

Seva Mandir

Covid-19 Relief Efforts



Activities Report
April to June 2020



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Introduction

Covid-19 in southern Rajasthan

Covid-19 has brought unprecedented challenges to the entire world – challenges that are magnified for those living in poverty. In southern Rajasthan, the issues already affecting the rural and urban slum populations have been increased, catalysed by loss of income.

The loss of income and restriction on the movement of goods (especially at the start of the lockdown) meant that families struggled to access to vital supplies such as food and hygiene materials. Furthermore, the suddenness of the lockdown did not give families a chance to prepare for the crisis, leaving them vulnerable to its affects.

Many families in the region that Seva Mandir works in are supported by the income earnt from members who have migrated to towns and cities often hundreds of kilometres away. These migrants lost their jobs suddenly when the lockdown was announced, cutting off a key source of income for their family. The migrants themselves were faced with a dangerous journey to reach their homes and were at high-risk of contracting and carrying Covid-19.

Those migrants who returned were without a job, with no means of making an income and bringing an extra burden on their family's resources. Already meagre incomes have been stretched to feed and house migrant workers. This also has had a detrimental effect for women and children, increasing the workload of women in the home, especially with activities such as collecting water. Children, particularly the younger ones, have been deprived of care and nutrition.

Access to information related to the virus was particularly fragmented. Many people in rural communities do not have access to modern communication technology and thus cannot receive quick and immediate information. Most news is spread by word of mouth, such as through village meetings - but this is relatively slow.

Overview of Seva Mandir's response

Seva Mandir began immediate short-term relief for communities from the outset of the lockdown. Short-term relief identified those most in need and provided them with essential supplies, whilst the organisation also provided support to the government's efforts in delivering immediate aid across Udaipur and Rajsamand districts.

A comprehensive awareness campaign was also implemented, providing rural and remote communities with frequent and diverse information pertaining to Covid-19 and the lockdown.

Existing funders and donors were quick to give their support, ensuring that the organisation could deliver on the relief efforts. New funders partnered with Seva Mandir which was also bolstered by an increase in individual support through online and direct donations.

Overall, Seva Mandir provided more than 50,000 relief kits to families in rural and urban slum communities, along with supporting government efforts, and implementing a comprehensive awareness campaign focused on preventative measures against Covid-19. The Village Institutions that are created and facilitated by Seva Mandir were vital to the success of the relief efforts. They aided the organisation in connecting with the most vulnerable in their communities, helped organise and implement the distribution and awareness efforts and took charge of preventative measures.

Community Awareness

160,000

Number of people reached through community awareness

200,000

Number of awareness materials printed

Spreading awareness of the effects and preventative measures of Covid-19 and the official guidance surrounding the pandemic rapidly have been crucial to curtailing its spread. However, in the communities that Seva Mandir works with, circulation of news is typically slow and fragmented, further worsened by a lack of access to modern technology and infrastructure. Therefore, the first response was to make the information on the virus and the preventative measures reach the remote villages. A community awareness campaign was created to spread quality information and advice in an efficient, concise and understandable way. The campaign was supported by the Village Institutions who took extra efforts in ensuring that the awareness reached everyone in their communities.

New modes of communication technologies and committed volunteers in the communities were the key areas of focus.

Village Volunteers

Community workers reached out to their own contacts by telephone. Village Institution leaders, Shiksha Kendra teachers, Balsakhis and others connected and stayed in touch with women, parents and children respectively. They ensured that they had the most up-to-date information about the pandemic and were in good health.

Videos

To build a better understanding of Covid-19 preventative measures, Seva Mandir created a series of videos focusing on proper hand-washing, social distancing and how to wear masks. The videos were created by community members and used local contexts, songs and language to make them relevant to the target audience. They were shared via WhatsApp to community leaders and community workers who further distributed them amongst their own contacts.

Posters and Leaflets

Print material was created to cover the wide range of information and guidance regarding Covid-19. Posters and leaflets informed of various preventative measures to different target audiences (e.g. pregnant women, elderly people, families, children). Posters were placed in prominent locations in the villages such as on schools, panchayat offices and vehicles. Leaflets were distributed to individual families.



An audio awareness campaign in Jhadol block

Banshi:

Spreading awareness of Covid-19 in his community

The Covid-19 lockdown forced hundreds of millions of migrants across India to make the perilous journey back to their homes. They were suddenly without work, not able to send vital earnings back to their families and not able to support themselves.

