

S M Sehgal Foundation Channels efforts to combat COVID-19

Background

Coronavirus (COVID-19), an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus, has presented a tremendous challenge for everyone, but its impact is felt most severely among those without access to the basics such as clean potable water, food, and essential information about government relief programs. Currently, experts say the best way to prevent and slow down virus transmission is to be well aware and informed about the COVID-19 virus and how it spreads. The primary focus is on protecting oneself and others from infection by washing hands frequently and following social distancing protocols.¹

Sehgal Foundation has already started working in its project areas by conducting awareness sessions, dissemination of IEC materials, and holding village sanitation activities to protect against the effects of COVID-19 with the help and active participation of local bodies.

The lack of accurate information and the limited access to health facilities makes the marginalized and vulnerable communities in remote villages in India need more support than ever. A large migration of daily wagers is also taking place from urban to rural India, which puts more pressure on already-underdeveloped regions.

Sehgal Foundation has years of experience in providing support in agriculture and allied activities, water management, and good rural governance in rural areas, and the team is now adapting the following intervention work within these communities for preparedness against COVID-19.

1. Good Rural Governance (GRG)

The GRG program promotes grassroots democracy and citizen participation with a strong emphasis on women's empowerment. Rural governance plays an important role in disseminating information about COVID-19. The focus:

1.1 Village Leadership Schools for awareness and training

The existing Village Leadership Schools (platforms for trainings and governance meetings) create awareness, preparedness training, and the need for social distancing for COVID-19.

1.1.1 Health schemes/insurance: Create awareness and help communities access and register for health schemes such as the PM Health Insurance Scheme Ayushman Bharat.²

1.1.2 First response preparedness for disaster management: Connect people to authentic sources to access information related to COVID-19. Create awareness against rumor mongering and fake news.

¹ Source: WHO

² provides a medical expenses cover of up to Rs 5 lakhs.

- 1.2 Visual Information:** Display IEC material on COVID-19 at multiple village locations such as Panchayat Bhawan buildings and common meeting points.
- 1.3 Digital Community Library:** Install user-interactive display screens at common points in villages. These will be loaded with information related to health including local healthcare workers' number the latest schemes, and short informational movies. The same material from the community screen will be made available through an app that anyone with a smartphone can download and access.
- 1.4 The Citizen Information and Support Center (CISC),³ a toll free number:** CISCs to include COVID-19 information, preparedness, and how to access to the right healthcare.
- 1.5 Identification of gaps in local hospitals:** Combat COVID-19 and communicate the same to donor agencies so that identified gaps are fulfilled.

2. Agricultural Development Program

Malnutrition and undernourishment are concerns in rural India. The foundation team has begun work with communities to educate people about balanced diets and restrictions as suggested by health experts, especially for children below age ten and adults over age sixty. The focus is on boosting the immune system through balanced dietary requirements among farm families as well as diversifying farm income. For this, the team will continue to build the capacities of farmers and provide assets to enable them to engage in some services within their ecosystem. Focus:

- 2.1 Promotion of agriculture and allied activities:** Diversify and promote kitchen gardens, animal husbandry, and goatery for nutrition security and subsistence income
- 2.2 Farmer Collectives:** Create and promote farmer collectives for organized sale and marketing of their produce for income generation and sustenance.
- 2.3 Farmer preparedness:** Conduct farmer trainings for health and hygiene practices when working in the field.

3. Water Management Program

Rural communities face acute water shortages, and the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak may increase India's water woes due to pressure from added migration. Water efficiency, rejuvenating the groundwater, and safe drinking water will play even more critical roles in the coming times. Therefore, spreading awareness to be water-efficient is critical now. Focus:

- 3.1 Personal and Community Hygiene:** Organize regular health, hygiene, and sanitation drives in the villages to create awareness. These will also include efforts toward water-use efficiency especially while hand-washing.

³ The Citizen Information and Support Center (CISC) is an effective resource for community members to learn about governance initiatives, grievance redressal mechanisms, and project-related issues. The center provides information through a cloud-based integrated voice-response-system technology to callers, from a toll-free helpline.

3.2 Soak Wells: Soak wells are simple low-cost, environmentally friendly, community wastewater management structures to percolate wastewater into the ground after it passes through a filtration mechanism. It can be constructed in community water tanks to help recharge the wastewater.

3.3 Safe drinking water: Sehgal Foundation will promote its biosand filter (JalKalp), a low-cost water filter for rural populations that doesn't require any energy or spare parts replacement. JalKalp is capable of filtering all biological contaminants, suspended particles, iron, and arsenic with some customization.

4. Transform Lives *one school at a time*

This program creates positive change to secure a better future for schoolchildren in rural India. Rural government schools are transformed into secure, healthy, and stimulating learning environments, which transform the lives of the schoolchildren. Focus:

4.1 Hand-washing activities: Ongoing hand-washing activity is now included within every Transform Lives school and made a quarterly activity with teachers and members present from the School Management Committee.

4.2 Inclusion in Digital Literacy sessions: Accurate information related to COVID-19 is now included in existing digital literacy sessions. Pictorial presentations on do's and don'ts will be presented in the digital literacy centers in villages for the larger community.

4.3 Visual art learning: Wall paintings and story boards with COVID-19 awareness will assist messaging in the schools.

5. Community Radio

Sehgal Foundation's community radio, Alfaz-e-Mewat, in Nuh district of Haryana will continue to play an instrumental role in getting messages from the Health Department to the communities through radio.

About Us

S M Sehgal Foundation (Sehgal Foundation) is a public charitable trust registered in India since 1999 with a mission to strengthen community-led development initiatives to achieve positive social, economic, and environmental change across rural India in the areas of food security, water security, and social justice, now in 890 villages, 27 districts, and 9 states: Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Telangana.