

RURAL WOMEN-LED RESPONSE TO COVID-19



Key Highlights

Since the COVID-19 pandemic last year, Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) team and grassroots women leaders (Sakhis) have been working extensively with the government to address the needs and improve access to various schemes and services. In the second wave, SSP and women leaders have delivered information, relief and economic and basic needs of the most vulnerable households in Maharashtra, Odisha, Kerala and Bihar.

Women leaders 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, mobilizing communities on vaccine drive, etc. They are working in alignment with Govt health systems to speed up COVID recovery and resilience.

SSP's strategies to stop the spread of COVID-19:

- 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 in underserved communities.



Inauguration of a Community Isolation Center

Impact At a Glance

- Outreach: 500 villages across 15 districts in Maharashtra, Bihar, Kerala & Odisha states in India.
- 3,000 rural women taking lead as Sakhi Task Force members.
- 6000+ families with relief kits.
- Community contribution: Groceries, vegetables, dairy products mobilized by leaders
- Three lakhs+ families educated on health services, COVID prevention, testing, vaccination
- 5,000+ farmers trained online on climate resilient agriculture for cultivation of food crops and distribution of sowing kits
- Rural women supported micro - entrepreneurship to stabilize their incomes from diversified livelihoods/livestock enterprises.

“We must recognize grassroots women farmers as equal and formal partners in recovery. Capacitating them through access to resources and enabling policy frameworks. They need to be involved in recovery planning process as leaders”.

Naseem Shaikh, Associate Director,
Swayam Shikshan Prayog

1. Distribution of Grocery/Food Kits



Distribution of kits to vulnerable families

It is critical to address food and livelihood needs of the most vulnerable-wage workers, small farmers, migrant, landless women and women led families. As COVID rages on, rural women and vulnerable groups bear the brunt as their health & livelihoods are under immense stress. SSP in partnership with Crypto Relief has distributed 3000 Ration Kits to vulnerable families across 7 districts of Maharashtra.

“Life was not the same after the COVID crisis. We had a very small piece of land and we used to work as farm labourers in other’s land to help our ends meet. With the dreadful impact of the second wave we have not been having any job for the last three months and it was very difficult to feed our huge family of 8 members.” says Rohini Waghmare from Malkaranja village in Osmanabad district.

“We have no land of our own and we work as labourers. With no job at hand and mere income through our buffalo we were facing difficulties for food and essentials.” says Shainaz Tamboli from Devlali village in Osmanabad district.

Many vulnerable people like Rohini and Shainaz had to put their life at a pause because they had to worry about food. Dry Ration Kit distribution is helping many such vulnerable families in this crisis period. <https://m.facebook.com/CryptoReliefIndia/>

New Initiatives

We are part of the Project “CAVACH” by NSE Foundation with more than 30 leading civil society organizations of India to work on vaccine hesitancy in aspirational districts in partnership with NITI Aayog UNICEF India and NSE India in next six months.

Through the project “CAVACH” starting from August 2021, SSP will work with district health administration, Collectorate, Sahayaka Samitis, etc. focusing on COVID and Vaccination Awareness Campaign for Health” and will achieve 100% vaccination in the 734 villages in eight blocks of Osmanabad district of Maharashtra in light of the present circumstances resulting from COVID.

DASRA UK has launched a program #BacktheFrontline to support NGOs in India serving the vulnerable populations for COVID relief. SSP has been supported by DASRA since June 2021 to support communities and women farmers across 100 villages in Maharashtra. The project will support SSP to provide farm-sowing kits for women farmers belonging to marginal farmer households, setting up community level COVID isolation and care centres that will be supported by the local governments and run by SSP’s. The Frontline Women Leaders are armed with experience in dealing with the pandemic last year.

2. Partnership with Local Government

Haqdarshak Training to leaders: Lack of knowledge and awareness on existing schemes, the majority of the resources are returned back to the govt unutilized. To address this issue, SSP along with Haqdarshak has trained 31 women leaders across 30 villages in Nanded district of Maharashtra as ‘Haqdarshikas.’ These leaders were provided digital literacy on how to use the Haqdarshak App to know about the current and upcoming government schemes and how to access and avail the benefits of those schemes.

