

GIRLS AND WOMEN ON THE FRONTLINES COVID19 RELIEF WORK

25TH APRIL- 12TH MAY 2020



Coalition Network:

Action India, Bihar Women's Collective, Bal Umang Drishya Sanstha (BUDS),
People's Action for Change and Empowerment (PACE), Nirantar Trust, Sakar &
Sahjani Shiksha Kendra (SSK)

Report by Nirantar Trust

Number of organizations involved:	7 organizations across 3 states
Geographical coverage:	North East Delhi, Shahdara, South Delhi, Central Delhi, and North West Delhi in New Delhi; Lalitpur and Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh; and Gaya, Kaimur, Muzaffarpur, Sasaram, West Champaran and Sitamarhi in Bihar
Distribution of dry ration and hygiene products:	1100+ families
Facilitating Rights and Entitlements from Govt:	13000+ individuals
No of podcasts disseminated so far:	2 in 3 languages (Hindi, Bundeli, Awadhi) and 1 on Gender and Health (in Hindi)

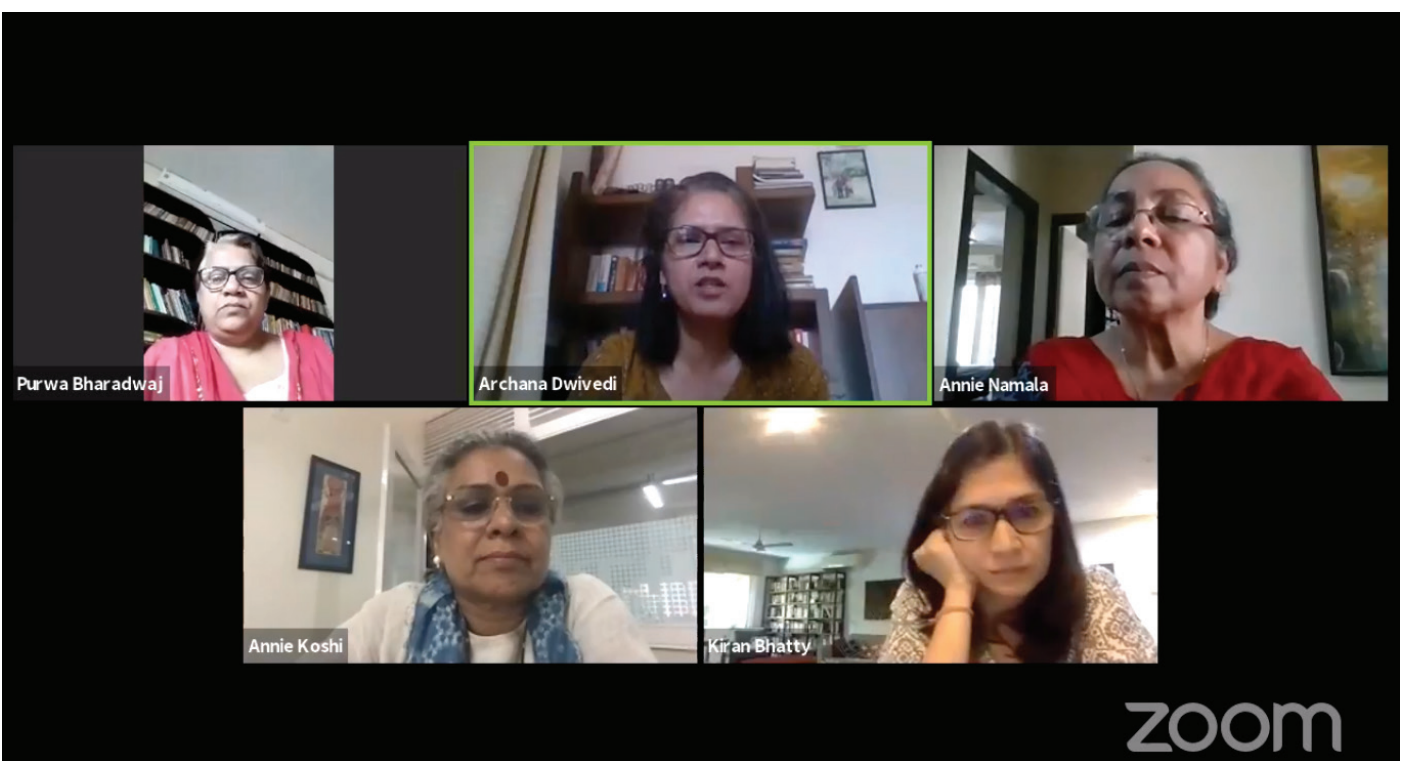


With the continuation of the nation-wide lockdown, the coalition network members have continued to provide as well as facilitate relief work across Delhi, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The lockdown continues to affect the marginalized communities which include people, especially women, from Dalit, tribal, Muslim and other minority communities, daily wage earners, many women with illness, pregnant women, single women (especially those deserted by marital family), persons with disabilities and transgender persons. Since relief work began on March 25, 2020, dry ration kits have been distributed to about 2000 families, rights and entitlements of the government facilitated to 15000+ individuals and cooked meals have been provided to almost 2800 families till 24th April 2020. This is the third update on the work done since then.

Providing access to information and dissemination

Nirantar and the coalition members have been collecting Covid-19 relief related updates, new information and details of the services available online, relaxation on certain services etc. Coalition members are also encouraged to collect further information from local sources and share the update in their respective communities.

In the last few days, there have been several updates on division of various districts into red, green and orange zones with different degrees of relaxation of services in each zone. These new updates are being shared with field team members in Hindi to spread awareness among community members. Ever since the lockdown was announced, children and adolescents have forced to stay indoors and many of them are also living in stress due to ongoing lockdown in their respective areas. Coalition members are providing updates and information regarding counselling support, helpline numbers for children living in stress





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and isolation. Our frontline workers have been provided with details of organisations that are willing to provide support to persons with disabilities, especially to those who are living alone during the lockdown.

