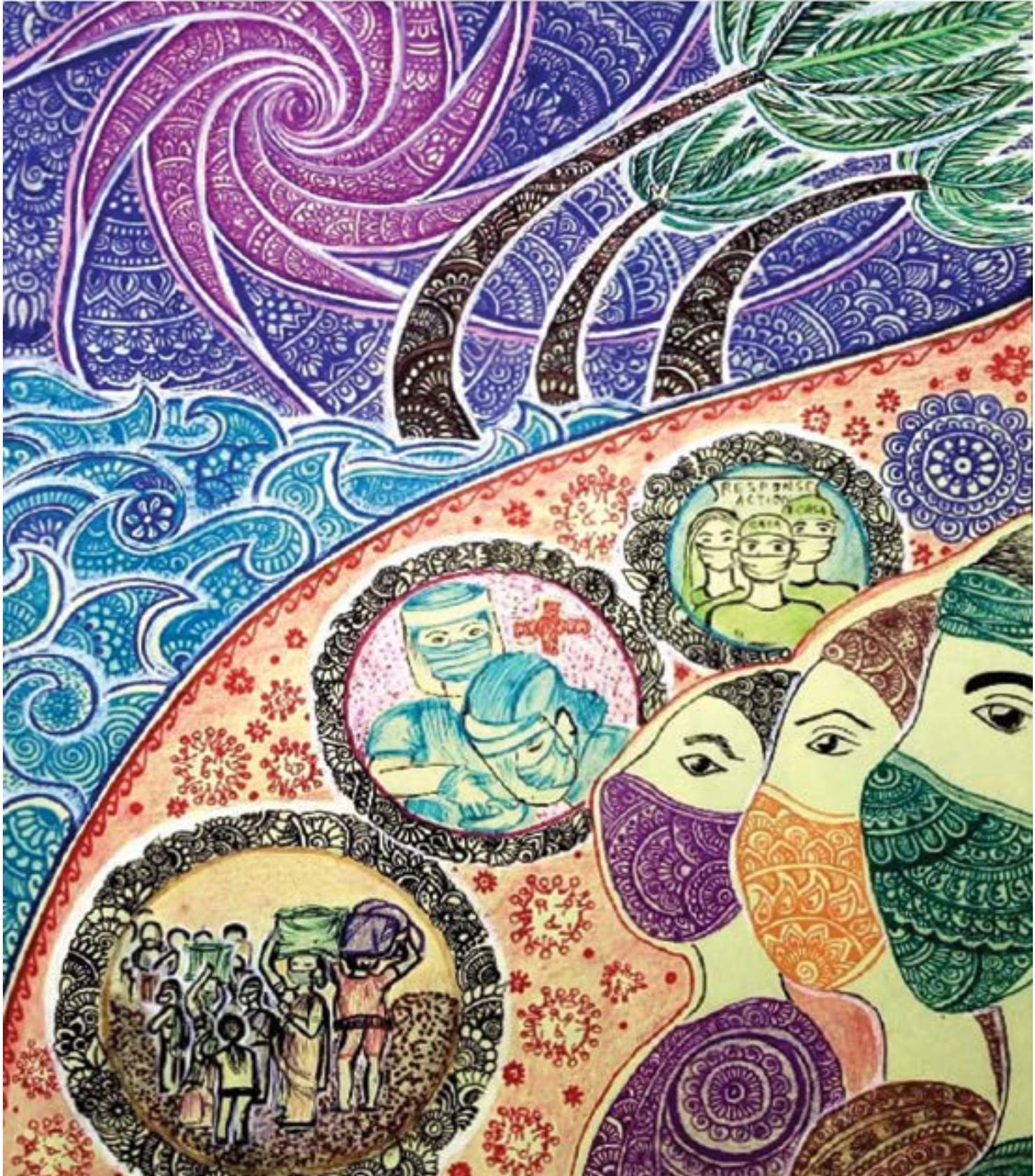


CASA in Action

PANDEMIC-DISASTER-IMPACTS AND RESPONSE





church's auxiliary
for social action

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EDITORIAL

The unforeseen health emergency perpetrated by the global pandemic was no short of a nightmare. From urban to rural expanses, not a single life was untouched by the physical or mental challenges posed by COVID-19. A distorted new normal of terminated social interaction, masked existence and perpetual anxiety overshadowed the entire year of 2020.

Over decades, CASA has mastered the craft of Disaster Risk Management by engaging susceptible communities in charting their way to reduced vulnerability and accelerated recovery post-calamity. However, a medical emergency was unconventional. Impulsive lockdown stripped thousands of guest workers of their single source of bread, deprived rural children of education and exposed women to inescapable domestic hostility, glimpses of which are encased in this publication.

As CASA channelised a fine-tuned Response Action to help the disproportionately affected section sail past the deadly atrocities of the microscopic pathogen, a monstrous supercyclone from the Bay of Bengal hit the ailing premises of West Bengal. Supercyclone Amphan ravaged houses, farmlands and properties which were central to the sustenance and identity of the battered communities. Stories included in the issue, reflect a familiarity with the ethnic, environmental and geographic subtleties of rustic Sunderbans, generated through years of humanitarian engagement, that enabled CASA to expand prompt assistance to the communities in overcoming the tribulations of the dual catastrophe.

This edition does not only echo the woes of the communities that have been thrice marginalised by pre-pandemic scarcity, COVID-19 and supercyclone Amphan, but also strives to draw a realistic picture of the devastation caused by the calamities.

DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

For a significant part of our society, which has been either 'othered' or shadowed from mainstream attention, survival is still a game of chance. Accessing livelihood opportunities, healthcare, education, financial security, social dignity, and other crucial factors to development, are rarely a claimable Right to them. With the tragic outbreak of COVID-19, the ugliest predicament of this disadvantaged strata was largely exposed to the nation's scrutiny. The regulation of a sudden lockdown throughout the country fueled an unprecedented surge in the humanitarian crisis. There were dreadful instances of reverse migration, unemployment, blockage in supply chains, and a rise in gender-based violence amidst the extraordinary medical emergency. The pandemic also loomed a potential threat to reverse our organisation's decades of effort in eradicating child labour, which is a curse to the future of our nation.

As a collective, we planned and organised CASA's Response to COVID-19 with a sense of dutiful urgency to aid the vulnerable communities across the nation. Besides identifying the concerns of the marginalised and propelling it positively towards a resolution, CASA's extensive response action also encompassed several steps, such as community collaboration and gender mainstreaming, to maximise the efficacy of the action. Our network of active local volunteers and CASA's knowledge of project areas provided a robust foundation to channelise quick yet nuanced approaches. We were dedicated to raising awareness against coronavirus, providing relief to the guest workers, assisting the marginalised population in accessing livelihood opportunities and securing the avenue for recovering as well as reviving the rural economy.

CASA's local partners and international stakeholders assisted enormously in mitigating the distress of marginalised families with dry ration and hygiene kits, distributing cooked food to the stranded migrants, and organising health camps for free check-up services, supplying marginal farmers with agricultural seeds. Multiple awareness campaigns were conducted for conveying the Dos and Don'ts during COVID-19. Gradually, these campaigns extended in accord with the need of the hour, into curbing gender-based violence and informing the rural residents about the government scheme for job provisions and other entitlements during the lockdown period. We are proud to highlight that the women volunteers and leaders from several villages made an outstanding contribution as front-line COVID warriors. The women groups arrived door to door to raise awareness and encourage women to voice their concerns.

CASA also had the responsibility to safeguard the volunteers on the ground from contracting COVID-19. Therefore, we ensured that preventive measures are observed strictly. With regular disinfectant sprays, use of PPE kits, obeisance of physical distancing, and checkups the threats to contact transmission were completely eliminated. CASA teams across departments also got exposure to enhancing digital competence. Therein, online meetings with local volunteers and leaders were conducted to prevent the collaboration from slacking off in action.

Each of our efforts was funded generously by our stakeholders and donors, in acknowledgement of which, I shall like to express my heartfelt gratitude for their contribution. The combined endeavour, put in place at the right hour, has saved many from sleeping with an empty stomach and feeling terrorised by the nightmares of existential shortcoming.

Dr. Sushant Agrawal, Director - CASA

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Dr. Jayant Kumar
Head of Programme

understanding of the way CASA operates. With an online orientation, conducted by our staff members, we could train them to manage situations during a crisis like COVID-19".

If one may speculate the serious consequences that mere compromise with precautions may cause, during the pandemic, it would not be difficult to recognise how precarious the unaware communities are to the virus. "The villagers were initially reluctant that COVID-19 would not infect the village as the cities. However, with migration, the realisation of the severity elevated.

"CASA has tremendous trust in the local volunteers because they have exemplified wonderful work in our general programs due to their regional availability. The local volunteers, connected to our partners, are spread across the country, assisting in delivering prompt actions at the location of any incident. It is not only their quick response but also passion to respond which extends CASA's effort to the localities despite the distance", states Jayant Kumar, Program Head, CASA, communicating the importance of localised efforts in CASA's response to COVID-19.

In the extraordinary times of global pandemic, conducting a response has its fair share of challenges to meet. Focusing on those testing situations, the Program Head states, "since the lockdown restricted much of our accessibility to far and wide regions, therefore, we identified the operational presence of our direct or indirect partners across the country. The local volunteers, at our partner organisation, have an adequate

The villagers quarantined the incomers, outside the premises, for 14-16 days before permitting an entry. We mobilised the local volunteers to aid and raise sufficient awareness among the communities and partners organisations. But awareness alone does not suffice. The village leaders, fearful of contact transmission and asymptomatic cases, did not participate or respond to the regional situation, even in a group of 4-5. Our localised efforts were an impetus to initiate response action and participation".

After the initiation, CASA connected the drive to the government authorities. Clarifying the need to let local institutions take over, Jayant Kumar mentioned, "Our resources are perishable because it is finite and so is the period of our operational presence in the regions. So, after our initial thrust, the panchayat or state administration should take over the whole process. The linkages were conveniently established because the state governments eventually geared up releasing several schemes and the

district administrators were on their toes to counter the crisis".

Supervising through online means, was not easy for staff members with minimal digital literacy. According to Jayant Kumar, "Conducting video training programs seemed unmanageable. But with an unbeatable spirit, our team carried technical equipment to monitor areas with decent connectivity where 2-3 local volunteers could be connected over a telephone to the training advisor at CASA. Gradually, we also upskilled our staff to operate through digital communication channels."

CASA was well aware that "Any disaster exacerbates the suffering of women and children". Even the migration process was unsafe for them physically and mentally. Jayant Kumar explains, "One definition of feminism is to see the problem from a woman's eye. Integrating women's perspectives and participation in the COVID-19 response has been remedial. Furthermore, In certain areas, where we had maintained links with volunteers from the concluded CLFZ program, we have requested an approval to restart the 3rd Bridge School after having identified around 46 child labourers and parentless earners".

"COVID-19 is an emergency where everyone is scared to step out and even talk to each other. Now, we need to focus on medical emergencies as we do for natural and man-made calamities. The departments concerned with Development and Emergency are now integrated". Dr. Jayant Kumar acknowledges, "We have to include new measures in emergency planning and increase the canvas of our response through localisation." Evidently, the challenges posed by COVID-19 was an opportunity for CASA to learn and upgrade the competence in responding to such emergencies.

An overview of COVID-19 response

A year and more has passed since the COVID-19 outbreak. After a slow initial spread, the virus began to infect more of the population quite rapidly. Recalling March 2020, one may revisit the burning side of obscurity around how bad or worse could the impact of COVID-19 be on India.

CASA promptly initiated an awareness campaign in mid-March 2020, as a part of the COVID-19 response action. The programme was implemented in 23 states either directly or through partners. CASA members' institutions were also involved in raising appropriate awareness throughout the nation.

Anticipating the potential of a fierce spread of COVID-19, the Government of India implemented a nationwide lockdown to curtail the infection. However, the lockdown had its own problems and led to the rise of other implications like migration, lack of livelihood, issues concerning gender and children. CASA's Task Team, which was constituted to follow up on COVID-19, met frequently to review the context and develop strategies to reach the most vulnerable groups. A major thrust in the response, initiated in late March/early April, was focused on the guest workers who were returning to their native states.

The process of implementation was complicated. On one side, there was a growing impact of COVID-19 positive cases and on the other side, more people were getting identified in need of assistance. More helpless guest workers were returning to their native places and livelihood in the rural sector came to a standstill for many. CASA participated in frequent parleys with the government mechanism to ensure that safety and precautions supersede the response. Our actions were formulated in the larger interest of containing the spread

of COVID-19 within the villages in the aftermath of a steady inflow of returnee guest workers.

It is applaudable that CASA's reach has been massive, penetrating among the most diversely affected people spread across varied geographical regions. As of 30th Sept 2020, CASA has reached 5 million people in more than 14500 villages, spread across 23 states, of which Material and Other support from CASA has reached more than 1,50,000 families in more than 2500 villages spread across 23 states. There were three major ways to approach the situation: directly implementing the programme, responding through partners and collaborating with member institutions. These avenues, given the lockdown and the implication of work from home, brought in many dimensions of working methodologies, based on the capacity and skills of CASA's team on the field, the partners and member institutions who collaborated and associated.

The stories of "reaching the unreached" have been phenomenal. Of sorts, it was an amalgamation of a diverse culture of approaches. In the response spread in 23 states, CASA has associated with more than 120 partner/member institutions. It is by and far the largest number in partnering/collaborating for a single response in CASA. The organisation's firm belief in Localization over a period of time has helped to bring in effective ways and processes that confirmed that the local agencies'/ member institution's role in such a critical hour of response is vital. When the government eased out the lockdown, offices began to open. With a limited number of staff members and rota in place, it was also essential that due emphasis is given on livelihood in the response and the communities were to be linked with the government schemes. Substantial efforts were put in to ensure the communities and, in particular, the returned guest workers were oriented properly for the government linkages. Added to the support provided by CASA, the returned guest workers actively participated in the MGNREGA

programmes to uplift their circumstances.

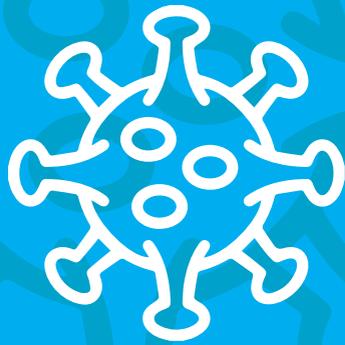
Alongside these responses, CASA engaged in the process of ensuring a clear understanding of the issues concerning Gender and Children gets across CASA and its partners. Staff with expertise in these aspects led the process and also strengthened the response. With these, the thrust was given to reach more women and youth in the CBOs, where they played an active role and in the process gaining a foothold on Leadership. It was interesting to witness the emergence of new leadership from among the communities, mostly the women and the youth.

Whatever be the situation, the CASA Team continued with the action. The responses are stretching beyond 2020 with a few in 2021. A recollection of these happenings give reverberates that time and again multiple disasters have tested the relevance and efficacy of the organisation. COVID-19 is no exemption, however it was beyond complexities in terms of reach and and bringing in the entire staff to an understanding with limited mobility and time, where the approach in the response itself had to be different, far beyond the conventional system of functioning. Gearing up and positioning the staff within a short span of time with active participation added to their involvement in the process proves the immense coping and adaptation skill that the teams in CASA possess alongside commitment, trust and vitality which plays a crucial role.



Joseph Sahayam
Additional Emergency Officer, HQ

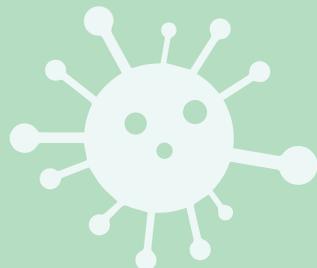
A VIRUS THAT CHANGED OUR DEFINITION OF NORMAL



- Coronaviruses are enveloped RNA viruses. They cause a wider range of respiratory illnesses from the common cold to deadly pneumonia.
- Only 7 of them have been identified to cause respiratory illnesses in Humans. Mostly are zoonotic pathogens that first infect animals and then spread to humans.
- 4 of the 7 cause mild symptoms of the common cold and cough.
 - a. Coronaviruses 229E, OC43, NL63, and HKU1
 - b. They may also cause bronchiolitis and pneumonia amongst other severe lower respiratory tract infections
- 3 of the 7 are deadly and infectious Human coronaviruses
 - a. MERS-CoV - the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) first reported in Saudi Arabia in 2012.
 - b. SARS-CoV- severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) began in China in late 2002.
 - c. SARS-CoV-2- novel coronavirus- responsible for COVID-19 pandemic, started in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China in late 2019.

What is COVID-19?

- SARS-CoV-2, the seventh of the identified human coronaviruses, caused the COVID-19 pandemic.
- It was a new strain of coronavirus that was never identified before the pandemic outbreak.
- Third respiratory viral infection after MERS and SARS with a notable transmission tendency from person to person.



Transmission:

- Through small droplets from the nose or mouth of the infected person while talking, coughing or other exhalation.
- Contact transmission when a healthy person touches a contaminated surface or things belonging to a patient and then immediately touch his/her own eyes, nose or mouth



Impact:

- Mild to moderately impact: Most infected individuals, especially youth, may recover without special medical assistance.
- Under high-risk: The elderly, immunocompromised, obese people, patients of sickle-cell anaemia, and those with underlying medical conditions as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer.



Symptoms

May appear anytime between 5-14 days after coronavirus enters the body.



Most common symptoms

- Fever
- Dry cough
- Fatigue



Less common symptoms

- Body aches and pains
- Sore throat
- Diarrhoea
- Conjunctivitis
- Headache
- Loss of taste or smell
- A rash on the skin or discolouration of fingers or toes



Serious symptoms

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Chest pain or pressure
- Loss of speech or movement



Treatments

- Each of the categories needs a different medical approach since there is no treatment to COVID-19 specifically. Health professionals combine different medical procedures to treat patients:
- **Mild illness:** Any mild signs and symptoms of COVID-19 but without serious ones- resolve within a week with no special medical treatment.
- **Moderate illness:** Patients with an indication of lower respiratory disease and oxygen saturation (SpO2) $\geq 94\%$ on room air at sea level.
- **Severe illness:** Patients with respiratory rate > 30 breaths per minute, the ratio of arterial partial pressure of oxygen to fraction of inspired oxygen (PaO2/FiO2) < 300 mmHg, SpO2 $< 94\%$ on room air at sea level, lung infiltrates $> 50\%$
- **Critical illness:** Patients suffering shock, multiorgan failure, thromboembolism, pulmonary emboli disseminated intravascular coagulation (DIC), haemorrhage, arterial clot formation- Respiratory failure may demand mechanical ventilation

Prevention

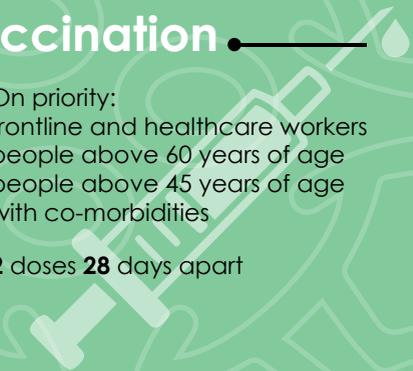
- Clean your hands frequently for 20 seconds using soap and water, or an alcohol-based sanitiser.
- Maintain Physical distance of at least 2 meters (6 feet) from one another in public places.
- Wear a mask whenever you go out.
- Don't touch your eyes, nose or mouth with unsanitized hands.
- Cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze.
- Prevent travelling if you feel unwell.

Medication

- In the initial year: no dedicated treatments for COVID-19. Globally, pharmaceutical companies and research groups tested to see if older ones can be repurposed.
- Midterm investigation: Available information from the investigational vaccines to SARS and MERS outbreaks utilised to find a treatment for COVID-19.
- Currently: Most countries have developed their vaccines- India has two approved COVID-19 vaccines - Covishield and Covaxin. However, no specific medication for infected people.

Vaccination

- On priority: frontline and healthcare workers people above 60 years of age people above 45 years of age with co-morbidities
- **2 doses 28 days apart**





MIGRANT CRISIS IN INDIA

The COVID-19 pandemic has left vast numbers of migrants without a livelihood, leaving them homeless under tragic circumstances.

The lockdown in India has gravely impacted the informal workforce, as a surge in the loss of employment in urban cities led the migrants to traverse hundreds of kilometres on foot, to reach their native villages. This migration is considered the largest migration in India since 1947. With bruises and blisters covering their feet and no proper meal to survive on, the migrant workers were left in dire straits. With the lack of monetary savings, unorganised transportation facilities and no ration to feed themselves, the migrants in India have borne the gravest repercussions of this lockdown.



RISE IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The COVID-19 pandemic compelled the nation to stay indoors to curb the spread of the coronavirus. However, this led to an exponential rise in the Shadow Pandemic of gender-based violence against women. The existing societal evil of gender-based discrimination and abuse received an impetus due to the lockdown. Cases of domestic violence have been rapidly increasing. The pandemic has aggravated gender inequality. As the nation continues to quarantine, women shall continue to be adversely affected, without any proper means of availing the support. It is imperative for us to take action against this social malice and ensure women and young girls are safe and healthy at home.



THE PANDEMIC AND CHILD LABOUR

The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has triggered the vulnerabilities in the lives of several people. What hovers as a larger concern is the impact of the pandemic in furthering the evil practice of child labour. The instability of the financial situation may encourage vulnerable families to force children into earning and compensating through labour. The possibility of an increase in child labour could be more disastrous than it currently seems to be. Battling against these impending threats to society has become more important than before.



LOSS OF EMPLOYMENT

Threatening the sustenance of a large section of the population, the COVID-19 pandemic has terminated the jobs of millions of people across the nation. The loss of employment has not only jeopardised the source of income of the afflicted individuals or their families but has also brought the country's economic structure to a risk. The impending commercial slowdown has further threatened the social predicament of a significant population.



EDUCATIONAL CRISIS

The educational crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the sudden shutting down of schools across the country. The impact is more critical on the children belonging to the marginalised communities since they have no access to either the internet or smartphones, necessary to attend the online-mode of educational classes. As education adds knowledge and value to an individual, it should be the most advancing sector for the overall growth of a society and a country. But at the moment, the educational emergency caused due to COVID-19 has brought millions of children out of school. India has now primarily adopted the digital way of learning. However, only a selected number of students have access to the internet in India, highlighting this as a major concern to be looked after.

**UNDER THE SHADOW OF THE
NATIONWIDE
LOCKDOWN**

52,56,793

No. of people reached

23

States covered

TILL SEPTEMBER 2020

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Joseph Sahayam - Additional Emergency Officer
 Arushi Narchal - Digital Media Manager, Communications
 Pankhuri - Associate, Communications

One of the most serious health hazards to hit the world, COVID-19, is sweeping through India at the moment. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every nation across the globe, gravely striking the marginalised identities. To mitigate the crisis, CASA has been actively working to address and alleviate the concerns of the vulnerable communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic emerged in the mainland of China, at Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province, in December, 2019. By January, 2020, the World Health Organisation had declared it to be a public emergency. COVID-19 was declared a pandemic in March, 2020 by the World Health Organisation due to its extremely contagious nature. The WHO's statement, followed by an unexpected turn of events, led the Indian government to announce a nationwide lockdown on 25th March, 2020. While the lockdown did seem necessary, yet it exposed the pre-existing loopholes in our society, with the vulnerable and marginalised bearing the worst brunt of this fallout.

Various COVID-19 response strategies have been implemented, till-date, to address and minimize the impacts of novel Coronavirus. However, as the year 2020 drew a picture of chaos over the world, people retreated to their homes, taking extreme precautionary measures to keep themselves safe. It became clearer with the passage of time that observing the precautionary measures were also privilege-based. Therefore, it was the ones living under fragile circumstances who suffered the extremity.

CASA has successfully reached out to 52,56,793 individuals as of 30th September, 2020, assisting marginalised communities in the far-flung regions of India that have fallen victim to the crisis. Our response programme has secured the sustenance of affected communities besides spreading awareness across 23 states of India. The COVID-19 response programme has followed an all-rounded approach to assist the vulnerable and alleviate their predicament from extreme circumstances.

As rural India has limited facilities and resources, especially in terms of health management, the risk of COVID-19 cases in such regions is higher due to the inflow



▶ CASA VOLUNTEERS EDUCATING THE HAND WASH TECHNIQUE TO THE PEOPLE

CASA has been actively educating the rural communities on the precautionary measures to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus. Our volunteers have been present in the far-flung villages of India, since the implementation of the lockdown, to raise awareness. Several workshops have been conducted, demonstrating the correct handwashing procedures, stressing on the importance of

physical distancing and the usage of face masks. Volunteers have also used wall painting method as an educational tool to raise awareness concerning the pandemic.

CASA's volunteers have been proactively working with well-coordinated efforts despite the challenges that came in moderating our approach with COVID-19 as the new normal.

of returnee migrants post lockdown. CASA's COVID-19 response strategies have taken these points into account. Identification of gaps among communities, capacity strengthening, emphasis on personal hygiene and physical distancing, public awareness and health support are the factors which were incorporated among our strategies in our Plan of Action.

CASA has reached out to communities across the country that thrive in the most remote and far-flung regions of India that include tribal populations surviving under vulnerable circumstances. Our approach renders communities that live in regions distant from the urban land, and sometimes even outcast by the society.

COVID-19 RESPONSE STRATEGIES



CASA'S INITIATIVES UNDER AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

Information, Education and Communication

CASA's field workers were regularly educated and updated through virtual means to raise awareness and educate communities on COVID-19. Information was shared among communities not only through demonstrations (that strictly followed physical distancing) but also through the usage of posters

AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

Obliviousness to the precautionary measures regarding COVID-19 has acted as a major obstacle in containing the spread of the infection. As India has a population of over a billion people, physical distancing and maintenance of hygiene are the prime issues that require more attention.