“We never used to get to know what schemes were available and who could avail the benefits. But with this Haqdarshak app, there has been great transparency to know about the government scheme. It also helps the most needy to access these schemes at the right time,” says Sangita, a trained Haqdarshak leader from Shailgaon village in Nanded district. Haqdarshak training has saved our INR 50,000-60,000 and also helped us to avail these schemes through Haqdarshak app.” Says Pushpa Kalkekar, a trained Haqdarshak leader.

3. Community Health



Community Isolation Centres

Grassroots women leaders have taken a big step in supporting the COVID patients with mild and moderate symptoms to recover faster. Given the current situation of the pandemic 85% of cases are advised home isolation. It is impossible for the poor and joint families using the same cooking spaces and toilets, to practice home isolation of COVID positive members. To address this problem and with the possibility of the third wave hitting soon, SSP, with support from the Climate Fund Managers, is set to inaugurate 30 Community Isolation centres.

"We have arranged separate rooms for women and men, so that they feel comfortable. A friendly atmosphere was created for patients and their needs and problems were carefully listened to and appropriate solutions were provided", says Shubhangi, a woman leader who has played a key role in this process. Alongside, these centres will also act as COVID information and vaccination assistance desks. These isolation centres will also conduct regular health monitoring for children, health camps for antigen testing, mobilization and vaccination drive. While inaugurating the Rajuri centre, District Health Officer-Osmanabad, Dr. Vangare remarked, "This centre has been started as we are predicting the third wave of COVID, we are preparing this space as prevention to deal & handle the third wave better."

Vaccination Drive

Investing in women's leadership is the right COVID-19 Vaccine for rural communities. During this second wave, 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 the vaccine. The leaders joined in the vaccine drive with local panchayats, creating awareness for registering the villagers to speed up the vaccinations. Women leaders 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.



लोकमत

गृहविलगीकरणातील रुग्णांची होणार सोय

राजुरीत लोकसहभागातून उभारले कम्प्युनिटी आयसोलेशन सेंटर

लोकमत न्यूज नेटवर्क
उस्मानाबाद : तालुक्यातील राजुरी येथील जिल्हा परिषद शाळेत लोकसहभागातून गावपातळीवर सुरू झालेल्या जिन्हातील पहिल्या अत्याधुनिक कम्प्युनिटी आयसोलेशन सेंटरचे उद्घाटन सोमवारी जिल्हा आरोग्याधिकारी डॉ. हनुमंत वडगावे यांच्या हस्ते करण्यात आले.

यावेळी अतिरिक्त जिल्हा शल्य चिकित्सक डॉ. सचिन देशमुख, गटशिक्षणाधिकारी रोहिणी कुंभार, पंचायत समिती सदस्य कुसुमनाई इंगळे, नायब तहसीलदार मुस्तफा खॉंद, स्वयंशिक्षण प्रयोग संस्थेच्या नसीम शेख, किरण माने, प्रशांत पाटील, सरपंच मधुकर गळकारे, पंचकार महेश पोतदार, उपसरपंच गणेश घोगे, ग्रामसेवक अश्विनीकुमार पाटील आदी उपस्थित होते. दहा वेडची सोय असलेले हे कम्प्युनिटी आयसोलेशन सेंटर तयार करण्यासाठी गावकऱ्यांनी, ग्रामपंचायतीमार्फत लोकसहभागातून पुढाकार घेतला आहे. तसेच स्वयंशिक्षण प्रयोग या सामाजिक संस्थेच्या सहकार्याने आणि जिल्हा परिषद आरोग्य विभागाच्या मार्गदर्शनाखाली हे कम्प्युनिटी आयसोलेशन सेंटर चालविण्यात येणार



उस्मानाबाद तालुक्यातील राजुरी येथे गावपातळीवरील कम्प्युनिटी आयसोलेशन सेंटरचे उद्घाटन केलाना जिल्हा आरोग्य अधिकारी डॉ. हनुमंत वडगावे, अतिरिक्त जिल्हा शल्य चिकित्सक डॉ. सचिन देशमुख, गटशिक्षणाधिकारी रोहिणी कुंभार, नायब तहसीलदार मुस्तफा खॉंद, स्वयंशिक्षण प्रयोग संस्थेच्या नसीम शेख, किरण माने, सरपंच मधुकर गळकारे आदी.