Some walked hundreds of kilometres, some hitch-hiked in cars, trucks and buses. The common factor was that no one could practice social distancing. Most migrants work in the large towns and cities of India where Covid-19 was spreading most quickly. The rural areas that these migrants were returning to do not have the infrastructure to deal with a potential outbreak of the virus. However, the biggest challenge for these communities was a lack of knowledge about the virus and how to protect against it.

Banshi lives in a village in the area Seva Mandir operates in. He was working as a cook in a business's canteen in Ahmedabad; one of the cities most affected by Covid-19 in India. When the lockdown started, he lost his job and knew that the only way he could survive was to travel back to his village in Sarada, around 230 km from Ahmedabad.

He began walking, lugging the only belongings he had with him through the summer heat, which, on some days, reached more than 40°C.

After traveling by foot for nearly 90km, Banshi was able to get a seat on a government bus which was heading to his home region. More than two days later, he arrived home.

Social distancing was impossible on his journey back home and Banshi knew that he may be a carrier of Covid-19. Before heading to see his family, he knew he would have to be tested for Covid-19. He immediately went to a local health centre to be tested for the virus. He was told to go to his home and self-isolate until the test results came back. Even though he was desperate to see his family, he knew that he would have to maintain distance until his results were returned.

The test result was negative. Banshi was delighted. He could finally see his family without the anxiety of whether he will infect them.

Knowing the importance of returning migrants self-isolating themselves and getting tested, Banshi dedicated himself to spreading awareness amongst the local community. His efforts led many other migrants to understand the significance of the pandemic and the importance of self-isolation.



Relief Kits

50,545

Number of relief kits distributed to families by Seva Mandir

38,113

Number of government relief kits supported by Seva Mandir

Access to vital supplies, such as food and hygiene materials, was restricted during the Covid-19 lockdown. Seva Mandir, with the support of partners, funders and donors, began an effort to provide those most in need with relief kits.

It was essential to ensure that the families most in need were able to receive all the support that they needed. Priority was given to families in the following criteria:

1. A family with children under the age of five.
2. A family with pregnant and lactating women.
3. A family with elderly members.
4. A family with a single parent or women who are widowed.
5. A family identified by the Village Institutions as vulnerable.

The above criteria were set as to maximise the relief efforts and ensure that those most in need could be reached.

Relief Kit Packing and Distribution

The relief kits were distributed by staff who live in the villages or nearby communities, by community workers such as Shiksha Kendra teachers, Balsakhis or by Village Institution members. To ensure their safety, they were provided with basic PPE. To build a better understanding of Covid-19 preventative measures, the organisation created a series of videos focusing on proper hand-washing, social distancing and more.

The relief kits were primarily packed by volunteers at Seva Mandir's Head Office and blocks offices. Packing was also conducted at a local level at Seva Mandir's block offices, where supplies were available.

Permission from the Government to carry out relief work was obtained. Depending on the location, the distribution would either happen at a central location in a village (such as a panchayat office or school) or house-to-house.

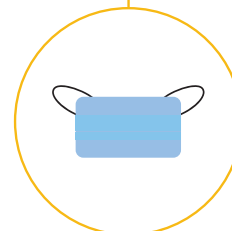
Seva Mandir also supported the Government in distributing relief kits by providing connection to village leaders and volunteers for distribution. Volunteers were present during the distributions to ensure social distancing measures.

Ensuring that all relief kits were ready and able to be distributed to the intended recipients was key, especially in making sure that volunteers who were distributing had the safety kits prior to carrying out their work.



Food Kits

Containing vegetables, grains, spices and cooking oil. Enough for a family of 5 for 2 weeks.



Safety Kits

Containing masks, gloves, hairnets/caps, soap.



Grain Storage Kits

Gummy bag to store 200kg of grains and a tarpaulin sheet for some families.



Sanitation Kits

Containing soap and detergent. Enough for a family of 5 for 2 weeks.

