: Our relief response began with support to 1000 needy families with dry rations - a complete kit to survive the six weeks of lockdown till they got back to work. After multiple attempts, we learnt here how to approach, organize and implement safety and social distancing among angry and hungry people who didn't trust anyone. As of today, this set of people are back on their feet, at their work. When we thought our work was over, the un-anticipated roller coaster ride began. As word got around, calls poured in from small and large needy groups, in and around Noida. When we hit the bottom of all known resources, we couldn't just grow deaf to the overwhelming deluge of distress calls. We did what we had never done before - making public appeals through emails, phone calls, social media channels as well as on "Milaap", an online fundraising platform to reach-out to every

possible donor and helping hand.

As the numbers needing help swelled, we took the difficult decision of supporting more families with dry ration by reducing our kit size to 10 kg flour, 2 kg pulses and 1 kg salt. We also realized that the migrant workers were fleeing back to their home against all the odds, with no food and money with them. Therefore, we decided to serve cooked food for them. Our team members distributed cooked food in several places in Noida and Delhi such as bus stops, railway stations and roadside in National highways, covering over 2200 people.

Planning resourcefulness:

- One of our friends was able to connect with the Food Secretary Mr Ravi Kant, and his office put us in contact with FCI, Lucknow. After negotiating bureaucratic hurdles, we have bought kgs rice @ 22.55/- as against the market price Rs. 35/-
- SDM Loni had provided us with the transport to pick up the rice from FCI godown in Hapur and dal from a wholesaler who offered a rate Rs. 56/- per kg as against the price Rs. 65/- we had budgeted. Money saved by these efforts further helped us to reach out to 4262 additional families.

Using the public distribution network:

In Loni, most of the areas were coming under the contaminated zone. We used the Public Distribution Channel for reaching out to the 8000 distress families who were non-ration cardholders and deprived of essential ration in 36 wards of Loni subdivision.

Coordinated mechanism with NGOs/Solidarity groups:

We administer relief work with the help of three solidarity network who were actively engaged in Delhi and NCR. These networks help us to identify the genuine needs and avoid duplication.

Coordination with the local administration:

We preferred working in collaboration with the local administration in this pandemic situation. The District Magistrate, Ghaziabad and Sub-Divisional Magistrate, Loni extended their ample support to our intervention.

Need-based support:

We opted to have a flexible approach during distribution. Initially, we were supporting the Ragpicker families with six-week dry ration; afterwards, we were providing two-week dry ration to the domestic workers and construction workers. We distributed cooked meal to the workers who were travelling back to home. Currently, we launched a program called "Food for work" in which we are providing two-week dry ration support to the workers who are not able to get back to work. They are engaged in the cleaning and maintenance work of their slums before the rainy season.

Reporting, documentation and monitoring of the COVID response:

To ensure transparency and accountability of our initiative, we maintained all the required data, records and testimonials.

Atmashakti team extends its sincere thanks to all the supporters, especially to the DM Ghaziabad, SDM Loni, Food Corporation of India, Delhi Flour Mills for their support, coordination and donation.

Details of the Support

Total Fund Raised- 7731478/-

Funds received in the bank- 6749674/-

Contribution received in kind- 981804/- (cooked food, dry ration, logistic support)

Coverage

Area - Noida, Delhi, Gurgaon, Faridabad, Ghaziabad, Loni

Population - 93280

Segment- Ragpicker, Construction worker, Domestic worker and Daily wages labourer



Our COVID response team with the officials of the Sub-Divisional Magistrate, Loni, UP



Distribution of cooked-food in several bus stops in Noida area for migrant labourers and their family members on their way back to West Bengal and Bihar



A woman firing up wood-stove after she received essential rations from our distribution centre in Noida

Testimony

As if the lockdown served a death bell for us. Had we not been provided rations in time, we would have ended our lives amidst lockdown. Thanks Atmashakti for their timely help."



Sheela Rani Viswas
A Ragpicker in Shihani Village,
Ghaziabad

Online link of the media coverage

<https://indiaeducationdiary.in/this-is-how-atmashaktis-missionrahat-campaign-is-helping-distressed-and-stranded-families-during-covid-19-in-noida-and-parts-of-up/>

<https://www.swatantraawaz.com/headline/11341.htm>

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/readersblog/peoplefirst/covid-19-understanding-the-invisible-troubles-faced-by-the-ragpickers-21142/>

<http://uijwalprabhat.in/people-suffering-from-hunger-got-the-support-of-the-atma-shakti-trust-the-members-of-the-atma-shakti-team-are-constantly-helping-the-needy-families/>

For more queries, please contact us

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