



SWAYAM SHIKSHAN PRAYOG

Quarterly Update

April to June 2020

Relief Initiatives

To deal with the COVID-19 crisis and lockdown, SSP has prioritized immediate food security through the distribution of food relief packages to migrant daily wage workers and women-headed households. This was a community-owned effort facilitated by SSP's existing well-trained network of village-level Sakhis - Women's Task Force to evolve strategies & address the crisis at local level.

Sakhi Task Force was successful in ensuring equitable distribution of COVID relief, leveraging the village level resources to help the most vulnerable families and in collaborating with the Gram Panchayat (GP) to ensure social inclusion in terms of ration cards and job cards.

Sakhi Task Force brought all the key stakeholders together such as the GP, Frontline Workers, functionaries of WASH, ICDS, PDS to focus on needs of vulnerable groups (pregnant women, mothers, elders, landless families) through identification. They were successful in bringing together village level functionaries and activating Sahayata Committees and Frontline workers on COVID prevention and control, monitoring services at quarantine centers, access to food relief and essentials for vulnerable groups & supported migrants and landless to access work through MGNREGS. Along with social inclusion, they also ensured that the village level issues were taken up at the block and district level.

Introduction

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 and is working to empower grassroots women's networks and communities across Maharashtra, Kerala, Bihar and Odisha 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 crisis

With the lockdown from 21st March, the stranded migrant labourers and travellers found shelter camps as an only option. The hygiene, safety and security of the people was crucial with the rising COVID cases. The GP suddenly found itself with the great burden of responsibilities. The Sakhi Task Force stepped in and ensured that safety, hygiene and physical distancing norms were being maintained in the shelter camps and quarantine centres. They also ensured there was food in the camps and the people got proper meals. The Sakhis took extra care to ensure safety for the women in the camps.

In such a short span of time, the women took charge of the situation and were ready to adapt to any situation to help the community. The women quickly learned how to coordinate with the use of technology. One month into the intervention, they were attending zoom call trainings and also arranged online zoom dialogues with the various stakeholders and block level officials.

The efforts of the Sakhis were inclusive, they reached out to all, from vulnerable families to stranded migrant labourers. Apart from ensuring that all families apply for ration cards, their constant dialogues with the GPs and block offices made it possible to arrange for free ration for all. They not only worked with the Government stakeholders, but also leveraged resources from the villages in terms of cash for essentials of migrants and vulnerable families and ration for them in the days of the lockdown.

In the quarter, with the support of UNICEF program, the overwhelming figures of the number of people who benefitted in the 50 villages of Osmanabad district and the appointment of 150 Sakhis into the Sahayata Samitis at the village level helped us demonstrate how women closely working with the government could leverage the resources and optimize benefits for the communities. Over 2000 families applied for ration cards and the Sakhis referred 2000+ early COVID detection cases to ASHA workers. 400+ people, both men and women, obtained job cards and work under MREGS.

Impact at a Glance



Sakhi Task Force (STF) team evolved organically during the crisis, has taken the lead while working with local government in relief distribution, COVID prevention awareness, ensuring ration supply, jobs under MNREGA, local food security & livelihoods for poor families & migrants:

Outreach: 15 districts across Maharashtra, Bihar, Kerala & Odisha

Impact: 1,500 grassroots women taking the lead as members of Sakhi Task Force.

Total kits distributed: 18,320 needy families with food/ration & hygiene kits.

Families assisted: 2,20,517 families through education & practices

Community contribution: Rs. 35.64 lakhs + groceries, vegetables & dairy products mobilized by women leaders.

Ensured public distribution system reach: over 30,000 families.

Assisted in MNREGA : Over 2,050 persons secured jobs Ensured vegetable gardens: 1,441 families.



New Business Opportunities

New businesses started by women leaders includes vegetable business, goat rearing, poultry farming, dairy business, oil ghana, photography, shewai, kurudi, papad, chili kandap, dal mill, ready- made garments, grain cleaning machine, labor contractor, sprinkler repair, mobile accessories, xerox machine, cattle feed, sewing, rent of agricultural equipment, disinfect of offices and houses, tea business, preparation of masks, hand-washes, and so on.

- **Fashion Designing:** Many women are interested in tailoring, also they need input and capacity building support on fashion designing. There is market demand for various designs of garments.
- **Papad Production:** There are many papad producers in the local market. But demand for handmade papad is unique. Many women shown interest and decided to join the papad production.
- **Jewelry Production:** Jewelry in various forms and designs is a real-time market. Demands of customers are fulfilled by buying from cities. Women leaders have decided to explore the 1 gram jewelry item production and sales also the business of giving jewelry on a rental basis.
- **Catering Business:** People demand healthy yet delicious food. Demand for healthy food like jowar roti has increased, especially because diabetes people rely mainly on jowar roti.
- **Free of Cost Medical Services:** SSP's women milk producers are being provided with health services by doctors. Farmers can seek guidance from veterinary doctors through a call, anytime. Doctors also visit animal shelters and inspect the animals. In addition, doctors conduct zoom training and guide farmers every fortnight on various topics including herd management, fodder management, and vaccination.
- **Climate-resilient Agriculture (Kharif Season) Training to Farmers** were organised for Krishi Samvad sahayaks and further, they will pass on the same to women farmers in villages. Trainers have conducted demonstrations of seed treatment, germination, bijamrut, and pesticide management like Jivamrut, Bijamrut, Dashparni. etc. Through these pieces of training, we covered 2500 Farmers across Osmanabad and Solapur districts.
- **Convergence:** In the convergence, we did online zoom training with Krushi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) to Farmers, leaders, and Samvad sahayaks on Climate resilient agriculture (Kharif Season). 150 farmers and sakhis participated for the same. Linked farmers as well as migrants to connect to MREGS. Linked small & marginal farmers to Kisan Credit card Schemes and horticulture schemes.