Relief Kit Distribution*

Sanitation Kits	37,826
Grain Storage Kits	4,286
Food Kits	3,209
Safety Kits	3,118
Safety Kits (ICDS workers)	2,106

*Seva Mandir's own distribution efforts



857,200

Kilos of grains potentially stored using grain-storage kits

150,000+

Kilos of soap distributed in the sanitation kits

32,090

Kilos of flour distributed in the food kits

10,448

Number of masks distributed in safety kits





Meera: Self-Help Groups helping women receive aid

Just a few months ago, Meera's mother died. She had been living under her daughter's care for many years, relying on her for every need. Meera's husband has died 25 years earlier, and, aside from her responsibility as a full-time carer, she also worked as a daily-wage labourer as a means of earning some income.

When the lockdown due to Covid-19 started, Meera's only way to earn an income was abruptly cut off. She didn't know how she was going to survive. Her only support network was her local Self-Help Group - a women-only group created and facilitated by Seva Mandir. Aware of her situation, they told her of Seva Mandir's Covid-19 relief efforts.

Seva Mandir's is distributing vital sanitation, food, and agricultural kits to the neediest people in Udaipur and Rajsamand districts of southern Rajasthan. Each kit is enough for 5 people and can last 2 weeks.

'My situation is already so bad - I did not think it could get any worse.' Meera explains. 'But then the relief kits came, and suddenly I felt like my own family is here to help.'







Village Institutions

Fundamental to Seva Mandir's philosophy is the notion that communities should be in charge of their own development. To achieve this, democratically elected and gender-equal Village Institutions (VI) are set-up and run by members of the community. Seva Mandir facilitates the VIs through trainings and capacity building to ensure they can carry out their duties in the most efficient and effective way. To date, there are over 735 VIs across Udaipur and Rajsamand districts leading the development of their communities.

Village Institutions Role in Relief Efforts

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the VIs have been instrumental in Seva Mandir's relief efforts. At the beginning of the lockdown at the end of March, the Village Institutions began the distributing awareness and identifying those in their communities most in need of relief.

A rapid needs-assessment was conducted by Seva Mandir and supported by VI leaders. The assessment collected information using mobile assisted forms, WhatsApp, SMS and phone calls to identify the families most in need. The data from this was used to coordinate the relief efforts and calculate the number of relief kits that would be needed.

The VIs were also central to the distribution efforts of relief kits and awareness materials. They informed families of the relief kit distribution locations and timings and also provided volunteers to distribute the kits.

VIs took the decision to stop all community events and rituals, such as weddings, melas and all Mrityu Bhoj. This was done in consultation with community members and the panchayats to ensure full cooperation, and was implemented in all villages Seva Mandir works with.

Furthermore, the VIs also assisted the panchayats and local health authorities with the identification of returned migrants and ensuring that they are quickly quarantined.

Staff and Volunteer Safety

Many people put themselves forward as volunteers to help Seva Mandir and their communities during this crisis. However, following official advice, it was essential that only those who were in good health distributed relief kits. To assess this, people were asked to voluntarily provide their medical history and age. Those who fell into a vulnerable category were put into roles with minimal or no contact with other people.

Basic Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was provided to all staff and volunteers supporting Seva Mandir's relief efforts. All were provided with masks, gloves and hairnets/hats, whilst those distributing the relief kits were also provided with soap.

At the beginning of the relief effort, a video was made showing staff and volunteers how to properly wear their PPE and how to wash their hands correctly. For those distributing relief kits, a video was made to show and explain proper social distancing measures needed to ensure the safety of all involved.

Hammerpal village: A community response to Covid-19

In the village of Hammerpal, the Village Institution's (VI) quick and strong action is protecting the community from Covid-19.

Hammerpal is over 85km from Udaipur city, located in the breath-taking Aravalli mountain range near the historic Kumbhalgarh fort. As with much of India, there has been an influx of migrant labourers returning to their rural homes after travelling, in some cases, hundreds of kilometres by foot. Not only have they lost the incomes that were so vital in supporting their families, but they also carry the risk of bringing Covid-19 back to their villages.

With the support of Seva Mandir, the VI in Hammerpal, as with many other villages, began conducting health-checks of all returning migrants as soon as they arrived back in their village. Along with the local level government panchayat, 45 families have been quarantined, and they are being provided with food, water and sanitation materials.

Many of the migrant labourers now see themselves as a burden. They have lost their job and cannot support their family financially.

Seva Mandir is working in partnership with the VIs to focus on providing long-term livelihood support to migrants and their families, helping them to mitigate the effects of the economic downturn.

However, all families, even those not supported by a migrant labourer, are now struggling to access to the most vital necessities due to the Covid-19 lockdown.