In Delhi, the frontline workers are being informed about recent directions given by the court to Delhi government to deal with those challenges and ensure provision of ration to all people irrespective of their identity proof documents. New update about ration and relief kit provided to each family, emergency relief coupons to people in urgent need of food were also shared.

In Bihar, a team of 112 women leaders from six federations have been given the task to create awareness around Covid-19. Around 4425 women's households were reached out over through use of social media platforms, messaging and phone calls thus reaching out to approximately 17700 individuals indirectly. Apart from that, they are also actively helping burst myths and superstitions that have been arising time to time.

Nirantar organized two webinars- "Exploring significance of Digital literacy and Adult education in times of COVID-19 & beyond" along with NCE, and "Future of Education in Times of Crisis" on 2nd May and 8th May 2020 respectively to talk about various aspects of education and literacy from a gender perspective, and its impacts as a result of the current pandemic. Some of the questions that the webinars explored are- What does it mean for learning opportunities among marginalized communities and populations? What kind of online initiatives is being taken by mainstream education? What is the reach of these interventions - who is in/who is out? What about children with learning difficulties? How are women and girls with an increased burden of work and surveillance accessing learning opportunities? What is the relation between the use of technology, violence, and education? What changes are needed in policies to address these concerns? How interactive and participative the online processes are? The webinars were attended by more than 100 participants each and we also uploaded them on Nirantar Facebook page for wider dissemination

Nirantar has released one new podcast in the past two weeks titled Gender and Health in times of Covid-19. It talks about different aspects of health, including the current state of Indian health system because of the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as about emergencies, issues faced by pregnant women and patients with chronic conditions who are finding it difficult to access healthcare at this point.



Provision of cooked meals and dry ration

After announcement of extension of the lockdown period, there has been significant increase in total number of people who would require urgent support in terms of basic needs. Earlier most of the daily wage earners were identified for distribution of dry ration but in the last one week, people involved in other small works like hawkers, rickshaw pullers and factory workers were also included in the list. In last one week, we have focused more on providing dry ration distribution and linking those who were ill-stricken by the lockdown.

