

RISING UP TO “FLATTEN THE CURVE”: RESILIENT WOMEN, RESILIENT COMMUNITIES



SSP Approach

At the core of SSP’s approach is building robust partnership eco-systems that enable grassroots women’s networks to access skills training, financial and digital literacy, technology and marketing platforms. Since ten years, SSP has impacted 180,000 women directly and over 5.5 million people. Our two decades of experience in turning “crisis into opportunity” to build community resilience in climate hit, drought prone regions is holding us in good stead. And as a result, we have a strong network of women leaders – the “Sakhi Task Force” - ready to face any crisis head-on by taking a leadership role in their communities.

Challenges

In the fight against Covid-19, we strongly believe in supporting women’s groups and communities to work closely with the frontline health workers and local governments. The Covid-19 pandemic will affect rural communities for many months to come. SSP views the recovery and resilience building of the community as a long-term commitment and will be addressing it in a phased manner.

Sakhi Task Force leaders are guiding and counseling communities in matters of health, hygiene and livelihoods and helping them access Covid-19 relief. This challenging task is being achieved within the prescribed norms of social distancing and without any person from the village having to venture beyond their local boundaries.

Introduction

This brief update from Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) outlines our Covid-19 relief efforts from March 19th to May 19th 2020. Rural communities have been hit hard by Covid-19 crisis. Families are struggling with looming hunger & loss of livelihoods. SSP has joined the national efforts & is working to empower grassroots women’s networks and communities across Maharashtra, Kerala and Bihar through relief, recovery and building long term resilience to reduce the impact of this humanitarian, economic and health crisis.



Our Sakhi Task Force helps communities deal with the COVID-19 crisis

Due to the impending Covid-19 lockdown, SSP decided to close all its centres from March 19th. SSP management, field and community teams quickly adapted to working remotely. The team connected with our women leaders and constituted Sakhi Task Force, across 500 villages across eight districts in three states – Latur, Osmanabad, Solapur, and Nanded in Maharashtra, Nalanda and Gaya in Bihar and Wayanad and Kottayam in Kerala.

The Sakhi Task Force swung into action and first identified vulnerable families (SC/ST, women headed households and daily wage workers, returning migrants) from these regions most hit due to Covid-19 crisis. As part of its Covid-19 Relief Campaign, SSP decided to address food security through distribution dry rations package worth Rs, 4000 for over two months. Our leaders at the last mile with the local government systems set forth to to identify, mobilize resources where needed, and then arrange for public distribution of ration kits with dignity to needy households who included widows, migrant daily wage laborers, elders without support, disabled, landless, poor farmers.



Immediate actions initiated by Sakhi Task Force facilitated by SSP teams

Safety measures:

- Sakhi Task Force members conducted household level awareness activities by visiting each and every family to apprise them of the crisis and preventive measures to be taken.

Immediate food security:

- Partnered with the local grocery/kirana stores to provide credit for purchase essential items.
- Activated the Public Distribution System (PDS) to provide ration, even to those without ration cards.

Livelihoods:

- Identification of women who could sew and set up them to make and sell masks, thus helping the fight against Covid-19 while earning them some income.
- Enabled farmers to sell their produce directly to urban consumers.

Collaboration with local government:

- Women leaders support migrants issues, quarantine and services as part of COVID-1- Action Committees.
- Working at the last mile with frontline health workers on home visits to check and identify people with symptoms.

Impact at a Glance



Sakhi Task Force and SSP assisted over 15,000 needy families with food/ration and hygiene kits so they could stay healthy, safe and protected.

Over two lakhs families reached out through doorstep education and adopted Covid-19 prevention practices.

Summary of contributions to SSP towards COVID relief and recovery

SSP received grants worth Rs.61.54 lakhs. Individual and corporate donors included Shapoorji Pallonji Finance Private Limited, Kamal Udwadia Fdn, UNICEF, Misereor, Habitat for Humanity India and Merrimac.

Community contribution mobilized by Sakhi Task Force at village level: Rs.15.88 lakhs + in kind contribution of groceries, vegetables and dairy products.



Inspiring Stories from our COVID Warriors

Young Leader and Arogya Sakhi

A young graduate Payal Kokate is from a remote village and an emerging young leader and role model for many in Nanded district in Maharashtra. Since the lockdown, the major vegetable market was closed making it difficult to sell farm produce. Payal created a village market with few women vendors from the village to sell the produce generating an income of ₹200 per day. More important, she ensured that 200 families are getting organic vegetables. "I thought I had to do something to help poor women to earn and stay healthy too. Payal also prepared 200 masks distributed to the poor families. The cost for the masks has been borne by her farmer's group.



