



Key Highlights

Rural India is not insulated in the second wave of COVID. While it's important to stem the spread of COVID through widespread education and infection management including vaccination and home care, it is equally urgent that we look at the economic distress faced by wage workers, farmers and vulnerable households in the context of day to day survival.

Since April 2021, SSP has adopted its learnings in dealing with the second wave, to empower grassroots institutions - Gram Panchayats and women leaders to adopt holistic approach from response to resilience process - continuous outreach, education, assessment, prevention and build community resilience through improving food security, livelihoods & access to social protection for vulnerable groups.

Home based Covid-care and isolation is almost impossible for the vulnerable rural households. To address this problem, women leaders have taken a big step in supporting the GPs and Primary Health Centres to start community isolation centres for COVID patients with mild and moderate symptoms.

An isolation centre has started in Bavi village of Osmanabad on 23rd May 2021. We are in the process of setting up about 30 such Isolation Centres. Doctors, health workers and leaders are working together to reduce the COVID spread in villages.

Rural women-led response to COVID-19

Women leaders / Sakhis who have been trained on COVID prevention measures and long term approaches are taking lead in distribution of food relief kits, helping farmers for seeds and inputs, working with local govt in running isolation centers, taking patients to hospital and mobilizing communities on vaccine drive. SSP's strategies to stop the spread of COVID-19 are:

- Build capacities of women to form Village Action Groups with knowledge on prevention and control measures
- Equip local governments and frontline workers to coordinate mass awareness, food and medical relief and emergency services.
- Work along with the Health Systems to ensure readiness for vaccination and access to health services especially for women and children.



Setting up of a Covid Isolation Centre



1. Distribution of Grocery Kits & Essentials



Distribution of relief kits to vulnerable families

In this quarter, SSP has distributed 4,000+ grocery/food Kits to the needy families of Latur, Osmanabad, Solapur, Nanded, Jalna, Ahmednagar and Aurangabad districts in Maharashtra; Gaya and Nalanda districts in Bihar and Kottayam and Wayanad districts in Kerala. Many thanks to Kaushalya Foundation and Smiles For All for the great support by providing SSP the materials to distribute 3,150 food kits to the vulnerable families. Smiles For All initiative is a volunteer-driven team led by a group of IIM Ahmedabad Alumni, for the food relief drive, to get food to those impacted by COVID.

In Wayanad district in Kerala, SSP team with women leaders and farmers have identified the most vulnerable communities from tribal and disadvantaged families. Women groups mobilized resources from the general public and distributed food kits for 65 Tribal families in Edavaka. Apart from this 300 kg of Tapioca cultivated by Sakhi farmers have been distributed to vulnerable families. 250 grocery/food kits were distributed by the SSP team to the most needed families with the support of Kaushalya Foundation. In Mundar in Kottayam district, SSP has created COVID awareness and mobilized people for vaccination. 250 grocery/food kits were distributed to the families in Mundar.

In Bihar, SSP team and women leaders created COVID prevention awareness across Nalanda and Gaya districts and 400 grocery kits were distributed to the vulnerable families with immediate need.

Impact at a Glance



- Outreach: 500 villages across 15 districts across Maharashtra, Bihar, Kerala and Odisha states
- Impact: 3,000 grassroots women taking the lead as members of Sakhi Task Force.
- Total kits distributed: 4,000+ needy families with food/grocery kits.
- Community contribution: Groceries, vegetables and dairy products mobilized by women leaders.
- Families assisted: 4 lakhs families through education programs on health services, COVID prevention, testing and drive to promote vaccination
- Over 17,825 farmers trained online on climate resilient agriculture for cultivation of food crops and distribution of agriculture sowing kits
- Over 5,196 rural women supported on micro-entrepreneurship to stabilize their incomes from diversified livelihoods –livestock enterprises.