In Delhi and Bareilly, a total of 844 ration kits were distributed in around 9 field areas to help children, adolescents, and young adults, pregnant women, migrant labours, widows, street dwellers, and transgender people. The kit included rice, pulse and other basic items. In every field areas, we focused more on identifying most marginalised people who are not able to access the services provided by government and other civil society organisations. A total of 2150 packets of cooked food were delivered over the last two weeks to migrant labourers and other people belonging to most marginalised groups across all field areas across Delhi and Bareilly.

In various parts of Bihar, the federations reached out to another 145 vulnerable women and distributed dry ration packets to them. The women who were distributed food packets were selected in consultation with Elected Women Representatives (EWR,) who were also Sangha members. The distribution was carried out by 58 grassroots leaders, in the presence of 48 Panchayat representatives such as Ward members and Mukhiyas. More than 80% beneficiaries of the ration are from Dalit, Maha-Dalit and Minority communities with a focus on single, divorce, old and disabled women.

In Lalitpur (UP), relief kits of dry ration were provided in the three districts of



Mehroni, Birdha and Mandawra to 65 families where Sahjani Shiksha Kendra (SSK) frontline workers have been continuously working. A majority of the people in the 100 villages to whom relief was provided belong to the Sahariya community. Ration kits were also provided to the families of frontline workers who have been aiding in relief work. They are also part of the marginalized communities that they are working with, and their families are also facing severe implications because of the lockdown.

Facilitating people to avail rights and entitlements of the government

The government of Bihar launched a drive between April 21-25, 2020 to identify and prepare a list of people that did not possess ration cards. The federations utilized this opportunity and recommended names of about 483 families who did not have ration cards. The names were then forwarded to Cluster Managers of JEEViKA (Bihar Rural Livelihoods Project) through village organisations and JEEViKA promoted Self Help Groups (SHGs) of whom many of the federation leaders are also members.

The Jyoti Mahila Samakhya Federation reached out to 150 migrant labourers stranded in Delhi due to lockdown. The list of these stranded labourers was generated by the village level leaders during the distribution of food packets. Various agencies including CITU were contacted to help out the migrants.

The government of Bihar also announced a special financial package of Rs. 2000 for the stranded migrants.

In Delhi and Bareilly, the frontline workers are constantly in touch with local authorities to act as mediators between the government and communities, ensuring that services and entitlements reach people, and their demands and complaints reach the authorities. We have linked local people to the nearby Delhi shelter homes and government schools for collection of cooked meals.



After an announcement by Delhi government to provide ration to other marginalised groups who do not have ration cards, many such people were identified from each field areas. The frontline workers have filled online forms of 147 families under Delhi government e-ration coupon scheme in the last two weeks. Based on the online forms filled earlier, 80 families have received ration last to last week.

In Lalitpur, keeping in mind that all lot of reverse migration has taken place from the cities, the frontline workers have been working towards creating awareness and raising demands for the people to be enrolled under MGREGA Scheme. So far, in 100 villages, around 1400 people have sent in written demands to be employed under the Scheme. Currently, 325 workers are also working without a written contract. Without a written contract, there is a chance that the workers are not paid full wages. Sometimes, the Pradhans take part of that commission. The frontline workers have also facilitated distribution of ration to 1679 Antodaya Card holders, 3540 Job card holders and 4157 Patra Grihasthi card holder.





Provisions of essential hygiene products

Our coalition network has been reaching out to different organizations for their support, in order to provide essential hygiene products in the communities. Apart from provision of other basic food needs, we have provided sanitizer, a pack of sanitary napkins, soaps and a mask for protection. We have provided basic protection kit to our entire on-ground team and the community members with protective masks and gloves. In some of the field areas, our coalition network members have made local masks and distributed them in their communities.

Hygiene products along have been distributed to over 800 families in Delhi and Bareilly. In Mori Gate (Delhi), around 300 re-usable cotton masks have been distributed.