Online Trainings

Training to Women Farmers supported by Department of Agriculture, Department of Animal Husbandry & Center for Agricultural Sciences:

Women farmers could not be given classroom training on organic farming, business, and the environment. As an alternative, SSP provided them mandatory information through the Zoom app. This training was imparted jointly by Agricultural Science, Central Department of Animal Husbandry, Department of Agriculture, and SSP.

Initially, the women did not know about the usage of the Zoom app. They were guided on how to download the app and join the training at the village level, later they were delivered training via a link which got forwarded. Following activities were organized:

- Capacity building workshop on zoom
- Developed a user manual on how to use zoom application in Marathi to spread awareness
- Surveyed 300 families on the awareness of COVID -19 and its impact of lockdown
- A WhatsApp group was created to communicate and register stakeholder's for capacity building demand generation
- Team building conducted an alternate day's team review meeting and shortlisted 30 potential use cases to prepare business plans.



Women leaders acquire various skills through online trainings

Awareness for using digital technology: Krishi Samvad Sahayaks (KSS) were trained for using zoom app technology. Block coordinators trained first and then KSS for the same. It was an opportunity for field staff and women to learn IT literacy. Currently, our KSS are training other farmers using the zoom application.

Knowledge Sharing and learning Meeting: Each Samvad sahayak daily trains 4 to 5 farmers and gives climate-resilient agriculture information. Also, block coordinators and samvad sahayaks use mobile technology to get the awareness of agriculture and receive COVID updates. In this quarter, technology has helped in awareness meetings and conducting training to over 2500 people in the grassroots in Latur district.

Kharif Pre Sowing Training to KSS - We conducted 3 districts wise training to KSS on pre-sowing of Kharif. In this training, all KSS from six blocks were participated using their smartphones. This training was done through Zoom app. Trainings were focused on sustainable agriculture, food security, water management, women empowerment, and COVID preparedness measures. KSS trained farmers on Kharif pre-sowing preparation for collective procurement of agriculture inputs, using their own seeds and local biofertilizer. We trained 4203 farmers through this app. Also, communicated to Krishi Vigyan Kendra as well as Agri department representatives and companies for collective procurement of Kharif seasons inputs. We connected around 1300 farmers in a collective approach.

Women farmers grew vegetables in the backyard and met the need for a healthy diet at their homes. This helps in saving time, money, and lowers the risk of contracting COVID and furthermore, convincing others of the importance of organic farming.

Soil Testing - Women farmers were linked to the Agri Dept for soil testing & water testing by creating awareness about the soil sample collection process, benefits of sample testing, etc. Farmers spend a huge amount of money on fertilizers, so we tried to reduce cultivation costs through inputs. All inputs are made at their own level or collectively procured from vermi entrepreneurs.

Refresher Training of Kharif Season to Samvad Sahayak: Refresher trainings were organised on Kharif season to Samvad sahayaks. In the training, we shared knowledge on Climate-resilient Agriculture as well as agri-allied businesses. Over 80+ Samvad Sahayaks and Leaders attended these training sessions. After this training, SS conducted village level training and the trained village level farmers.

Start-up Village Entrepreneurship Program

- The SVEP program is being implemented in 236 villages across Mohol and Barshi blocks in Solapur district.
- 56 CRP-EPs trained and placed
- Submitted 222 entrepreneurs proposals to govt's online and offline portal under PMEGP and CMEGP. Out of these, 31 entrepreneurs benefited Rs. 69 lakhs
- 124 entrepreneurs accessed Mudra loans
- Accessed bank loan of Rs 107 lakhs
- Radio 98.3 FM interviewed 10 entrepreneurs
- Through convergence, 1547 entrepreneurs have been given Udyog Aadhar license and 206 enterprises have been given food licenses (FSSI)
- 7725 Potential entrepreneurs trained under the 321 EDP Program and 4129 enterprises supported under SVEP. And, 27 entrepreneurs have applied for GST certificate
- Rs.145 lakhs Community Enterprises Fund (CEF) amount released from MSRLM to nodal CBO and CEF sanctioned to 1576 enterprises of Rs. 447/- lakhs.
- CEF given to 887 SVEP enterprises and is Rs. 231 lakh
- 353 entrepreneurs accessed credit from banks of Rs 164/- lakhs. Through convergence, 580 enterprises have given training from KVK for product packing, branding, labeling & legal process
- From Malikpeth village, Mohol 73 SHG members linked to
- Janashree Bima Yojana under Kamgar Kalyan Yojana, 19 SVEP entrepreneurs linked. 12 members received equipment kits for their regular work in the field.

