



SAMPARK PLAYS A CRITICAL ROLE IN THE COVID-19 CRISIS

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The impact of nonprofits in the Covid-19 crisis is unparalleled. Sampark is one such organization with 28 years' experience of successful developmental initiatives across India. Sampark's area of work includes, but is not limited to, Building Women-Owned Institutions, Empowering Migrant Construction Workers, and Early Childhood Care. During the period of March-July 2020, the efforts from Sampark reached out to more than 25,000 people, majorly including

migrant workers, daily wage earners, rural women, and children. Sampark's active involvement in combating various socio-economic issues during the pandemic 'deserves all appreciation'.

Support to Migrant Workers and Rural Communities - In the context of novel coronavirus, the migrant workers and rural communities faced several new challenges. At this time, Sampark decided to step in and support all its beneficiaries in 40 labour sites in Bangalore as well as rural communities in 13 villages in Varanasi district.

Sampark adapted its existing interventions to respond to the needs of the community during the lockdown, and its work covered beneficiaries in urban and rural areas who were highly vulnerable due to loss of jobs and incomes, followed by uncertainty of the situation.

Some of these interventions are outlined as follows,

Grocery distribution The Sampark team, since April, has delivered 8,811 ration kits and reached out to more than 32,000 vulnerable people across Bangalore and Varanasi. It also partnered with other NGOs and reached out to daily wage workers and the physically challenged in Kolar and Malur.

Ensuring Child Nutrition Before the onset of the pandemic, Sampark operated 17 creches for children of migrant workers, of which 16 were on sites of builders and 1 on a non-builder site.

During the pandemic, not only did the creches stop functioning, but the parents' ability to provide nutritious food to their children also diminished. So, Sampark started by providing nutrition kits for children on 26 building sites, with support from other NGOs and individual donors. Sampark also partnered with UNICEF to distribute 1,450 nutrition kits for lactating mothers and young children.



Hygiene kits Distribution Once the lockdown was lifted for construction work, only 30% of the workers could be on-site at a time. They were called for work 3-4 days a week based on the availability of construction material at the site. To ensure workers were able to follow safety protocol at the sites, Sampark distributed 1,900 hygiene kits. Further, recognizing the sanitation needs of women, the distribution also included 2,750 sanitary napkins contributed by partner NGOs.

A Helpline and Community Leadership The helpline operated by Sampark ensured regular contact with the community, especially in providing awareness and guiding the workers with correct information.

The leaders and members of the Karnataka Construction Workers Union helped Sampark to identify the most vulnerable workers, and to distribute food, nutrition, and hygiene kits in labour settlements.

The Sampark team in Varanasi worked closely with the village leaders, to analyze the specific needs, prepare the quarantine centers, and welcome the returning migrant workers. Simultaneously, the field team passed on relevant training and information to the village leaders. The team also trained women from self-help groups, enabling the setting up of community health monitoring systems and surveillance.

Bridging the Digital Divide for Early Childhood Development Sampark had realized the need to bridge the digital divide, especially for the underprivileged families. Considering the same, Sampark focussed on increasing the tech capabilities of 33 teachers by providing interest-free loans for smartphones. During the lockdown, the teachers have developed over 100 videos of learning material. A pilot training programme has also been launched (supported by a philanthropist) with 2 creches to support distance education for children in labour settlements, with a focus on simple learning activities such as rhymes, songs, stories, dances, etc. Sampark has also launched a drive for the collection of desktops and smartphones for increasing the tech capabilities of the organization, with 4 desktops and 4 phones already received through individual donations.

Access to Social Protection An important area of Sampark's work has been to admit workers to the Karnataka Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board, which then entitles them to social protection schemes, ranging from accident insurance to educational scholarships, grants for marriage, and house construction. During the pandemic period, nearly 800 new workers were admitted into the Board.

In Varanasi, Sampark kept track of the government entitlements of food relief and PMJDY transfers applicable to the 900 women and their families; and ensured that they accessed them.

Collaborations and Contributions Several IIMA alumni and their families supported Sampark for its COVID19 relief work, along with many foundations, partners and non-profits. Sampark is in regular touch with the Karnataka Fights Corona group, a task force of the state government, which liaises with leading NGOs for COVID-19 relief and livelihoods support.

Research for Planning Support From the period of the lockdown, the ground realities have been changing, requiring an adjustment to the support provided by Sampark. In order to ensure that its relief programme meets the needs of the workers, Sampark team has conducted fortnightly surveys on all the 40 sites where it works. A survey was also conducted with the parents of the children on 17 sites. This not only shows how many families have returned to their homes and worksites, but also highlights the need for awareness, change in behaviour for better preventive practices, and the need for food, nutrition and educational support to the children and the mothers.

With the new normal in place, Sampark plans to reach out to more migrant workers and their children in urban areas, also build the capacities of rural women to improve their incomes during this epidemic.