In Bihar, around 1560 Masks were stitched and distributed by the Federations and Sangha members. A team of 35 women and adolescent girls have been stitching masks after an online training provided by State coordinator Ms. Urmila. The federations have decided to get 1000 masks each for distributing to Sangha members and those being distributed food packets. The

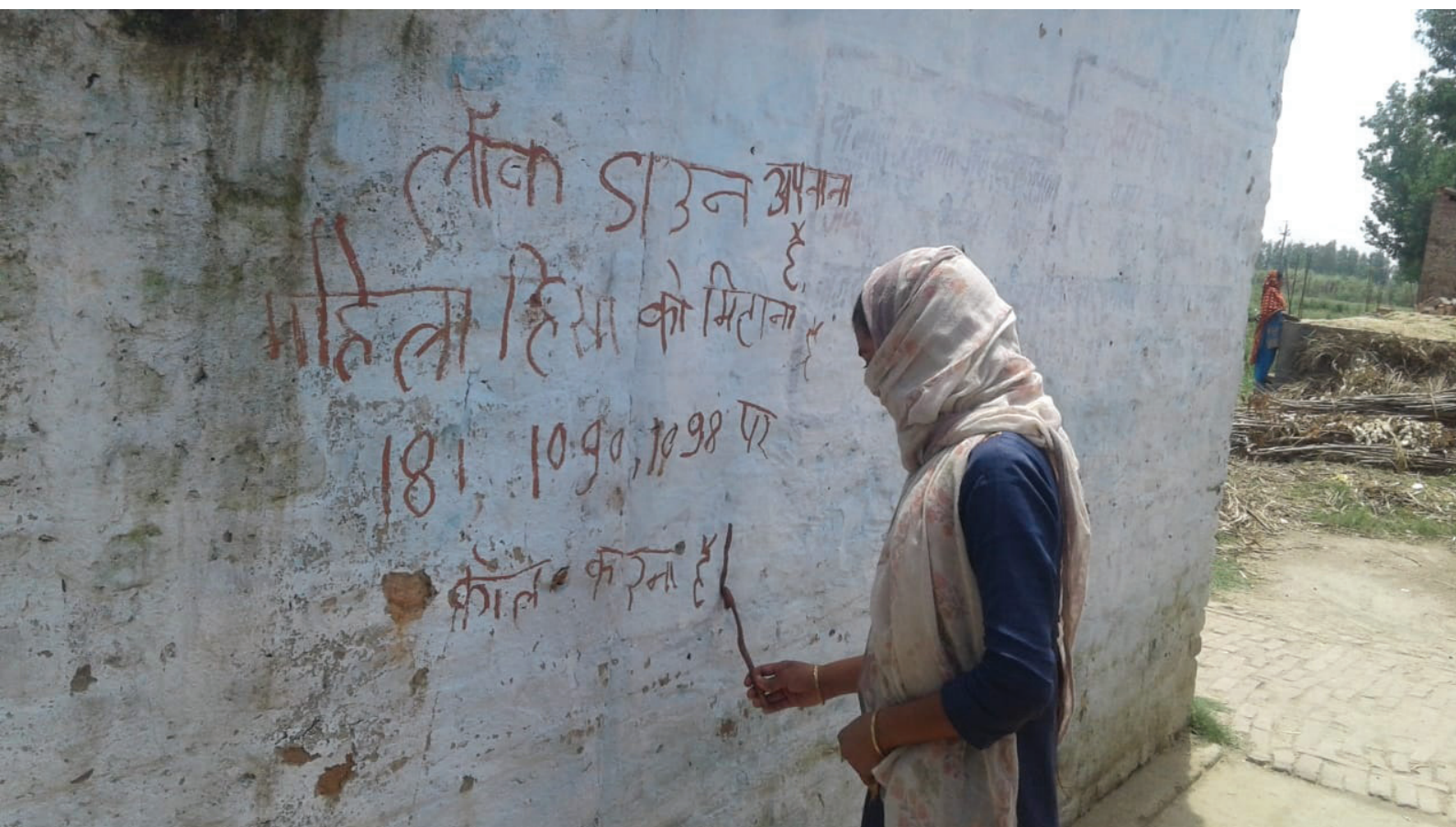
federations have adopted an innovative strategy to ensure that every household does stitch their own masks from the material available with them. The two masks per family will be given for free with a demonstration on how to stitch the mask at home. The federations have already reached out to about 1000 households in six districts. The remaining two thousand families will be covered in next two weeks. Along with that, the federations have distributed soaps to 145 families who were given dry food packets, and to another batch of 115 children identified by Child Help Line.