आहे. भविष्यात कोरोनाच्या आपत्ती ओढवल्यास यावर मात करण्यासाठी, गाव पातळीवरच संपुर्णपणे करण्याच्या उद्देशाने हे सेंटर काम करणार आहे. या सेंटरमार्फत प्राथमिक टप्प्यातील कोविड संसर्ग झालेल्या लोकांची काळजी घेतली जाणार असून, होम आयसोलेशनचा सल्ला दिलेल्या रुग्णांना येथे दाखल करून घेण्यात येणार आहे. तसेच कोविड संसर्ग रोखण्यासाठीची प्रतिबंधात्मक उपाययोजना, माहिती, लोकांच्या मनातील भीती दूर करण्यासाठी समुपदेशन, लसीकरण संबंधित माहिती आणि लसीकरणसाठी ऑनलाईन रजिस्ट्रेशन, तसेच ऑटोजेन तपासणी देसलेल करण्यात येणार आहे. गावातील जागरूक तरुणांना रुग्णांच्या काळजीबाबतचे प्राथमिक प्रशिक्षणही

येथे देण्यात येणार आहे. विशेष म्हणजे या कम्प्युनिटी आयसोलेशन सेंटरसाठी राजुरीच्या ग्रामस्थानी लोकसहभागातून पाणी पुरवठा, दैनंदिन स्वच्छता, रुग्णांना संकस नारता, चहा, जेवण, वीजपुरवठा, इमारतीमध्ये फॅन, ल्यूब, आनंददायी निवासाची सोय, गरम पाणी, टॉयलेट-बाथरूम, तसेच रुग्णवाहिका उपलब्ध करून दिली आहे.

१५ गावांमध्ये करणार सोय

राजुरी येथे उभारण्यात आलेल्या आयसोलेशन सेंटरसाठी शाळेच्या वतीने चार वर्गखोल्या उपलब्ध करून दिल्या आहेत. या शाळेच्या आवारात ग्रामस्थानी जोपासलेली वनराई असून, अतिशय निसर्गरम वातावरणात हे कम्प्युनिटी आयसोलेशन सेंटर सुरू करण्यात आल्याने ग्रामस्थानी दिलासा मिळाला आहे.

संस्थेच्या सहकार्याने उस्मानाबाद जिल्ह्यातील १५ गावात असे आठ सोलेशन सेंटर निर्माण करून रुग्णांची सोय केली जाणार असल्याची माहिती यावेळी देण्या आली.

तसेच स्वयंशिक्षण प्रयोग सामाजिक संस्थेने १० वेड, गा आधुनिक वेबकीय उपकर ऑक्सिजन कॉन्सट्रक्टर, इन्ड्र संगणक, प्रिंटर, थर्मामीटर १ ऑक्सिमीटर, बीपी मॉनिटर, स्ट्री टेबल, सुर्च्या, व्हीलचेअर यासारु रुग्णांना उपयोगी पडणारे साह्य उपलब्ध करून दिले आहे.



4. Regenerating Livelihoods



Online Training for Farmers

Economic empowerment support for women farmers

Currently, women farmers are unable to enter markets to sell or start agri allied value added enterprises face several barriers. Since July 2021, the Ashoka: Innovators for the Public supported project aims to strengthen locally led eco-systems that provide continual economic empowerment support for women farmers, together with micro entrepreneurs to collectively organise as producer groups and later as Farmer Producer Organizations to participate in selected value chains with market and financial linkages across Osmanabad, Latur and Solapur districts in Maharashtra (Project supported by Ashoka: Innovators for the Public).

Training of Trainers for Farmers

To revive the farming and agri allied livelihoods, women have been given training on Kharif pre sowing, vegetable garden, non chemical pesticides, seed germination, seed processing, making bio pesticides and fertilizers as well on entrepreneurship. During the ongoing pandemic, with limited income sources and skyrocketing prices of vegetables, farmers find it difficult to purchase even for household consumption and often compromise the nutrient intake of their family, posing a severe threat on food security. Over 95 women leaders from five blocks of Osmanabad district have been participated in the trainings.

“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. The 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.

The trained women leaders will 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 more than 650 families across Osmanabad and Latur districts of Maharashtra.

