

Sustaining Hope

The fight is on...

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ADRA India's Quarterly Newsletter July-September 2021



ADRA

COVER STORY

Message from the Editor

Dear Reader,

This quarter felt like the calm after the storm. As the second wave of COVID-19 receded, it left the country with pieces to pick up and put back together. We as an organization too navigated the situation the best we could. We reshifted our focus from hospitals and went back to the communities. We tried to identify the problems that this novel situation had brought about and brainstormed on ways to overcome them. As diverse as India is, different regions needed distinct solutions. But one thing was consistent in all the communities - mental burden of the disease. So, at ADRA India, we tried to address this problem within all communities irrespective of the type of intervention we were working on. Be it our Behaviour Change Communication Programmes in Assam and Uttar Pradesh or our cash assistance project in Tamil Nadu - we acknowledged the psychosocial impact of the pandemic and the lockdown and offered counselling to the vulnerable and marginalized people, who otherwise cannot afford the "luxury" of psychological assistance in the times of crises. We aim to scale up our mental health interventions in the coming months and strengthen our response in this field.

New Initiative to Provide Financial Support to Communities Impacted by COVID-19



- > HAVAH Project provides immediate relief through Unconditional Cash Transfer to at-risk people
- > 1557 families are being supported 23 villages in Chennai, Tiruvallur, Trichy districts of Tamil Nadu
- > Transfers will be made in three instalments through September, October and November
- > The project also addresses gender inequality in communities by sensitization and awareness sessions
- > 23 Advisory committees have been formed to ensure sustainability of the project

When the second wave of COVID-19 hit India in April 2021, it left an already battered and bruised workforce even more wrecked. The effects of the restrictions on the economic activity and the lack of any social security safeguards hit the informal sector workers the hardest. Realising the need to respond, the HAVAH project was brought to life. ADRA India identified 23 villages from three districts in Tamil Nadu – Chennai, Tiruvallur and Trichy, where majority of the people are either from backward communities or are migrants who do not receive any support. Under the project, 1557 families are being supported with Unconditional Cash Transfers (UCT) for 3 months. The aim of the initiative is to provide immediate relief to the poor and vulnerable people in coping with the loss of livelihood while they try to search for new opportunities. Through this project, the first installment to the beneficiary families has been made in the month of September.

The project also deals with the issue of gender disparity in the communities. Due to the prevailing social norms and gender dynamics, women do not have a say in the financial affairs of the family, ADRA India stepped in to ensure that the cash provided by ADRA is being utilized judiciously. ADRA India is undertaking efforts to sensitize men and women on gender equality by holding discussions and awareness meetings. ADRA India has also formed 23 Advisory Committees with members from the community to ensure sustainability and sustenance of the project. Capacity-building sessions are being undertaken around Cash Transfer and Gender mainstreaming with the committee members.

IMPACT STORY

HELPING THE COMMUNITY BACK ON ITS FEET POST PANDEMIC



ADRA India is helping put food on the table for Renuka and families like her facing loss of livelihood due to COVID-19 outbreak through its Unconditional Cash Transfer project in Tamil Nadu.

Renuka, a 40-year-old tribal widow from Tiruvallur District in Tamil Nadu, struggles to make ends meet for herself and her two young sons, Thangarasu 13 and Thirumala 7. Renuka is the sole breadwinner of the family, managing the finances and her children alone since her husband's death many years ago. Providing even three meals a day was a challenge for Renuka, who had been earning her living by doing menial jobs. Renuka's family had poor access to health care, lack of access to essential assistance like clean water, sanitation, and education. When the pandemic hit, work became scarce and her already meagre income shrunk even further. Her children were facing difficulty in continuing their education as the children couldn't afford school anymore. ADRA India became aware of Renuka's problem and others struggling like her and identified vulnerable communities in Tamil Nadu. ADRA came up with a plan to support marginalized families like Renuka's with emergency Unconditional Money Transfer (UCT) for three months. Renuka was relieved to receive her first monthly installment of UCT in September. Through this amount, Renuka concentrated on enhancing her family's food consumption and meeting their nutritional needs. She then directed some amount towards her family's healthcare. She also bought necessary stationery like notebooks, pens, and pencil for her children's school. She bought a cycle for her child so he could travel to school without any barriers. Renuka is now more optimistic about dealing with the hardships as she has additional three months to look for work as the economy gradually goes back to normal.