Vaccination Drive

Rural women have shown tremendous courage and leadership to stem the spread of COVID. Through meetings and house visits, women leaders have been mobilizing and motivating the communities to get vaccinated. Leaders joined the vaccine drive with local panchayats, creating awareness for registering the villagers to speed up the vaccinations to stem the pandemic. They have given scientific truths to counter the myth of communities against vaccination. Due to this drive in Maharashtra, more than 65,000 people got vaccinated and developed a feeling of safety among the communities. In Kerala, the leaders and Gram Panchayats worked closely to monitor the COVID situation, fumigate the places, identify patients, help the community to register and schedule for vaccination. 1,100 people are vaccinated under this drive. 40 Tribal families have been taken to the hospital for vaccination. As in the case of Bihar, over 1,000 people got vaccinated through women leaders' efforts in our operational villages.

2. Women Leaders Build Resilience



Screening carried out in the villages

Sakhi leaders moved door to door, identified symptoms, delivered masks, soaps and sanitizers. They mobilized women from vulnerable groups to be part of decision making. Apart from ration and medicine distribution drives, these village level leaders organized health campaigns at the village level to increase vaccinations and encourage families to follow COVID-19 protocols. SSP has partnered with the district and local administration to spread awareness on the infection, its spread, myths and the vaccine as a solution.

As the cases are rising every day and the poor people find it difficult to afford hospital care, Women have mobilized through Sakhi Task Forces in over 500 villages to address various issues in COVID. Ranging from relief distribution of essential food items to home isolation and livelihoods, these leaders are part of the COVID Sahayata Samiti of the Panchayat /local government to bring down the numbers and provide financial aid , if needed. Awareness on social distancing, distribution of masks and sanitisers are some of the initial steps taken by women leaders.

"It is unprecedented and we never expected that the COVID second wave would come to our villages. As we have the experience of last year in addressing the crisis, we are not taking any chances, as the situation could become worse", Jayashree Kadam, Jadhkot village.

Jyoti Sonkhambe from Dhapshed village in Nanded, faced strong refusal from villagers for getting vaccinated. She took it as a challenge and visited every house in her village, explained the benefits of vaccination. She has helped 134 people to get vaccinated. "Now, the fear has reduced and people understand the importance of vaccination. People come to me asking, when will the vaccine be available for the next dose", says Jyoti Tai. This is a great shift & women leaders are doing remarkable work, they are stepping out, putting their life at risk to convince as many as possible so as to keep their village and its people safe.

Respecting Frontline workers

Health workers are under pressure and working tirelessly to save the life of people at their risk. SSP team handed over 1,000 PPE kits to health workers of Ter rural hospital, Zilla Parishad Latur. "We are ready to extend our support to SSP to scale up their resilience efforts," says Mr. Abhinav Goel, Chief Executive Office, Zilla Parishad, Latur.

"Giving is a way of showing solidarity and taking care of the poor," Dr. Gangadhar Parge, District Health Officer, Latur, while receiving the 1000 PPE kits from SSP. The kits were handed over on 12th May 2021 at the Zilla Parishad, Latur.



Women leaders take lead in stem the spread of COVID

When Zinnar, a small village in Osmanabad in Maharashtra, saw a sudden rise of eleven COVID-19 positive patients, Jayashree Kale, a leader from the village, along with Gram Panchayat isolated these patients & followed safety measures to reduce the spread of the infection in the village. Leaders have been working in creating awareness on safety norms to be followed, helping people with contact tracing and getting fumigated and sanitized every house in order to save them from COVID. "We will not put our community in despair. We have the will and experience in dealing with COVID", says Godavari Dange, a Grassroots Leader from Marathwada.

3. COVID Awareness and Local Partnership



Community isolation Center managed by women leader's, run by gram panchayat and technical support by primary Health Centre

Sakhi Task Force

Sakhi Task Force leaders closely worked with Gram Panchayat and local government to do door to door visit to identify COVID patients, taking them to primary health centers, run COVID isolation centers for those who can't afford health services, distribute masks and sanitisers and regenerate livelihoods through training and Community Resilience Fund support.