The major challenges that were faced by CASA to raise awareness were the restrictions that were imposed during the lockdown, therefore, our staff and volunteers used virtual methods to educate communities. Our volunteers that were present in villages were trained virtually so that coordinated joint responses were implicated even in the most remote regions. The barriers that were met during lockdown were overcome by the usage of modern communication methods that include social media, visual (video) recording, telephonic training and IEC materials. CASA diligently made use of the existing networks to share essential information.

Lack of awareness, malnutrition, insufficient clean water and inaccessible public healthcare centres have been the preliminary challenges that impacted the rural regions of India.



▶ AWARENESS THROUGH WALL PAINTING MADE BY CASA VOLUNTEERS



▶ CASA VOLUNTEERS SHOWING THE HAND WASH TECHNIQUE

and wall-painting that used regional languages to communicate to communities restricted to certain areas. Radio and video broadcasts were presented alongside to support our communication plan. Essential Helpline Numbers were shared among communities in order to request for direct help from the Government in any emergency situation. Materials that were developed by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) were used to train the frontline workers to promote hygiene practices and build resilience despite the pre-existing drawbacks.

FOCUS ON WASH PRACTICES

With the number of cases surging each day, CASA has acted upon the urgency by demonstrating the correct method of washing hands, across all the project areas

in the country. This small act has the power to curb the spread of the virus and propagate proper hygiene. As access to clean water and sanitation are the setbacks that are faced by many communities, CASA has educated individuals on good WASH practices that include the prevention of hygiene and sanitation related diseases. We have also introduced sustainable methods in villages to promote WASH practices and inculcate a sense of responsibility i.e. every individual plays a crucial role in curbing the spread of the virus.

HYGIENE KITS DISTRIBUTION



2,501
VILLAGES

1,12,345
FAMILIES

5,61,725
PEOPLE REACHED

SPRAYING OF DISINFECTANTS

CASA was involved in a sanitation programme across five states of India, namely Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Telangana in eight districts and 297 villages



297
VILLAGES

36,135
FAMILIES

1,80,675
PEOPLE REACHED



▶ A WOMEN VOLUNTEER TRAINED BY CASA SKILL CENTER STITCHING A CLOTH-MADE MASK



assigned domestic responsibilities that engage their managerial and labouring skills at the same time. Investing entrepreneurial skills in women and giving them an idea of the market, encourages them to unleash their earning potential in its entirety. An impactful initiative by women during the COVID-19 pandemic would now continue to be counted in the instances that CASA is whole-heartedly appreciative of.

Under the initiative to provide livelihood prospects and entrepreneurial advancement, CASA has been providing skill training to the marginalised women for social and financial empowerment. With masks elevating to an almost imperative piece of clothing during the pandemic, the upskilled women, who were taught tailoring under the program, volunteered to stitch cloth-made masks.

Carefully packed inside the relief kit distributed by CASA, some of these masks made their way to the members of the distressed communities and assisted them in observing the preventive measure against COVID-19. Moreover, the women tailors were able to set a small-scale business of stitching these sustainable cloth masks and raising their family income to cope with the lockdown.

MASK DISTRIBUTION BY FEMALE VOLUNTEERS

Empowering women is empowering a community for posterity
Across regions and dimensions, most women are

CASA has witnessed innumerable instances wherein the efforts of women in a community has cast their reflection within a short period of time. Empowering women has not only transformed the predicament of the households at the micro-level but also of the villages at large.



1689
VILLAGES

48532
FAMILIES

242660
PEOPLE REACHED

► FOOD AND NON FOOD ITEMS DISTRIBUTED BY CASA

FOOD AND NON FOOD ITEMS DISTRIBUTION

India has witnessed a significant rise in food insecurity, especially among the marginalised communities. COVID-19 has exacerbated the condition of the vulnerable as availability and access to food has become difficult. Our COVID-19 strategies have covered the primary necessities of an individual including the provision of dry ration to the poverty-stricken, to fulfil their nutritional needs. As our efforts extend to the remote areas of India, the ones living under fragile circumstances have been provided with basic food requirements. Proper nutrition is imperative for healthy bodily immunity and balanced mental state, which can not be overlooked during these tragic times.



PROVISION OF COOKED MEALS

As the accessibility of food has become a prime concern, CASA initiated the provision of cooked meals to the ones who did not have any resources to fulfil their nutritional requirements. We have held camps across the country, to provide meals to the ones tottering on the verge of starvation as the pandemic has worsened the situation.



62
VILLAGES

13684
PEOPLE REACHED

► COOKED FOOD DISTRIBUTION ORGANISED BY CASA



CASH SUPPORT

The unravelling of tragic incidents, because of the lockdown, accelerated unemployment across the country. The predicament was worsened to an extent when people did not have any savings left with them. Though support was extended in terms of food and hygiene, yet the affected ones continued to find the circumstances heavily-daunting.

Cash Support has been provided to the affected, especially the guest workers, to help them rebuild their lives with dignity. This cash support will help them to meet their needs which could be associated with livelihood, shelter, food items, non-food items, etc. The process for cash transfer is done systematically (through bank transfer) to mitigate the economic fallout among the vulnerable.



► CASA volunteers initiating the Cash support program



219
VILLAGES

1900
FAMILIES

9500
PEOPLE REACHED



It is painful that the economy of our developing country, being mostly balanced on those hands of the labourers, has but a little to offer them against their hardships. The intellectuals, who were supposed to be the "brains" behind the socio-cultural welfare of the entire nation, yet again let the interest of the marginalised down with the sudden imposition of a curfew, followed by the extended lockdown, at the outbreak of COVID-19 in India. A lockdown was definitely crucial to curb the spread of coronavirus, but the suddenness of it and the lack of systemic planning reflected a sheer

LINKING STRANDED MIGRANTS WITH THE GOVERNMENT AND LOCAL AGENCIES

There are countless accounts when the miseries of the marginalised labourers have been justified by appropriating them as the "hands" that toil for the social benefit. More often than not, a hegemonic discourse denies them the recognition of an intellectual. Well, why not? Their task is bound to be more muscular-nervous than cerebral in nature, so much so that they hardly have the leisure to philosophise their lives or the community they belong to. Each morning they hit themselves so harshly against backbreaking labour for survival that by the dusk, they have no spirit left to ignite their critical faculties. Sustaining themselves somehow through one day to another, through one week to another, occupies their only focus when existence falls through the narrow strait.

ignorance towards the impact it was about to have on the lives struggling in the subjugated stratum.

Having left one's native state to feed the belly, torturing oneself over days and nights to meet one's basic needs, ultimately what fell into the hands of these affected communities, was an unprecedented shutdown ripping them off their livelihood sources, minimal savings, health-based welfare and sanity. History recorded the next largest mass mobilisation and migration of humans after that of the partition in 1947. Back in the year of Independence, communal violence and poverty made the migration extremely unsafe. Yet this time, added to the financial shortcomings during the pandemic, returnee migrants were exposed to a microscopic enemy, threatening their lives- the deadly, contagious, and rapidly transmitting coronavirus.

Despite the best efforts by the government, NGOs', CSOs' and individuals, who reached out and helped the stranded people during the COVID-19 lockdown, there still prevailed a concern on the accessibility to the support. Several small groups of migrant labourers and their families in distress sent out messages through social media and calls in the request of urgent support. CASA firmly believed, and yet does, that no human being deserves to suffer through starvation, unsafe circumstances and a daunting crisis due to the urgent lockdown. Through our vast network, contacts and supportive partners, CASA is reached out to the communities as quickly as possible. Certain instances of this urgent support, delivered within a brief notice period, have been provided below.

16 April 2020

- 40 visually challenged persons from Mumbai and Thane received Rs. 1600/- each through Google Pay.

1

18 April 2020

- 8 migrant families from Himachal Pradesh were stranded in Pandharpur, Pune, Thane, and Mumbai received Rs. 2000/- through Google Pay.
- 10 families from Rajnandgaon, Chhattisgarh, were stranded in Nagpur city without any basic necessities. Director NMSSS and team contacted them with dry ration kits.

2

25 April 2020

- 20 members of transgender community in Shirampur, Ahmednagar district, Maharashtra were provided with Immediate Dry ration support.

3

May 2020

- 10 youths from Rajasthan were stranded in Mohammadwadi, Hadapsar, Pune were given Food support.

4

5 May 2020

- 3 medical check-up camps organised by team of doctors and 540 youth of 4 Southern states in Ratnagiri, Maharashtra with assistance of CASA.

5

7 May 2020

- Food rations for two months was given to 17 boys and 3 workers of Marathi Mission Boys Hostel, Vadala.

6

GOVERNMENT USING CASA RESOURCE CENTRE AND OTHER UTILITIES



CASA is providing one of its resource centres to the Ahmednagar Municipal Corporation for the Quarantine facilities, initiated by the Maharashtra Government. Similarly in Odisha and in West Bengal, the respective state governments have identified 2 resource centers, the buildings constructed by CASA which were handed over to the Government during the Super Cyclone Response have been currently identified for quarantine facilities at this time of emergency.

In Manipur Hand Wash Basins have been constructed for them to promote hand washing while they move out of their village and return back to the village.

HEALTH CAMP AND INFRASTRUCTURE UTILITY



13 Villages Covered
620 People Reached

LIVELIHOOD SUPPORT

COVID-19 has resulted in a significant fall of employment which has specifically affected the daily wage labourers, farmers, guest workers and the minorities. CASA has provided livelihood support to the vulnerable through the following initiatives:

SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD

Livelihood has become a major concern, especially for guest workers and daily wage labourers, as the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by the lockdown, has triggered the loss of employment. This issue is pertinent in the urban as well as the rural areas. The lockdown and the loss of employment in urban areas saw the returning of guest workers in multitude. The process had multiple adverse-effects, as the rural and semi-rural communities lack local employment opportunities and are dependent on the MGNREGA. Though MGNREGA is a much-talked-about livelihood option, to what extent can the scheme accommodate every member of the financially troubled sections is a big question. Added to it are the concerns in terms of what skill sets do the guest workers have? These concerns lead to filtering out and segregation of the available alternatives to livelihood generation based on the skills of the returned guest workers. In sync with these concerns and considerations, livelihood support has been initiated for livestock, fish culture, vermicompost pits and seed distribution.

LIVELIHOOD INITIATIVE WITH GUEST WORKERS

 Anita Kukreti - Project Officer - National, Programmes

Migration is a strategy adopted by millions of people in India to earn their livelihood. Most of these migrations for work and employment are directed towards urban centres. Consequently, about half of the urban population turns out to be guest workers and one-fifth of them are inter-state migrants. Indian guest workers (migrants) during the COVID-19 pandemic have faced multiple hardships. With factories and workplaces shutting down, under the nationwide lockdown, millions of guest workers had to deal with the loss of income, food shortages and uncertainty about their future. Following this, many of them and their families went hungry. Thousands of them began walking back home on foot, with no means of transport available during the lockdown. Many guest workers lost their lives and several committed suicides for reasons ranging from starvation, exhaustion, accidents and denial of timely medical care.

Furthermore, due to the current COVID-19 situation, the gulf between the rich and the marginalised has deepened. India's marginalised had to pay a heavy price in their fight against coronavirus as it has severely impacted the lives and livelihood of millions of citizens. The current migration has been considered the largest post-partition migration in the history of India. With the uncertain future in front of them, little savings, and a poor social security net, the guest workers were rendered more vulnerable and deprived. Their social safety and food security nets demand to be strengthened and advocacy needs to be done at various levels to ensure that the poor and marginalised get their legitimate entitlements.

CASA's response has been sustained carefully to ensure a healthy increase in our reach and boost the efficacy in addressing the need for the marginalised and vulnerable groups. Since the lockdown, most of the COVID-19 specific programmes of CASA have also been addressing the issues of reverse migration.



CASA has supported the community and included guest workers in its operational areas with activities which are as follows:

- A. Access to livelihood options;
 - a. Access to a different state and central schemes and packages for small and marginal farmers, landless, and other most vulnerable groups
 - b. NTFPs collection,
 - c. Agriculture and its allied activities

ACCESS TO LIVELIHOOD OPTIONS:

CASA has identified various livelihood options through which the guest workers who returned to their homes, as well as people who have been already in the villages, may access livelihood options. Such livelihood options and CASA's work for its promotion are as follows:

A. Advocacy for access to a different state and central schemes and packages for small and marginal farmers, landless, and other most vulnerable groups:

CASA has always been developing micro plans in its operational areas to raise the demand for work from panchayat at various places. These are prepared in consultation with the community. As per the need and requirement of the locals, a plan is submitted to the panchayats for work under MGNREGA as well as access to other social security schemes. MGNREGA is the need of the hour as millions of guest workers have come back to their villages with no readily available livelihood options.

CASA has improved the opportunities for the marginalised by facilitating the process of demanding



jobs. CASA has also helped many eligible persons in applying for job cards with the help of Sarpanch and Panchayat secretary. Efforts have been taken to include most of the cardholders for MGNREGA benefits and the job profiles are functional in most of CASA's operational areas. Also, CASA has started collecting data to map the skills available amongst migrants who have arrived. The skill-related database will enable CASA to design livelihood strategies for the migrants in the long run.

APRIL 2020

When COVID-19 lockdown was still on, MGNREGA registered the lowest job demand in five years. Situation changed from May as lockdown measures were eased

JUNE 2020

44 million demanded jobs => 71% higher than the demand in June 2019

MAY 2020

36.2 million households jobs under MGNREGA => 44% higher than the demand in May 2019

JULY 2020

31.03 million demanded jobs => 70% higher than the demand in July 2019

Source: MNREGA MIS report

B. NTFPs Collection and marketing

Non-Timber Forest Produce is another very vital part of the economy in tribal areas. This became more important during COVID-19 time. The government has allowed collecting NTFPs with certain Dos and Don'ts. CASA has actively encouraged the forest dwellers in its operational areas to collect NTFPs sustainably and sell them at the local market. Unfortunately, the nationwide lockdown has also cast a grave shadow on the trade of NTFPs, as weekly markets are not operating and traders are not allowed to move freely in nearby towns.

C. Agriculture and its allied activities

As the agriculture sessions are arriving and people have no money to hire labour. In this condition, CASA has encouraged community leaders to motivate the community to work collectively through which time and money will be saved.

1. Collective farming: After the lockdown period was over, people were searching for work as this period was important for Kharif and Rabi crops. So CASA, with the help of VDC and local people's organisations, promoted collective farming. Landless families were also part of the collective group and they worked together on a common land whose produce will be shared with all farmers for their efforts.

2. Linkage developed with the agriculture department: Special linkage development with agriculture, horticulture and forest departments assisted in providing seeds to the families who needed agriculture seeds during the period of lockdown.



► COMMUNITY PEOPLE ENGAGED IN LAC CULTIVATION

3. Policy advocacy

Certain interventions can also be planned with an aim to give relief to the farmers for loan waiver as the lockdown has jeopardized their agricultural avenue very badly.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE UNACKNOWLEDGED

It must also be highlighted that although the government is committed to providing for the needy, especially in rural India, most of the government-sponsored donations (especially under PDS) are conditionally helping those who're in need. The beneficiary has to be registered and possess identification cards to be eligible to acquire anything under government schemes. There are millions of destitute and homeless persons throughout the country who have no documentation of any kind, let alone government related documentation. CASA does not discriminate whether the person in dire circumstance holds any such documents or not and is working sincerely to be of help to the most vulnerable and exposed ones during this strange and troubling time.

CONCLUSION

Millions of guest workers lost all their hope because of the way they have been treated during lockdown within their own country. Projections were made all over the world that India would become a five trillion economy by 2024-25, but the pandemic caused due to COVID-19 has put a question mark on our assumptions and our policies to adequately care for our citizens. The gap between rich and poor has always been a concern in India, which is never acknowledged and addressed in a way it should be.

With the Pandemic widening the gap between the rich and poor, the Humanitarian Sector needs to build appropriate systems and mechanisms to ensure that the vulnerable and the marginalised groups are protected and have access to necessary resources and livelihood opportunities. With the prevailing context of Reverse Migration, the challenges are growing tougher. However, certain opportunities could also emerge in this context as migration has picked up the attention of many. Gender inequality is another grave concern. We should ensure that the pandemic and the lockdown should not spoil the efforts of the Civil Society in trying to bring a gender-equitable order. Civil societies also need to get united to build back better.

3. Lac cultivation: Lac Cultivation has been done on the plants of *Semialata* in the programme areas of Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh. Through this Lac Cultivation, the community will be getting the benefit in Cash after selling the Lac. Along with this, there were some gaps in the land where *Semialata* was planted. CASA, Bilaspur applied mixed cropping and planted some vegetable plants in those gaps for some seasonal vegetables.

4. Nutrition House (Poshan Ghar): The objective of vv is to avail food at any time in the village, so no one will sleep empty stomach. So, during the harvesting period, the communities have collectively stored agriculture products like rice, paddy, vegetables and other sources along with forest produce like Mahua, in a commonplace and distributed them in the times of need. Also, the community members may sell it in the open market to distribute the amount equally among the contributors or to purchase any common item for the community. This is a new effort which has been taken by CASA, Bilaspur to inculcate an idea of cooperation. CASA is hopeful that in coming years this will help a lot of people in the community to start any entrepreneurship or purchasing agricultural inputs.

CASA's proposed work/ Future strategies in its operational areas:

For CASA, urgency lies in the fact that the rural economy needs to be revived as soon as possible. CASA has always proposed its support to livelihood options through which the marginalised can increase gain their income, for instance:

1. Agriculture and its allied activities

2. Non-farm sectors

- Handloom and Handicrafts
- Small cooperatives and processing units etc.
- Skill-building and setting up of small scale industries in rural areas.

Apart from the agriculture and its allied activities above mentioned non-farm sectors could be one of the best ways to tackle the current situation.

DOMESTIC HOSTILITY DURING THE PANDEMIC

Women's safety has been one of the burning concerns of institutions and authorities across the globe. Fearing the predatory circumstances that women might get subjected to in the public sphere, a lot of families, as well as institutions in India, restrict women from getting their deserved professional opportunities. Claiming that women are ill-treated only when they step out of their homes implies that the premise of the house has to be the safest haven whatsoever. Yet, all these implications were debased by the 'Shadow Pandemic', a term coined by the United Nations for the alarming rise in cases of Domestic Violence across the globe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The entrenched patriarchy in various social systems, across the country, was well known to CASA. The organisation has continued to promptly address, encounter, and act to curb the instances of gender-based violence, across all the operational areas, since decades prior to the outbreak of COVID-19. Gender Mainstreaming has been at the core of CASA's approach in every program at regional and national levels. From developing an agenda, and implementing it, to finally shifting the leadership on to the local authorities, the organisation never compromises in the input, inculcation, and implementation of a non-discriminatory and gender-inclusive action.

With the rise in the COVID-19 curve, instances of gender-based violence, especially domestic violence began to reach new heights. To say the least, CASA was disappointed with the predicament of women in their houses, but not surprised. Prior to

the nationwide lockdown, CASA had strengthened the local systems for tackling domestic violence and promptly reaching out to the victims for help. From volunteers to local women groups, including local partners and stakeholders, every individual or organisation associated with CASA were informed well in advance about the helpline numbers to be dialled in emergency and the legal assistance that has to be sought to aid the victims of domestic violence.

As the lockdown was imposed, human-to-human interaction was barred entirely. The National Commission for Women began to receive insurmountable calls and complaints, from the far-flung corners of the country, seeking assistance against the intolerably rising domestic hostility. Important to note here, the voices of women who did not have access to mobile phones or internet connection were still suffocating under the roofs and waiting to be extracted, heard, and acted upon.

CASA heard the heartbreaking pleas of women and children, especially from the socio-economically marginalised sections, getting tortured by their drunkard patriarchs, insensitive in-laws, or sick relatives. Having to unwillingly spend a larger time with toxic family members, during the lockdown, several children and women fell victim to unjustified rage and frustrations both physically and mentally. Mitigating this crisis was not possible overnight but prompt action in rescuing the victim was possible.

CASA actively allocated teams of volunteers and joined hands with women associations for executing an expansive awareness

and aid-based response against domestic violence across all its functional areas. To lay out a permanent resolution to gender-based violence, several workshops, awareness campaigns, and discussions were organised from time to time. From wherever we felt that the voices were failing to reach us, our team arrived door to door to excavate the unheard notes and imbibe confidence as well as dignity among adolescent girls and ladies.

Since CASA's core and partner programme areas cover a nationwide presence, it was important that a dedicated task force should be formed and employed at the local level to identify cases of gender-based violence promptly. Our familiarity with the local population and their cultural phenomena required us to formulate an assessment procedure customised to excavate the deep-rooted concerns of the elderly, women and children in our operational areas during the pandemic. Keeping gender mainstreaming right at the heart of our approach, the National Gender Task Force team was allocated zones across the country to retrieve information related to domestic violence.

CASA's National Gender Task Force circulated a questionnaire including 19 questions on gender-based domestic violence during the COVID-19 lockdown

- CASA's field staff, community organizers, volunteers and partners across zones participated in the questionnaire.
- The answers were studied in August for assessing the impact of domestic violence on women and children during the lockdown.

Gender and Pandemic



The heart-wrenching image and media reports of a toddler trying to wake his dead mother on Bihar's Muzaffarpur railway platform will forever haunt us. While this image was one of the most disturbing realities of the lockdown, we also came across many such images of elderly women, pregnant women, young and adolescent girls walking barefoot and travelling through difficult modes to reach their destination, bruised and battered. This only consolidates the fact that in any disaster women are affected disproportionately and despite the impact, women are always at the heart of care and response.

There was an unfortunate glorification of the story of Jyoti Kumari, a fifteen years young girl who cycled her way from Gurugram to Bihar (more than 1,200 km) with her ailing father at the back as all public transportation was suspended. Jyoti and her father, a rickshaw driver, lived in Gurugram where she decided to move from Bihar to take care of him after a road accident.

Jyoti's father is a rickshaw driver by profession and hails from Bihar. After a road accident, Jyoti decided to migrate to Gurugram where she would look after him. However, Due to the extension of the nation-wide lockdown, without any source of income, their landlord asked them to vacate their room.

Using up all their savings, they bought a bicycle and began their journey back home. The terrifying reality of poor India as a 'beautiful feat of endurance and love' is an irony. Many similar stories were eulogised in the media for bravery and extraordinary efforts. However, the reality was monumental.

Making online work and education mandatory has had its side effects; as girls and women often have to fully take charge of household responsibilities and may get doubly burdened. Working from home, for instance, is most certainly not a strong step to gender equality during this time and stands as an additional challenge to gendered work lifestyles.

According to Aliya Hamid Rao, professor in the School of Social Sciences at Singapore Management University, "Working from home enables workers to do both paid and unpaid work. But it does so by reinforcing the idea that caregiving is privatised and that it is primarily women's responsibility.

While working from home encourages an essential cultural shift in workplaces to view women as both caregivers and workers, it does not account for how (married) men and women value each other's paid and unpaid work. Working from home may do little to encourage shifts toward a more gender-egalitarian organization within heterosexual families."

Parenting, patriarchally perceived as a 'mothers' job', has been a challenge for working women in the past year. With work from home being the 'new normal', undertaking household chores, including care work, has been an added burden too. It, however, must be understood that these difficulties are faced by urban

working women as a prominent gender role; the reality in rural areas slightly differs.

When The Gender Desk visited Core Programme areas in Maharashtra earlier this year, community women confessed that coping with the pandemic whilst losing out on agriculture and labour work had made their lives more difficult than ever before. Today, an 'unlock' of the lockdown and CASA's contribution has brought them a ray of hope to recuperate from the shortages of sustained livelihood, proper nutrition and the threats to the safety of women. Yet, the already growing socio-economic disparities continue to add to the burden of the poor and marginalised Indian woman.

Given that over 70% of women engage in the health, social sectors, it is of indispensable importance that women's safety, health, economy, and decision-making should be given utmost priority if we are keen on a gender-equitable response.

Due to the prolonged lockdown last year, women and children have been subjected to live with their abusers (partners, fathers, and/or family) for a longer duration than they usually do. Moreover, several studies undertaken by credible organisations have simultaneously proven) the vulnerability of women, children, sexual minorities, the elderly, the disabled, etc. during the pandemic.

The moment necessitates governments to intervene and take strong action to ensure that women and sexual minorities are protected within their homes, with or without a pandemic.

While many women leaders have ensured that the COVID-19 pandemic affects their people very sparsely, most of the world saw women being left out of decision-

making processes. Even in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, women have challenged the social construct in adapting to the change responsibly and contributing positively despite the strange and precarious nature of the time. We must question ourselves. Do we listen to the voices of our women when we create contingency plans for our country, communities, and households?

In Maharashtra, CASA's Nandurbar and Surat Core Programme areas have taken the initiative of engaging volunteers and community members in the fight to eliminate gender-based violence and identify the subtleties involved, providing help or recording observations if they're unable to intervene.

CASA's volunteers also worked towards healthcare for women and girls alongside ASHA workers in the community. They visited home to provide confidence and support to pregnant women and adolescent girls. The training provided under livelihood options and entrepreneurship development for women has helped many young women to come forward to tailor and stitch masks voluntarily, with facilitating support of CASA and also as a small-scale business.

It has been a difficult journey, but CASA and our communities have kept each other encouraged, motivated, and ready to take charge in such times.

At the time of any humanitarian crisis CASA takes an additional responsibility to put gender requirements first and to ensure that they are executed effectively – this time, it was no different.