Highlights of Activities by women leaders

Economic empowerment of women

During COVID-19 lockdown, keeping up the spirit and earning incomes, when most livelihoods were disrupted, women entrepreneurs were selling milk and distributing surplus milk to the needy. SSP's economic empowerment of rural women was based on group approach and market linkages. Janaki Suryavanshi is one such women farmer from Nagarsoga, Latur district. She sold about 30 litres of milk and earned Rs 700-800 per day. Janaki has enough cows to get manure for making vermi-compost. She got good yield and income this time due to adoption of a mixed cropping system. Despite COVID impact - so far 200 women have emerged as Dairy Entrepreneurs and 1,000 women- farmers as Milk Producers across Latur and Osmanabad districts.

Unmasking skills during COVID crisis

In Bihar Sakhis produced masks in collaboration with Gram Panchayat (GP) in four villages, to meet the market demand and earn quick incomes for survival.

Over 10,000 masks have been stitched and distributed in Bhasinghpur village, Parwalpur Block, Nalanda, women Panchayat provided the material and generated INR15,000/- as an added income. "We maintain a good relationship with the Panchayat through our response in any crisis.", says Poonam.



Investing in Clean Energy Products

Solar will enhance livelihood prospects, improve efficiency in rural households. In Bihar, Sakhis who have invested their capital to sell solar energy products and started businesses locally. Solar energy also provides a multiplier effect by providing employment and entrepreneurial avenues to rural livelihood.

Climate resilient farming and local food security in Kerala

During the COVID lock-down, Sakhi farmers group in Wayanad and Kottayam districts in Kerala have spent their time effectively on farming extensively. All of them have taken up farming of vegetables near their kitchens. This will ensure availability of vegetables during COVID since the market is having shortage of vegetables.

As part of a new initiative, 600 Sakhi Farmers were trained on climate resilient farming practices. Training was conducted on Birds Eye Chilli, Tubers, Chinese Potato, Mushroom and Paddy cultivation for Sakhi Farmers in Kerala. To address local food security, 60 Sakhi Farmers from Wayanad have taken 25 acres of land on lease to cultivate traditional aromatic rice varieties of Gandhakasala and Jeerakasala in organic method. This initiative will ensure food availability of poor families in crisis time. Lands are prepared for sowing the seeds and negotiation is going on with Krishi Bhavan to get free seeds from the government. They are also working with the local governments under the 'Subhiksha Kealam' programme (Food Security for all) declared by the Government.

Securing daily jobs for the poor

Komal Pawar from Baswantwadi village, in Osmanabad worked as project lead in the COVID19 committee. Beyond call of duty, she managed to list priority issues -ration cards, economic distress, lack of job cards and adequate work while involving key stakeholders - Gram Panchayat and Gram Sevaks to discuss solutions and get sanction of the MNREGA work. She helped villagers submit job demand forms. Enabled 20 women to get jobs under NREGA earning INR 200/day. Due to the effort of STF, GP agreed to provide daily jobs for migrants. Around 400 such people got jobs under MREGS after processing job card applications in Osmanabad. Over 20 to 40 migrants and landless labourers per village were involved in work of water conservation. Women leaders held a meeting with the CEO and GPs to get work under government nurseries, tree plantation, drainage & road work.

New use of skills change lives

We never imagined using our skills learned from previous trainings. Now lamp wick making gives us additional income and recognition in this difficult time," says Vineetha, from Wayanad in Kerala. The lockdown has persuaded the women group to think positively and decided to make the lamp wicks and distribute them to nearby shops, temples, churches and houses.



Inspiring Stories from the Field

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. She 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

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".



Inspiring Stories from the Field (continued ...)

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.



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Lessons from SSP combined with social commitment



Bhagyashree Londhe was farming in the traditional way to meet her needs before joining SSP's SVEP program. In such a situation a ray of hope appeared with the help of SSP. After completing entrepreneurship training, she decided to make homemade spices and chutneys (chilli powder). Following that, started the business by gathering women from self-help group and making chutney. The chutney began to sell in the market as a brand "Jijau masale".

With the help of SSP, she got food license and other necessary licenses, the group set up its first stall in the Saras Bazaar in Mumbai. In just 8 days, she made a turnover of Rs 5 lakh and made a net profit of Rs 1.5 lakh. After returning to the village from Mumbai Saras, all the women came together and decided on the same masala formula and with the help of her husband, Bhagyashree planned the business. While making spices, chutneys, lemon pickles, jams, summer food, gave a boost to the 'Jijau product'. In taluka places, houses, villages are supplied as per the demand. Her 2 children are studying. At the same time, the Gram Sangh got a four-wheeler 'Ajivika express' from UMED Abhiyan. Bhagyashree drove the Jijau group and set up four-wheelers as a shopping center. All the skills learned from the SVEP training is being used today to develop the brand 'Jijau product'.

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 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.



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