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3000 people are provided COVID awareness training by Sakhi leaders in Wayanad. Women leaders and Sakhis are taking the lead in COVID awareness in Nalanda and Gaya districts in Bihar. 30 Super Sakhis have formed WhatsApp groups in their villages and mobilized around 2000 families to provide COVID awareness, safety measures and relief support.

Social Security Schemes

In addition to disseminating information in their communities and educating vulnerable households about government entitlements, women went so far as to accompany individuals to local government offices to get identity cards made, fill applications to ensure and speed up access to entitlements. Furthermore, women leaders have been continually collaborating with village/ block/ district officials to ensure that beneficiary lists for government programs are updated to include names of eligible individuals or households missing from official records.

Women leaders in many villages have explored support measures and programs available under various government schemes as over 3000 vulnerable women and families received entitlements through their lobby & advocacy with local government.

COVID Free Village

Bhasvantwadi village, in Tuljapur taluka of Osmanabad district has made its way to be a COVID free village, despite being surrounded by four other villages which have a high number of COVID cases. When asked how they accomplished this, the women leaders of the village exclaimed, "We all saw it as 'My village, My responsibility', and a sense of responsibility towards the village was deep embedded in our heart." Initially it was very difficult to convince villagers. When we went for household visits people would just turn away. Women leaders of SSP, Asha workers and COVID Sahayata Samiti members conducted regular meetings and discussions to find different ways to convince villagers and bring a sense of awareness among them. We worked as a team and decided to never give up, as it was the only way to keep our village safe." Keeping strict vigilance on the movement of people & continuous awareness drives have brought a remarkable change in people's attitude. Now the villagers have grown a sense of responsibility and all are working together to fight this crisis. Questions around livelihoods brought by the limitations on movement were swiftly solved by support from local government, who worked tirelessly to allot alternate livelihood opportunities for the villagers without the need for them to venture out.



Women leaders of Swayam Shikshan Prayog, Asha workers and COVID Sahayata Samiti members discussing ways to bring a sense of awareness among the villagers.

4. Community Health



Rural Communities are not an exception from COVID-19. In the second wave, rural infection rates are rapidly on the rise. Yet, due to misinformation and stigma, rural families are reluctant to come forward for screening, testing and have shown hesitancy towards vaccinations. Rural health systems - PHCs or hospitals are not easily accessible, while frontline health workers' capacities are overstretched. For the rural poor, health information and access to health services and efforts on vaccination are urgently needed. With increasing demand for oxygen supplies in rural hospitals, four oxygen concentrators were handed over to the District Collector for the Rural Hospital in Ter, Osmanabad district by SSP.

Baseline mapping

Baseline mapping in 96 villages of 5 blocks in Osmanabad was conducted to analyze the health status of the community, lack of employment opportunities, safe drinking water and drainage system, etc. in the context of COVID-19 pandemic.

Online Trainings

When the Gram Panchayat and District Health Departments of Latur and Solapur came together, it was a good opportunity for Sakhis to take a step ahead in helping the already overworked health workers at the last mile. They attended trainings' from doctors and experts. These trainings were focused on how to prevent COVID, alert people & follow strict rules set by the government to control the pandemic.

The training conducted online on 29th May was very effective and provided a good platform for frontline warriors and women leaders to come together for dealing with COVID cases in the villages. The training saw a huge turnout of 132 women leaders from 5 blocks of Solapur district in Maharashtra. This only proves the caregivers at home are equally eager to help their communities.

Menstrual Hygiene Day

On the occasion of Menstrual Hygiene Day on May 28, 2021, online training was organized for Arogya Sakhis and adolescent girls across 30 villages of Nanded district. Women were guided on proper menstrual hygiene management. Dr Swati Gore, Dr Rachna Jaju, Dr Rakhi Sarada, Dr Sagir Pathan and Block Coordinator Revati Kangule facilitated the training. Over 500 women and adolescent girls participated in a webinar jointly organized by SSP and Gynecology Department in Latur district.

