

CORONA PANDEMIC

RESPONSES TO THE MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

BY EKTA PARISHAD INDIA

CONTEXT

Covid-19 pandemic is an unprecedented situation in our life and this situation has put us in a highly unpredictable state of affairs organizationally, in immediate terms, at least for the next thirty days or so. However, there are larger & long-term consequences of this pandemic in the lives of most marginalized communities and their families, which has already started showing its effects. The quantum of both the primary and the secondary impact is also highly unpredictable in terms of severity.

Ekta Parishad (one of the largest people's movements in India) with thousands of volunteers is setting up 'Immediate and Long Term' response systems and coordination points in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Manipur, Tripura, Bengal and Maharashtra. Apart from these states, Ekta Parishad is also trying to collaborate with many grassroots organizations.

ORGANIZATIONAL CALIBER

STATE	N/ DISTRICTS	N/ ACTIVISTS + VILLAGE VOLUNTEERS	REACHOUT/VILLAGES
Madhya Pradesh	38	120 + 1200	1500
Chhattisgarh	22	65 + 650	900
Orissa	15	22 + 220	350
Bihar	10	15 + 150	150
Jharkhand	8	12 + 120	120
Assam	8	11 + 150	150
Manipur	6	8 + 100	110
Tripura	4	6 + 40	100
Uttar Pradesh	2	6 + 80	100
Kerala	4	4 + 50	50
Tamil Nadu	4	4 + 20	40
Rajasthan	2	4 + 20	40
Bengal	2	1 + 10	20
Maharashtra	1	2 + 10	20

With above horizontal strength, Ekta Parishad's activists and volunteers are well connected with the villagers and local administration over many years. Further, village organizations (EP Unit) and trained local leadership provide a robust organizational base for any organized activity at the grassroots level.

In majority of these States, Ekta Parishad as a well known Gandhian organization has very good rapport with the State Governments. Ekta Parishad leaders are also part of many state-level units and processes dealing with community-issues over last many years.

INITIATIVES & RESPONSES

Ekta Parishad with its extensive presence and strong intensive link with the rural communities is trying to focus on following strategic interventions:

SHORT TERM/ IMMEDIATE RESPONSES

Production & Supply of Masks and Distribution of Food Grains etc.

In spite of bulk production of health safety measures, there are huge gaps in supply of these measures in remote villages. Considering the costs of masks, it may not be possible for every poor family to purchase these. Ekta Parishad's effort is to ensure free (or with minimum cost of Rs 10/- each) to all the families and for every member of the family. We are also supply food grains to the needy poor families in the villages.

- Production of Hygienic Khadi Cloth Mask (currently Morena Khadi Production Unit producing 200 masks/day but can be scale up easily). Supply of Mask to remote villages (including especially for the community workers who are engaged in community services)
- Distribution of food grains and cooked food to the needy poor people in the villages. Ekta Parishad's supported these Grain Banks are instrumental to ensure food in crisis period.

Information about Migrant Laborers

A large number of wage/migrant laborers who have migrated to other States are really facing serious crisis of wages/livelihood. Since most of 'work/labour sector' has already been closed (after Corona Pandemic) they are helpless and facing problems even to return back to homes in their respective villages. Though, State Governments are trying to help them, still many of them are out of administrative radar. Ekta Parishad is trying to support them through contacts and linkages with the local State officials so that they can travel back to their homes/villages and get assistance. Ekta Parishad is supporting in respect to:

- Headcount of migrant labourers (those who are not yet back to their villages)
- Inform the local administration (Labour Officer & District Collector) for providing assistance to those families to bring them back to their homes in villages

Relocation of Migrant Labourers

Hundreds of migrant labourers (including children) are now traveling back to their respective villages. In this unfortunate situation, they are also being seen as a vector for transmitting the Corona Virus (CV). For the larger health safety, it is important to set up 'Isolation Centers' and request all 'new comers' to stay in these centers for specified quarantine period. Ekta Parishad is helping the local administrations on this mission by counseling the migrants returning back and the community and is also assisting for other urgent services to these people. The role is to:

- Assist those migrant families who have already reached to their respective villages for staying (Isolation Center) in a School Building/ Community Center etc. and ensure urgent necessary facilities (Food/Shelter/ Masks etc.)
- Create awareness among migrant labourers regarding health safety measures

Ensuring Cash Transfers

Some State Governments have launched and are streamlining and strengthening various schemes of 'Cash Transfer' to the eligible people. These are mostly related to Cash Transfer to Destitute; Old Age Pension etc. Recently, Central Government also announced direct cash transfer to the farmers and labourers etc. All these schemes need strict monitoring and facilitation especially to reach out to the 'rightful people'. Ekta Parishad is trying to assist the local administration on these missions, including:

- Preparing list of 'entitled' persons for each of 'Cash Transfer' schemes by taking consent of village representatives
- Assisting the local officials for reaching out to the eligible people and ensuring 'Cash Transfer' on time