Seva Mandir's response is to help VIs such as the one in Hammerpal to be vigilant in checking the health of all the families in the village and spreading awareness of Covid-19 and preventative measures. It is also delivering food and sanitation kits to be distributed throughout the communities. In Hammerpal, the VI has provided 30 families with food kits containing grains, vegetables, spices and oil - enough to last five people two weeks.



Support Received

The Covid-19 relief efforts required a rapid response for financial support, and Seva Mandir's received this from existing and new funders, individual donors and staff.

Many existing funders made immediate efforts to utilise parts of existing project funding for Covid-19 relief work. At the start of the lockdown, this was vital to ensuring the relief efforts could be kick-started and provide kits to those in need as soon as possible. Existing and new funders also began micro-projects specifically for Covid-19, ensuring that all funds can be used for relief efforts.

Individuals were also crucial to supporting the relief efforts. Those already connected to Seva Mandir provided generous donations from the outset of the lockdown. Individual donations were also raised through online via Seva Mandir's website and through crowdfunding platforms such as GlobalGiving, Give India and through Facebook.

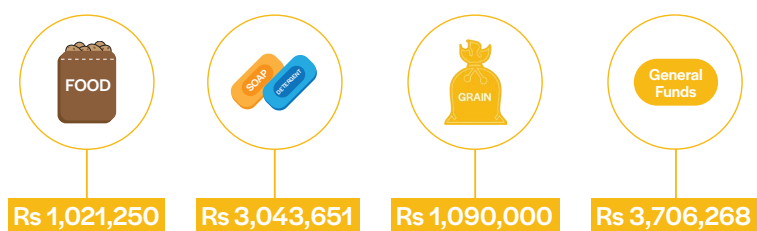
Seva Mandir's staff also came together to voluntarily donate a portion of their salary towards the Covid-19 relief efforts.

Friends of Seva Mandir

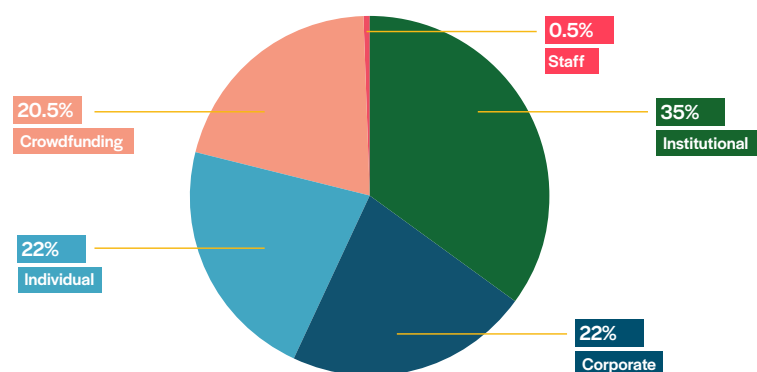
Seva Mandir's is supported by two 'friends' organisations: Friends of Seva Mandir UK and Friends of Seva Mandir USA. These organisations help to raise funds from institutions, corporates, foundations and individuals in their respective countries.

Their quick and effective response to support Seva Mandir's relief efforts resulted in FSM UK raising more than Rs 450,000 (£4,700) and FSM USA more than Rs 380,000 (\$5,100).

Funds Raised



Supporters



Communications

An external communications strategy was created from the outset of the Covid-19 lockdown to enhance the reach and quality of Seva Mandir's communications surrounding the pandemic.

Press

As part of the external communications strategy, existing connections with local, regional and online press were utilised to share the relief efforts.

Online - Website

A dedicated Covid-19 webpage was set up on Seva Mandir's website to explain and regularly update the reach of the relief kit activities, share awareness materials and to give a dedicated method of donating to the Covid-19 relief efforts.

In two months, the page had nearly 650 unique hits. These were mainly from India but also from Europe, North America and Australia.

A second webpage was launched on the 30th of May solely for sharing case studies and stories from the individuals and communities Seva Mandir works with related to Covid-19.

In one month, the page had over 100 unique hits, coming from India, the US and the UK.

Online - Social Media and E-Mail

Regular updates on Seva Mandir's Covid-19 relief efforts have been shared on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram, and also by email. The aim was to raise funds for the Covid-19 relief efforts and to share the work being done and the communities themselves. Updates included the reach of the relief efforts and case studies from the individuals and communities that we work with.