The theme for this year is: "Action and Investment in Menstrual Hygiene and Health." "Menstrual health is a human right. Yet, menstruation can result in discrimination, stigma & exclusion against women & girls." United Nations.



An online training organized to guide women leaders on COVID prevention measures & vaccination, with Dr. More, PHC, Niturga, Nilanga in Latur district.

5. Regenerating Livelihoods



Demonstration of Vegetable garden cultivation

Digital Training on Agriculture and Livelihoods

Due to lockdown amid COVID crisis, families engaged in agriculture and agri allied businesses have lost the bare sustenance of their livelihood. Women were trained to use social media, form WhatsApp groups, in their villages to coordinate and stay updated on the new symptoms and vaccination. During the COVID lockdown period, SSP has been training women on digital literacy on how to use smart phones to conduct online training with ease. With these training, women leaders have been successfully carrying out training programs for the grassroots women farmers. To revive farming and agri allied livelihoods, women were trained on pre monsoon preparation of land, seed germination, seed processing and making of bio pesticides and fertilizers. Over 2,500 women farmers trained on various agriculture techniques and practices. District Agriculture Department, Krishi Vigyan Kendra's and Women Farmer Resource persons participated in these trainings.

In Bihar and Kerala, Women leaders are in action to regenerate livelihoods and farming to get income and food availability in the crisis period. In Wayanad district, 426 women farmers from 33 women groups, have started the pre-monsoon preparation to make the land for rice, tuber, vegetables and fodder cultivation.

Training on Vegetable Garden Cultivation

Over 80 women leaders from three blocks of Osmanabad district have been trained on vegetable garden cultivation. “We had neglected our health, our immunity was quite low and we used to often fall sick, and immunity is all that is needed to keep one safe in times of the pandemic. This vegetable garden helps us to grow at least seven different types of vegetables, including leafy vegetables, increasing the nutritional basket.” says Savita, a trained leader. This model can be easily replicated in one’s backyard with a small space of even 134 sq ft. The choice of vegetables are such that they grow within a 30-45 days time span, providing an early harvest of leafy vegetables. “This model can be used for any season and we can grow seasonal vegetables. We have sown leafy vegetables at the centre, surrounded by small plant vegetables and at the end rounded with creeper vegetable plants, designed in such a way that every plant gets adequate nutrients and water supply. ” 130 leaders are being trained to demonstrate and help five to seven families in each village to replicate this model. With a target of 130 villages, this model will provide food security for over 650 families across Osmanabad and Latur districts and will scale up to other districts of Maharashtra.

Women Taking Digital Training a Step Ahead

For leaders, digital training to use Smart phones by SSP has been her gateway to help her community. For someone who never knew how to access a phone, Komal has come a long way. Komal Shinde a leader from Bhasvantwadi village of Osmanabad district in Maharashtra took keen interest in online training and putting those learnings to use.

She has created two WhatsApp groups, one for training villagers regarding the care and precautions to be taken during COVID and another to conduct online training for women farmers on pre-sowing for the upcoming Kharif season.

“I am successfully conducting online training not only for the women in my village but also for women in neighboring villages”, says Komal. With such great efforts, it is not a wonder how they have managed to keep their village COVID safe, while neighboring villages are combating high cases of COVID.



Farmers participate in an online Training

6. EVENTS

Generation Equality Forum, June 30, 2021

Grassroots women need to be recognized as economic contributors and as decision makers for regeneration of economies and with increased access to health and social protection services for effective recovery to happen. "During the pandemic, thousands of migrants came back to the rural areas, these organised women took charge to help these migrants to restore their livelihoods and create safety nets and social protection for these migrants. In the agriculture sector, during the lockdown women farmers have created local markets and generated different ways to improve the rural economy. The grassroots network is very important for bringing these changes. We require an action coalition of economic justice to access finance, market and productive resources as well as digital technology to sustain our efforts in economic recovery." Naseem Shaikh. Generation Equality Side event was organized in partnership with HuairouCommission, IDWFED and WILDAFAO.