Shanti Devi – The true leader

Shanti Devi hails from Jehli Bigha village in Gaya of Bihar. Her family was highly dependent on use of chemicals for farming in their merely 2 acres of land, Shanti was often disappointed with the harm, but could not afford to purchase either a cow or set up vermi compost beds. She approached the Sakhis in her village, explaining her problem and she got some free samples. She tested the organic manure in five vegetable plants in her backyard. Soon she could see a remarkable difference in quality of vegetables and amount of moisture that was retained in soil.

Shanti, having seen the difference it could bring, was determined to try it out in her entire farm. Her husband who was first reluctant to try it on his farm saying its is our only bread and better, allowed a small piece of land. To start off, she convinced her husband to use 50% of organic manure on their land which was available for Rs 125 for 1 litre vermi liquid bottle. There was a significant difference seen between organic and chemically grown plants, and her vegetables were first to be sold in the market. Even in heavy monsoon her farm stands strong. She was able to earn an additional income of Rs 9000 per season. “This organic manure has done a miracle on our farm. Today we are able to eat healthy, sell fresh vegetables in market & earn a decent profit margin. It has brought a sense of respect and recognition for me in my village,” says Shanti Devi.



Shanti Devi in her farm

Events

Webinar on Community Resilience to Droughts

This event was organised by NIDM with a focus on the roles of community and community institutions in the drought risk reduction and how the social vulnerability is related to droughts.

Naseem Shaikh, Associate Director, SSP shared how so far, 150,000 women farmers and households have begun the shift towards climate resilient farming in drought prone regions. With additional agri allied and livelihood activities farmers have created 1 lakh plus income per year. This has led to good improvement in women's decision making and food secured for families. SSP has supported women to convert 60,000 plus acres of land to bio farming, brought in effective water management systems with linkages to the government schemes like MREGA where we have seen a 20% increase in effective water management in drought prone regions.

Developing women as farmers and entrepreneurs not only addressed their gender related challenges but also built the economic resilience of their families to deal with financial challenges by diversification of livelihoods.

“Drought and poverty have a very strong relationship. It's time to focus more on the households, we need to look at the cropping system at the village level. Unless we focus more on the households it would be very difficult to make the communities and the farmers more resilient.” Says Dr. Krishna S Vasta, Member, NDMA.



UN High-Level Political Forum 2021 on 6th July, 2021

In the UN High-Level Political Forum 2021, grassroots women leaders from Maharashtra had participated and advocated for solutions to address climatic risk and create evidence with local governments as women are better managers and decision makers of their land, resource and development.

Naseem Shaikh, Associate Director Programs at SSP spoke at UN High-Level Political Forum 2021 on 6th July, 2021 about 'Driving more effective adaptation to climate impacts through inclusive, locally-led action'. Women with flexible finance enable them to design and implement innovative solutions to increase the adaptation and reduce the risk. Over 500,000 grassroots women are part of this initiative in India and they are making use of the resilience fund.

In COVID crisis, SSP has given the Health Resilience Fund to the vulnerable families in 30 villages in Marathwada. Now the fund has grown to INR 7 lakh (USD 9370) to access health care services and ensure timely treatment for COVID. This shows that, if we give finance support to grassroots women, they identify solutions in crisis situations. Anjana Sabale, a grassroots leader, mentor and farmer explained how Community Resilience Fund (CRF) can empower grassroots communities to adapt and enable decision making and plan with better solutions in crisis periods.

Instead of providing a one time subsidiary to the women, if we can build their capability and provide them flexible finance, they will find better solutions to build their community resilience.



NASEEM SHAIKH
Associate Director
Swayam Shikshan Prayog

Community Priorities for Asia-Pacific Action Plan (2021-24)

Huairou Commission virtually hosted the above meeting for implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction on 26th July, 2021. The meeting had 45 participants from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, India, Japan, Nepal, Philippines and Vietnam representing grassroots women's organisations and networks, as well as government and non-government organisations. The participants spoke on their strategic priorities for learning and advocacy on building disaster resilience over the next five years. Women leaders talked about the role of the grassroots community in disaster preparedness and early warning systems at the local level.

"Government should develop a resilience fund mechanism for grassroots women groups to take decisions and address the loss in agriculture and business in times of crisis", remarked Godavari Dange, grassroots leader from Maharashtra. To achieve economic resilience, it is essential to build capacities for identifying local business and market. Vulnerable and migrant communities should be given skill based training for job creation and partnerships with private/public is essential to improve the quality of the products, access to market and finance.