Addressing the Increasing Cases of Domestic Violence

Cases of domestic violence are increasing with the lockdown being extended. This is because of various reasons including being locked inside homes with abusive family members, frustration due to loss of livelihoods and stress related

violence. There was a recent such case in Delhi where the frontline workers reached out to police officials as well as the Women Helpline number (181). However, none of the responses were satisfactory. One of the police staff from the nearby station was found to be Covid-19 positive and had passed away. Now, the police officials are scared to visit and want the woman to be sent to the police station to file her complaint. At the same time, the Women Helpline Number (181) was also not working. However, we received help from our local staff who live in that area and they helped by visiting the house of the woman who had faced violence, speaking to their family members and keeping in touch with the woman lest she faces any type of violence once again. It becomes challenging to respond to the cases of domestic violence during the lockdown period as other helpline numbers are not responding to the needs of the people in urgent need of support.

In the last two weeks, Lalitpur has seen two cases of deaths due to domestic violence. The first case is from Gidwaha village in Mandawra block. The in-laws had the woman killed and buried in a nearby field and then started a rumour that the woman had run away. When her natal family started enquiring about her whereabouts, they dug up the body and threw it in a pond. By the time the body was found, it had started decomposing. Because of the lockdown, the police were also not paying much attention to the case. There was also a pressure from the husband's family to not enquire about it as one of their family members is in a position of authority in Lucknow. The SSK frontline workers got to know about the case from a local newspaper, after which they went to visit the woman's family. They supported the woman's family by telling them the next steps that need to be taken, i.e., going to the police station and filing a First Information Report. They encouraged the natal family to lodge a First

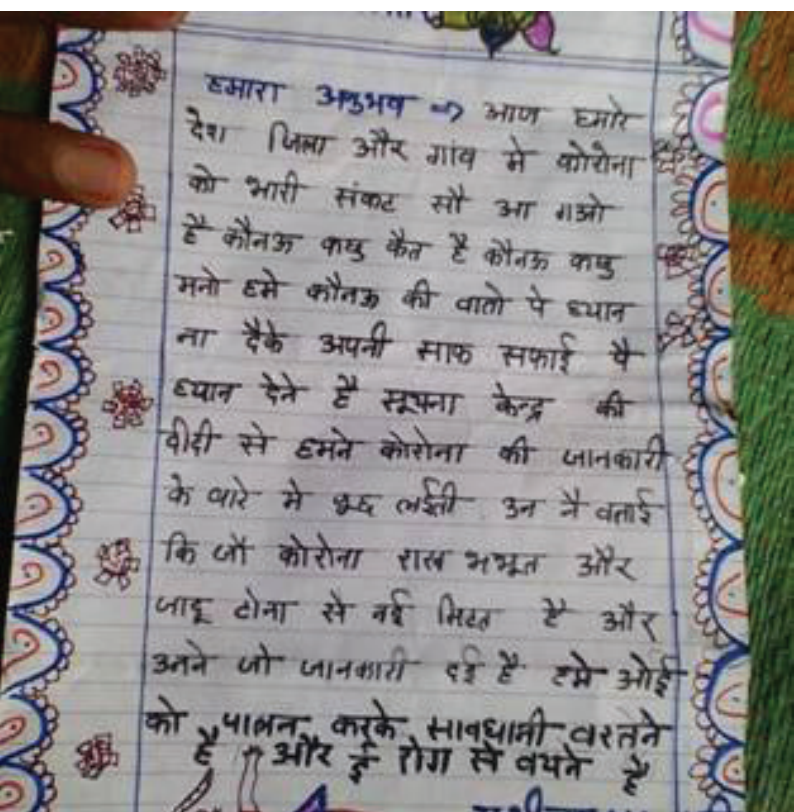


Information Report against the husband and his family and informed them about the sections under the Indian Penal Code. Even after continuous pressure on the police personnel, there were not filing a FIR. Finally, after continuous pursuance, FIR was filed against the marital family under Section 498 and Section 304 of the Indian Penal Code and the husband was arrested. The frontline workers are continuously following up on the status of the case.