London Climate Action Week event, 30 June 2021

Speaking at the event, Godavari Dange, Grassroots women leader and Huairou Commission Representative from Asia, highlighted that "Managing Community Resilience Fund (CRF) by grassroots women to address climate risk thru adaptive and innovative practices and enable them to become decision makers and fund managers to build resilient communities. We follow a simple process to give funds to communities unlike banks or financial institutions. We support women for agriculture and agri allied business". "Women need to be considered and provide access to finance and decision making powers to manage and utilize the resources wisely and contextually." Naseem Shaikh.



"When you empower one woman, she empowers entire community", June 4, 2021



Grassroots women leaders, Malan Raut and Seema Sayyed from Maharashtra participated in the two hour online dialogue on 'Resilient Women, Resilient Nation' with Ms. Girija Deshpande as part of the Varun Kapur Show, the World's Longest Live Stream of 14 days, a Guinness World Record.

During the event, Malan Raut, a young and innovative women farmer from Osmanabad interacted with the audience on how she overcame challenges and became a successful entrepreneur, farmer and a mentor. "It was a tough challenge to begin my journey with opposition from my family. But with the determination to change the financial condition of my family, I risked everything.

Learning about Swayam Shikshan Prayog's one acre model farming was the biggest breakthrough in my life. I am able to do my own farming, earn a good income, support and ensure healthy and nutritional food to my family. Even if one or two crops fail, it does not have a bad effect as other crops give good yield. We, women, are not to look back today, we are involved in the decision making process of the Gram Panchayat, and we explore and access government schemes and entitlements."

Today, Malan conducts meetings and training via online platform, Zoom and using mobile phones to reach several women in the entire block.

7. VOICES OF WOMEN



Reenu Sinha, Gaya district, Bihar

Hardships and challenges brought Reenu Sinha a powerful woman today. Reenu is a self-motivated Sakhi entrepreneur who promotes clean energy products in her neighbourhoods. She has been selling induction cooktops, solar lamps, and LED bulbs for the last one year and earning an average income of INR 4,000 per month. “The income from energy products takes care of our daily needs, as earnings from farming are saved for the future,” says Reenu. In the last eight months, Reenu has managed to get 22 regular customers who purchase LED bulbs, Sanitary Pads and Bio-compost from her. For last mile marketing, distribution and sales Reenu leverages different networks of women – Self Help Group members, students and young girls who informally learn sewing and cooking from her. This has helped Reenu create awareness about her products and acquire new customers. She developed and improved her skills in digital communication and received training from SSP. Use of smartphone and digital platform have helped her to strengthen her business. “Online meetings save travel time and cost; we can now learn sitting at home.” Reenu has moved from cash to cashless transactions and digital payments.

Laxmi Milk Collection Centre

Laxmi Milk Collection Centre Model has identified milk production potential of intervention villages and created livelihood opportunities for women entrepreneurs and farming households. Women farmers used to sell cow and buffalo milk to local milkmen who gives a normal pricing irrespective of the quality. If the farmers wanted to earn more, they had to travel to the nearest large dairy. SSP set up 30 village-level Milk Collection Centres in Osmanabad and Latur districts intending to increase income of farmers, by measuring quality and ensuring farmers get right prices for the milk they sell. To execute this, Laxmi's - village level women entrepreneurs have been trained to operate the centers, with access to services and by establishing linkages to high-quality cattle feed and veterinary doctors. As a result, income from milk has doubled for farmers – approx INR 38- 40 per litre of Cow Milk and INR 50-52 per litre of Buffalo Milk depending on the quality parameters. Additionally, women entrepreneurs from the village running the collection centres earn INR 0.75 per litre of milk securing an income of INR 5,000 to 10,000 per month. “Earlier I used to get INR 35 per litre for buffalo milk. After I have started to sell it in the Laxmi Milk Collection Centre I receive INR 50 to 52 per litre”, shares Sushma Kadam from Chincholi village of Osmanabad.