Staff Feature

Suganthi Merwin joined ADRA India as Monitoring & Evaluation Coordinator, Chennai in 2015. Over the years, Suganthi has been working on various projects, mostly with refugees, women and children. She has been involved in cyclone response, flood reliefs, and in COVID – 19 responses. During the first wave, when the entire nation was under lockdown, Suganthi and her team braved the challenges to reach out to people to understand their sufferings and support migrant labourers with dry rations and food packages. At present, Suganthi is involved in cash distribution to the most vulnerable communities in Tamil Nadu impacted by COVID-19 through the HAVAH Project. Suganthi and her team are also dedicated to providing community protection assistance to Sri Lankan refugees to live a dignified life. "At the end of the day, getting to know the stories of the people and the impact of our work gives a satisfaction of changing someone's life and a new spirit to serve more," says Suganthi.

FEATURE STORY

ADRA India Flags-off E-Rickshaws to Spread Awareness on COVID-19

- > Infotainment Rickshaws to spread awareness on COVID-19 and COVID-19 Appropriate Behaviour launched in Assam and Uttar Pradesh
- > The battery-operated rickshaws are part of ADRA's Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) programme
- > ADRA India is involving community influencers to create behaviour change on COVID-19 in the tea garden and minority communities
- > ADRA is helping bust the myths around the COVID-19 Vaccination and providing vaccination support to the government

E-Rickshaws displaying messages on COVID-19 were flagged-off in several districts of Assam and Uttar Pradesh through the quarter. These Battery-operated Rickshaws are a part of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) India's campaign on Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) for COVID-19. Between July and September, several districts saw the launch of the rickshaws by government officials.

The infotainment rickshaws go around the villages, carrying messages on symptoms of COVID-19, ways to prevent infection, messages on social distancing, handwashing, and the importance of getting vaccinated. In Charaideo District of Assam, a big launch event was organized on August 15 to start operation of the Rickshaws, followed by awareness rallies in two tea estates. "We at ADRA India believe that an important way to end the pandemic is through clear education and promoting vaccinations for everyone. We feel it is especially important to sensitize the rural and marginalized communities because they have very limited access to resources or proper information. We are honoured to be able to reach out to the tea garden communities in Assam through innovative ways. We hope that our contribution will help stop the spread of COVID-19," said Weston Davis, Country Director, ADRA India.

Under ADRA India's Risk Communication Programme, community mobilizers and influencers such as Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) and Self-help Groups (SHG) members, village functionaries are being sensitized and further involved to create awareness about COVID-19. The community mobilizers, along with the ADRA team, are working in the field to teach people about the virus and help address the stigma around the vaccination.



E-Rickshaw Flag-off in Tinsukia, Assam



E-Rickshaw flag-off in Uttar Pradesh



A COVID-19 Awareness rally in Charaideo, Assam

REFLECTIONS

HOPE ON WHEELS



By Himangshu Bailung,
Project Coordinator, Assam Region, ADRA India

What have I done in the last 3 years? What has my team done in the last 3 years? It's a question that I ask myself every day and this draws me back to that moment when I started working with ADRA India in November 2018 here in Assam, the tea state of India. The district of Dibrugarh is the heart of the tea estates of Assam and the community that lives and works in and around the tea gardens is called the tea tribe community. Due to the scale and diversity of the operation of the tea gardens, the tea tribe community is one of the most vulnerable communities in the region in terms of exploitation, education, health and hygiene.