Joycia Thorat : Project Officer



ROLE OF YOUTH LEADERS AND COMMUNITY

several times, on different issues, to exercise their role of leadership. COVID-19 response in our operational areas has given opportunities to young women and men to take lead and raise awareness in the operational areas, under the necessary guidance of our staff. As there have been restrictions on the mobility of outsiders into villages, the presence of our youth leaders and volunteers in the operational areas has been supportive in raising awareness and effectively conveying our messages to the community. Conveying information in their local language is more effective while delivering the correct information to the communities.

They have been actively engaged in developing campaign materials with the minimal resources available like handmade posters, wall paintings etc. They are also providing training on WASH to the communities. Since most of the youth have good linkages with the local panchayat, they have been able to collect IEC material from the panchayat for distribution in the villages. At some places, WhatsApp groups have been created where CASA staff and volunteers, along with the youth leaders, collectively share the updates and discuss several issues.

With the current scenario, it is difficult for the CASA staff to move to the villages. However, that doesn't stop the team from lending a helping hand. The community engagement process, which gained significant inroads on the fight against coronavirus in the operational areas of CASA, has taken up a prominent role in this time of crisis. This would enhance the scope of CASA's COVID-19 response to enable the leadership among these community development processes to effectively link with the government response on COVID-19.



Youth leadership building is an important long-term strategy in the core programme areas of CASA. The youth and women of our operational areas are capacitated and equipped with relevant information and skills to enable them to take initiatives on their own without depending on any external support. CASA focuses on youth leadership to bring about a change by preparing self-dependent individuals. Youth have been groomed by our staff in such a way that has made them self-independent and aware of many issues and related policies. They have led many campaigns,

Imparting awareness to the remote

I live in a family of 15 and my husband is a farmer, working in the cultivation of apples in Shimla. I am heading the Education Society for Information and Technology (ESIT), which was registered as a social organisation in 1999. CASA has been supporting ESIT for 2 years now. In this duration, we have expanded our reach to over 12 local villages. The contribution made by CASA has been meaningful to us. The village suffers through deprivation from the facilities of the mainland. There are limited livelihood and educational opportunities here. The local schools offer education only till standard 10 and students have to either leave for the city or leave education. The community has also been struggling through the pangs of financial scarcity and lack of health care facilities. Hospitals are over 40-45 km away from the residential core. The delay in the arrival and departure of an ambulance, at times, complicates the ailing person's predicament. Pregnant women too face a lot of difficulties during the time of delivering the baby. Not much could be done since the roads are highly irregular and prone to land-slides. The lack of infrastructure dissociates the village from the fast-paced development and progress of cities.

When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, people of the unaware communities in Bosari, Rohru of Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, were caught in a psychological tussle of disbelief and anxiety. While some assumed that their remote areas shall never be affected by the Coronavirus, others prohibited even the social organisations or relief assistance from entering into their local premises. It is very difficult to make them understand the need for awareness of such exceptional disease. After a thorough communication with the local leaders, the Education Society for Information and Technology (ESIT), sustained by CASA, was finally granted the permission to conduct the awareness camps and educate the villagers on the do's and don't during the pandemic. We identified 20 families to be in dire need of support. With the ration aid from CASA, their problems were significantly relieved. We are looking forward to conducting more humanitarian support-related programmes and relief distribution to uplift the situation of the subjugated sections.

COVID-19 RESPONSE – PARTNERS

Despite the shutdowns at the International and inter-state borders, due to COVID-19, our shared desperation for normalcy has shaped several relatable experiences beyond the mapped boundaries. In this unprecedented battle, the global community had to shield itself until it could wage a powerful attack against the seemingly invincible microscopic enemy. However, within this overarching global community, several strata of the society had to balance multiple struggles adjoining the defence. It was because the nationwide lockdown to bar our enemy, ironically ended up curbing the only source of income that the marginalised individuals managed to secure after perennial challenges.

CASA's endeavours to uplift the subjugated would have failed to encompass a vast reach had our overseas partners not been upholding the ribs to our

core. The financial and moral support, provided by our partner organisations, enabled the extensive relief distribution and essential emergency programs undertaken by CASA.

Under our medical and preventive approaches, DKH-HAF supported the health-camp organised by CASA, while Bread for the World (BftW) assisted in the spraying of disinfectants across several villages. As CASA stepped into empowering the subjugated, our partners continued to significantly endorse our progress. With Episcopal Relief and Development, CASA could sanction INR 1000 cash transfers to the affected individuals in Maharashtra. Moreover, Christian Aid collaborated with CASA in surveying the guest worker families and distributing vegetable seeds for agricultural help in 8 districts of Uttar Pradesh.

In the shadow of this ruthless calamity, several families were forced into starvation. CASA's collective responses, planned distinctly with DKH-HAF and Bread for the World (BftW), provided the impacted families with a nutritious cooked meal across several states. All the duly named organisations, along with Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiative; Students of the University of Texas (UT), Austin, USA; UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST, and Give India program have played a key role in empowering the distribution of dry ration and hygiene kits.

From supporting the stranded migrant labourers with food to presenting livelihood means to the potential farmers through seed distributions, the support of our Partners elaborated our COVID-19 response to a new dimension.



DKH- HAF



Dry Ration distribution



Wash and hygiene kits distribution



Cooked food distribution



Health camps



Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh



BREAD FOR THE WORLD (BFTW)

Planning, Monitoring and Coordination (PMC)



Dry Ration distribution



Wash and hygiene kits distribution



Cooked food distribution



Disinfectant spraying



Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh



AZIM PREMJI PHILANTHROPIC INITIATIVE



Dry Ration distribution



Wash and hygiene kits distribution



West Bengal, Kolkata Metropolitan Slum Area



CHRISTIAN AID



Survey of guest workers families



Wash and hygiene kits distribution



Dry Ration distribution



Vegetable seeds



8 districts of Uttar Pradesh



EPISCOPAL RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT



Dry Ration distribution



Wash and hygiene kits distribution



Cash Transfer of Rs. 1000/-



Maharashtra



STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS (UT), AUSTIN, USA



Dry Ration distribution



Andhra Pradesh



Wash and hygiene kits distribution



UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST



Dry Ration distribution



Tamil Nadu



Wash and hygiene kits distribution



GIVE INDIA



Dry Ration distribution



Wash and hygiene kits distribution



Chhattisgarh, Bihar, West Bengal and Nagaland

LOCALISATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

Joseph Sahayam - Additional Emergency Officer, CASA South Zone

The pandemic has led to a multi-dimensional impact on the people as well as the economy, where there is a significant need for the Humanitarian agencies in responding to the multi-dimensional impact caused by COVID-19. However the present disaster restricts the movement of the people, where the humanitarian aid workers also have their restriction on mobility to the affected or worst affected area. Amidst these challenges the process saw an overwhelming response from the local NGOs, though the support mechanism from the international arena was less/limited.

These local NGOs have been able to access resources or enable linkages with the government systems to serve the affected and the needy. This also leads to the debate on Localisation which was formulated in the World Humanitarian Summit in 2017 of which localisation is on among the ten workstreams in Grand Bargain – “More Support and Funding tools to Local and National Responders”.

Despite the process being there since 2017, there has been a lack of significant progress in it. The reports tend to give a picture of some progress; in reality, the programmes

are not substantial. Since its inception in 1947 as a homegrown organisation, CASA has pioneered disaster response over the years and has been instrumental in developing contextual-based approaches for disaster responses, where community organisation is one of the key components and forte of CASA. This has helped to build responses and programmes with processes driven by the community.

CASA has a deep-rooted mechanism of localisation approach in its works for years which has helped to evolve systems of localisation. In COVID-19 response, CASA has partnered and collaborated with 119 partners spread across the country with the significant aspect decentralised approach and independent pattern of engagement, where the local agencies are involved in finalising the need based on their discussions with the community. The process also builds in a factor of accompaniment, where a support mechanism is also ensured to the partner, which enhances their confidence level.

CASA's inherent system of localisation and partnership in emergency response and

development of programmes, tailored to enhance local partnerships in reaching the remote area of need through the local agencies, have evolved significant approaches of localisation in one of the development programmes namely the PMC. The Coordination Hub is one such Hub where the power will be transferred to the local stakeholders. It is a platform collectivising and synergising all POs, primarily emerging from CASA-related processes, and stakeholders at state level i.e. the State ecosystem. The Hub shall be held together with a legal/central project holder, i.e. the Forum which has emerged or anyone partner which has the infrastructure and capacity or an existing forum.

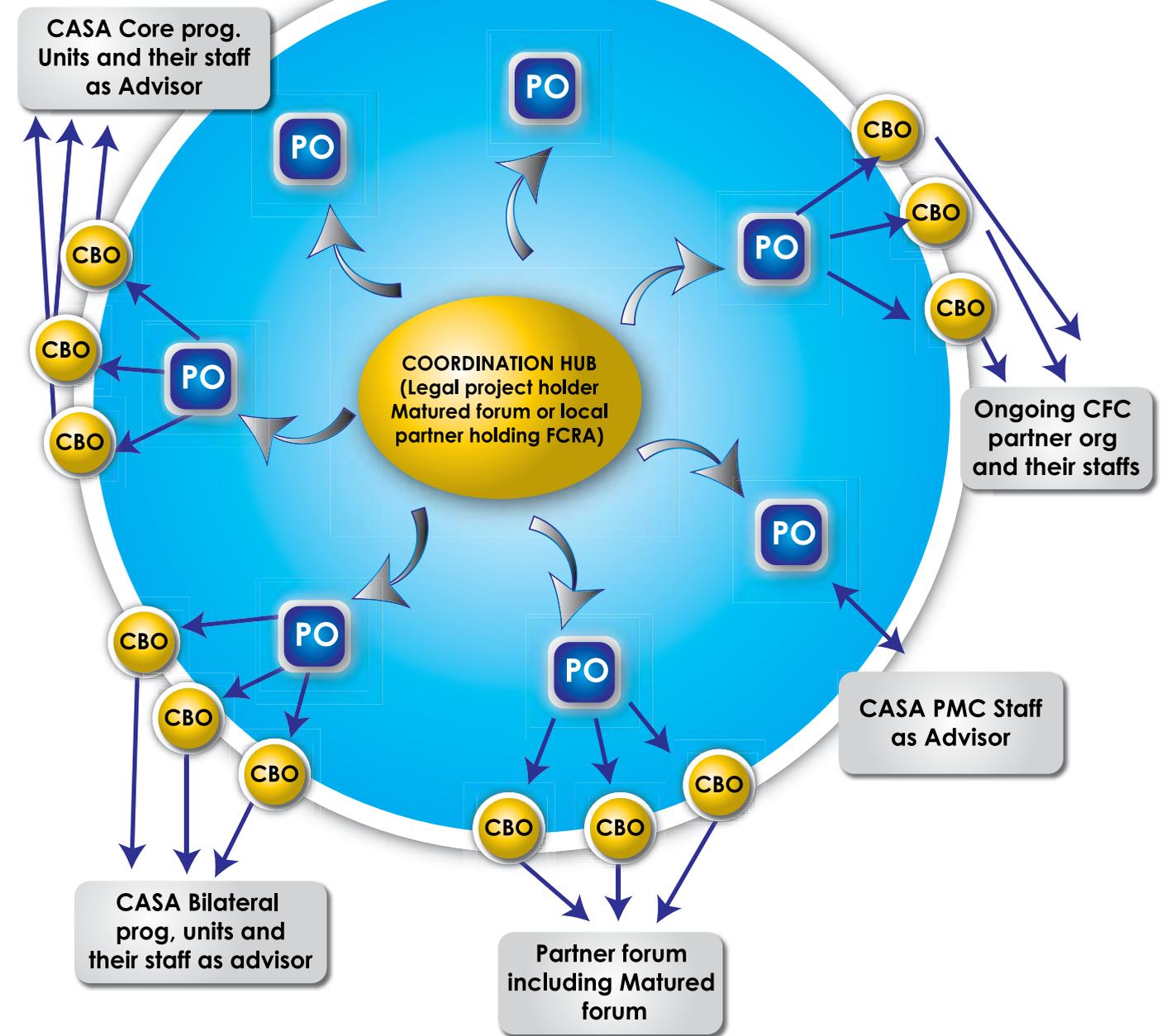
The overall governance of Hub shall be done by a Governing Board (a coordination committee and not a constitutional structure) consisting of the representatives of the legal project holder, Forum, other stakeholders in the CFC ecosystems and representative of the people's organisation. 60% representation in the Governing Board shall be from the People's Organization (PO) decided through a transparent and representative mechanism to be established. In

order to qualify as legal project holders for a hub, potential project holders have to go through a thorough process of prefunding assessment to be initiated by the

resource partner, namely Bread for the World. Only those organisations who qualify shall become project holders. CASA will play an essential role in strengthening and sharing

of capacities. A diagram depicting a tailor-made hub within a State Ecosystem is provided below.

FUNCTIONING OF THE COORDINATION HUB



CASA staff shall have the role of supporting Legal Project Holders in meeting compliance requirements and performing perspective and capacity building roles. The focus of the activities in Hub in the second level would be on

institution building of POs, leadership building and strengthening local resource mobilisation. Additionally, collective concept building around development, social transformation and around their social and economic issues will be

undertaken. PO shall also develop and pursue their individual and collective strategies. Furthermore, focus shall be on collective POs conceptual building, skill-building, and knowledge building around common issues.

The idea is to help the state Hub, through the state ecosystem, manage independently after CASA withdrawal. This shall represent genuine transfer and devolution of power. At times of disasters, CASA has proactively used one of its programmes, namely the Humanitarian Aid Fund supported by DKH, to support homegrown agencies and ensure the need of the affected areas is met. The agencies in these kinds of isolated pockets are not receiving funds from others. They have access to resources for response through this

support, which ultimately sustains their capacity.

CASA's capacity being built upon contextual approaches enables an ecosystem to enhance the participation of local agencies in the humanitarian response. CASA has the edge as an organisation with a diversified reach cutting across many states and many agencies locally, nationally and globally. This paves the way for CASA for bringing in the effective mix to enhance the reach of localisation in India to be a

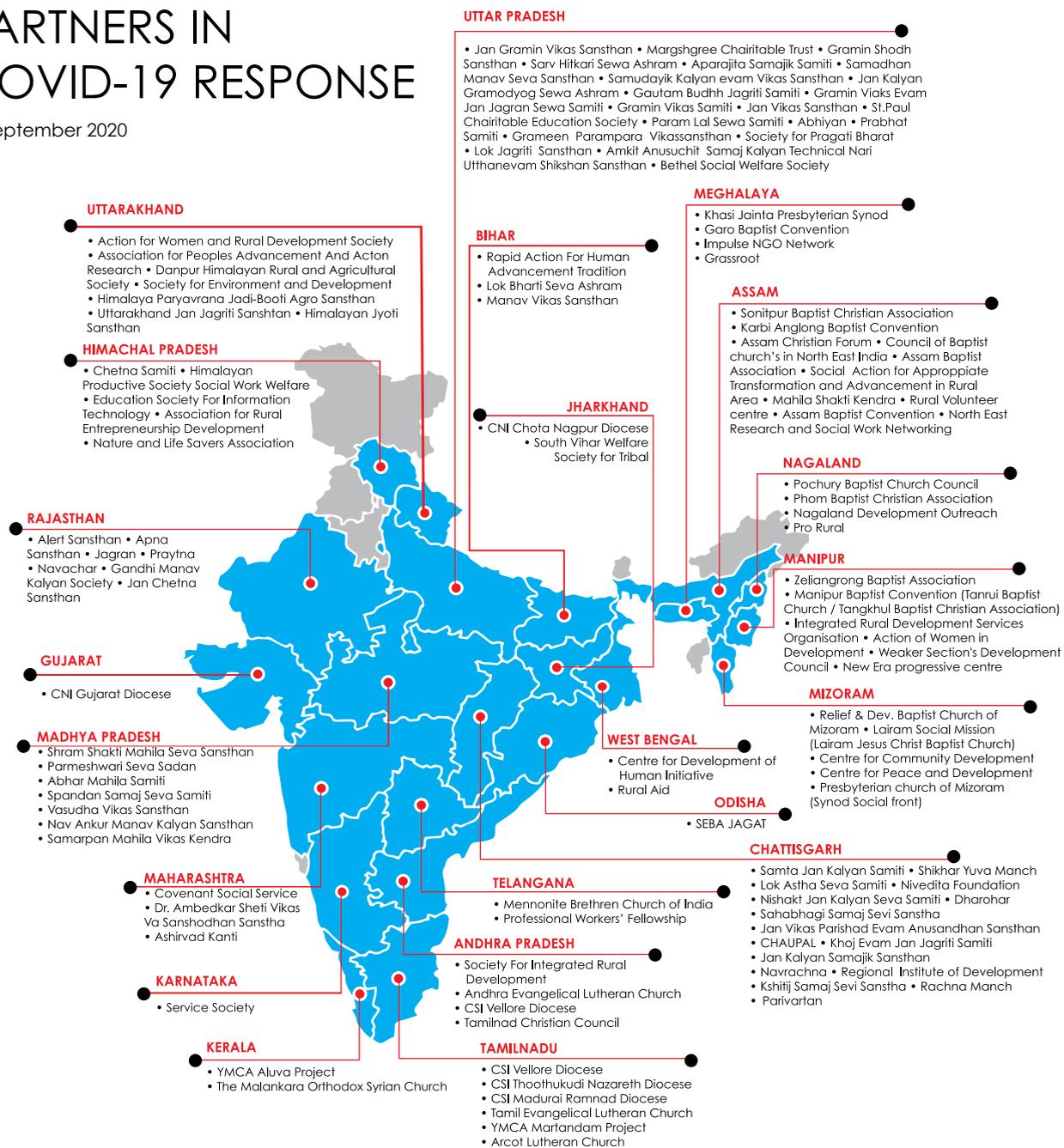
significant nexus between the localisation and local agencies.

Currently, CASA is actively involved in the NEAR NGO advocacy on localisation in the global scenario and is engaged in the formation of India Humanitarian Hub which intends to promote the process of localisation with the involvement of local agencies. CASA also plays an active role in the ACT India Forum on the "Forum Led Alliance" process of ACT Alliance.

Stories we became a part of

PARTNERS IN COVID-19 RESPONSE

Till September 2020



CORONAVIRUS: EFFECT ON FOREST-DWELLING COMMUNITIES



"I traversed 12 to 13 kilometres on foot, through the forests, to reach the villages which the Chakma tribe had inhabited. The path to reach the region was unmetalled and muddy. When I first arrived in a village called Tedangnala, I saw that the majority of the households had lack of access to basic necessities. The novel coronavirus may not affect the isolated communities in India, but hunger definitely will."

CASA's Programme Associate, Sukan Chakma reached out to the Chakma tribe in four villages of Assam in the midst of COVID-19 lockdown to provide relief materials. At present, the tribal community is in dire straits due to the implications of the COVID-19 lockdown which was imposed on 25th March, 2020. Their livelihoods have been jeopardised as their only source of income was earned by selling their agricultural produce.

"I gathered information regarding their living conditions through friends and social media by contacting my school seniors who had already visited the villages. Hailing from the Chakma community myself, I wanted

► Story by North-East Staff

 Pankhuri - Associate, Communications

to offer help but I couldn't contact anybody from the village through phone hence I decided to visit the place and assess the situation from the ground."

The Chakma tribe is a forest-dwelling community that is dispersed across the North-eastern states of Tripura, Mizoram, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The tribe has its historical origins in the Arakan territory (present day Myanmar) and are presently found in India, Bangladesh and Myanmar.

There are more than 550 families from the Chakma tribe that reside in the interior regions of Karbi Anglong and Hojai districts in Assam. They lack proper road connectivity and communication channels, and the closest market is located 10-15 kilometres away from their village. Due to the distance, they are deprived of basic healthcare facilities, schools, etc.

The Chakma practice Jhum cultivation i.e. a method which includes cutting and burning of plants and trees in an area which is left to dry before the rainy season, and ploughed immediately after the shower. After cultivating in a particular piece of land, they shift to another patch, and the cycle continues. This method is said to improve the soil quality. The Chakma tribe's only means of income is their agriculture, which has come to a complete halt due to the COVID-19 lockdown. Although the COVID-19 lockdown was relaxed for the forest-dwelling communities, the traders were still affected. This in turn affected the economy of the tribals as their produce could not be sold.

"My husband is physically weak and is unable to work. Since the lock down, we do not have anything to eat because the markets have been closed and we haven't been able to sell our Jhum products. I have four children and we all have been surviving by eating jungle potatoes only. We don't even get that when it rains. Children cry out of hunger but what can we do?", shared Alomoti Chakma of Sushi Ranjan Chakma Basti in Assam.

The country-wide lock down imposed to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has gravely affected the lives of forest-dwelling communities. CASA reached out to 767 families of the tribe and provided a dry ration that included rice, pulses, soyabean, mustard oil and salt. We also reached out to other tribes such as Karbi, Garo, Kachari as well as migrant communities and provided them with relief materials. "At first it was an individual approach to just reach out to one particular community but because of CASA, we were able to reach out to further more." Sukan was stuck in the remote regions of Assam for about a month due to heavy rains but his sheer commitment to humanity paved the way to serve the isolated communities.

► Story by Chhattisgarh Staff

THE SNAKE CHARMERS THAT LOST THEIR SWAY



Saura is a tribal community that mainly resides in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh. They were labeled as one of the 'criminal tribes' under Criminal Tribes Act, 1871, and are still suffering from social stigma and ostracism in modern times. However, most of the members of the Saura community are struggling to get the status of tribes.

The forest-dwelling tribe lacks experience in agriculture, and relies on the forests for its livelihood. The principal occupation of the Saura remains snake charming, and they wander from village to village, performing with deadly snakes like cobras.

They are also expert snake catchers, and are often called in by other villagers to catch snakes and remove the poison from persons bitten by snakes.

A few have now taken up permanent settlement and are mainly sharecroppers. They remain an extremely marginalised group, suffering from poverty. Saura (Sapera) are still largely involved in their traditional occupation of snake charming and snake catching, as well as collecting wild roots and tubers, which they use for medicinal purposes.

CASA has provided dry ration and hygiene kits to 24 families of the Saura community from Kanker district (north Bastar), Chhattisgarh.

► Story by Madhya Pradesh Staff

THE SUCCOUR TO HER LOST WORLD

The lockdown and the pandemic have affected different sections of the society and have particularly rendered the migrant population helpless. One such story is that of Bhuri Adivasi, a 36-year-old migrant worker from Chattarpur, Madhya Pradesh. Along with her family, she has been working as a contract labourer for the past 3 years in Dharwad, Karnataka. Having no agricultural land in their village, the family relies solely on the earnings from their contractual work for their survival.

When the countrywide lockdown was announced on March 24, 2020, she was among the millions who thought the lockdown to be transient and that things would normalize soon enough for her to resume earning.

On the contrary, as days went by, the lockdown continued and the situation worsened. The construction site where she was working was closed, leaving her family in despair.

Helpless with no source of income, she had to migrate back to her village on foot. Upon reaching her village, she was quarantined for 14 days. But things weren't well in the village either. With no source of livelihood and diminished earnings, she and her family were struggling with essential items, especially food.

During a survey, her situation was identified by CASA. We coordinated with our partner organisation, Abhar Mahila Samiti and provided dry ration as well as hygiene kits to her family. This gesture was greatly appreciated by Bhuri Adivasi who expressed her gratitude to CASA and Abhar Mahila Samiti for their support.



AN ENDEAVOUR TO PROVIDE A SECURED SOURCE OF SUSTENANCE

“I still didn't find work when the lock down was declared at the outbreak of the pandemic. I was left trapped in the city. The situation kept getting worse with each passing day. My savings were depleting and by the month of May, I had exhausted every resource of survival.”



Jitendra is a 26 year-old migrant worker from the Bargadawa Raja Gram Panchayat of Maharajganj district, Uttar Pradesh. His father maintains a piece of agricultural land whose yield supports their family's day-to-day needs. Although both of Jitendra's brothers had migrated to cities to earn a living, they faced several challenges to meet the basic necessities of the family. “Keeping the financial shortcomings in view, I decided to shoulder the responsibility of my family alongside my father and brothers. At the age of 26, I planned to seek employment in bigger cities.”

Amidst the constraints and deficiencies, Jitendra proceeded with the hope to earn a better life. “I had heard about Mumbai from my friends. I was assured that there were many livelihood options and work opportunities available in larger cities. I reached Mumbai in January, 2020 to realize my dreams. My friends and acquaintances helped me to look for opportunities. This quest spanned across the months of January and February but we didn't get hold of any opportunity.”

It wasn't that easy to find a job in Mumbai as it was verbalised to be. Poverty, social discrimination and unequal distribution of privilege have forced many youths like Jitendra to separate from their homelands

only to end up struggling in cities alien to them. The circumstances didn't seem to improve for Jitendra while the upcoming tide was about to disrupt all the means that existed with him.

“I still didn't find work when the lockdown was declared at the outbreak of the pandemic. I was left trapped in the city. I managed to spend a few days with the aid of friends and neighbours but the situation kept getting worse with each passing day. My savings were depleting and by the month of May, I had exhausted every resource of survival.

My friends and I were about to start on foot when a neighbour informed us regarding the Shramik special train services. We arrived at the station with all our belongings but didn't get a train back home. Undergoing a lot of hassle, we finally succeeded in registering for the return, and after waiting for two more days, boarded the next Shramik special train.”

The train lacked a lot of necessary provisions. Jitendra had to starve throughout the journey. The pre-existing deficiencies in the family worsened at the advent of unforeseen challenges and Jitendra's family could witness the shunning gates of livelihood generations.