Jijabai an Arogya Sakhi from Madki village, Nanded district

Jijabai has been instrumental in improving the health of many women in her communities. She has guided pregnant women, young mothers and their families to develop kitchen gardens and spread awareness on the need for consumption of healthy food for the mother and child. She also counsels adolescent girls on menstrual hygiene management and nutrition, counsels their parents to wait until she turns 18 years as ideal marriage time.

When the COVID-19 lockdown impacted the community, Jijabai started awareness campaigns, approached the affluent farmers to give jobs to the poor, mobilized women’s groups to stitch masks and distribute them in the village providing them with employment. On behalf of her Self Help Group she distributed ration and essential kits to 15 poor women in her village.

As Jijabai recollects, “the steps we took to protect our village were indeed fruitful and there was not a single positive case found in our village.”

She approached the village level officials and helped 4 women avail benefits for construction of soak pits, she has helped landless women in completing documentation process to start poultry or goat farming. Now with Self Help Groups they plan to start packaging and marketing of turmeric in their village.

“I was reluctant to join SSP, but today having worked for the welfare of my community and being able to bring changes in my village, I feel satisfied with my work and people have started respecting me for my work.” Jijabai says.

“Working as an Arogya Sakhi has given me an opportunity to help my community and evolve as a confident leader of my village.”

Jijabai Namdev Wad
Nanded, Maharashtra



Jijabai Namdev Wad from Loha in Nanded district of Maharashtra is one of the many resourceful women trained as an Arogya Sakhi by Swayam Shikshan Prayog.

IN THE NEWS

In the hinterland, women mount spirited offensive against pandemic



Shoumojit Banerjee

PUNE, JUNE 19, 2021 23:40 IST
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Local women leaders engaged in COVID-19 relief activities and services.

"Swayam Shikshan Prayog's three key strategies to contain the spread of the contagion involved capacity-building by forming 'village action groups' headed by women with knowledge on prevention and quarantine measures. Secondly, we helped equip local authorities and frontline workers to coordinate mass awareness programmes, and help out with food, medical relief and emergency services. Our women activists worked along with the extant health systems to ensure readiness for vaccination and access to health services, especially for women and children in backwater villages & hamlets," Prema Gopalan, Executive Director

Read the article at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/in-the-hinterland-women-mount-spirited-offensive-against-pandemic/article34861956.ece>



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Read the article at

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/apr/06/green-tech-keeps-the-cool-india-maharashtra-dairy-farms>

AWARDS & RECOGNITION

SWAYAM SHIKSHAN PRAYOG

selected as an awardee for the

*+1 Global Fund by
The Roddenberry Foundation*

in recognition of its impactful work during COVID pandemic across adversely affected 15 districts in seven states of India.

MARGIN TO MAINSTREAM

SSP has been selected as an awardee for the +1 Global Fund by The Roddenberry Foundation in recognition of its impactful work during COVID pandemic across adversely affected 15 districts in seven states of India on April 04, 2021.

Over 180 organizations were nominated for their work in supporting marginalized communities most affected by COVID-19. We are thankful to Mahila Housing Trust for Nominating us.

SUPPORT & PARTNERSHIPS

Government Partnerships

- Alignment with Government of India's NRLM GoM projects supported by Maharashtra State Rural Livelihoods Mission (MKSP & SVEP)

Donor Partnerships

- Climate Fund Managers, Dahan Foundation, DASRA, European Union, Habitat for Humanity India, Husarou Commission, Kamal Udwardia Foundation, Misereor, NABARD, Roddenberry Foundation, Shaikh Jaffer and Nematullah Ebrahim Family Foundation, UNICEF, Welthungerhilfe, Womanity Foundation

Corporate partners

- Avendus, CSRBOX, Great Eastern CSR Foundation, Shapoorji Pallonji Finance Private Limited, Digital India Corporation.

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