ADRA India identified the problem and started a project with one of the most innovative ways to develop and bring behavioural change in the community. The projects have gone on to empower the community with good health and hygiene, livelihood opportunities, education, and most importantly, a HOPE for a better life and future through its awareness drives on wheels. Under the "Assam Childhood Immunization and WASH Project (also known as Jump Start Project)" in 60 tea (now 120) gardens of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia district of Assam, ADRA India has deployed infotainment vans to sensitize the communities.

As the wheel moved, the motto of the whole team was to reach the maximum people who are vulnerable and are in need, through most innovative and sustainable ways. In this tenure, programmes like ACCHE School (Adolescents Clubs for Communication on Health/Hygiene Education), HEROS (Handwashing Education for Restoration of Overall Sanitation) were started and are operating to present day.

The establishment of the sanitary pad making unit to provide employment and good health to women, the awareness drives and actions on COVID-19 since the pandemic started, magic shows, games, rallies and street plays to spread awareness on several issues, hand written magazines by the community, formation of committees, mental health screening and treatment for the needy are some of the activities that have reached people in good numbers, who have seen an improved quality of life along with hope for their future generations.

That's the answer to the question that I ask myself and this acts as my catalyst and motivator to help me work towards a happier and healthier community. I believe that to bring change it always starts with "me", then "we" and then "us".



A mobile classroom session in progress under the RISE Project



ADRA team distributing pamphlets on COVID-19 Awareness in a tea garden in Assam



Community women being sensitized on COVID-19 Appropriate Behaviour in Uttar Pradesh

OPINION

COVID-19 and the Indian Social Sector: An overview

By Weston Davis, Country Director, ADRA India

“Civil society and non-governmental organizations in India were one of the first responders to help lessen the impact of this novel disease. Despite the uncertainty caused by the pandemic and lockdown, the social sector stepped up to identify the problems and support the needy. The social sector reached out in a number of ways: helping people directly in the hospitals, providing food and essentials to those who had lost their livelihoods and ensuring that children did not lose out on their education,” writes Weston

I am a fairly avid reader of current world affairs and most anything news worthy. It was sometime in January of 2020 that my wife and I had friends from the USA visiting us in New Delhi. I casually asked our group of friends if they had heard about this “Corona” thing that was impacting China? Everyone in the group kind of shrugged and said that they may have heard about it but did know too much. Who could have known a year and a half later the entire planet had been impacted by the pandemic of COVID-19 in ways not thought possible in our modern times? Many of us have experienced the virus on several levels. Some have been mildly infected and have moved on. Many have friends or family members that have paid the ultimate price. Some have lost their livelihoods and normal daily living and wonder if life will ever return to what it was. Regardless how this pandemic has impacted you, there are lessons that have been learned. Many people have responded and served well.

It is well known that during the first wave of COVID-19, India was remarkably spared the worst of the pain and impact. There was sickness and death in India but relative to the population and potential risks, India escaped much of what was impacting other developing and developed countries. However, there was another kind of challenge that was brought about the three-month-long lockdown imposed by the national government to help curb the spread of the virus. Loss of livelihood impacted millions, especially the daily wage laborers who were already living hand to mouth. Closure of schools was another major challenge. The results of these school closures are now presenting themselves in the reduced mental and emotional wellbeing of students across India.

It was at this time of crisis that world got to see the real impact on the social sector – a sector that has faced increasing scrutiny from the government and public alike for the misdeeds of some during recent years. New challenges that came with a first-of-its-kind lockdown were identified such as domestic violence and mental health issues. An important role that the civil society has been playing during the period of COVID-19 is to ensure that funds are spent in the most appropriate ways to ensure maximum coverage.