Meanwhile, CASA in partnership with Change Alliance surveyed the condition of migrant and daily labourers in the district of Maharajganj. Measures were specified to assist the marginalised labourers in developing better means of sustenance for their families. Jitendra identified this opportunity to sustain his family and approached us. He informed the support members that his father holds a cultivable land but due to the existing debts and economic constraints, they are unable to purchase the seeds to sow. Jitendra advocated the fertility of the land in nursing vegetable cultivation which would largely benefit him to earn better. Imbibing this new hope in his request, he asked for tomatoes and cauliflower seeds. Granting his wishes, CASA, supported by Change Alliance, distributed him the seeds of tomato and cauliflower plants on the 6th of July, 2020.

“The provision of those seeds gave me a new breath of life to outlive the desperate circumstances. I have created a positive strategy for farming to empower myself in meeting the inefficiencies of my family. CASA and Change Alliance have favoured me with a ray of hope to improve my life. I feel grateful for their help and can never express it well in mere words”

CASA remains dedicated to empowering the marginalised with better income generation options while meeting their immediate needs for survival. We commit our heartfelt efforts in improving the lives of the ones in dire need of relief.

QUEST TO REDEFINE MY IDENTITY



21- year old Vimla Devi is a migrant worker from Nepal. She migrated to India with her family in search of better livelihood alternatives. However, her husband abandoned her, making her the sole caregiver of their children.

Patriarchy is a deeply ingrained and highly normalised norm of our society. Women have often defined themselves with regards to men, living under their shadow when they were unable to fend for themselves. However, Vimla Devi was committed to not fall into the malicious trap of the male dominant social strata that surrounded her. Her resolution to redefine herself by moulding her identity to her unique individuality helped her overcome the challenges that lay in front of her.

Things took a turn for the worst when the lockdown was imposed. The informal workforce of India, leading a

hand to mouth existence, has been acutely affected by loss of jobs.

“I had faith in myself. I needed to provide for my family and I was determined to pave my path by myself.” Vimla Devi resides in the remote village of Bosari, in Rohru region of Himachal Pradesh. She got connected with CASA's ground partner Education Society for Information Technology (ESIT) that provided her daily wage work of digging and clearing roads in nearby remote villages.

CASA has come to the forefront by providing assistance to several migrants in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, by linking them with the Municipal Corporation of Shimla, paving their way towards permanent jobs and providing them with assured monetary security.

Many women have been provided with the opportunity to stand on their feet and ensure sustenance for their families.

In these staggering times, migrant labourers have come forward, voluntarily, and taken up responsibilities of manual work, such as repairing unmetalled roads to mending rainwater drainage systems, in exchange of dry ration and a monetary benefit of 1,000 rupees (given through bank transfer) provided by CASA, to serve their essential needs.

The dry ration and monetary help, along with government supported work, will give them food security and alleviate their situation in these staggering and difficult times.

CASA is relentlessly striving to not only provide for the unmet needs of the vulnerable communities but also to empower women to stand with conviction, independence and confidence, for their families. On the ground report by Sahiba Chawdhary, Photojournalist and Arushi Narchal, Manager, Digital Media



THE PLACE THEY CALL HOME



The lockdown imposed due to the COVID-19 Pandemic has uncovered the latent class inequalities prevalent in the country. It has brought forth the living conditions of many people, each replete with its challenges and trials.

Janki Devi is a 43-year-old migrant worker. Originally hailing from Jodhpur, Rajasthan, she along with her family migrated to Bosari, Rohru in Himachal Pradesh, around 20 years ago, in search of better living conditions and work opportunities.

Her family led a hand-to-mouth existence and relied on doing seasonal work such as working in apple orchards, digging wells, clearing paths of rocks, making hosiery materials, etc. to make ends meet. Work, though variable, was sufficient enough to sustain the large family, consisting of elders, sons, and daughters. The variability of work prompted the younger generation of the family to move to nearby places, thus, affecting their education.

The current Pandemic has affected over 40 million internal migrants across the country according to the World Bank. Loss of livelihood in the host state has forced many migrants to return home.

A majority of the migrants returning to their villages are temporary migrants, i.e. they migrate to other places on a seasonal basis and for a short period. However, permanent migrants move to other places on a long-term basis and thus have been living in their place of occupation for many years.

It is the permanent migrant population consisting of people like Janki Devi who face a dilemma; having cut ties from their home state years ago, they have no choice but to stay put during this time.

This year's pandemic has created a shadow of ambiguity in their lives. "In the many years that I have lived here, this is the first time that I am facing such difficulties. This is something new and unexpected." Life during the lockdown is full of adversities for them. "Work is hard to come by in the lockdown. Basic items like food and clothes were becoming scarce for us." Having no savings, the family lived in deplorable conditions.

This was until CASA reached out to the family. "The volunteers present here asked us whether we needed help. They promised to help us and they did." Under the COVID-19 Response Programme, she was provided dry ration in exchange for voluntary labor. CASA provided her dry ration support and CASA's partner organisation Education Society for Information Technology (ESIT) provided her daily wage work of digging and clearing roads in nearby villages.

"The ration items provided to us have helped lessen our difficulties for some time," says Janki Devi. She is hopeful that the present conditions will change in the future for the better.

CASA is working relentlessly for the upliftment of the various stratum of the society that has been severely affected by the Pandemic. It's 'Kaam ke badle Anaaj' initiative, wherein the affected get dry ration aid in the return of voluntary labor, has allowed in preserving the dignity of the migrants receiving the aid and has also resulted in the betterment of many areas in which physical work has been carried out by the migrant workers. CASA aims to widen its outreach, impacting many more such lives.



MOLLIFYING THE SEVERE REPERCUSSIONS OF THE COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

"The nationwide lockdown was imposed when I arrived in Shimla ... No one has been employing domestic help or labour ... How should I feed and sustain myself without work? Moreover, I have a 12 years old daughter. How should I bring her up?" shares Gyanti Devi, a 38 years old migrant worker and an extremely strong woman.



Troubles never come alone, nor do they have a preface to their approach. A calamity always spares the survivor with an invisible wound. The survivor alone perceives whether the scars heal with time or not. Yet, their stories become an exemplar of inspiration for many propelling against the vicissitudes of destiny.

Gyanti hails from Chapra district of Bihar. Despite trying her best to meet the medical expenses of her husband's treatment, she lost him to cancer in 2015. Depleted of property and savings, she shifted to her maternal place with her eight years old daughter and a seven years old son. Yet the misfortune was merely the tip of an iceberg.

In 2016 her son developed mild fever and was carried to the village hospital. After the constant change in referrals from the village hospital to the district hospital and finally, to Patna, what happened next was heartbreaking. "We travelled to Patna overnight by bus. My son got treated, but soon he lost his voice. The doctors told us that they are trying their best to treat him, but whether he will survive or not is up to fate." Gyanti broke into tears while narrating the events of that day, "My child died after six days."

Gyanti was too devastated to sense what followed next. All that she remembers was her brother buried her son, and she couldn't see her child again. Gyanti fainted in shock and was carried back home. Consoled by her sister-in-law, Gyanti was convinced to join them in Shimla to work, earn and live together. "I started working as a Household help in Shimla. My daughter was enrolled in a school"

We wish it was the end to her misery and her story could have taken an easy route in progression. But fate had another set of the tide against Gyanti to face. "In January 2020, I went to my hometown and came back in the first week of March. The nationwide lockdown was imposed when I arrived at Shimla. We have been sitting idle at home since the lockdown. No one has been employing domestic help or labour. We were worried about sustaining ourselves. I shared my worries with a (CASA) volunteer and conveyed all I had been through. How should I feed and sustain myself without work? Moreover, I have a 12 years old daughter with me. How should I bring her up?"

CASA assured Gyanti to provide all possible help and support. "The (CASA) community members have indeed helped me a lot. The CASA volunteer (addressed as CASA Didi by Gyanti) assisted me."

Gyanti was employed and was supplied with a monetary amount of 1000 rupees along with a month's ration. Encouraged to reshape her life, Gyanti works with dedication to sustain her daughter and herself. No one can ever compensate for her loss or perceive the pain in her emotional wounds. But the strength that she harboured through those struggles, makes her worthy of a dignified life ahead. CASA intends to support more brave individuals like Gyanti whose predicaments have been worsened in these unprecedented times of the COVID-19 pandemic.



SURVIVING THE IMPROPER STIGMA OF A CONSERVATIVE SOCIETY

“When I stand in the queue for receiving support, I don’t understand whether to stand in the line for men or that of women, since there is no line for transgenders.”, remarks Diksha (name changed), a transgender carrying out her life in Dehradun, Uttarakhand.

The transgender community has suffered the insensitivity of social prejudices. The digression of any conventional social norms, designated to the genders, continue to be labelled as unacceptable in the conservative spheres. The transgender people, therefore, have always dwelled under the apathetic gaze of society that raises several unjust questions against their sexual orientation.

Diksha narrates her familiarity with these prejudices and why she chose to fight against it, “My family did not accept me exhibiting the responses that are considered feminine or inappropriate to the expected gender roles. They used to threaten, scold and assault me for dressing like a girl or woman.

Social discrimination forced me to leave my home and come to Dehradun. I have always felt that I am an ostracised section of society. Later on, I met many other Transgender who acknowledged my worth and my choice of defending my individuality.”

Diksha, however, started reshaping her life in acceptance of her identity. She was employed as a janitor in a school. While everything appeared to fall back into place, life yet had more hurdles for Diksha. “I had to resign, after a while, because I was not receiving the respect and recognition that I deserved.

To make myself self-supporting, I purchased a cow and started selling milk in my nearby area. I was happy until the day I got to know that I am HIV positive. This news erased all the peace of my life because I had no choice but to live with it.”

Diksha’s true story of accepting herself against each piece of social stigma began at that instant. While the battle was not yet over, the outbreak of COVID-19 further grieved her predicament into worse.

“The pandemic has brought my life to a halt. The customers, who used to buy milk from here, went to their respective homes. Raising the cow and feeding fodder

without an income have made it very difficult for me to continue with my life.”

Diksha did not receive financial help from anybody. “When I stand in the queue for receiving support, I don’t understand whether to stand in the line for men or that of women since there is no line for transgender.”

CASA came across Diksha and extended her a helping hand with the response to COVID-19, **“CASA supported me financially and also provided me with ration. I could never thank them enough for this help.”**

CASA aims to support every person in dire need of support irrespective of the social bias. We highly condemn discrimination based on caste, religion, race, gender, and sexual orientation. CASA is hopeful in making the society a better and safe place for everyone to live without feeling abandoned or ostracised.



SEEN THROUGH AN INVISIBLE LENS

Kareena (name changed) is a 30-year-old transgender woman living in Dehradun, Uttarakhand. Since childhood, she was subjected to apathy, verbal and physical abuses by her parents, siblings and other family members owing to her sexuality. “They thought that I had physical and mental defects, and spared no chance in harassing me, asking me to mend my ways.” It was when Kareena was harassed by her classmate in school that she realised she had suffered enough. She discontinued her studies and leaving school in sixth grade, left her home and came to Dehradun. That was in 2014.

Out in the world to fend for herself, she soon experienced the prejudices revolving around a transgender more starkly. Renting an accommodation was a mammoth task; often she had to vacate the premises because she was a transgender.

India houses a significant population of transgenders, around 4.88 lakh, as per Census 2011. However, the transgender community faces oppression and discrimination at multiple levels in daily life. They are ostracized from their families and the society. Being deprived of the opportunity to participate in any economic activity, most of them have to resort to doing odd jobs, begging or sex work to sustain them. Access to education, health care and public spaces is limited.

Kareena strived hard to sustain herself and aimed at being independent. She started working as a tailor; although, the earnings were meagre, she was satisfied with herself. Complications arose when she learnt that she was HIV positive. “I had lost all hope. Later, my transgender colleagues supported and encouraged me to be brave. I have accepted that I am HIV positive and have learnt to live with it.”

However, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted her work. She hasn’t been able to secure a livelihood since the past four months. While the pandemic has affected different communities across the country, the transgender community has

been severely affected. Several of them lack sufficient documentation like Aadhar card or ration card, as they require gender identification. They are thus unable to get access to any benefits from the government schemes. Many of the measures taken by the government to provide relief to the affected in turbulent times don’t include the transgender community within their reach.

Kareena couldn’t approach any social welfare schemes for aid as the State Social Welfare Department doesn’t provide assistance to socially and economically disadvantaged transgenders.

“I don’t have any life or health insurance because of my inability to pay premium. I was really anxious and was worried of how I could sustain myself.”

Taking cognizance of her dire situation, CASA, along with partner organisation provided dry ration support and a monetary support to 15 transgenders like Kareena in Dehradun, Uttarakhand. “I am extremely grateful to CASA who helped me during these difficult times, when no one else did.”

CASA believes that every human being is equal and should receive equal respect and support like every other person belonging to the society. Based on our wish for an egalitarian society, CASA endeavours to reach out to the vulnerable and disadvantaged members of the society and help them improve their lives.



HOPE BEYOND THE CLOUDS



A chilly wind blows softly over the place. The streets are empty, save for an occasional passerby. It is an unusual sight at this time of the year, where normally the streets would be bustling with pilgrims. Chanting hymns, sanguine pilgrims would reach the Holy Temple of Kedarnath, after completing a distance of 16 km by different means. But this year seems to be different.

Nestled between the Garhwal Himalayan Ranges lies the temple town of Kedarnath, which is one of the holiest shrines of India. About a million people visit the shrine every year, with an average footfall of 10,000 people a day. Situated in the Rudraprayag district in Uttarakhand, the town lies near the Chorabari glacier and the Mandakini River and is flanked by snow-capped peaks. The nearest motor road is at Gaurikund, which is 18-19 km away.

The town has a population of nearly 600 people, with a majority of them linked with the tourism and hospitality industry. Small restaurant and hotel owners, animal service providers are some of the people belonging to the working community. The working pattern of these people is often dictated by the extreme weather conditions in the region. Hence most activities occur between April – October, coinciding with the temple's operational period.

Mukesh works as a mule service provider for pilgrims in the region. During the peak season, his two mules transport pilgrims to the temple. However, this year's COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a sharp decrease in the number of pilgrims visiting the shrine.

"My livelihood was linked with the Kedarnath yatra that occurred every year. Due to the halt in the yatra,

pilgrims have not been visiting the shrine and thus my source of income has been severely affected. It has been difficult to sustain myself during this period."

Amidst the worrying pandemic, many challenges still loom large. Bare necessities like food and water are scarce. Apart from humans, animals are also bearing the brunt of the pandemic. "There is a shortage of food for the animals. Basic maintenance of the animals is becoming difficult and the animals have been feeling weak due to the lack of food."

Taking note of the dire conditions of such people, CASA came to the forefront and provided dry ration and hygiene kits to many such people like Mukesh, in the Rudraprayag district of Uttarakhand.

"I am extremely grateful for the aid that CASA has provided us. These resources will lessen our difficulties for some time," said a gleaming Mukesh.

Recently, the state of Uttarakhand has allowed the entry of pilgrims from its state to enter the shrine from July onwards. People from other parts of the country are still not allowed due to the existing pandemic.

Various guidelines have been released, with the new standard operating procedures involving social distancing, use of face masks, sanitizers, and the capping of visitors per day etc.

Though the conditions are improving, it will take some time to return to normalcy. But these people are resilient and optimistic about the future.

HOPE TO SURVIVAL AMIDST COVID-19

With the whole world coming to a standstill and struggling to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a section of the population that has lost their livelihood and earning. Sailam Raihing, a single mother of three children who hails from Paorei village, Ukhurul district of Manipur was also left jobless and struggling to support her family.

Previously she had worked at a restaurant earning Rs. 7000/- monthly. Spending a huge portion towards her children's education and the rented room. Being the sole bread earner for the family of four, the lockdown had left her life miserable and struggling to make ends meet.

She was able to manage a few initial weeks by digging her savings and using up the provision stocked at home, but the situation worsened up with time. She then resorted to selling "ShingJu" (a popular Manipuri snack item) at roadside shops earning about Rs. 100-200/- a day for a few weeks but couldn't continue it further due to several norms in the state.

With the ever-increasing prices of groceries and vegetables etc. she was left worried about how to provide for her three children. The paddy cultivation brought some hope, as she engaged in the field of others as a daily wage labourer earning Rs.300/- a day, and sustaining her family with this. Some timely initiatives of the state government providing dry ration for a few days and other help has also eased her hardships to an extent.

We at CASA are working tirelessly to provide people like Sailam and help fulfill the needs of vulnerable communities. When her story reached the implementation partners of CASA based in the Ukhurul district of Manipur, called Action of Women in Development (AWID). She was provided with dry ration and hygiene kits, under CASA's COVID-19 Response Programme.

She mentioned that she barely earned Rs. 200-300/- during the lockdown to support her family which is increasingly making it difficult to sustain herself and her families on a daily basis. There are many people like Sailam Raihing who are waiting for some ray of hope. Desperately looking forward to the support from State Government and other organisations for relief packages etc. to survive amidst COVID-19.



FAR FROM HOME, NEAR TO STARVATION



40-year-old Babli Tulsiram of Ambada, Madhya Pradesh, has a family of seven to look after. With the nationwide lockdown, the rate of unemployment has increased unprecedentedly, with Babli being no exception to this suffering.

Each year, her family migrates seasonally. This year, during the Kharif season, which is the most productive time for cultivation for farmers to maximise their output, she was compelled to undertake seasonal distress migration to the neighbouring district of Khargone, which is known for its extensive chilli cultivation.

Babli was working in the chilly fields when the lockdown was announced due to COVID-19.

“I no longer have a job at the chilly plantation. Far from home, we were worried and unable to provide food for our children.”

They waited anxiously to return to their native village. With the end of the lockdown nowhere to be seen, the District Administration arranged a vehicle for them to return, but they had no money left to serve their basic needs.

“Essential foods and household items are either in short supply or charged at exorbitant rates. This adds to our burden of failing to maintain food security for our family, with the government support of 35 kilograms of rice not being enough.”

On discovering Babli's dire conditions, CASA, in collaboration with partner organisation Spandan, provided dry ration and hygiene kits to Babli's family. “We could not have made it to the end of the lockdown if it wasn't for the support we received.”

CRISIS IN THE MIDST OF PANDEMIC

Sanjay Kumar Saroj is a 19-year-old resident of Rasulpur village in Gram Panchayat of Jaunpur block, Machil Shahar, Uttar Pradesh. He belongs to the 'Pasi' community and has a family of seven to look after. Due to financial strains in the family, they could not perform farming activities on their small landholding. Working as a daily-waged labourer in the nearby areas for about 3000-4000 rupees per month, he was barely able to sustain his family.

He shares his experiences of discrimination and difficulties due to belonging from the lower strata. “The people of marginalised sections of the society are very poor, have unequal access to resources and are exploited.” Lack of sufficient livelihood opportunities, discrimination and exploitation had compelled him to migrate outside. Working as a welder in Ahmedabad, he could earn around 8000 rupees per month that helped in sustaining his family. With the sudden imposition of lockdown, all the work in Ahmedabad was shut down and it became very arduous for him to make his ends meet. Due to financial instability, he decided to go back home, covering the journey on foot in 10 days. **“I was very confused and uncertain about the future. But with the help and support of CASA and CAID I have ability to provide for my family.”**

Sanjay Kumar Saroj received the aid of the seed support programme, an initiative of CASA for migrant families who had returned to their native villages but were facing financial problems due to the ongoing pandemic and were provided with seeds and fertilizers. CASA, in collaboration with CAID, also provided dry ration and WASH kits. The urgent aid and assistance helped him to generate income for his family and ensure food security for the coming days. With association to this programme, he is also educated about various government welfare schemes and gets opportunity to avail the benefits. This has helped him fulfill the basic requirements of his family amidst this crisis.

CASA has helped Sanjay look forward to a promising future, and a hope to live a dignified life with stability.



GIVING HOPE TO THE MARGINALISED

The sudden nation-wide lockdown led to what was probably one of the largest mass migrations of people in recent times. Out of jobs to earn a living, out of a roof to live under and with little to zero access to food and medicine, the migrant workers from various parts of the country were forced to move back to their hometowns and villages.

Shubham Yadav, a 28 year old migrant worker recounts his experience of the journey he and his family had to take because of the lockdown. He said, “I was traveling on a local bus with my family with almost no money to feed them. The bus was filled with so many people that even the thought of breathing needed an effort and on the way, I was thinking to myself about what did we do to deserve this and is this road ever going to end?”. Shubham Yadav is a migrant worker from Chouki, Madhya Pradesh who, with his family migrated to Dhudiya, a small town in MP.

The family moved to Dhudiya and everyone from Shubham's parents to his siblings started working to earn a living. Because in their village Chouki, the employment opportunities were extremely scarce as the land was no longer cultivable. This forced Shubham and his family to leave their hometown in search of work. And so they ended up in Dhudiya as daily wage labourers. Shubham and his family worked in a construction site for almost 8-10 months while living in an interim hut close to the construction site along with other immigrant workers. The family together managed to earn a combined lump-sum of approximately Rs.12000 per month due to the shortage of work on a daily basis.

“Life is good for those who are privileged in these times. While we just struggle throughout our lives to have food in our bellies until the day we die” said Shubham as he cried with broken dreams in his eyes. The sadder part is that his story is not the only story like this. Just when Shubham and others like him thought that life could not bring anything worse to their plates, the outbreak of COVID-19 and the subsequent national lockdown only worsened their already miserable state. While everyone in the country was regulated to stay inside their homes, the ones without a permanent home were just hushed away and left on their own as if their lives didn't matter.

As a result, all of the immigrant workers and their families such as Shubham's were forced to go back to their native villages. Thousands of people rushed to railway stations, bus stations and some even just walked to get back to their homes. Shubham and his family were forced to move back to Chouki, on 23rd March,



2020, without any kind of financial backing or savings to support themselves in a place which was already doomed when they left.

Ever since the pandemic hit the nation, it has been CASA's constant effort to help and aid those who are suffering in these testing times and are all alone. Therefore, CASA in collaboration with Shram Shakti Mahila Seva Sansthan (SSMSS) conducted a survey in Banjariya and found out that Shubham and his family's condition, they didn't have the most basic of necessities like food and water in order to sustain their lives. Shubham and his family didn't get any assistance whatsoever from any organisation or individual. Ever since they returned to their hometown, they had been helpless and were living miserably. After learning about the family's troubles from the survey, on 30th April, 2020, a ration kit and proper masks were distributed to the affected family members.

Due to the joint efforts of CASA and SSMSS, now Shubham and many others like him are finally able to meet their daily necessities and sustain a healthy standard of living. It has given home to the affected families, assuring them that they are not alone in these times of crisis. They have received help from CASA and other individuals who want to make this world a better place for everyone. Now Shubham has the opportunity to look for work and earn a daily wage in their own villages without worrying about COVID-19 and the lockdown. The survey helped identify the migrant workers according to their skills and link them with district level agencies for employment opportunities. Every member of these families can now go to work and earn a living to support themselves.

THE WOMAN OF THE FAMILY

The limited availability of worldly resources has always been under the strict target of the capitalist's greed. Thereby, an unjust scarcity of critical means of sustenance, turns the basic need of the marginalised into a vulnerability. Here's where inequality in society holds an origin. We live in a world of contrast where lavish fortunes adjacent deficiencies, yet hardly does the marginalised find a helping hand in the time of need. Beyond the inequality in wealth distribution, we as a society, also suffer biases based on gender. The story of Sona Bai underlines both the inequalities and unfolds the narrative of a woman employed in the unorganised sector.

Sona Bai is a resident of Semalpura, a village in Dhar, Bihar. Sixteen years ago, she lost her husband and landed in a terrible economic inadequacy. Since then, she has been the support of the family. Sona Bai narrates, "I work as a daily wage labourer, and I am the sole bread earner of the family. I look after three children and my father-in-law who are survived by my husband."

Sona bai exemplifies the strength of women who earn for the sustenance of their families despite the social stereotypes that consider men as the breadwinner. She sheltered her family from insecure conditions after her husband's demise. Yet the greatest challenge was yet to come in the face of the nationwide lockdown to restrict the spread of COVID-19. Sona Bai was rendered unemployed. Her distresses kept getting worse beyond the lack of income. Besides the need for her family's daily expenses, her daughter fell sick and the situation turned more pitiful.

"I had to borrow Rs 3000 thousand from Patel (moneylender) for my daughter's treatment and Rs.2000 from my relatives to provide for our daily expenses. But it diminished the crisis only for a month. I was again standing at the beginning of the loop."

CASA learned about Sona Bai's anguish and proposed for immediate assistance. Dry Ration support was provided to her to keep up during these challenging times. The help led astray her concerns regarding the family's nutrition and primary sustenance. Sona Bai could now find a little comfort but the solution to her larger concerns was on her to lead. After the lockdown was lifted, Sona Bai returned to work in Hoshangabad, determined to fight COVID-19 with precaution and awareness. She said, "If I stayed back, then surviving might become difficult for my family. Also, I have to pay back the money I borrowed for my daughter's treatment. I am grateful to CASA for the help they could provide to uplift me by feeling supported in my struggles."

Courageous Sonabai is all set to work for her and her family. She is setting inspiration for how to deal with the pandemic until the circumstances return to normal. Serving people, by providing whatever we can, might not absolutely erase deficiencies, but it can give an assuring relief to the one suffering through these shortcomings. CASA is determined to help the disadvantaged lives escape from crumbling under hostile circumstances. In our dedicated efforts, there has been one persistent motif, that is, to support the marginalised through their strife to sustain.