#PeopleofCovid19

Covid-19 has affected each person, family and community differently. It is essential that their stories and voices are recorded to build an understanding of the direct human impact the pandemic is having.

Seva Mandir began the #PeopleOfCovid19 campaign to share these stories online via social media, e-mail and the organisation's website. The stories highlight the impact Seva Mandir's staff and volunteers are having during the crisis, the leadership of VIs in their communities, and the resilience of the individual families and people living in Udaipur and Rajsamand districts.

A Case Studies team worked to collect and distribute case studies by making regular calls with Seva Mandir's field team, community leaders and in some cases, community members.

Tracking Systems

A detailed monitoring system was created to analyse the need being generated by the beneficiaries, the distribution of relief kits, the funding received and the amount spent. A dedicated team worked to manage this.

A number of funders had given specifics on the number of kits to be distributed as per their support. The monitoring system ensured that the number of distributed relief kits could be matched to each funder's support.

To achieve this, team members shared information on a daily basis to the monitoring team; how many kits are required in a certain area and how many kits have been distributed.

Finances were tracked closely to ensure the correct amount was being spent as per donor requirements and to plan for the days ahead.

Data was collected from the field using monitoring and evaluation applications by Seva Mandir's field teams. This enabled data to be sent instantly to the team managing the input and analysis. The monitoring system was created using the Google Suit so as to ensure the most recent and updated information could be accessed easily. The system was created in a way that it could be easily adapt to the evolving situation and the team's individual needs. The relevant internal teams accessed the information and worked with the monitoring team to ensure all information was correct.

Working Groups

To enhance the coordination and delivery of the relief efforts, a core Covid-19 team was created to focus on relief efforts. Working groups were created within the core team to focus on specific activities such as for awareness, relief kit creation and distribution, employee and volunteer safety, monitoring and collecting case studies.

WhatsApp groups were used to enhance the spread of information between team members and between the working groups. Conferencing software was used to connect all members of the core Covid-19 relief team for regular meetings.

Case studies were shared weekly with Seva Mandir staff to update everyone with the impact that their efforts were having on families and communities. Furthermore, photos and videos of the relief efforts, from packing to distribution, were also shared.

Going Forward

As the initial brunt of the crisis is over and the lockdown is slowly lifted, Seva Mandir's focus is now on developing and implementing long-term relief for communities and individuals through livelihood interventions.

The economic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown are now becoming clear. Migrant labourers have returned back to their villages and are now out of work and putting extra pressure on the meagre resources of their households. The lockdown has also affected farmer's cultivation and harvesting activities.

The VIs are central to ensuring communities have the power and ability to be prepared and resilient through this crisis and future crises. Through VIs and directly through the programmes, Seva Mandir will build the capacity of individuals, families and communities to adapt to the new normal and continue in leading their own development.

To mitigate the economic effects of Covid-19, Seva Mandir is rapidly expanding its comprehensive livelihood support to ensure families and communities have the tools, knowledge and ability to continue to improve their lives.

During this time, Seva Mandir will continue to support and improve the nutrition of children, strengthen support systems for women through Self-Help Groups and Women's Resource Centres, provide childcare where possible and adapt the Shiksha Kendra education system to function efficiently whilst ensuring social distancing. All other programmes are adapting their focus to continue their current work facing the reality created by Covid-19.

Bhimraj: The importance of Food Security

Central to Seva Mandir's work is building the food security of farming families. This is done through developing more efficient water management systems, regenerating common lands, building the knowledge and capacity of farmers, and providing them with the tools and seeds they need for successful growing and harvesting.

These farmers are no strangers to hardship, and they have a resilience and strength that helps them to survive. But life is not easy.

With the Covid-19 outbreak, that has become even harder. Having strong food security means that these families are able to feed themselves for longer.

Farmers like Bhimraj.

'Help from Seva Mandir has been a big relief - especially in this crisis.' Explains Bhimraj, who is able to support his family with the vegetables that he harvests. 'My family are not getting any income due to the lockdown, but we have enough vegetables to feed ourselves. We will be able to sell some in the local market once the lockdown ends.'

The Covid-19 pandemic is affecting people like Bhimraj and their families disproportionately. By supporting farming families and by regenerating the natural environment, we can ensure they have the ability to support themselves in the long-term.







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