Usha Gurav, Boramani, Solapur



Work from home has hit the widows in Marathwada, the most. They had lost their daily jobs and small businesses faced closure. When people do not have enough, who is to look out for widows and their children? In neighbouring district of Solapur, twenty widows in Boramani village had no one to look to. They would lose their dignity, if they asked their neighbors. Seeing their plight, Usha Gurav urged her group saying "Wasn't mutual aid the reason why we formed this group"? She motivated her group to dig into their precious savings and made a plan to support twenty widows and others. In presence of their Panchayat, they procured and distributed fifty grocery kits enough to feed well over 200 people. Unstoppable, these leaders went on to help the Panchayat to look after migrants who have traveled back bringing back nothing with them. "They are not outsiders, they are after all, our people"...Says Usha about people who have returned from cities.

Santoshi Survase from Mamdapur village, Latur district

Santoshi Survase from Mamdapur village, Latur district is a Krishi Samvad Sahayak for the last two years. She was one of the first women in her village to adopt the "Women-led Food Secure Agriculture Model". She then motivated 60 women farmers in her village to adopt the model. In addition, she helped them link their farms to agro-allied business ventures and as a result their average income went up by 30%. Taking the lead in any situation, especially a crisis is now her second nature. She started awareness and behaviour change campaigns much before the local Gram Panchayat did. She is an active member of the village level Corona Monitoring Committee. She has done house-to-house visits for over 250 families where she conducted sessions on how to prevent the spread of Corona virus. She also identified 35 highly vulnerable families in her village and supported them to get ration kits. With the help of her group members, she collected 500 kg grains and pulses worth Rs. 20,000/- and distributed 50 kgs of vegetables free of cost to villagers. Being a flour mill owner, she has allotted these services free and offered goods on credit to the poor for next 3 months. These simple actions have inspired other flour mill owners to do the same! She says "Swayam Shikshan Prayog encouraged me to become a farmer, an entrepreneur and most important... a leader".



Helping someone in need should be done without delay!



Susheela Devi from the Mahadalit community, Modan Tola village, Patna, Bihar is one of our Sakhi Task Force women leaders. When Susheela Devi realised that families were not able to avail of food during lockdown she swung into action and helped 25 families get 10 kg of rice and wheat for 3 months, and Rs.1500 each through govt support and JanDhan. She helped 225 families with ration card application and with Aadhar-Bank linking enabling them to access Govt Schemes. "Helping someone in need should be done without delay" she says.

Sakhi Task Force take the lead for Community Kitchen

To help the poor families and migrants, Sakhi Task Force took lead in starting two community kitchens in Edavaka and Kottathara Panchayats in Wayanad in Kerala. Sakhi Farmers Group, Kudumbashree and Panchayat jointly operationalized these kitchens and provided breakfast, lunch and dinner for migrants, tribal communities and poor families. The group prepared and distributed 1245 food kits in Two Panchayats and distributed 100 food packets to the Government General Hospital in Wayanad.



Covid-19 Prevention and Building Resilience - A project supported by UNICEF

- 300 frontline workers, community leaders trained on Covid-19 safety measures, water, sanitation and health precautions.
- Coordination with ICDS service providers to ensure take-home rations distributed through home-visits and food grains given to families without ration cards – over 900 families covered.
- Ensured mid-day meals to school going children
- Hygiene kits distributed in 50 villages of Osmanabad
- Study report of 9 migrant shelter camps with recommendations

Lessons Learnt and Way Forward

Investing in women's entrepreneurship and networks to build women's resilience

The Covid-19 crisis has validated the years of investment in solidarity networks which enable women to not just face many crises head-on, but take a leadership role. Over the last many years, women in these climate hit regions have faced many crises due to floods, cyclones and droughts. Their leadership, commitment and action are what have enabled them to quickly respond to any crisis in a manner that meets the needs of their communities, especially the most marginalized. They do not believe in copy-pasting external solutions, but instead focus on arriving at solutions that are co-created and co-owned by the entire community.

A few learning's from the recent intervention that will enable SSP to focus on the process of Covid-19 recovery and building resilience of rural economies

- Aggregation of products, services and labour/skills is a powerful way for women groups to link to companies who want to develop alternate markets and business models.
- Ensure food security through food from farm and home gardens
- Groups and networks, are the only measure of disaster prevention that poor women have, they help to transmit and transfer right information and leave no one behind.
- As women entrepreneurs grow, they build business to business (B2B) connections, embrace community leadership to ensure food, health, livelihoods, protect water and other resources, and give back through their networks to the most vulnerable. In addition, women have started getting digitally literate through phone-based training including digital payments.
- Facilitate new local markets, alternate business models, and shorten value chains by connecting farmers directly to consumers.

Our Partners



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