REFRAIN FROM MISTAKING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AS A FAMILY MATTER



Undoubtedly, amid the lockdown, the common mass is dealing with various concerns. No struggle could be underestimated at any tone. However, during such an unexpected time, our homes are supposed to be the safest of places. Home has our comfort, security, and a sense of connection deeply imbibed across every corner. Yet, incidentally, we can not turn a blind eye to the abusive households existing in our society. For the duration of the lockdown, many women across the nation have experienced hostile environments inside their homes.

CASA came across the story of Meena, a resident of Sonadehe village in Madhya Pradesh, under the light of domestic violence. A mother of three, Meena does labour work for livelihood. She is dependent on her daily wage and the resources from a nearby forest for the sustenance of her children. Her husband is a supervisor in the forest department, but he does not pay even a single penny for the house.

Reportedly, her husband spends most of his time

under the influence of liquor, and unlawfully vents his frustration by physically beating Meena. He demands the wages which Meena earns and, if she denies, he pawns the household things to get the value for buying liquor. Meena had to take care of herself and her children. Such violence was a sheer violation of a woman's right to her own body and sanity. Violence goes beyond the physical pain to destructive mental agony and should not be shadowed under the garb of "family matters".

Meena used to go to Hoshangabad in Bihar for work along with ten labourers. Unfortunately, due to the lockdown on March 24th, 2020, Meena was unable to work and had to stay inside the cruel home.

The extended lockdown against the rise in COVID-19 cases, halted the financial income and deepened the deficiency in the home. Household expenses and rationing depleted the savings that Meena had. Unable to get any work in the village, Meena was rendered jobless. Under these grieving circumstances, Meena asked her husband to arrange for some money. Little did she know, her mere concern for the family would subject her to violence without thought or empathy? Her husband beat her up brutally and repeated the same with her children. But this did not end there. He kicked them out of the house by tossing off their clothes and utensils.

Living in such an abusive relationship for a month, she asked for some help from the neighbours, but Meena's husband continued to abuse whosoever even laid an ear to her. Meena grew scared that this persistent harassment might risk her and her children's life. Hence, Meena, with the assistance of CASA, moved to her brother-in-law's house for ten days. When Meena's brother became aware of the horrendous situation, he took his sister and the children to his residence. As a guiding figure, he explained to Meena the need to strengthen her confidence in herself. Meena had to be stubborn and stand against her husband's torture. Inspired by her struggle and the subsequent emancipation, Meena filed a case against her husband.

Instances of violence against women have risen during the nation-wide lockdown. The elevating cases of domestic violence, at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, are alarming. CASA is present in 30 villages that fall under Shahpur block of Betul district, Madhya Pradesh, raising awareness amongst women to prevent and respond to the gendered effects of lockdown. We have formed a Gram Samiti, with two representatives in each village. The teams are directing efforts towards assessing the situation across the nation and help the local communities learn more about the criminal incidents of domestic violence occurring in their neighbourhood.

PLIGHTS OF THE DIFFERENTLY- ABLED INDIVIDUALS

"We are facing a lot of difficulties to sustain our family. There is no work available to earn any income."

The havoc created by the pandemic has made life extremely difficult for 32-year old Gora Bai Kodar, who is paralysed from the waist down. She lives with her family of four in the village of Pounatha in Chhatarpur district of Madhya Pradesh. With everyone suffering the brunt of the lockdown, disabled individuals face greater challenges. Although her father is a farmer who owns a small piece of land, it proves to be insufficient to meet the family's needs.

Unable to work herself, she cannot contribute any income, making it all the more difficult for the family to preserve their livelihood. CASA conducted a survey to identify migrant workers residing in Chhatarpur district. This survey enabled the volunteers to reach out to Gora Bai.

CASA, under its COVID-19 response programme, distributed dry ration to Gora Bai to help maintain food security for her family. Along with this, she was also provided hygiene kits to maintain proper sanitation practices and prevent the spread of coronavirus. Unable to receive the items herself, CASA volunteers ensured the ration reached her residence.

A small step taken in the direction of helping those in need can go a long way. CASA, in collaboration with partner organisation Abhar, were able to successfully provide aid to many such families of Madhya Pradesh. The dry ration and hygiene kits can help Gora Bai and her family maintain a livelihood in these challenging times.



PROVIDING SUPPORT TO THE MIGRANTS OF INDIA



Amidst the gloom and doom caused by the global pandemic, millions of migrant workers were stranded in the cities, without any transport facilities to reach their native villages.

Fate had a way to take its course for Deepak, along with his seven fellow men that were stuck in a small village of Padharpur near Pune, Maharashtra. "We belong to Kedarnath, Uttarakhand and were surviving here on daily wages. Once the lockdown was declared, we were deprived of our basic necessities and had no income to rely on." Deepak and the seven others work in the informal sector to meet their daily needs.

"CASA had provided humanitarian aid at the time when the Kedarnath floods had occurred in 2013. I approached CASA again at this time of emergency as I believed that they would come to the forefront and help us."

CASA was informed of the plight of these eight migrants and took immediate action by providing them relief. "Because of CASA's strong networks, our accounts were transferred with rupees 2000 each through Google Pay within four hours itself and we were able to fulfil our basic requirements."

CASA has always come forward in such times and rescued thousands of people who have fallen victims of uncontrollable disastrous situations. "We are grateful for CASA's help in these dire times when resources are unavailable."

WHAT'S MORE FATAL? LOCKDOWN OR VIRUS?

Mostly, all of the workers in factories and construction sites are daily wage labourers. With a nationwide lockdown, all types of factories, encompassing mills and construction sites were shut down, leaving these workers unemployed and without any sources of income during the pandemic. Rajen Rabha is one such factory worker who was robbed of his daily source of income. Like most workers, he too had migrated from his village with his family for better financial opportunities. But ever since the lockdown, his family has been suffering as they are sleeping with empty stomachs.

As Rajen recollects his journey, he shares, "We have encountered so many tragic circumstances, that now we fear hunger more than the virus itself." Rajen Rabha and his family used to work in the 'GoodDay' biscuit factory in Lokhra, a small locality in Guwahati, Assam. They had migrated to Guwahati from Tamulpur, a small village in the Baska district of Assam. Ever since they migrated to Guwahati, almost 10 years ago, Rajen and his family have been working at the factory and were completely dependent on it.

The nationwide lockdown was touted to be beneficial for the citizens of the country in their fight against the coronavirus as it would restrict the further spread of the virus. But the fact that this lockdown would come up with such terrible predicament for the underprivileged the population was overlooked.

A majority of the population was neglected while some privileged citizens whole-heartedly welcomed the lockdown. Several factories and construction sites were shut down depriving millions of workers of any sort of employment sources. This resulted in a lot of these underprivileged people ending up on streets with a menial income to support and feed themselves and their families.

He further explained that even though they had financial problems before the lockdown, their living conditions have only worsened at the onslaught of this lockdown. He said, "We've been living under the rogue of poverty long before the lockdown was established, but the crisis was not as miserable six months ago as it is now".

Rajen and his family of five are living in a rented accommodation, which alone drains a large chunk of their income. The family is experiencing the most wretched of situations as they don't have any savings and no proper food security. Without any kind of aid, and out of money to support themselves, the family was



forced to sell vegetables on the street. While plenty of institutions and individuals claimed to have provided these victims with aid, Rajen informed us that his family had received ration only three times, which was insufficient for their family's survival.

The sole earning from the vegetable shop fails to provide for his entire family. Therefore, to compensate for their basic needs, Rajen also began fishing in the swamp region of Guwahati, in the late evening, as most of the southern part below NH 37 serves as a suitable breeding ground for freshwater fish during monsoon.

Yet again, the troubles came knocking at their door as the sole bread earner of the family caught fever because of staying in the water for excessively long durations. On top of that, it was challenging to find a doctor since all the medical facilities and its staff were concentrated for the care of COVID patients in the big hospitals. Thus, everyday survival for Rajen and his family became even more miserable.

The family seeks support from anyone willing to help them with the most basic of necessities like food and medicine.

A PERPETUAL FIGHT AGAINST HUNGER



The lockdown due the global pandemic has held a tight grasp on the lives of people suffering from unsteady income and food scarcity.

Since the outbreak of the virus, a majority of the population from urban cities to rural areas has been clouded by unemployment. However, not all of them face the situation in the same manner.

HIDEOUS NATURE OF THE PANDEMIC

People living in rural areas and non-metropolitan towns have encountered the raw and hideous side of the pandemic, as they are unable to access even the most primary necessities to survive the lockdown. A similar situation was faced by Prabhuram, a labourer living in Mungthala, Rajasthan, who has been suffering for a basic two times of proper meal since the commencement of the national lockdown.

PROBLEMS CREATED BY THE PANDEMIC

"They don't care if we sleep hungry. All my savings are gone and there is not even the bleakest possibility to continue earning"

Prabhuram used to work under the MGNREGA scheme for under-privileged people and since he has an impaired eye, the scheme helped him a lot to earn a living. Unfortunately, the pandemic surfaced and the lockdown came along with it. The scheme under MGNREGA is a social security measure aiming to guarantee employment and the right to work to the marginalised population. However, it was scrapped in some parts of the country, including Mungthala village of Rajasthan. Additionally, due to the pandemic, Gram-Panchayats (village heads) were not conducting Gram Sabha (village assemblies) for the benefit of the villagers, which left the labourers helpless and without income amidst these tragic circumstances.

HELPING HANDS DURING THE PANDEMIC

Supported by Jan Chetna Sansthan, CASA initiated a campaign named 'No One Sleep in Hunger' which focused on reaching out to the people in need and the daily wage workers who were severely affected by the abolishment of MGNREGA. Through the campaign, a dry ration kit was provided to Prabhuram, which would last him for some weeks and he wouldn't have to sleep hungry. An application was also sent to the gram panchayat of the village to revive the work for MGNREGA.

It would not be excessive to say that the pandemic has made the livelihood of people from economically weaker sections- a hell on earth. They are struggling a lot to meet even their basic needs like roti, kapda and makaan especially when they are unable to get jobs to support themselves. Organisations like CASA India strive to help out the people from such backgrounds so that their lives become easier and are able to support themselves completely.



They don't care if we sleep hungry. All my savings are gone and there is not even the bleakest possibility to continue earning



EMPLOYMENT VAQUISHED DURING COVID-19



The distressed scenario of India's migrant workers has haunted the country. Suffering and hardships have come hand in hand along with the coronavirus. In the midst of this heart-wrenching situation, Virender Singh, a migrant worker from Uttar Pradesh, currently residing Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, lost his only source of earning. " I migrated to Shimla in the hope of finding better employment opportunities. I was working here in the hotel management sector until the pandemic hit and I lost my livelihood."

Virender's life had taken a turn for the worse when COVID-19 compelled the nation to enter into a lockdown. Although, the pandemic has brought various impediments for all, the marginalised communities have been severely impacted. There has been a sharp decline in employment opportunities, with families facing acute cash crunch. Upon losing his job, Virender had no means of maintaining his sustenance. He decided to go back home. However, owing to the nation- wide lockdown, there were no inter-state public transport facilities available. Hiring a taxi proved to be too expensive and thus, he had no choice but to stay in Shimla.

Uncertain about his future prospects, Virender does not know when will he be able to resume work. "Hotels have been shut and I believe we will be not be catering to tourists anytime soon as the curb has been

imposed on inessential travelling." CASA's COVID-19 response assisted Virender during this dire situation by recognising his frantic state. We supported him by linking him with the Municipal Corporation of Shimla for employment opportunities, where he voluntarily took up various responsibilities in exchange for dry ration and a monetary amount of 1000 rupees (given through bank transfer).

"I am grateful for all the support I have received from CASA. In these challenging times, a lending hand can make a huge difference." There are many migrant workers, stranded in towns far from home, who neither have the means to go back to their native states nor do they have any way of securing their daily bread. CASA shall continue to provide aid and support to such marginalised communities, who have been adversely affected due to COVID-19.



► Photo credit: Sahiba Chawdhary



I migrated to Shimla in the hope of finding better employment opportunities. I was working here in the hotel management sector until the pandemic hit and I lost my livelihood.

HOW TO DEAL WITH A SOCIAL-STIGMA PANDEMIC?

“In June, I felt sick due to a throat infection. The news broke out in society, and everyone began to see us as a mark of disgrace.” – Anupam.



The lockdown and the pandemic have caused severe problems to daily wage laborers' lives, particularly in the marginalised communities. The virus survivors in India are struggling every day to change the perceptions of society towards them. One such story is of Anupam Dhanwar, a 26-year-old resident of Bhamobari Tea Garden of Kalchini Block of Alipurduar District in West Bengal. He alone is the bread earner of a four-member family, who works as a Data Entry Operator in Latabari BPHC. His mother works in a tea garden and earns a decent sum daily.

Working 14 km away from his hometown, he somehow manages to earn a minimum wage to fulfill his family's basic essential needs. In the middle of June, Anupam fell sick due to a throat infection. He went to the doctor for a COVID-19 checkup and test. The news created fear in people's minds regarding Anupam and his family, and they began to boycott them. The act was not of maintaining social-distancing but social-discrimination that distinguishes them from other members of the society.

After two days, he received the COVID-19 report saying “negative” and advised by the doctor to stay in isolation for seven days. The seven-day isolation was

only a precautionary measure to combat the disease. But, the society concluded that he had fallen in the grip of COVID-19, and his family was asked for a 14-day strict quarantine.

The situation became worse with time, as Anupam's family members were treated with humiliation. When the complete lockdown was announced on March 24, 2020, they were among many who thought that soon everything would be back to normal. But the rise in the cases made all the economic activities crushed into pieces. The family was deprived of cash, food and no social support. None of the family members were allowed to collect dry ration from the government broker. Anupam's mother was also not allowed to collect wages from the tea garden.

“I called one of my well-wishers to buy some sugar and other essential commodities such as milk, oil, salt, and vegetables for us.” – He cried. The seven-day isolation became the most emotional and critical phase for him and his family.

CASA, with its partner organisation Rural Aid under CFC West Bengal Package Project, immediately looked into the matter and interacted with Anupam and other community people. CASA decided to hold public awareness programs by joining hands with ASHA workers; to educate marginalised communities about the COVID-19 disease. The program's main motive was to make people aware of the illness and remove misconceptions, confusion, anxiety, and fear as it is a new disease. They encouraged communal support and unity among the people in response to this outbreak.



PROMOTING HEALTHY HABITS



Children are the future of our country. During these difficult and unpredictable times, it is really important to familiarize this generation with a healthy habit of sanitization. The curiosity at their age makes them learn new things and also, children are the best way to convey these habits onto the elders in their family. To substantiate this role of children in helping the people around them, here is the story of Lokesh.

Lokesh Kumar is an 8th standard student who lives in Kadma village of Jhalara block in Udaipur, Rajasthan. One evening, he was playing with his friends in Baroliya village, and his curiosity led him to an awareness camp on do's and don'ts of COVID-19 organised by Prayatna Samiti with support of CASA and the IEC material arranged by the side. He got interested and paid careful attention and learned about the five steps of hand wash which removes the microbes as demonstrated in the camp.

As soon as he got back home, he found a piece of soap and placed it in front of the veranda. He even made sure to educate his family members about the benefits of washing hands especially during COVID-19. Lokesh says, “The five steps of handwashing was a new practice for me. I had never come across those steps recommended by UNICEF even in my textbooks. After the camp was over, I immediately thought of arranging a soap and planned a suitable place to keep it”. Lokesh's family members have made this a habit. Lokesh is happy to promote the message to keep the microbes away.

CASA has always valued the concept of educating mass regarding the best practices. The awareness camp on COVID-19, conducted in various villages across the country, has helped awaken many people, including women and children.



COLLECTIVE FORM OF COOPERATION - WEST BENGAL

Sundarbans, the largest delta in Asia, is known for its vast mangrove forests, Bengal tigers and complex ecosystems. Located in the southern region of West Bengal, bordering the country of Bangladesh, Sundarbans has been enlisted as the UNESCO World Heritage Site. The delta region is formed by the confluence of Ganga, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers in the Bay of Bengal. On the geographical map of India, Sundarbans appears to be a vast and complex mesh of criss-crossing rivers and tributaries,

which in fact, is lined by mangrove plantations. The deceptive beauty of this region blankets the intriguing stories that are oblivious to the world.

CASA's Collective Form of Cooperation (CFC) project in Sundarbans sheds lights on the various hurdles that are faced by communities that reside in the fragile region. As adventurous it might seem, life in the delta looms with danger and lacks livelihood options, experiences frequent cyclones where socio-economic

problems and inaccessibility to basic necessities add up to the hurdles faced by the residents. CASA has partnered with ten non-governmental organisations in Sundarbans to work upon the various issues that are faced by the inhabitants of the region. Our reporters covered the initiatives that fall under the CFC project and were implemented under Paschim Sridharkati Janakalyan Sangha (PSJS) and Bagmari Mother and Child Development Mission (BMCDM) in North and South 24 Parganas of Sundarbans.

Development Research Communication and Services Centre

Baikunthapur Tarun Sangha

Bithari Disha

Canning Swanirbhar

Panitar Pally Unnayan Samiti

Bagmari Mother & Child Development Mission

Bhetkipur Famili & Child Welfare Society

Goranbose Gram Bikash Kendra

Paschim Sridharkati Janakalyan Sangha

Sonartari Woman and Child Welfare Institution

 Arushi Narchal - Digital Media Manager, Communications

 Pankhuri - Associate, Communications



► A GLANCE THROUGH LENS OF LEBUKHALI RIVER, SUNDERBANS

Paschim Sridharkati Jan Kalyan Sangha (PSJS)



► COMMUNITY MEMBERS ENGAGED IN MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF PSJS IN SUNDERBANS

Bishnu Padamridha, age 37, is the Secretary and Development Professional of Paschim Sridharkati Jan Kalyan Sangha (PSJS) in Sunderbans, West Bengal. PSJS was registered in 1997 and two years later, in 1999, it came into action. PSJS established connections with CASA in 2016, under the programme named Collective Form of Cooperation (CFC). The collaborative project primarily focused on Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction.

Project centres around:

- Capacity building in the far-flung rural villages of Sunderbans,
- Facilitating the available Govt schemes for the villagers' benefit,
- Networking among alliance-building with Community-Based Organisations
- Training on Disaster Management and Disaster Risk Reduction
- Promoting creative livelihood and alternative livelihood
- Promoting Gender Mainstreaming and gender equity among the village decision-makers and supporting equal participation in opinions.

Activities:

- Indigenous Seed Conservation and preservation
- Mixed nutrition garden
- Alternate Livelihood
- Organic farming
- Mangrove protection and conservation

Bagmari Mother and Child Development Mission (BMCDM)

Alam Hussain, 52, is a Founder member of Bagmari Mother and Child Development Mission (BMCDM), a non-governmental organisation that is present in Sunderbans. BMCDM partnered with CASA under the CFC project and primarily focuses on capacitating communities by following a multi-dimensional approach that include :

- Mangrove plantation and protection to prevent erosion
- Nurture and plantation of vegetables
- Formation of Institutional groups (Women groups, Farmer groups, adolescent groups)
- Disaster Mitigation Task Force



Nandita Goswami:
Senior Programme Coordinator

Since you have been coordinating the CFC West Bengal Project, would you like to present us with certain insights into the project and the issues it tackles?

Yes, definitely. So, CFC stands for Collective Form of Cooperation. The CFC West Bengal Project is a partnership project where 18 organisations have coordinated with CASA for a shared mission. Our prioritised area of intervention is in the Sunderbans, where we are mitigating the concerns of climate change.

Geographically, Sunderbans is located in the mangrove delta. The population majorly inhabits the islands that are protected by the mangroves, since it acts as a buffer to the cyclonic activities. Earlier the occurrence of the deadly cyclones was not that frequent. In the purview of the past 15 years, the miserable repercussions of climatic conditions have led to multiple cyclonic storms.

 Kajol Tanaya - Intern, Communications

We are losing much of the island areas because they are outlined by the water bodies, and the human-induced calamities are outrageous. The cutting down of trees, especially the mangroves, is destroying the environment which is exhibiting itself through the changing climate.

This has been a fervent concern that many articles and newsletters deal with, highlighting how Sunderbans is at stake.

These effects of climate change can be dated back to the early 2000s. We still remember, in 2009 Sunderbans encountered a major disaster, named Aila, followed by different cyclonic

invasions throughout the period. Therefore, CASA emphasised that if localised partner organisations, in the disaster-prone areas, can be capacitated, they will successfully create a climate-resilient community. These organisations, located in those impact areas, have a better understanding of the native language, customs and can communicate efficiently with the residents. So CASA directs its project intervention through localised partner organisations. Further, through capacity building within the community, by various mechanisms, would reduce the effects of climate change as well as promote livelihood opportunities.

What has been CASA's strategy for approaching and monitoring the situation?

The project was initiated in October 2016. It is a ten-years long engagement which is divided into three phases for better implementation and analysis. The first two phases are of 3.5 years

each and the final phase shall be of the remaining 3 years. The first phase has been successfully concluded by March 2019 and the second has been initiated in January 2020.

This partnership project is supported by a collective contribution and participation of 18 local organisations which are functional across 6 districts of West Bengal. 10 organisations are located in the southern part of Bengal, that is in the Sunderbans region, covering the districts of North 24 Parganas and South 24 Parganas. The remaining 6 organisations are located in the northern part, covering 4 districts of North Bengal.

The total strategy is set in the form of collaboration. CASA has been voted by the partners for leading and providing hand-held support to these organisations in their respective areas. CASA has long-term experience in dealing with aspects of Disaster Risk Reduction and climate change. Therefore, we share that expertise with our partners who, in turn, are responsible for educating the community regarding awareness, prevention and mitigation of the impact of climate change.

What components, at individual and partnership levels, were considered for the planning?

This project was developed focusing on basic three components i.e. life, livelihood and gender mainstreaming, which CASA is very much concerned about. The components are the same for all the 16 partner organisations through which CASA is directing the intervention. Within our mission, we also examine whether our partner's vision is in the same line with what we envisage or not. It is a collective approach where our concepts are put into action or practice through the partners.

These organisations are also locally dealing with specific concerns of their respective regions. Mitigating the impact of climate change, and the subsequent capacity building,

is one of their missions that overlaps with CASA's and we are together working towards the shared goal. Though the activities conducted by the partners may differ, yet they are designed to address the same issue with the specific geographical location in mind. Moreover, such a collective form of operation is slightly different from a basic partnership project because it involves layers of customising the plan according to the local issues.

Would you elaborate on the concept of gender mainstreaming?

It is primarily based on fostering gender equality, gender equity and participation in whatever initiatives CASA makes. Well, it's not just participation, it is meaningful participation. From gender representation in the community to the representation at different levels of the planning process, encompassing block-level, district-level or state-level, CASA pays attention to these essentialities. This is an empowerment that is ensured to the genders we deal with. It is not only a thing that we believe or practice alone, but we ask the community to practice it as well. It is a process as well as a strategy for efficient planning.

Ma'am, would you like to highlight why gender mainstreaming is imperative in the project areas?

To give it a zoomed-in view, this area is highly vulnerable to climate change, which makes life and livelihood very insecure. Women and children comprise a majority of the section that is most sensitive to disaster. Men and the elderly population are also affected but the impact on the health and social aspects of women is more grave. Various instances have influenced the population for an unsafe migration in search of livelihood and it also triggers violence against women in different aspects. Now, zooming out, we may identify that it is an ignorant practice to subject women to such vulnerabilities. The communities are not well informed on what qualifies as a domestic

affair and what is domestic abuse. It is also related to extreme poverty over there.

Most girls drop out of education because there are very few opportunities for higher education in their community. They need to come near the mainland of Kolkata for further studies but communication forms a greater impediment. Addressing such issues we have concentrated on gender mainstreaming as a part and parcel of the process.

How has the loss of livelihood increased the vulnerabilities of the community?

The existing livelihood opportunities are basically related to agriculture. Since the major area is associated with rivers and water bodies, people are mostly into the fishing profession. But with the changing ecosystem and the hazards related to climate change, the species which they used to collect for livelihood are gradually decreasing. The ecosystem is imbalanced and those who earlier depended on these kinds of livelihood, are now gradually shifting to minimise the loss they are incurring.

At the lack of alternatives, they automatically migrate, which turns is unsafe sometimes, leading to trafficking. We can't stop migration but we can ensure that it is a safe migration. We can watch out for people, who are going for jobs, are finding a secured job and there should not be any violence against them.

With the conclusion of the first phase, what changes did CASA witness at large?

Before our intervention, the areas were only addressed when any kind of disaster would occur. It was superficial. Long term development ideologies and goals associated with securing the marginalised life and livelihood, were missing. CASA's intervention introduced these concepts that people were in need of. Understanding their needs

and responding through these initiatives have brought tangible and intangible changes to society at large. This has given them the opportunity and scope to come out of their cocoon and understand the world from a wider perspective and witness the changes that are happening in and around the community.

Since it is an initial startup of the project, so what is measurable is visible too. However, there are behavioural changes that are not always measurable. It is only evaluated or perceived when we interact with the community and discuss with them. The community's increasing responses and participation are also indicative of a change that is taking place in society.



*Alok Kumar Ghosh
Additional Emergency
Officer, Headquarters*

It wasn't before cyclone Alia hit Sundarbans in 2009 that people realised that there are communities who reside in the delta region. Sundarbans was just known as a tourist spot before, with extensive wildlife that includes the famous Bengal Tiger and crocodiles. When CASA had reached out to the communities back in 2009 to provide cooked meals, I distinctly remember that a man had approached us just to give him the leftover rice water. That request opened my eyes and I realised the level of poverty in the region. Even today, if a disaster hits the region, the situation of the inhabitants of the region will still be the same because of the limited number of resources and livelihood options present there.