After the first wave subsided, life had returned to a fairly normal state and people had resumed their work, worship and play. Then came the Spring of 2021. The invader had arrived and soon waves of COVID-19 cases began to impact communities and the healthcare system. Many of the early mild cases were treated aggressively with massive oxygen therapy and hospitalization. Sadly, this turned out to be a fatal mis-call for the health care sector. As wave after wave of more serious cases materialized, the hospitals found themselves in an oxygen shortage. Hospital beds also became increasingly scarce. Word got out that even if you made it to the hospital there was no guarantee of proper care due to the shortages of supplies and equipment. Sadly, this resulted in many fatalities that otherwise would have likely survived with proper medical care. Medical oxygen became the number one issue for predicting survivability of COVID-19. As people began to realize the importance of the oxygen issue some people began to hoard oxygen cannisters acquired on the black market. All in all, a secondary disaster formed and contributed massively to the primary disaster.

Many agencies both private, corporate and governmental began to respond however they could and to fill in the gaps of our healthcare system. NGOs like ADRA India evaluated the best ways and methods to respond as well. Resulting from consultation with the healthcare community, ADRA India decided to procure and install oxygen related supplies and equipment. They were able to quickly supply oxygen concentrators to a number of facilities and organizations. However, the larger goal was to procure and supply Oxygen Generation Plants (OGP) for hospitals. Donors from around the world stepped up and supported the cause and as of this writing, ADRA has procured a number of OGP for hospitals around India. This has given healthcare providers an added level of confidence in the event there are future surges of COVID-19 or other respiratory disease outbreaks.

We are all learning as we go to step up to unique challenges of this pandemic. One of the main lessons learned is to prepare for the future by learning from the past. The pivotal role of the social sector must also be acknowledged and strengthened. This is best done through more financial aid, enhanced relations between the government, the social sector, and institutions, and inclusion in the decision-making process. Looking ahead, a structured and organized collaborative model is needed to overcome the impact that has left the world grappling with socio-economic challenges. We at ADRA India hope that we are responding to these lessons in a small way and by adapting to the changing needs we are helping the country with gifts that keep on giving.

NEWS & UPDATES

World Breastfeeding Week



ADRA India celebrated World Breastfeeding Week from August 1-7. ADRA India, in collaboration with National Health Mission, Tinsukia organized a district level programme to create awareness on the importance of breastfeeding. The organization gifted nutritious food items to 10 lactating mothers and pregnant women. A street play was organized on the importance of breastfeeding for infants. 30 participants took part in the programme.

World Literacy Day



Under the Remedial and Inclusive School Education (RISE) Project, ADRA India celebrated World Literacy Day on September 10 with the children of Anna Nagar Community in Tamil Nadu. Drawing and speech competitions were organised for school children associated with the project, which provided an opportunity for the students to exhibit their talents. 35 students from two villages participated in the event.

Suicide Prevention Day



ADRA India celebrated World Suicide Prevention Day on September 10 in collaboration with District Mental Health Programme, Tinsukia civil hospital in Dighalturong Tea Estate. A total of 40 participants were present for the program. ADRA India screened community members for mental health fitness and organized health awareness camps and suicide prevention camps in different tea gardens of Tinsukia District.

National Nutrition Week



Various programmes were organized in ADRA India's intervention areas in Tinsukia, Assam to commemorate National Nutrition Week between September 1 and 7. An adolescent health awareness program was organized in Rajgorhali Tea Estate in collaboration NHM, Tinsukia. In this programme, ADRA India distributed sanitary napkins to adolescent girls. A nutrition specialist was invited to counsel the girls on the importance of nutritional diet. Another programme was held along with Block Primary Health Centre. Discussion on various topics of nutrition, food habits, sanitation and health were initiated along with several games and quiz competitions. In another event, ADRA India also gifted food items and sanitary napkins to women in Kayhung Tea Estate.

COVID-19 Update

Provisions to Hospitals | July - September 2021

| | | | | | |
|--|--------------------|----|--|----------------------|-----|
| | Infant Warmers | 3 | | ABG Machine | 1 |
| | Multipara Monitors | 8 | | Pulse Oximeter | 160 |
| | ICU Ventilator | 8 | | Oxygen Concentrators | 30 |
| | ICU Beds | 10 | | Oxygen Flow Meters | 200 |
| | BiPAP Machine | 3 | | | |



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