To initiate the regional dialogue in this perspective, SSP has planned an advocacy dialogue with Maharashtra State Disaster Management Authority (MSDMA) for building grassroots women's capacities in disaster reduction and climate change adaptation.

The review session was enriched by grassroots leaders and government officials across Asian countries including Japan, Cambodia, Nepal, Philippines, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Indonesia and India. During the discussion, grassroots leaders Godavari Dange, Shailaja Narvade, Anjana Sabale and Priya Rakhunde from Maharashtra and Rita Devi from Bihar have contributed their learning and recommendation for the next five years plan for implementation of Sendai Framework for 2021-2024. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (Sendai Framework) was the first major agreement of the post-2015 development agenda and provides Member States with concrete actions to protect development gains from disaster risk.



London Climate Action Week

Huairou Commission Asia Regional Committee member, Godavari Dange from SSP spoke at the London Climate Action Week 2021 in the session titled 'Frontline funds: investing in grassroots-led responses to climate change'. She talked about how the Community Resilience Fund (CRF), which is a flexible finance mechanism, is used to help women deal with crises. The session was co-hosted by Huairou Commission, along with partners Global Resilience Partnership, Slum Dwellers International - SDI, International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and Climate Justice Resilience Fund.



NSE Foundation Launches Project to Spread Awareness on COVID-19 Vaccination

Proud to be a part of Project CAVACH by NSE Foundation with more than 30 leading civil society organizations of India to work on vaccine hesitancy in aspirational districts in partnership with NITI Aayog UNICEF India.





"SSP leaders are actively working with 500+ villages in Osmanabad and Latur. Currently they are supporting 3 Community Centres focusing on screening registration and facilitation of vaccination, which is being expanded to 15+ centres in the coming days. They are also providing 5 Oxygen Concentrators to support the PHC. In their April-May 2021 report, they elaborated that due to Vaccination drive in Maharashtra, more than 65,000 people got vaccinated and developed a feeling of safety among the communities. SSP has been working in 500 villages across 15 districts across Maharashtra, Bihar, Kerala and Odisha states. They have provided ration, promoted women's leadership, worked on COVID awareness through Sakhi Task Force, facilitated the provision of entitlements, conducted digital training on agriculture and livelihoods and conducted a baseline mapping in 96 villages of 5 blocks in Osmanabad. Shared on 10 June." <https://www.sphereindia.org.in/>

Grassroots women leader Godavari Dange from Osmanabad was featured and interviewed by Doordarshan for their Tejaswini Programme. During her speech, she said, "SSP has empowered grassroots women and made them strong to face any adversity life throws, whether it is earthquake, drought, flood or pandemic, women have gained courage to face any challenge and to find a way out, supporting their family, other women and be a pillar of strength for their community." Listen to her speech <https://youtu.be/VzgZd68x4PY>

Our Partners



MacArthur Foundation Awards 'Equitable Recovery Grants' to Help Indian Communities in Wake of Pandemic

https://www.indiawest.com/news/global_indian/macarthur-foundation-awards-equitable-recovery-grants-to-help-indian-communities-in-wake-of-pandemic/article_5a09c552-f105-11eb-a8b7-f3f8865022bb.html

SSP is happy for being recognized for the grassroots initiatives in COVID-19 pandemic and livelihood recovery. To recognize this, The MacArthur Foundation announced around \$80 million in grants centered on advancing racial and ethnic justice, including some with a focus on helping communities in India on July 27. SSP is one among the grant recipients to provide COVID relief for marginalized communities in 100 villages of Maharashtra.

"We are committed to ensuring that our response to the pandemic is focused on supporting the reimagining of systems that create a more just, equitable, and resilient world," MacArthur president John Palfrey.

The SSP team and the women leaders extend our deepest thanks for standing with us to support the Rural Women-Led Response to COVID-19.

Our special thanks to:
 Ashoka Innovators for the Public, Avendus, Climate Fund Managers, Crypto Relief, DASRA, Francis Lobo, HSBC, Huairou Commission, Hunger Collective, Milaap, Ketto, Kamal Udwadia Foundation, Kaushalya Foundation, Smiles for All, MacArthur Foundation, Misereor, NSE Foundation, UNICEF, Promothean Power Systems, Roddenberry Foundation, Rohini Nilekani, Welthungerhilfe.