IMPLEMENTATION OF SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD PRACTICES

Ensuring a life of dignity through community-based adaptations and integrated development by providing sustainable livelihood to the communities that thrive in Sundarbans is CASA's prime objective. As the region suffers from the presence of salinity in water, CASA introduced a number of sustainable livelihood options for the inhabitants:

INTEGRATED FARMING

Integrated farming is an approach that takes into account the economic, environmental and social conditions of farmers, in order for them to become self-reliable. The main purpose of this method of farming is that no farming components go to waste but are used to support one another. It emphasizes organic farming, relying on using local resources by reusing organic waste. This method of farming is an important approach towards sustainable livelihood practices as little residue is left and involves crop and livestock recycling.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

“ Ever since I have started practicing integrated farming, my farm productivity, soil health and income have improved altogether ”



Meera Gain resides in the deep interiors of Sundarbans, in Paraghunti village of the delta region. She is a beneficiary of the CFC project and has been provided training on integrated farming. "Everything that is produced is consumed or sold. The soil quality of my farm has also improved which adds to the nutritional value of the vegetables produced on it."

Planning, implementation and support were the prime aspects that fell under the training provided on integrated farming. Meera Gain has used this method in a proficient manner as she diligently uses the produce not only for personal but also to fulfil her economic requirements. " I earn about 5000 rupees per month by selling the produce that I grow in my kitchen garden."

Meera Gain owns four cows and two goats. She also maintains a kitchen garden, a concept she learned under the training programme, that produces about 30 to 35 kilograms of vegetables per month. As paddy farming is a common form of farming in Sundarbans, her backyard holds two blocks of paddy farms that produces a variety of rice. " I only use the vermi-compost as it has yielded many benefits to my land."

Female farmers in India shoulder the burden of most of the big farming jobs such as sowing and harvesting. Meera Gain is an exemplar who has established her identity in the grassroots levels. Her determination to uplift and contribute to sustainable livelihood and build a climate smart village depicts dedication. CASA, along with PSJS shall strive to train more individuals, especially women, to create a balance in the society and contribute to combat the crisis of climate change.

INDIGENOUS SEED PRESERVATION



► VARIETY OF INDIGENOUS SEEDS PRESERVED FOR ORGANIC FARMING

Agriculture has been an important source of livelihood for a majority of the Indian population. Until the advent of the Green Revolution, farmers relied on their innate knowledge of the farming system and seed saving to amplify production. Seeds have been central to India's cultural heritage for centuries. They resembled the cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth. Certainly, a number of cultural ceremonies and festivals, even today, are incomplete without seeds.

However, the concept of organic farming, and the knowledge of seeds, gradually began to slide down the slope with the introduction of high-yielding seeds, chemical fertilizers and preservatives. Out of 1,00,000 varieties of rice and other staple grains, one can hardly find a handful number in the commercial markets today. Crop diversity has also been negatively affected due to Genetically Modified (GMO) seeds that seem more marketable than the indigenous varieties sown in India.

Seed preservation and organic farming are traditionally associated with the lives of rural and semi-rural farmers. The carefully preserved seeds ensure that farmers have the means to cultivate new crops and the indigenous strains are capable of surviving generations through adaptation. However, with the modern-day agricultural practices that sway us far from the organic culture of the soil and roots, several farmers have found it less efficient to save indigenous seeds than buying new ones from commercial seed companies. This impedes Indian crop diversity from attaining its intrinsic potential to continue being sown and reaped.

CASA focuses on preserving indigenous seeds in the Sunderbans delta that possess unique properties such as to tolerate salinity. Our prime focus is to preserve lost varieties of seeds. About 120 varieties of indigenous seeds are preserved.

 Priyank Samuel - Communications Executive
Kajol Tanaya - Intern, Communications

A STORY OF SUSTAINING GENERATIONS - SEED PRESERVATION IN SUNDERBANS



"Preserving seed is a tradition to us. These seeds have not only helped me carry out an existence but have also given me a source of income because they support an organic yield for generation after generation" expresses Shudha Rani Mondal, a 46-year-old rural farmer from Kalitala village of Sundarbans.

Seed preservation holds a special significance within the remote villages of Sundarbans, West Bengal. The indigenous varieties of rice found in the Sunderbans delta are characteristically known for their salt-tolerant properties. Despite a lower output than the retail high-yielding seeds, the indigenous ones have the greatest benefit of being less prone to crop-failure despite the nature of the land and farming procedure.

The Sunderbans delta is responsive to salinity ingress because of the brackish rivers and the poor protective embankment. Most high-yielding seeds fail to stand their salinity which is why the farmers settle for low productivity with indigenous crops rather than risking a crop failure. Since they mostly carry out a hand-to-mouth existence, they also can not afford advanced equipment to ensure a better crop defence. Moreover, indigenous crops have a distinct flavour and aroma to which the locals have grown accustomed since childhood.

"Certain distinct crops, such as the monsoon rice strains, sufficiently provide for our domestic consumption. Our traditional crops have a low cost of production and

can potentially secure generations-long seasonal cultivation irrespective of the low economic setup and disadvantage of salinity" adds Shudha Rani who has been practising seed preservation for years.

Sudha is aware that this method can be useful in restoring the natural good quality of the seed, soil and yield rather than the hybridized seeds that are sold in the market. She adds, "In most cases, the commercial seeds grow into plants that are genetically sound for the first generation or two and eventually grow less robust, losing the desirable traits. This lands the farmers in a cycle of dependency on commercial seed companies in order to maintain their strong harvests".

Moreover, the local farmers, who practise organic farming, are disjointedly located across the different islands of Sunderbans which does not facilitate communication or experience sharing among themselves. According to Shudha, this gives rise to a lack of knowledge which affects the seed preservation culture. Most of the traditional strains rarely make it to the market and are limited to ancestral practice which is also on the verge of extinction due to limited awareness.

Therefore, CASA's collaborative organisation Paschim Sridharkati Jankalyan Sangha (PSJS) in Sundarbans decided to take measures and initiatives to train the native farmers with seed preservation techniques and

processes to maintain good quality yield for their benefit. The Seed preservation process starts with a quality test, which helps in filtering out the good quality germinating seeds from the dead seeds. Members of PSJS trained the rural farmers with a simple homely technique like Water Testing.

Water Test: Take the seeds and put them in a container full of water and stir them. Let the seeds sit for about 10-15 minutes. If the seeds sink, those are still viable but if they float, it is most likely that those will not sprout. The seeds which sink are then dried and stored in airtight containers for the next seasonal farming cycle.

Shudha has followed the technique for the seasonal cycle of crops and vegetables. She practices crop rotation for each season which maintains the yield quality across each cycle. This method of preservation and harvesting has played a crucial role in the livelihood of many local farmers over the years. Besides giving them a nutritious organic yield to meet dietary requirements, the surplus enables farmers to sell organic vegetables and harvest in the market. As Seed Preservation and Organic Farming continue to sustain Shudha and many rural as well as semi-rural families, CASA and PSJS are committed to connecting the farmers to the right information and support. Besides conserving India's crop diversity, the practice is essential in ensuring financial stability and social dignity to the marginal farmers.



LIVELIHOOD PRACTICES AND SUSTAINABLE TECHNIQUES TO ENSURE SAFE SUSTENANCE

"I could sense the empowerment that arrives with self-sufficiency, because of CASA and Paschim Sridharkati Jan Kalyan Sangha (PSJS). Their skill-training initiative enabled me to reinvent a vital part of my identity and see myself beyond the role of a housekeeper", shares Latika Mondal is a 35-year-old farmer in the village of Hemnagar, West Bengal.

Agriculture as a mere economic activity is an understatement. It is a way of life for millions of people. Reflexive of the diversity of India, in terms of regional climate and customs, agriculture is pluralistic and encompasses a variety of techniques as well as approaches. The ecological provision, diet-based diversity and crop availability of a specific area determine its best pattern for farming. However, the awareness of the best practices of farming is extremely limited in marginalised communities.

Latika Mondal hails from a similarly marginalised section. For years, she was heavily invested in the role of a traditional housewife. Yet like many rural women, Latika wasn't comfortable in remaining confined to the domestic peripheries. Since the family's economic predicament demanded a boost in earning, Latika started putting out her skills in farming to contribute to the bread

of the household. "I did not have much knowledge on farming. But then I heard about CASA and PSJS training women groups in villages regarding different kinds of agricultural practices. I decided to participate and learn."

CASA and PSJS initiated the program to educate women on the benefits of integrated farming in livelihood upscaling. The prevalent mono-agricultural practice in the local area was uneconomical in many ways. It degraded the soil nutrients and led to increased use of harmful chemicals like pesticides, fertilizers, etc. Opposed to mono-agriculture, an integrated farm management system promotes the plantation of more than one crop variety and seasonal crop rotation for ensuring sustainability. It integrates livestock and crop production or fish and livestock and may sometimes be known as integrated biosystems.

The initiative started out by forming women groups in the village, where many women like Latika participated to learn and implement the techniques. They were then trained in the processes of organic farming, mushroom cultivation, vermicompost, etc. Necessary supplies like seeds and farming tools were also supplied to assist them in starting out their

 Kajol Tanaya - Intern, Communications

"I didn't know much about farming. But CASA and PSJS taught me about the systematic methods of integrated farming."
- mentions Latika



own nutrition gardens. "The PSJS volunteers go door to door to help women like us understand the advantages of an integrated agricultural system. They provided us with training on proper harvesting practices and distributed the seeds."

With the help of the training provided, Latika has become self-sufficient. "We no longer have to depend on buying vegetables from anywhere. In small-small sections of my land, I grow some 25- 30 different varieties of vegetables. This is my new-found independence. I am capable of supporting my family with fishery and mixed vegetable farming in our small piece of land. This is a boon for me."

In the landholdings of small-sized families, a combination of agriculture, horticulture and livestock rearing generates reliable income. It is not unconventional to find Indian Agri-farmers doubling up as milk producers, goat rearers, poultry keepers, aqua-culturists and more. Therefore, mixed farming is unarguably a powerful source of uplifting one's socio-economic identity in rural India. CASA and PSJS endeavour persistently to connect the marginalised communities with the best livelihood practices and sustainable techniques to ensure safe sustenance for ages to come.

MUSHROOM CULTIVATION

 Pankhuri - Associate, Communications

Fungiculture is a profitable source of income, especially for the vulnerable communities that reside in Sundarbans. Mushroom cultivation is done by using natural composts, without exposing it to moisture. The mushrooms take about one month to be cultivated and are then sold in the local markets. The harvest has yielded positive results to the ones who have benefitted from this training.

ADVOCATING TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY

In a modest earthen hut, on the banks of Rai Mungul river, Champa Biswas has built her organic farm in her backyards and cultivated mushrooms to expand her farming practice. An inhabitant of the largest delta on earth- Sundarbans, Champa has walked down a long path, striving towards economic independence.

Champa is a resident of Shamsernagar village of North 24 Paraganas district in West Bengal. "My husband immigrated to Bangalore due to lack of work opportunities in my region, he currently works in a battery factory there."

"On her course to become self-reliable through the training imparted by CASA partner Paschim Sridharkati Janakalyan Sangha (PSJS) on organic farming practices and fungiculture, Champa has fought the patriarchal norms of the society. "Women in my family never took a stand in decision making. When I was called for the training, my family was reluctant to send me but now I feel more empowered since I have started earning. The crops that I grow organically sell at a higher price in the market. I use my income for my sustenance as well as for my daughter's education."

Presently, Champa has evolved to become a self-sufficient woman. "I want to propagate my skills to other women in my region." With a vision to motivate her counterparts, Champa aims to create a socio-economic impact. She has set an example as she has liberated herself from the chains of the societal norms that suppress women and strives to create a healthy and secure environment for her daughter.

▶ CHAMPA BISWAS SHOWING METHOD OF GROWING MUSHROOM IN HER ORGANIC FARM



▶ CHAMPA BISWAS SHOWING COMPOSTS NECESSARY FOR SOIL-FERTILITY

ORGANIC COMPOSTS

Composts play a key role in enhancing soil fertility and structure which results in the harvest of nutrient-rich crops. Organic composts are climate-friendly fertilizers that do not use any chemical pesticides. They are prepared out of organic residues, where soil-friendly microorganisms help the decomposition process. Adequate moisture and oxygen levels are maintained that increase soil-fertility. The method of compost reduces the issues of waste disposal, is climate-adaptive and creates a healthful environment for plants.

ORGANIC FARMING - THE KEY TO A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

“ My farm produce sells for a higher price in the market because of its organic nature. ”

Tapun Mondal, 60, is a farmer who resides in the distant village of Sarkarpara in Sundarbans, West Bengal. As an avid reader, he keeps himself educated on the various farming trends and follows the path of chemical free farming. “ I have used both chemical as well as organic fertilizers for my crops. Chemical fertilizers ruin the soil quality and kill soil friendly organisms that are a farmer's friend.”

Despite the secluded location of his village in the delta region, Tapan has been rather updated regarding the climate crisis situation across the globe. His awareness has prompted him to use chemical-free fertilizers as they contribute to global warming, which in turn affects the ozone layer.

“I was awarded the Krishna Ratna by the Chief Minister of West Bengal with a token amount of rupees 10000.” Tapun Mondal's garden is a clear depiction of his fondness to grow a variety of plants as it is filled with diverse fruits and vegetables that include Thailand gooseberries, Darjeeling orange, Washington Papaya along with hybrid fruit plants.

“My father was a farmer, and so were his forefathers. Therefore, farming came to me by inheritance and I have observed the farming patterns that have been followed overtime. When BMCDM approached my village and provided training to the farmers here, I became aware of more farming techniques than the ones that I already knew.”

Since 2016, CASA's partner organisation Bagmari Mother and Child Development Mission (BMCDM) has assisted more than 2000 farmers including Tapun Mondal to incorporate organic farming skills for better quality yield.

Organic farming reduces soil acidification and retains the organic components. This practice is also an initiative towards climate adaptation by building climate smart villages.



ACCESS TO RIGHTS AND ENTITLEMENTS

Raising awareness on Government initiated schemes among the rural communities has the potential to aid rural development. As a number of schemes have emerged to help the powerless, CASA's initiatives ensure that the communities are educated on such schemes. The lack of development is the prime obstacle that hampers rural upliftment. The Government schemes are designed to diminish the financial hurdles faced by the underprivileged and provide them with opportunities that will ensure personal and financial development.



GENDER MAINSTREAMING

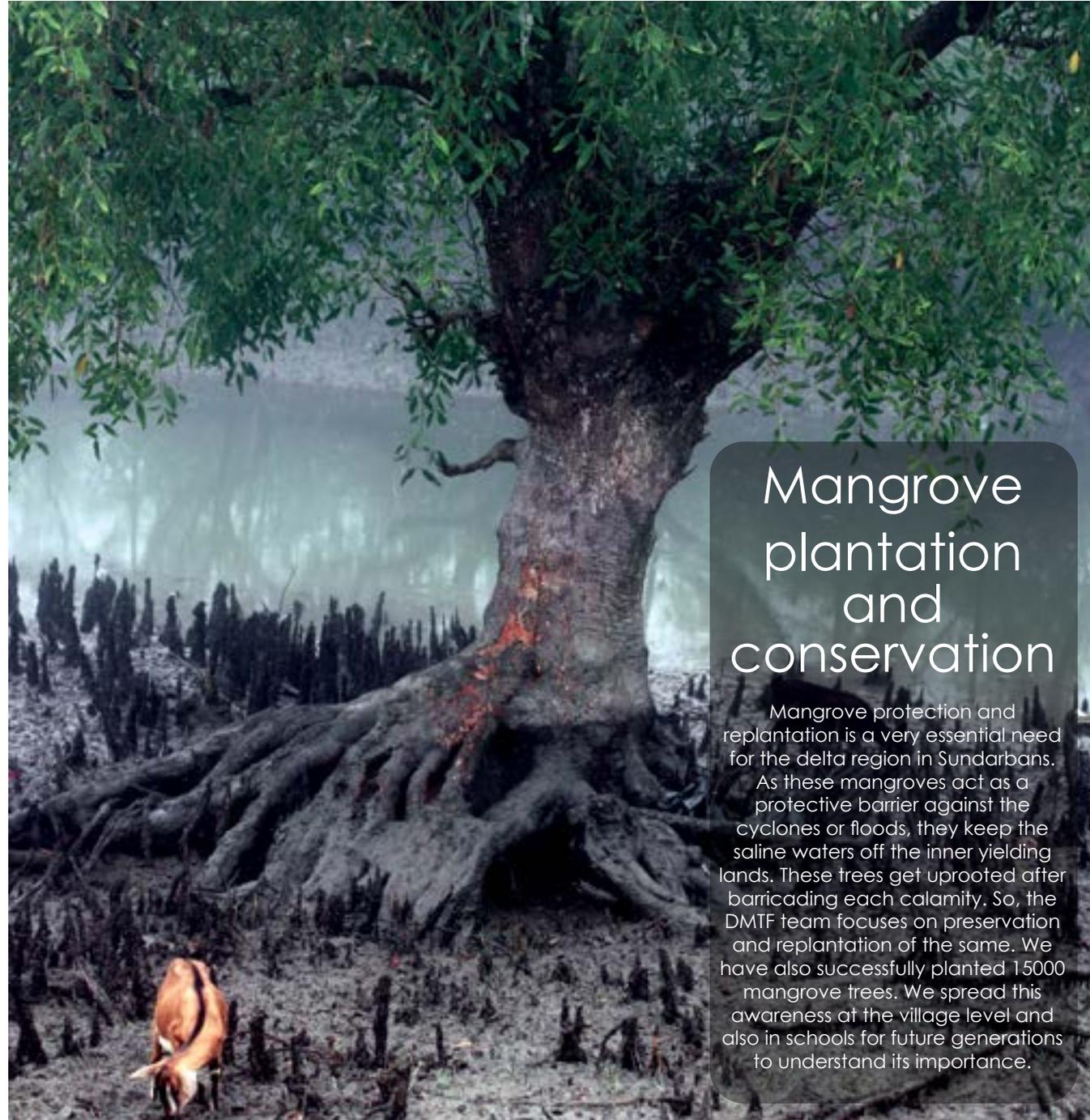
Interpreting the concept of gender mainstreaming as a mere branch of gender equality would be extremely superficial, if not incorrect altogether. Gender mainstreaming encompasses a wider dimension of inspiring, obtaining and perpetuating equal participation of men and women in developing the agenda of any action. Be it with respect to livelihood opportunities, capacity building or disaster relief action, CASA believes that humanitarian interventions can serve effectively if men and women collectively contribute their share of knowledge, interests and perspective in shaping and achieving the project's milestones.

CASA and the collaborating organisations through the CFC project in Sundarbans, strive to ensure that none of the gender groups loses out on either accessing or understanding the developmental policies that are locally functional. Gender mainstreaming also entails identifying and making changes to the mechanisms, within the policy or its framing methods, which may proliferate disparity in the participation of men and women. It also awakens the community to progressively rectify other social, economic, health-based, domestic or cultural factors that facilitates unevenness within their socio-institutional structures by restricting a particular gender from voicing their concerns or vulnerabilities. Gender mainstreaming is present under all our initiatives as we strive for gender-equality to bring a balance and recognise the potential of a world where all genders are given equal recognition.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

The Sundarbans delta has already been impacted by climate change. As it is a coastal region, it is a constant target of natural disasters such as cyclones and tsunamis. The mangrove forests that are present in the delta act as a buffer and form a line of defence against natural disasters. The CFC project has actively educated the residents on disaster management in terms of response and recovery, in order to lessen the impact of disasters on the vulnerable communities. We follow a systematic approach to assess and identify the pre-existing conditions of the regions, in order to reduce the impacts of the calamity.

 Kajol Tanaya - Intern, Communications



Mangrove plantation and conservation

Mangrove protection and replantation is a very essential need for the delta region in Sundarbans. As these mangroves act as a protective barrier against the cyclones or floods, they keep the saline waters off the inner yielding lands. These trees get uprooted after barricading each calamity. So, the DMTF team focuses on preservation and replantation of the same. We have also successfully planted 15000 mangrove trees. We spread this awareness at the village level and also in schools for future generations to understand its importance.

SUNDARBANS: ON THE FRONTLINE DEFENCE AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE REPERCUSSIONS WITH MANGROVES, A NATURAL SHIELD

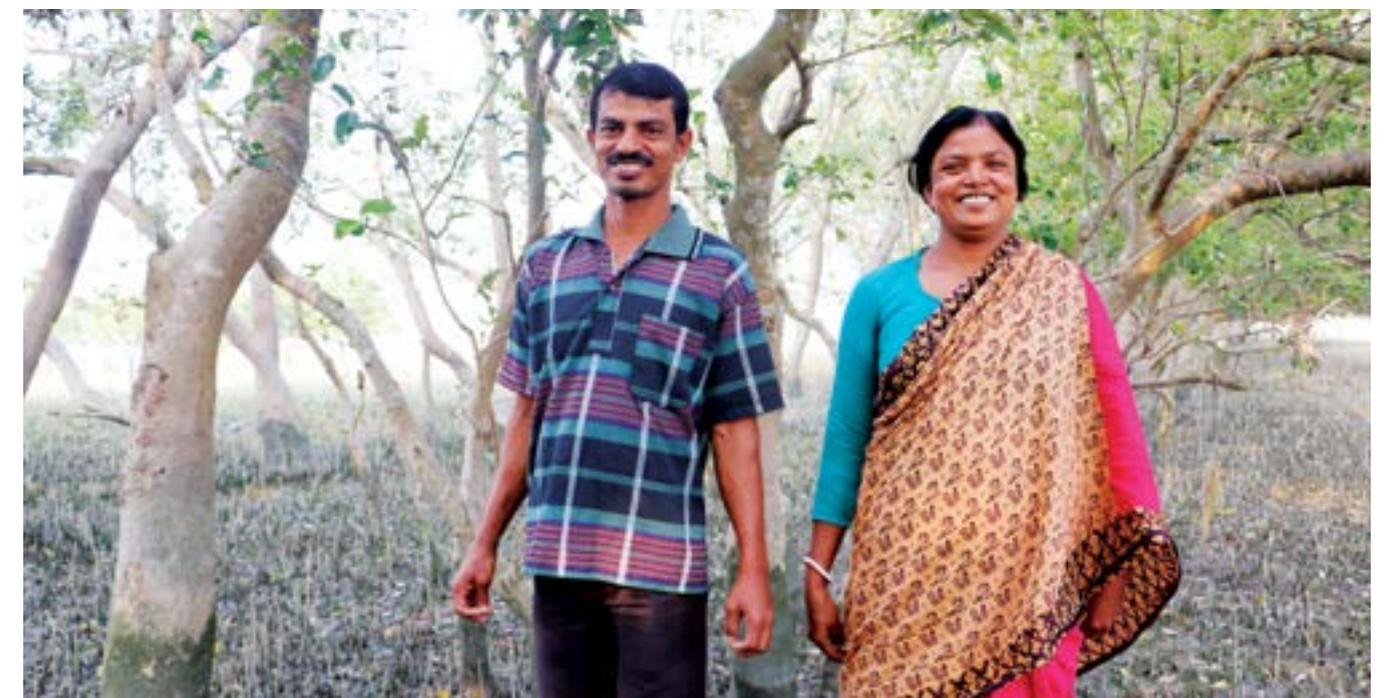
Ever since the origin of civilisations-forests, in their diverse forms, have played a central role to our flourishing on the face of Mother Earth. The classifications of various forest types are largely based upon the geographical position. But in every form and location, forests serve as a vast reservoir of natural resources that sustains life and multiple cultures. With unchecked early industrialization and growth of capitalism, vast areas of forest covers were cleared and exploited, leading to several issues from climate change and frequent natural disasters to the extinction of species and eroded indigenous identities.

The story of Sundarbans, a cluster of small scale islands in the Bay of Bengal between India and Bangladesh, follows a similar line. It is one of the largest forests in the world, stretching over 40,000 sq km from the Hooghly River in West Bengal, India, to the Baleswar River in Bangladesh. The Sundarbans is

famous as home to the mangrove trees that grow in the tropic and subtropic tidal areas and are highly tolerant to saline swamps. Situated in the eastern coast of India, the Sundarbans accounts for about half of the total area under mangroves in the country.

The ecological significance of Mangroves supersedes their consumerist economic valuation in multiple tangible and intangible ways. Important benefits offered by mangroves include water filtration and prevention of coastal erosion against natural calamities like hurricanes, floods, tidal surge and more. Mangroves also contribute to coastal recovery from calamities, buffering of ocean acidification, and biodiversity protection. They also stabilize the coastal climate and groundwater tables. A majority of the mangrove forest products are not meant for commercial outlets, instead, these are limited to the locals for self-consumption or barter.

Mangroves hold immense value in cultural terms. Many indigenous communities have intimate traditional links with this habitat. The Mangrove forest provides essential food and ornamental items. The honey and wax harvested from mangrove-visiting bees are highly valued in the coastal communities' cultural activities. Further, for its saline tolerance and hydrophytic structures, Mangrove imparts environmental education and valuable tourism for recreation. Recently, the genetic structures of mangroves and other indigenous crops of Sundarbans are under scientific examination to develop agricultural strains of plants that have high saline tolerance. Tragically, the increasing number of activities such as illegal hunting, tree extraction, agricultural encroachment, and other activities, poses a potential threat of climate change and loss of land to the Sundarbans region.