MID TERM/RESPONSES

Setting Up Grain Bank

Considering the long terms impact in the food security, it is really important to decentralize the system of Grain Bank in every villages. Fortunately, Ekta Parishad has already been running such grain banks in more than 10000 villages across its intervention and operational areas. It aims at:

- Protecting the existing grain banks and encouraging the government to take this grain bank as a buffer for further addition
- Working out supply systems for distribution of food grains to the people

Shyampura Village (Shivpuri district of Madhya Pradesh) is an interesting example, where Ekta Parishad successfully set up an example of local/self sufficient economy. After getting land, EP supported them to build a 'water pond' in order to secure water for domestic use as well as for irrigating crops/vegetables. In 2019, this village also got prize of best self sufficient village of Shivpuri district. Interesting, villagers decided not to migrate this year rather stay in the village and do agricultural work in their own land. They are having 20 Quintals of grain bank in this village. In current crisis, this village is shown an example, how with their hard efforts and organizational support actually protected them and encourage others to follow their strategies.

Agricultural Work in Village

In the Northern part of India, this is season for harvesting of Wheat, Pulses and Mustard and in the Eastern part of India – harvesting of summer Paddy etc. Recently Government of India has announced exemption for the farmers on essential agricultural operations so that harvest remains unaffected. Ekta Parishad is supporting its smooth implementation by:

- Preparing an 'Inventory' for requirement of labour in agricultural operations (mainly harvesting/thrashing etc.) in clusters of neighboring villages
- Preparing a system of rotational work for the wage labour of that particular area in order to complete the agricultural operations

Facilitating Public Distribution System (PDS)

Ekta Parishad is trying to collaborate with the local administration for strengthening the 'food & essentials supplies chain' and reach out to the poor people in villages. After current crisis, almost every State government has already started making PDS more efficient and responsive as per domestic need of the people.

- Preparing an inventory of eligible families and also for those poor families whose name not yet registered as an 'entitled household'.
- Preparing a calendar for ensuring supplies to the people. We are coordinating with local officials for making a comprehensive plan of action

Convergence of MGNREGA for Village Activity

Almost every State government has a sufficient sum of financial resources for the operating MGNREGA (Employment Guarantee). MGNREGA primarily focused to allow local labourers to work in the village itself in order to discourage forced migration. Since majority of wage labourers are in the village and waiting for employment, this is high time to start MGNREGA for building Soil-Water Conservation Structures,

Agricultural Land, Forest Plantation etc. Ekta Parishad has already trained village leaders in MGNREGA who are ready to support for such activities.

- Organizing consultative meetings with the villagers and preparing a 'work plan' for the village
- Ekta Parishad has a plan to share composite village plans to the concerned officials at the district level and ensure benefits of MGREGA to the villagers.

LONG TERM/RESPONSES

Setting Up Cottage Industry/Centers

The past experiences of Ekta Parishad especially in setting up various cottage centers can leverage many such activities for the village/cluster of villages. Ekta Parishad through its extensive experiences of setting up and running Weaving Unit, Forest Produce Processing Unit, Organic Honey Production Unit, Brick Making Unit, Carpentry Unit, Grain Mills, and Organic Cotton Production Unit etc. can meaningfully help the people/ State for strengthening this sector. Ekta Parishad will help:

- Promoting and strengthening the village level cottage industry/centers towards local production & consumption systems. This will also protect the migrant labourers to get labour/wage security in the village itself.
- Setting up at least one Cottage Industry/Center among each of 4-5 village cluster, which can easily serve the villagers and ensure local employment

Strengthening Rural Economy & Labour

The current crisis has also indicated for rethinking on new model of rural economy and rural labour-intensive employment. Ekta Parishad is ready to initiate larger consultative processes for presenting 'New Model for Rural Economy & Labour' and also trying to set up certain examples on the ground. This model could also be shared

with the State Governments and other potential partners for possible expansion in Rural India. It aims at:

- Organizing 'Local/Regional' consultations for evolving 'New Model of Local/Rural Economy' which essentially respects the wide canvas of biodiversity and is based on conservation of nature
- Advocacy with the State and other potential partners who are interested to strengthen Rural/Labour Economy for larger collaborations.

APPEAL

Ekta Parishad needs moral and financial support for expanding and strengthening these initiatives and also collaborating with many organizations across India.

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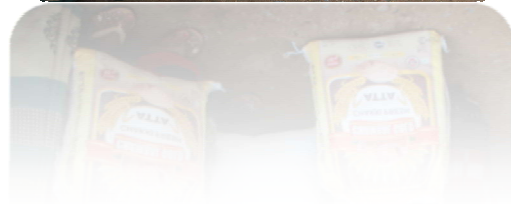
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Helping Villagers



Community Education of Villagers (Isolation Center)



Preparing Khadi Masks



Preparing Food Materials / Packet