The second case is from Pali village in Birdha. The husband was extremely violent towards the wife. In a bid to escape his violence, she ran towards the well and jumped into the well along with her two children, killing herself and children too. The villagers have declared that she slipped and fell into the well while trying to draw water from the well. The SSK frontline workers pushed very hard for the natal family to lodge a FIR against the husband. However, the family persistently disagreed to do the same. Later on the SSK frontline workers found out that the husband and his family had paid money to the natal money and it was absolved among them.

Many a times, people do not know whom to reach out to in times of distress and violence. The frontline workers have written the helpline numbers on walls and other public spaces visible to all, so that anyone in distress or facing any abuse or violence can reach out to these numbers.

Sharing and Capacity Building Spaces for Frontline Workers- Online and Offline



Our frontline workers, mobilizers and project coordinators involved come together from time to time and discuss various themes emerging through the COVID-19 relief work. The objective is to create a collective space for personal discussions and introspection. This helps the team to focus on themselves as well, along with the community they are helping. The first two meetings covered themes of increased workload of women during the lockdown, challenges of working from home while negotiating with the family, mental health and stress, challenges faced in the community while carrying out relief work, worsening situation on the ground, and the skills and initiatives they have

used to provide support to the communities. In the third meeting, we discussed the impact of the lockdown on the livelihood of the learners, their families and their communities. The consequences – unemployment, migration, poverty, hunger, homelessness and shifts to temporary petty jobs – were critically analysed from the lens of gender, sexuality, religion, class and caste.

During the lockdown, we have witnessed increased communal tension, increased circulation of fake news and rumours, harsh behaviour of landlords towards those on rent, unhelpful attitude of employers towards factory workers and domestic help, and an intense desire of migrants to go back home. We also tried to understand how this would impact education in the communities, especially the learners. The high possibility of increased financial burden on the learners and other factors will help us frame our educational strategies post the lockdown.

A lot of the frontline workers as well as learners have been sending in case studies and letters and have been expressing their feelings, experiences etc. from the last few days. They also use this space to share their anxieties and doubts. We try to amplify these voices through our podcasts, social media posts and case studies in our reports.

Challenges

Over time, we are seeing the emergence of new challenges. The continuing lockdown and loss of livelihoods has given rise to various issues in the different field areas. Some of them are as follows:

- Many individuals have been out of jobs and are not earning for almost two months now. We have noticed in every new round of ration distribution, more and more people come forward with their own personal needs. It becomes challenging to try and provide for everyone's needs and demands.
- It has remained challenge to negotiate with State government officials in helping people in urgent need of support.
- Despite the lockdown, many people are bound to move out of their houses to nearby government schools to get cooked food. In several cases, landlords harass them for going out in public places and threaten them to move out of their rented houses. People are living in continuous fear.
- Most of the frontline workers are working from home with their mobile phones. With extension of lockdown period, many of them are finding difficulties in writing case studies and even to work on excel on the mobile phones.
- Accessing bank accounts due to lockdown caused liquidity crisis resulting into slow distribution of food packets. Shortage of food items and price hike – the rations which are procured from the local shops were many times

reported to be unavailable in required quantity. Also, the price hike of daily supplies impacted the budget of federations had estimated for a food packet.

- With time, cases of gender based violence and domestic violence are on the rise. This is because of various reasons including stress related violence, frustration because of loss of livelihoods and being under lockdown with abusive family members. Although the frontline workers are continuously spreading information about helpline numbers, nevertheless, cases are increasing. One of the difficulties for the frontline workers is also that it takes place within the private sphere and many a times, they do not get to know of such cases unless the women or neighbours reach out to them.