INSTITUTIONAL BUILDING AT VARIOUS LEVELS

As secluded and inaccessible the region of Sundarbans may be, the individuals who reside there live a life far from the one that is experienced in the urban areas. Apart from the pre-existing disparities that already exist in our country, rural India suffers from inaccessibility to healthcare and quality education, migration and lack of livelihood opportunities, domestic violence, human trafficking and several more. Institutional building is an initiative that falls under CFC's Plan of Action, that takes into account the concerns of rural India. Institutional building develops and strengthens the communities in terms of skills, resources, livelihood and upgrades the attitude of individuals to become self-reliant and self-dependent. It focuses on building groups that bring about collective efforts in their respective villages.

Women groups

Little do we know about the problems that exist in a region located on the brinks of India and Bangladesh. Human trafficking, domestic violence, alcoholism, child marriage and lack of education among girls are the prime issues faced by the females that reside in the region. CASA, under the CFC project, collectively raises awareness on such sensitive issues that gravely impact the lives of women and children. Under the project, we have formed several women's groups across the villages that fall under CFC's project areas, in order to strengthen and empower women. Lack of female representation in villages is what propelled us to raise awareness on issues that otherwise are discussed with hesitation, and sometimes not discussed at all. Building a group that acknowledges gender issues, not only boosts confidence but also renders support to survivors of gender atrocities. CASA's ultimate aim was to provide a platform where women recognise their potential and support each other by collectively raising their voice.



FROM REFLECTIONS TO REGENERATION -

Empowering women in Sundarbans

Awareness regarding the negative impact of child marriage was very limited in the village. Nobody used to discuss it nor did it ever receive scrutinising attention”, shares Shikha Vishwas, a 37-year-old woman from Hingalganj of North 24 Parganas, West Bengal

Sundarbans, as the name itself suggests, is the land of “beautiful forests”. It stretches across India and Bangladesh, facing the Bay of Bengal. Cyclonic turbulences in Sundarbans are no ordinary event. Beyond their terrific magnitude and recurrences in recent years, they are a menace to the residents and hamper their occupations from fishing, honey collection, to agriculture. These cyclonic events pose severe challenges to socio-economic development by raising the levels of water salinity and reducing the prospects of cultivation.

In disaster-prone areas, several women and children fall victim to the family's financial frustrations over the losses incurred to life and livelihood. Disasters generally increase the volumes of migration. However, migrations are not always safe, given the risk of trafficking children and women. On the other hand, many deprived families opt to arrange for girl child marriages to reduce their liabilities. Mitigating poverty and making up for the loss of livelihood sways their attention far from the evils that they physically and psychologically subject the women and children in their households to face.

'Shubhe Sathi', an all-women group of 20 members in Hingalganj North 24 Parganas, was formulated in 2016 to tackle child marriage and domestic violence issues at the local level. This self-help group has been facilitated by CASA in alliance with PSJS. The story of Shikha takes

its first giant leap towards fighting for the safety of women and girl children from her participation in the organisation.

Shikha Vishwas has been one of the earliest members of 'Subhe Sathi'. With two sons and one daughter, she lives with her husband in a domestically peaceful setup. Along with the other members of the group, Shikha used to reach out to the community members from door to door to raise awareness on resisting domestic violence and child marriage. Her efforts in uplifting the vulnerable, by educating the mass, had a larger hurdle to overcome when a potential social evil began to raise its head in her personal sphere.

“My brother-in-law tried to arrange for the marriage of his 16-year-old daughter. She was underage. It would have been morally, psychologically and legally wrong to tie her up with a marital responsibility. Since this was a family affair, it was very critical for me to take a stand against it, no matter how harsh the tides were to turn against me”

Shikha explained to her brother-in-law about the consequences of premature marriage. It did not go well with a single discussion. But Shikha was reluctant to give up. According to her, initiatives begin at home and her failure in securing her niece's future would be symbolic of a larger failure of their mission. After many fights and disagreements, Shikha was ultimately able to get

her niece's marriage postponed till she acquired legal and emotional maturity.

Shikha adds, “Awareness regarding the negative impact of child marriage was very limited in the village. Nobody used to discuss it nor did it ever receive scrutinising attention. But after an association with CASA and its collaborative organisation PSJS, proper format and structures were introduced to educate the community and encourage them to speak up”.

Currently, the group holds regular meetings monthly to discuss each other's issues. They even collect a small amount of money for their fund to assist in financial-aid. PSJS provides them with consistent and diverse skill training on organic farming, mushroom cultivation, how to preserve seeds, and more. Besides securing a livelihood, upskilling empowers the women to cultivate a nutrition garden wherein they grow organic crops as well as vegetables. This duly meets their nutritional needs and enables supplying the surplus to the market for income generation.

Empowering the vulnerable, alongside making the community aware of the social evils is pivotal in bringing progressive changes to the social situation. Shikha expresses that the combined efforts of CASA and PSJS have facilitated the development of the entire community by ensuring dignity and empowerment to the silenced.

FARMER GROUPS

The livelihood security of farmers that reside in Sundarbans relies on the agricultural productivity of the region, which is heavily dependent on climate change and environmental factors. The presence of saline water, drainage congestion, frequent cyclones and lack of availability of freshwater for irrigation are some of the prime issues that are faced by farmers' in the delta. CASA, under the CFC project, has taken into account the obstacles faced by the farmers and has formed several farmer groups across the project area. These farmer groups have been educated on climate-adaptive farming and have also adopted several farming technologies. The farmers actively participate in decision-making in farm management that rely on several factors that include location specific constraints, level of development in the region, climate change and the agricultural patterns that are followed in that region. The collective efforts of farmers increases the production of farming and inculcates climate-adaptive farming in existing agricultural systems.



DEHUSKING – NO MORE A DIFFICULTY

Sowing and reaping of paddy appear too simple and romanticized on a couple of sheets of paper. Little did we know how tough a farmer labours on the field even before sowing and after harvesting the crops. The semi-rural and rural farmers in the far-flung delta regions of Sunderbans face a huge inconvenience after the harvesting of paddy.

As the season of paddy cultivation comes to an end, the grains require dehusking which is the process of separating the husk from the seeds. Sacks of paddy are transported to the vendors in the city that return as dehusked grains, costing the farmers a substantial amount of time and money. The entire task of farming, thus, becomes physically and economically more taxing. To assist the farmers in their endeavours, CASA reached these farmers through the intervention of a partner organisation- Paschim Sridharkati Jankalyan Sangha (PSJS) in Sundarbans, West Bengal.

During the intervention, PSJS came across Shodesh Ronjan Mondal from Hemnagar village in Sundarbans. Shodesh is a rural farmer whose main source of livelihood is farming and selling the farm produce. Identifying his grievance in similar lines to the case discussed above, PSJS helped him to access and utilise the Government schemes of his region to receive adequate aid. He was introduced to the scheme which provided a Dehusking and filtering machine to farmers with certain eligibility guidelines.



Despite meeting the criteria, Shodesh was reluctant to avail himself of this facility. Yet, reserving his faith in the process, he applied for the machine by depositing his savings as a token amount to the Government.

After the procedure of government's verification and by PSJS's support, Shodesh was successfully allotted the dehusking machine. The machine did not only benefit him personally but the neighbouring farmers as well. Eventually, Shodesh became a known-person in the neighbourhood.

The rural farmers in nearby areas could approach Shodesh for the dehusking instead of bearing the long transport to the city. The process transformed into an income-generation opportunity for Shodesh. He charges a minimal price (since it consumes electricity) to carry out the dehusking which is much cheaper in comparison to the overall cost that is borne for commuting to the city. He also lends the machine to fellow farmers on a rental basis, charging a fair amount for use.

At times just believing in the opportunities can turn into the greatest blessings in life. Shodesh's business also gained momentum as the machine was made available to him.

The equipment separates the husks and the broken rice granules from the whole ones much efficiently. This relieves the physical and mental exhaustion that these rural farmers experience through the harvest and marketing season.

The machine has also enabled Shodesh and other farmers, who are using the Dehusking tool, to save a considerable amount of time, energy and money. With the saved hours of the process, Sodesh has the opportunity to explore markets for selling the good quality rice and the broken grains separately so as to earn more.

PSJS, in partnership with CASA, actively organises workshops and raises awareness about the available government schemes that will benefit the rural farmers and other associated people. Apart from this, PSJS also promotes sustainable agriculture among the villagers by instructing them in the methods

of kitchen gardening and organic farming. This encourages the farmers to receive proper nutrition besides setting up a local source of livelihood to utilize the farm produce.

 Priyank Samuel - Communications Executive
Tanaya - Intern, Communications

ADOLESCENT GROUPS

The ones who survive under fragile circumstances become easily vulnerable to human trafficking and unsafe migration. As Sundarbans is present on the border of India and Bangladesh, the issue of trafficking and unsafe migration is quite prevalent in the region. CASA's CFC project trains and raises awareness among adolescents regarding such issues that persist. Youth groups are formed to educate their communities regarding such societal evils and remain vigilant. For instance, if they come across any case of trafficking or unsafe migration, then they are taught how to file a complaint and whom to complain etc. Apart from this, the importance of menstrual hygiene is inculcated among young girls.

As the Sundarbans delta is prone to disasters, the residents of the region often suffer from the trauma that lingers after the occurrence of a natural calamity. The adolescent groups often act as counsellors (although they aren't professional counsellors, they can still discuss issues openly and help others). The groups also focus on concepts of youth leadership that build confidence and enlighten the young with qualities that bring about a positive impact.

DMTF TASK FORCE

We have formed a Disaster Mitigation Task Force with about 10-12 members in certain locations that fall under our project areas, that focus on raising awareness to improve preparedness and response. The members work together in a coordinated manner and are trained to improve their technical skills. They are also provided with certain disaster management tools such as mike, rope, floating jacket, shovel, axe and a stick. As CASA has always been at the forefront at the time of emergency, we have also taught survival skills. Our DMTF groups focus on gender-mainstreaming where men and women are given equal representation.

Under this training, we provide :



EARLY WARNING



SEARCH & RESCUE



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SHELTER MANAGEMENT



RELIEF



Satyajit Das, Chief Zonal Officer

In the view of Satyajit Das, East Zonal Head, CASA, the problems that Sundarbans encounters are pretty complicated. Achieving even 1% resolution, to these geographical, environmental and ethnological concerns, is impossible with the contribution of just a few people.

Mr. Das enumerates, "The impetus to people's organisations stems from an idea that people should come together to identify the issues, which natives are confronting in their day-to-day lives, and try to collectively figure out certain solutions to those problems. For organising such a committee, we need cooperation, participation and the involvement of many. Not the constituting members alone, but also the support from the government, and like-minded organisations, say the voluntary ones or other partner organisations, does matter."

CASA assists in the formation of people's organisations and directs their initial approach. "In the process of resolution, these organisations are guided regarding where to go or whose help is required". Mr Das adds, "For the problem that can be solved through Government's assistance, CASA guides the committee to approach the appropriate departments. Whereas, for the problems which have to be mitigated by the people on their own, we provide requisite ideas, capacities, information, knowledge and even skill-training to the committee".

Such empowerment ensures that the organisation can manage its activities without much external support, from either government or non-governmental

organisations. The committee members learn to take care of themselves as a collective, to ultimately be able to stand on their own feet. With concerns to building a substantial internal capacity, the organisation is also connected with a broader realm of sustainability.

"As a point of view, we expect a sustainable environment for Sunderbans' communities to thrive", and elaborating on concerns of the sustenance of the people's organisation, Mr Das states, "CASA guides the members in recognising and mobilising their own resources, including those available at the periphery, for the organisation's sustenance. By preparing them we ensure that these committees can continue to exist and function for a longer period, even after the projects of the partner NGOs or CASA is over".

The nature of responsibility invested in people's organisation cultivates an ideal environment to promote leadership. CASA encourages the committee to identify potential leaders, from the youth as well as senior members, in whom the organisation can invest an opportunity to learn new concepts. They receive exposure through the training sessions, organised by CASA and partner organisations and by visiting other places where successful work is going on.

Giving further insights, Mr. Das elucidates the significance of such initiative through an example, "We always look for progressive farmers who can enter into innovative activity and experiment it over a small portion on their own field. If the experiment yields a good result, they may choose to expand it across their fields and can also share this idea with the neighbours". Besides identifying and training progressive farmers, CASA also provides a vital connection with agencies that are willing to equip farmers with technologies.

In this endeavour to organise, channelise and empower people's organisation, CASA has received a wholehearted appreciation of government bodies at the bloc-level, district-level and state-level. In the perspective of Mr Das, "Talking about Rights alone is not enough. We need to equally remember that every citizen has certain duties to perform in obligations towards the State. CASA imbibes sufficient understanding and guidance within the community to understand their role, function, responsibility and obligations. It is, at times, imperative to understand what the government can do for us. Thereby, approaching the appropriate department, in a clear understanding of the procedure, can help the community avail the allotted benefits".

SUNDERBANS

BEFORE CYCLONE AMPHANS



AFTER CYCLONE AMPHANS



CYCLONE AMPHAN

Termed as a 'Super Cyclone', Amphan made its landfall on May 20, 2020, causing widespread destruction in Eastern India and Bangladesh.

The wind blew softly. Broken branches, dead fishes, and ruins painted a grim scene. There was deathly silence all around except for the gentle lapping of the water, caressing the land after the devastation from the night before. This was the state of the Sundarbans which had been ravaged by the cyclone Amphan. Termed as a 'Super Cyclone', Amphan made its landfall on May 20, 2020, causing widespread destruction in Eastern India and Bangladesh. The initial fury of the storm was borne by the Sundarbans, a delta formed by the confluence of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and the Meghna rivers, which lies to the southernmost part of West Bengal and Bangladesh. Located in a region of high cyclonic activity, it is no stranger to cyclones, having faced quite a few in the past. But the extent of damage caused by this one wasn't anticipated. Hundreds were rendered homeless, their livelihoods snatched away from them and their future uncertain. Many argue that the impact of the cyclone was less than expected as its intensity was reduced to an extent by the mangrove trees in the region, which acts as a buffer during storms, slowing down tidal waves and dissipating a storm's energy. But these words carry little meaning for the inhabitants of the region. Most of them belong below the poverty line and survive on fishing and agriculture, which have been severely affected. Timely evacuation measures helped them seek shelter in assigned

buildings and thus reduced the number of casualties. But staying in the shelters increased susceptibility towards the COVID-19 infection. Torn between the choice of either staying in or moving out after the storm to their homes, most of them chose the latter. Many returned to find their houses and livestock swept away and their belongings scattered amongst the ruins of where their houses once stood. Land and water were merely distinguishable from each other. Bridges and embankments were destroyed, leading to extensive flooding. Supplies were disrupted and drinking water contaminated. Swathes of agricultural land were lost to the inundating saline water, which rendered the soil unfertile, setting back the agricultural activity of the entire region by 2-3 years. Trees were lying on the ground, entangled with the electric lines. The Sundarbans plunged in darkness were thus incommunicado from the

mainland for days. The region is a hotbed of rich biological diversity, with animals like Bengal tigers, saltwater crocodiles, and many species of birds and insects calling it their home. But the fate of these wild animals in the aftermath of the cyclone remains uncertain, with many species feared to be severely affected. Though rescue and rehabilitation efforts have been hampered due to the ongoing pandemic, there is still some hope. The people are slowly reclaiming their space. Houses are being rebuilt and embankments are being repaired. The uprooted trees are being removed and the electric poles are being fixed. A lot still needs to be done, but by demonstrating an optimistic and resilient approach, things are bound to get better.

 Arushi Narchal - Digital Media Manager, Communications

 Priyank Samuel - Communications Executive
Pankhuri - Associate, Communications



IMPACT

Locals that reside in the villages of Sundarbans have claimed that dozens of tube wells are lying defunct for a long time. While some have not been repaired since they were destroyed by cyclone Aila in May, 2019, many tube-wells have become useless when cyclone Bulbul hit in November, 2019. Many others became non-operational due to poor maintenance and sometimes no maintenance at all. Nearly 19 km of embankments have been breached and storm surges have destroyed the sluice gates. Saline water has gushed into the villages inundating the ponds and tube wells; destroying dozens of pipelines that used to supply drinking water to the islands surrounded by rivers fed with saline tidal water from the sea. Through breaches along the embankments, saline water has infiltrated the sweet water ponds and small water bodies are having seepage of brackish water and colours of the ponds are changing due to reeking of dead fish and filth.



THE PERPETUAL CYCLONES IN THE BAY OF BENGAL



By Houtheim - Intern - Communications

In the tragic year of 2020, the dangerous cyclones of Amphan and Nivar caused massive damage to human and natural assets in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, respectively, leading to loss of lives as well as that of flora and fauna. This was not the first time such super cyclones have affected the region around the Bay of Bengal, consisting of the coastlines of India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka.

Several factors, including the oceanic water temperature, the formation of Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone during monsoons' withdrawal, links to Pacific ocean and underground volcanic activities, render the Bay of Bengal suitable to initiate cyclonic actions.

In India, the eastern coast lined by West Bengal, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana, have always been at a more significant threat. These regions are vulnerable to the cyclones' perpetual nature and tend to face them quite often with short intervals for recovering.

MAJOR CYCLONES: A BRIEF TIMELINE



Due to the reasons mentioned above, cyclones have emerged in the Bay of Bengal since time immemorial. However, we would only focus on the major ones here. They are as follows:

NOVEMBER 1970

Cyclone Bhola hits Bangladesh (then East Pakistan). More than 300,000 people died in the storm.

NOVEMBER 1977

A devastating cyclone, designated as Cyclone Six (06B) strikes Andhra Pradesh. A total of 14,204 people were killed. However, some estimates place the loss of life at 50,000.

APRIL 1991

A cyclone from Bangladesh designated as BOB 01/02B killed nearly 139,000 people and hit in with a mighty speed of 225 km/h winds and a storm surge between 6 meters and 7.6 metres.

OCTOBER 1999

A super-cyclone BOB 06 sweeps through Odisha, killing at least 10,000 people and leaving an estimated 1.5 million homeless. Strongest cyclone recorded in the Northern Indian Ocean.

MAY 2008

Cyclone Nargis, an extremely severe cyclone hit Myanmar with a storm surge that washed up densely populated areas around the Irrawaddy River delta. Around 138,000 people were died.

OCTOBER 2013

Extremely Severe Cyclonic Storm Phailin intensified rapidly and became a very severe cyclonic storm. It became equivalent to a category 5 hurricane before it started to weaken as it approached Odisha.

OCTOBER 2014

Cyclone Hudhud entered the country's eastern coast, causing extensive damage and prompted the evacuation of some 350,000 people. More than 100 people were killed in Andhra Pradesh & Odisha and 21 lakh families were affected.

DECEMBER 2016

Cyclone Vardah heavily affected Tamil Nadu. More than 12,26,000 people were evacuated from low-lying areas. Damages caused were estimated to about ₹ 22,573 crores.

MAY 2020

Although Severe Cyclonic Storm Nisarga originated from the Arabian Sea rather than the Bay of Bengal, it did create a significant impact in Maharashtra. Over 12,440 acres of land were damaged.

NOVEMBER 2020

Very Severe Cyclonic Nivar arrived inside Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. More than 100,000 people were evacuated and were sheltered in 1000 relief centres in T.N. Based on a preliminary evaluation, 112000 people in A.P. were affected by the storm.

Why is the bay of Bengal prone to cyclones?

Tropical cyclones are rotating storms formed by strong winds with a low-pressure centre and clouds spiralling to the eyewall surrounding the "eye". The weather in the eye is calm and subsequently free of clouds. The diameter of a tropical cyclone ranges from 200 to 500 km but can reach 1000 km. Other severe impacts associated with tropical cyclones stem from violent winds, torrential rain, destructive wave surges, and coastal flooding. The cyclone's form and intensity are influenced by high sea surface temperature, upward changes in wind speed inside the spiral, and high relative humidity. The winds of the cyclonic storm blow anticlockwise in the Northern Hemisphere and clockwise in the Southern Hemisphere.

Since the combined effects of surface temperatures and humidity regulate cyclone formation, the Bay of Bengal is more likely to initiate cyclonic storms. It receives substantial rainfall whereas the sluggish winds keep temperatures constant and high around the year. Furthermore, the warm air currents magnify surface temperature and

aid the formation of cyclones. In addition to the higher rainfall, a consistent inflow of freshwater from the Ganga and Brahmaputra rivers, constantly replenish the water in the Bay of Bengal. The difference in temperature between the water in the Bay of Bengal and the fresh inflow generates an ideal place for a depression underneath the surface. In contrast, the Arabian Sea experiences stronger winds that dissipate the heat. Furthermore, the lack of constant freshwater supply helps the warm water mix with the cool water, reducing the temperature imbalance—no wonder why the Bay of Bengal initiates more cyclones than the Arabian Sea.

But not all cyclones are formed in the Bay of Bengal. This also serves as a host to the hurricanes formed elsewhere, especially those from the Pacific Ocean. The cyclones, developing elsewhere, usually weaken if they encounter a larger landmass before transferring the storm to another waterbody. However, due to the lack of any such geographical features between the Pacific and the Bay

of Bengal, cyclonic winds quickly move to the Bay of Bengal with all its magnanimity and insubstantial loss of intensity. The strength of these winds is blocked by the Western Ghats and Himalayas, preventing the transfer to the Arabian Sea or Northwards.

Higher temperatures of water and air are essential to the formation and intensifying of cyclones. Hence, the summer season could appear to be the most probable time to expect tropical cyclones. However, in a rule of exception, the Bay of Bengal witnesses cyclones in pre-monsoon and post-monsoon times.

The post-monsoon period has a comparatively higher number of cyclones than the pre-monsoon period. The pre-monsoon impedes the development of cyclone friendly conditions with a movement of dry and hot air from north-western India towards the Bay, blocking the vertical rise of wind from the water body, and the subsequent formation of clouds. The absence of this air movement in the post-monsoon phase increases the chances of cyclones.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING: A scourge to humanity



“ I fell unconscious within a few minutes and I woke up in an unknown vehicle with a few strangers around me as well as my aunt, who was trying to put me back to sleep, for me to remain oblivious to where I was being taken said Sagarika. ”

Almost after six years of repressing her emotional pain, Sagarika shared her story of sufferance as a human trafficking survivor. Currently working as a volunteer under CASA's IREACH Humanitarian Response project in Sundarbans, her journey of terror, trauma and abuse to an independent woman comes off as an exemplar in the present times. It was just a matter of chance that Sagarika narrowly escaped from the trap of trafficking and resumed her life with dignity after wading through dark waters.

Sagarika was 12 years old when she had travelled along with her family, to attend her 'Choto mami's (aunt) wedding in a nearby village named Pakuria, in Hingalganj block, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal. On the eve of the wedding, her newlywed aunt took Sagarika to her abode, where she fell unconscious. She later discovered that the toothpaste

offered by her aunt had been intoxicated with a certain drug.

Sagarika reached a small locality of Bhajanpura in Delhi where she was taken to a downtown area. "They took me to a flat, where I was kept alone in a room and I could hear screams of other girls from the next room".

Sagarika could sense the intensity of the strange situation she had crossed paths with. She was sold to a pimp named 'Raju', by her aunt. They escorted her to Coochbehar in North Bengal in order to escape the raids that were regularly conducted by Delhi Police in brothels and hotels.

"I was sold to the head of the red-light area in Coochbehar, to a woman named Arati Das, who was running the entire racket in the area. There, I was given a capsule that

had to be taken every day". Every time Sagarika swallowed the pill, she felt jittery, with her heart thumping rapidly against her chest, she would suddenly fall asleep. "I later found out from other girls in the brothel that because I was so young, I was given hormone growth pills in order to look older than my actual age so that I can satisfy the customer".

As she was the youngest among all, she was kept in a separate room until she developed into a fully grown woman, to entertain the customer. "A girl tried to help me from my situation but failed, as we were thoroughly beaten for building a friendship and tortured for getting close".

Sagarika was subjected to mental, emotional and physical torture every day. Her worst fears came to life when she overheard a dealer

discussing selling her in another part of India. "One night, I overheard that I was going to be sold in the northern part of the country, in the red-light area of Kashmir, and that the deal was in lakhs. The same night, a girl managed to run from the brothel and escaped".

Sagarika saw a ray of hope when her father came to rescue her and she was liberated from the chains of trafficking. She later found out that the girl, who had escaped, managed to contact her father who was a rickshaw-puller in the outskirts of Kolkata. On finding out the whereabouts of his daughter, he immediately reached the Coochbehar police station and the brothel where Sagarika was held captive, was raided with the help of a humanitarian organisation named 'Jabala' that works to eradicate trafficking in West Bengal. "A policeman shouted my name and I went running as I saw my father. We both shed tears of joy and relief. Many girls were rescued along with me and taken to a government run home at Sahebganj in Coochbehar".

After six months of trial, the traffickers were arrested and Sagarika's father was called for his ID verification to ensure that his daughter would never fall in the trap of the same racket again. "My father struggled to bring me back as he had to bribe the police and satisfy their demands, which led us to fall in debt. I came to Dakshineswar where my father pulls a rickshaw and my mother works as a house-help".

STOP HUMAN TRAFFICKING



After returning, Sagarika had the opportunity to complete her education and appeared for her board examinations. She married her childhood friend at the age of 15, whom she had known before falling in the trap of trafficking. "I now have an 18-month-old daughter. I live with my husband in a rented house as my in-laws didn't treat me well".

Sagarika is presently 18 and is working with CASA's IREACH Humanitarian Response project under Cyclone Amphan Recovery work as a volunteer for 'Public Health Promotion' in Sundarbans. "I came to know about CASA's work in my region as they were helping trafficked women under their project. I received financial support and later joined the organisation as a volunteer, in order to do my bit for humanity".

Human trafficking has been a major scourge to humanity, entrapping humans in the chains of forced sexual slavery. India was termed

as 'World's most dangerous for Women' in a survey conducted by Thomson Reuters Foundation in 2018. Despite the Indian Government's efforts to remove this evil society, the trafficking industry has tainted lives across all corners of the country.

According to the main international anti-trafficking law, known as the Palermo Protocol, human trafficking is defined as "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of

deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation."

CASA, since its inception in 1947, has worked to serve humanity, supporting victims of violence across all corners of India. We have always given provisions and support to many victims like Sagarika, who have been subjected to certain forms of violence. Our efforts remain persistent in our attempts to serve our purpose.

(The real name & identity of the persons in this story has been changed)

► Story by Anthony Das

 Pankhuri, Associate - Communications



AMPHAN- THE DESTRUCTION OF FAUNA, FLORA, LIVELIHOOD AND DREAMS IN SUNDARBANS

 Kajol Tanaya - Intern, Communications

Never had the human civilisation suffered a calamity more ruthless than the supercyclone Amphan, battering the eastern coast of India amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Several communities from the low lying areas and coastal regions suffered immensely. Amongst the ones gravely affected by the cyclone is Shyamali Munda, a 43-year-old woman from the

Kasiabad Mundapara village of South 24 Parganas, Sundarbans.

Shyamali's agony could be sensed to each nerve when she said, "May 20th, 2020 turned me into a destitute. All that I had was a small mud house, and God even snatched that from me". In the past 20 years, Shyamali's ancestral land has been engulfed by the widening

delta of Gobodia river. Several sections of the eastern Sundarbans were similarly grappling with the consequences of climate change when nature's fury, in the form of Amphan, finally wrecked them. Numerous trees and electric poles were uprooted by the gushing cyclonic wind. Repeated instances of landfall and electrocution led to large-scale devastation and

left behind a trail of agony. The overhead wires snapped across different areas in Kakdwip Island of South 24 Parganas cut it off from other parts of the state.

The means of communication and transportation networks were blocked, and many rural settlements were pitifully destroyed. Pointing to the waters, Shyamali said, "This River took most of the land we had. Now, the saltwater from the cyclone has just finished us. After Amphan, the Sundarbans have become unrecognisable."

Sundarbans serve as a defensive belt of mangrove forest to the floods and storms arising of the Bay of Bengal. But the enormity of cyclone Amphan almost perished the frontline belt to invade far into the state and incur massive damage.

Shyamali's family was dependent on fishing for livelihood. Unfortunately, the fishes were killed due to the infiltration of saline water into the sweet water pond.

Several acres of farmland turned infertile due to the far-reaching saltwater and the paddy fields resembled a painful lake of irrecoverable damage. Such sabotage would reduce the agricultural yields for the next few years significantly. These losses pertaining to livelihood have triggered the socio-economic insecurity of the vulnerable sections.

While Amphan was gathering magnitude to hit the eastern coast, the authorities sleeved up to mass evacuate the people from low lying areas to safer shelters and nearby buildings. Shyamali Munda, with the four of her family members, took shelter in Mundapara Primary school for more than 15 days. They were completely stuck for five days in waterlogged conditions along with three other families who had lost their residence too. These families had no choice but to stay there without maintaining physical distancing, COVID-19 precautions and personal hygiene. Shyamali conveyed our partner organisation, Sonartari Woman and Child Welfare Institution (SWCWI) that the first time they received a cooked meal since the calamity was six days after the cyclone hit, "We were getting dry food from the community kitchen."

When the calamity pacified a little, the family went back during the day to monitor the damage and repair needs of their house. Syamali's younger daughter, 17-year-old, had to stay back in the school. She was caught up in a situation where she can neither go back to their shattered home nor could she feel secure with strangers through the daytime. The young girl somehow managed to hang one long piece of cloth to maintain physical distancing from others during the COVID-19 emergency. The primary

school lacked necessary facilities like separate toilet and washroom, which is a risk for menstruating girls. Moreover, the place had no private spaces and the experience of staying there was not inferior to a nightmare.

Their shelter being a mark of sole possession is yet in ruins. Shyamali and her family have been unable to rebuild their home. CASA through SWCWI, supported them with immediate relief to minimise their miseries. The assistance included dry ration kits, hygiene kits, mosquito net and other non-food items including utensils to cook. The organisation also helped them fix a tarpaulin sheet on the roof and bridge sarees to guard the wall in creating a temporary makeshift.

From the gradual loss of land under climate change to the eventual lapse of livelihood and shelter in the perils of AMPHAN, the family is in a state of shock and distress. The tones of grief and desperate need of help mingle pitifully in the vice of Shyamali as she says, "We are so poor that it is impossible for us to build our house again. I am requesting the government and CASA to help us or else we all will die".

“ May 20th, 2020 turned me into a destitute. All that I had was a small mud house, and God even snatched that from me ”



CYCLONE AMPHAN: RECOUNTING TALES OF HORROR

“ The only property my family owned has been annihilated by the cyclonic storm ”

“Shob shesh hoye gyalo (Everything is over)”, was the answer that Dipankar Mridha received from his mother after cyclone Amphan ravaged the Sundarbans delta in West Bengal on 20th May, 2020. Dipankar Mridha is a 22-year-old migrant worker from Jogesganj, Madabkati village in Sundarbans delta, West Bengal. His family is struggling to recover from the destruction that followed after cyclone Amphan ravaged the coastal region.

Over 300 houses in Dipankar's village had been destroyed in the space of an hour. Dipankar had been working as a daily wage labourer in Port Blair in Andaman, 850 miles away from his home, where a total lockdown was imposed on 20th May, 2020, due to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. This meant he could not find a way to get back to his family who had lost

everything and needed him more than ever.

After nearly two months of waiting to reach back to his village, he eventually managed to get a flight home and reconnect with his family. He arrived at his village along with three other returnee migrants and was quarantined in an evacuation shelter. They had to undergo a medical test for seven days, leaving them feeling traumatised.

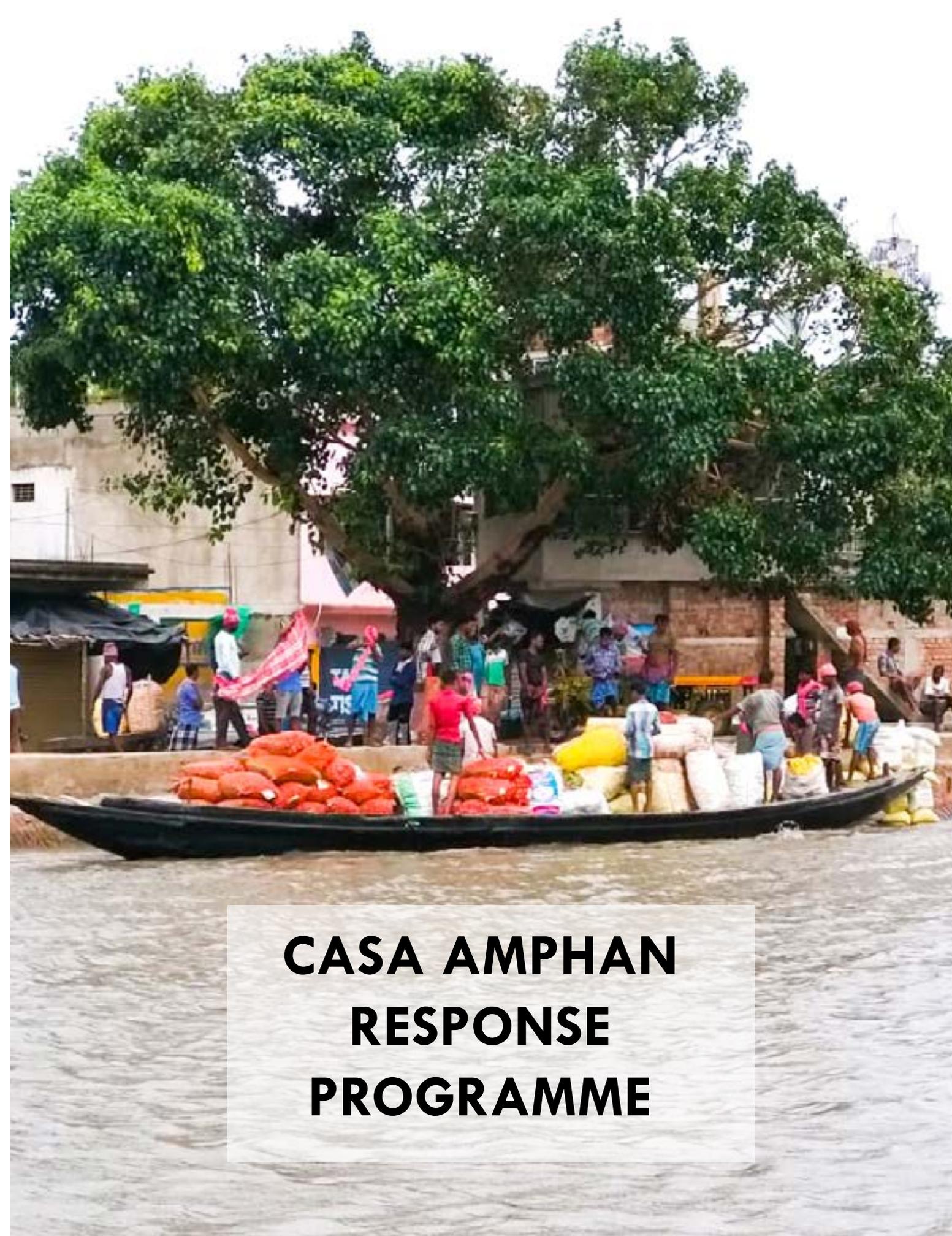
“When I returned to my native village, I became very depressed as I was treated like an outcast. The villagers were unwelcoming, avoiding me every instance”. There were no employment opportunities that Dipankar could avail in the area and fishing in the local river was never enough to generate an income for the struggling family.

CASA, along with partner organisation CAID, provided Dipankar's family with dry ration, non-food items and cooked meals for three days. They were also provided a remuneration amount of 10,000 rupees to rebuild their lives and start afresh.

“I spent the remuneration amount on my father's medicines, as well as on my mother, who is a heart patient and requires regular medicines. The support provided was a blessing in disguise for my family as I can also buy food and bamboo to repair my house that was damaged in the calamity”.

CASA's IREACH programme has reached out 24,295 individuals with cash support, repairment of shelters, awareness initiatives as well as water sanitation and hygiene (WASH) activities such as repairing, cleaning and disinfecting deep tube wells, water ponds and repair of toilets.

Cyclone Amphan had ravaged the Sundarbans delta in the midst of a pandemic, affecting the most vulnerable communities of the region. Our collective efforts have the power to bring a change and help the affected in this hour of need.



CASA AMPHAN RESPONSE PROGRAMME



DISASTER IS AN UNDERSTATEMENT - CYCLONE AMPHAN

Rising with an enormous magnitude from the Bay of Bengal, cyclone Amphan hit the Eastern coast of India on 20th May 2020. Forecasted to be one of the strongest cyclones to hit the country, akin to that of 1999, the disaster had a perilous impact on the states of Odisha and West Bengal, including the city of Kolkata.

With an eye, gyrating 30 kilometres in diameter, the deadly cyclonic storm advanced with roaring winds at 185 km/h. The fangs of the cyclone pierced through the coast by triggering the incidents of landfall. The Sea town of Digha, located on the coastal belt of West Bengal, was one of the regions to massively suffer the tragic consequences of landfall. There was a disruption of essential services and means of livelihood across the southern part of West Bengal.

Certain northern districts of the state were also crushed under the

claws of the cyclone since the commencement of the cyclonic storm, accompanied by heavy rain, unfortunately, coincided with the astronomical tide. It resulted in the surging of the storm with high waves rising to 15 feet. The magnanimity of the cyclone was monstrous enough to terrify the nation and threaten thousands of lives.

The coast was left behind with a trail of destruction. The scenic landscapes and habitable lands were now the grave-bed of 5 lakh uprooted trees and electric posts. The crescent-shaped beach of Bakkhali on the Sundarbans delta, which once prided itself for offering a rare view of both sunrise and sunset, was struck with winds at speeds of over 170 km/hr. The low-lying areas turned into pools of swamps, no longer habitable. Thousands of houses, despite an accountable distance from the immediate coastline, were wrecked off each piece of

brick. The buffer zone of mangrove forest, already menacing its shrinking covers, stood incapable of shielding the city of Kolkata. According to the state forest department, the cyclone has also ravaged about 1,600 square kilometres of the mangrove forest and killed over 21.22 lakhs animals.

The calamity was malignant enough for the people living in the Sundarbans region and having occupations interlinked to the fragile ecosystem. The people in the region primarily rely on farming, fishing, collecting honey and tourism. But the inundation of saline water led to a loss of about 17 lakh hectares of agriculture land crops (including paddy and vegetables and betel vine), reported from various districts offices, and killed the fishes in the ponds. The fishing community were also looted of their fishing boats and nets by the force of the storm. Resources of water, sanitation and hygiene conditions in the affected regions, were at their worst, imposing a higher risk on human life. The Existing deep tube wells of 800 to 1,200 feet were also contaminated and became unhealthy for consumption.

Yet to limit the perils of the disaster without mentioning the extraordinary time in which the cyclone arrived, would understate the distress. The plight of 28.56 lakh individuals, who lost their dwelling houses to the cyclone, turned precarious with the COVID-19 pandemic raging across the country. Cyclone Amphan was a devastating disaster circumscribed within another extraordinary disaster which only forced more lives into vulnerability. Besides livelihood, there has been severe damage to education-related infrastructure. Approximately 12,678 Integrated Child Development Centres (ICDS) were damaged, hampering the education of children.

CYCLONE AMPHAN RESPONSE PROGRAMME



Out of 102 islands in the Indian Sundarbans, 48 are present within the premises of the forests and the rest 54 are habitable areas in Sundarbans. Due to various limitations on transport and movement, stemming of COVID-19 added to the cyclone's perils, the island-based communities were incapable of accessing the relief aid either by the government or any non-governmental agencies.

Under our Disaster Risk Reduction strategies, our volunteers alerted the residents of Sundarbans way before cyclone Amphan made its landfall, by using loudspeakers and helped them in the evacuation process to safer regions. Post the landfall, within 48 hours, our teams had reached the region to provide relief aid to the residents, such as food and non-food items. The relief aid was provided through our local partners under the Humanitarian Aid Fund, supported by DKH. Alongside the response getting kick-started, CASA

also conducted a rapid assessment to formulate an in-depth understanding of the impact of the cyclone. The rapid assessment was done individually on CASA's front and also in collaboration with the Inter-Agency Group (IAG). The collaboration was a part of the Coordination Mechanism in West Bengal, where CASA is also the Convening Agency of the IAG. The assessment was crucial as this cyclone led to another severe impact amidst COVID-19, with the guest workers yet returning to their native villages. Such circumstances increased the vulnerabilities in many aspects.

Intending to immediately aid the affected communities, CASA provided the food and non-food items to 800 cyclone-affected families in 10 villages of Mathurapur-II block of South 24 Parganas district and five villages of Hasnabad Block of the North 24 Parganas district in West Bengal. The following food and non-food items were distributed through the DKH-HAF mechanism.





DKH HAF SUPPORTED PROGRAMME



WEST BENGAL

2 Districts

South 24 Parganas
North 24 Parganas

2 Areas

Mathurapur-II
Hasnabad



800
Dry Ration Kit



800
Hygiene Kit



24
PPE Kit for volunteers



WEST BENGAL

2 Districts

South 24 Parganas
North 24 Parganas

2 Areas

Kakdwip
Nazat



1000
Dry Ration Kit



1000
Hygiene Kit



12
PPE Kit for volunteers

UMCOR SOLIDARITY GRANT AND FLC SUPPORTED PROGRAMME

Under the devastating situation, individuals residing in the districts of South and North 24 Parganas became homeless with enormous damage incurred to their land and livelihood. The minimum belongings they could secure have been completely divested. There was a need for food items, non-food items and hygiene kits. With the help of **UMCOR solidarity grant, ERD and FLC**, CASA has provided food and non-food items to 1000 most vulnerable families in the North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal. Following is the account to it:

IREACH - INCLUSIVE RAPID EMERGENCY HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO COMMUNITIES IN WEST BENGAL AFFECTED BY CYCLONE AMPHAN SUPPORTED BY CAID/ECHO

CASA responded in the North 24 Parganas district with the help of ECHO through Christian Aid in 15 villages of the 3 Gram Panchayats. The project is expected to reach about 51,680 people. The Rapid Assessment conducted post-cyclone, identified the following priority humanitarian needs within the following sectors :



FOOD SECURITY; WATER, SANITATION & HYGIENE, SHELTER AND NFI



IREACH project aims to reach out to the most vulnerable and marginalised communities in North 24 Parganas district, with due priority given to the members of the Schedule Caste, Schedule Tribe, women-led households (including widows and female victims of trafficking returning to their villages), internally displaced people and daily wage workers.

The IREACH action is supporting the heavily impacted communities with Unconditional cash transfers to contribute to food and livelihood security. Necessary action plans are implemented to secure the disaster's victims with access to safe drinking water at home and the community/evacuation shelters. Attention is also given towards improving sanitation facilities and increasing awareness on healthy practices by confirming the availability of hygiene items at the household level.

Besides contributing towards the physical and social safety of the affected groups, CASA also keeps tab of the specific needs of the ones at greater grief of losing shelter. Conditional cash transfer, in combination with NFI, is provided to individuals and families for shelter repair. The programme delivery is adapted in line with COVID-19 protocols and best safety practices.



IREACH - Inclusive Rapid Emergency Humanitarian Assistance to Communities in West Bengal affected by Cyclone Amphan



Immediate Relief Support to Cyclone AMPHAN Affected Families in Hingalganj Block of North 24 Parganas District in West Bengal, India (IRS-CAAF, West Bengal) supported by UMCOR

Purpose:

To provide immediate relief to 1485 vulnerable families of Hingalganj with focus on WASH aspects to protect the community from COVID-19 through people's participation within 3 months.



CHALIYE KUCH KARKE DIKHAYE



'Chaliye Kuch Karke Dikhao' is an initiative by NGOs (Inter Agency Group) in the district of South 24 Parganas in Sundarbans, West Bengal with facilitation from CASA supported by UNICEF. This initiative has been taken for inclusive participation of children from rural areas under the pandemic situation. The creative involvement of children is the prime objective of this initiative.

Due to the distressful conditions caused by COVID-19 and Cyclone Amphan, the 'new normal' trend has set trauma in children's minds regarding their education. Since the pandemic, the schools have been shut, creating an impact in the minds of the children who live in remote villages and have no access to smartphones, to begin with the online classes.

'Chaliye Kuch Karke Dikhao' is initiated with the motive to encourage and provide education to children in order to reduce stress by fulfilling their basic needs. Since children are mentally distressed due to the pandemic situation, their positive involvement is the need of the hour. Children are motivated to explore their creative mind with different forms of curricular activities like singing, recitation, drawing, crafts making from throw away items and storytelling. A token of appreciation is also made to be shared to the performers for their future educational support.



KOBO TOOLBOX

CASA has provided training to several volunteers in Sundarbans on the West Bengal Digital data Collection through Kobo Toolbox, an open source digital data collection and analysis tool, used for Rapid Need Assessment and Detail Need Assessment of any disaster. This has been initiated with support from UNICEF and FADV to create surveys and get accurate and detailed information from the field that will help to uplift the circumstances of the communities and develop the proposal for immediate and long-term intervention.



Aloke Kumar Ghosh
Additional Emergency
Officer, Headquarters

Super Cyclone Amphan arrived with a deadly force when the COVID-19 pandemic was raging quite wildly across the country. It hampered the sustenance of several individuals from varying occupations and crashed hundreds of families into a paucity of resources.

Aloke Kumar Ghosh, Additional Emergency Officer at the Headquarters of CASA, observed the spine-chilling sociological repercussions of the cyclonic calamity in the Sundarbans region. "There are 102 islands in the Indian Sundarbans, 48 in Forest, and 54 in the locality in the Sundarbans. Due to the landslides and electrocution, transportation was impeded, whereby the island communities could not immediately access the relief either by the government or the relief agencies".

Under the pandemic and extended lockdown, the issue of reverse migration surged inevitably. Mr. Ghosh highlights, "The returnee labourers had no time to recover from the shock of the shutdown of industries when subsequently the cyclone destroyed their hopes. Individuals and authorities continued to face back to back challenges. Quarantine centres were converted into cyclone shelters since the count of the cyclone-affected families surpassed the capacity of the MPCs. Further, in the shelters, the lack of social distancing exposed the tenants to COVID-19 contamination."

A critical concern on livelihood & food security was looming larger under the shadow of the cyclone and pandemic. Besides the loss of agricultural land and crops, agri-allied activities like animal husbandry & pisciculture were also devastated. "During the field observation, CASA noted that the affected families compromised their nutritional needs due to the unavailability of food & fund crisis. Small money lenders, in the field area, began lending money at a very high rate of interest. The economic predicament of the marginalised families became pitiable". The impact was also perceptible in the misery that women and children suffered. "The assessment team identified that most children and women were exposed to deficiencies and diseases. Reports also indicated that domestic violence was on the rise. Moreover, the calamity increased the social frustrations which either the wife or the children in the households had to bear".

Aloke Kr. Ghosh, after having shared his critical and sociological assessment of the devastation brought into light CASA's effort in uplifting the predicament of the marginalised. Providing the survivors with economic aid and educating them on the precautionary measures against the pandemic has been the core of CASA's response action.

Elaborating on CASA's approach and assessment in the aftermath of the dual disaster, he shares, "CASA was aware of the geographical and ethnographic concerns of the local residents, through a number of functional programmes in the past and in the present. We had organised the Disaster Risk Reduction programme in the Sundarbans region that provided us with an outline to implement the rescue, relief and recovery approaches. Further, the Collective Forms of Cooperation project also aligned us with the local organisations through which we could initially build a familiarity with the community members and local governance. The knowledge of the locality, in addition to the perspective of the collective, could benefit the successful designing of a realistic need assessment and mitigation programme".

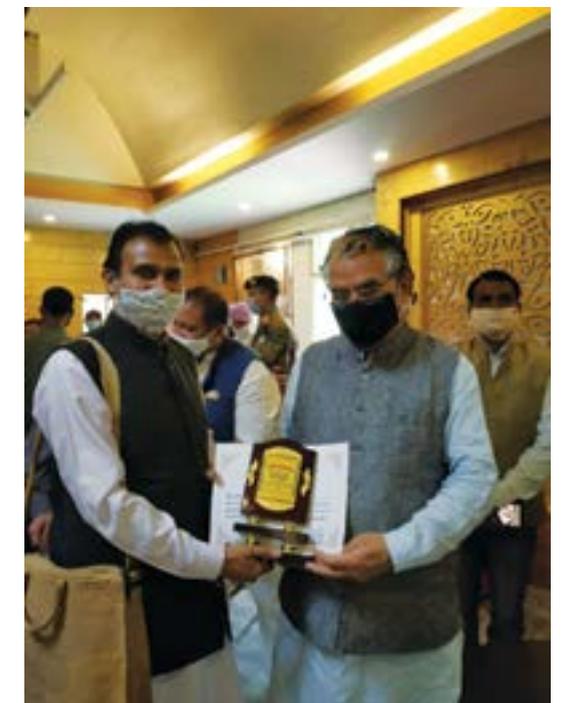
Engaged over a period of four months, CASA actively attempted to link the affected individuals to the available livelihood opportunities, Government-schemes, agricultural aid and cash transfers. With the community's collaboration, CASA was also capable of channelising attention towards eliminating social evils, especially those risking the welfare of women.

A GLANCE THROUGH OUR JOURNEY- ACHIEVEMENTS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Over a year ago, no one could have imagined the humongous scale on which a microscopic virus can challenge the governance and healthcare system around the world. Yet COVID-19, an unanticipated medical emergency, has upturned our perception, revealing how defenseless we are against Nature's curse. For any disaster that the world encounters, the impact is never uniformly received. Socio-economically disadvantaged sections suffer more gravely than the privileged do in the vicinity of their safe homes and the switch to virtual work.

CASA has been endeavouring to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the vulnerable groups, through an active COVID-19 Response Programme. Besides relief distribution, awareness campaigns, government scheme-based linkages, cooked food provisions, and CASH support, the core of our effort also encompassed escorting the local leaders, women-groups, and local partners in reaching out and excavating the unheard voices of the subjugated. We came across terrifying stories of migration, domestic violence, starvation, and even deaths which fueled our mission to keep expanding more and helping as many lives as possible alongside empowering the communities to sustain themselves and recover financially.

As a matter of honour, CASA's effort in responding to the pandemic has been recognised and applauded by various state governments including those of Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Chhattisgarh. Added to the smiles we were able to blossom across the states and the stomachs we could feed against hunger, it is a moment of glory for which we thank our volunteers and stakeholders.



▶ LEFT (TOP): OUR DIRECTOR DR. SUSHANT AGRAWAL WAS FACILITATED AS CORONA WARRIOR BY MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT AND B.O.C. WORKER FEDERATION OF INDIA FOR OUR COVID RESPONSE WORK.
▶ RIGHT: CASA BEING HONOURED AS CORONA WARRIOR BY SHRI SURESH BHARDWAJ, MINISTER - HIMACHAL PRADESH EDUCATION AND LAW.





**RESTORING THE DIGNITY
OF THE UNDERPRIVILEGED**