

# WATER DIGEST

LIVING OUR WET PLANET

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## COVID VS. WATER



Charging water resources for the

*future.*



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**EDITORIAL & MARKETING OFFICE:**

ADVANCE WATER DIGEST PVT. LTD.

Registered Office: 10 Rangpuri, Near Radisson Hotel NH-8, Mahipalpur, New Delhi-110037 (India)

T: 91-11-46015233, M: 09911473721;

Corporate Office: Vipul Business Park, 10th & 11th Floor, Sohna Road, Sector 48, Gurgaon-122019, Haryana

T: +91 124 4642000, M: 999887154,

E: info@thewaterdigest.com,

W: www.thewaterdigest.com

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# SEHGAL FOUNDATION

## A FRIEND IN NEED DURING THE PANDEMIC



– S.M Sehgal Foundation



*While the nation is slowly overcoming the emergency situation due to COVID-19, one organization has come forward to go beyond cities, and penetrate the vulnerable population of rural India in order to ensure adequate safety measures, educate the masses and provide relief packages among the underprivileged. Sehgal Foundation is trying its best to bring communities together and work towards a common goal of bringing awareness, positivity and hope among people and make them prepared to fight Covid-19 in the best way possible.*

When people come together, things happen. Unity in a time of crisis is the biggest weapon to move forward and prepare for a better future. The world has been gripped by the fever of Covid-19 and India is among the biggest sufferers of this global pandemic. While major cities have been hard hit by the virus, it has gradually started to find its way to smaller cities and eventually to rural areas as well. People across the hinterland are not fully equipped and almost helpless in this situation. It was time for someone to step up and reach out to them, bring them hope and positivity.

## TOGETHER WE CAN: SEHGAL FOUNDATION PROMOTES COVID-19 PREVENTION AND RESILIENCE IN RURAL INDIA

The global pandemic affects everyone, but especially the vulnerable populations who still struggle to have access to the basic necessities such as food security, water security, and social justice. According to a study released on May 13, "COVID-19 induced Lockdown: How is the Hinterland Coping?" (which included 5,162 households across 47 districts in 12 states between April 28 and May 2); 68% of households had reduced food items in their meals; half of the households had reduced the number of times they were eating each day; and women in nearly 62% of households had to make more trips to fetch water. As rural India faces extreme hunger and acute water shortages, Sehgal Foundation's core work is even more critical to help rural communities access these fundamental needs. With the government announcing relief packages to reboot sectoral growth and providing direct cash transfers below the poverty line



households and others in rural India, these vulnerable people must be made aware about these entitlements and should have access to them. Sehgal Foundation's experience in the development sector, along with support from the communities and partners, is currently helping to reach rural households in 980 villages across 31 districts in eight states.

## CHANGING TIMES, STRENGTHENED EFFORTS

The foundation's work during the pandemic has focused on preparing communities for better prevention and increased resilience. The response has been multifarious, including facilitating village sanitation drives, operating toll-free helpline, making cloth masks by youth volunteers, broadcasting awareness campaigns on community radio *Alfaz-e-Mewat*, helping farmers with crop advice for the coming season, and supporting Common Service Centers operated by the government in distributing masks, soaps, and phenol.

## IDENTIFYING THE WORST-HIT HOUSEHOLDS

Sehgal Foundation teams at the village level have identified the most marginalized households, so they were the first ones to receive masks and government relief. The teams are distributing crop inputs to 417 small and marginal farmers in the district of Alwar in Rajasthan.

Masks prepared by instructors and participants of the foundation's Life Skills Education centers were distributed door-to-door as a preventive measure to guard rural households against COVID-19.

## CATALYZING VILLAGE-LEVEL INSTITUTIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS FOR PREVENTION

Sehgal Foundation's response to COVID-19 rests on the faith that people can survive these difficult times by working closely with gram panchayats, school management



committees, and village health nutrition and sanitation committees, which have a critical role to play and are trusted by communities. The team has facilitated village sanitization and helped government-operated Common Service Centers with the distribution of soaps and sanitizers. Dry ration kits were distributed to 750 families in Muzaffarpur and East Champaran districts in Bihar. Working with Kodur Gram Panchayat of Chilamathur mandal, covering four villages in Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh, and the foundation team collaborated with GMR Varalakshmi Foundation to distribute masks, soaps, and phenol to 500 poor families and facilitated sanitization in four villages (Muddapalli, Madhurepalli, Koduru, and Timmadipalli). The teams conducted an awareness session for the shepherd community that focused on COVID-19 prevention measures, sharing the importance of hand washing, wearing masks, and social distancing. The Andhra Pradesh team also distributed free masks to 200 people in Chilamathur, Anantapur,

and distributed food to local and migrant labor in partnership with local youth groups. The Telangana team facilitated distribution of 24 kg rice, Rs. 500 rupees, and vegetables to fifty laborers in Nuthankal village of Medchal Malkajgiri, and facilitated the entire village with spray sanitizers.

### FARMERS FIRST

Farmer field days and interface meetings have transitioned into telephone farm advice. Local Sehgal Foundation teams engaged with farmers and provided them with packages of practices to ensure increased productivity. During the month of April, 417 farmers in Rajasthan received cotton inputs. Local teams connected with ten farmers each day in their village and shared advice on precautions to be taken against COVID-19, while harvesting their crops, using implements, sharing farm equipment, cotton input use, and self-care while returning home after harvesting. The team planned the millet input

purchase and distribution in more than fifty villages of Haryana and Rajasthan. In Haryana, farmers were given high-yield varieties and crop inputs for moong pulse cultivation. Some farmers in village Chakozi and Chandoli in district Samastipur, Bihar, resorted to the cash crop menthe (a medicinal and aromatic plant), which can be ready in seventy-five days that will help farmers come out of distressed times with increased incomes.

### SUSTAINABLE WATER-HARVESTING STRUCTURES

Rural communities face acute water shortages, and the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak increases India's water woes due to pressure from added migration. Water efficiency, groundwater rejuvenation, and safe drinking water play increasingly critical roles. Spreading awareness about how to be water-efficient is essential. Foundation teams focus on personal and community hygiene that includes efforts to use water-use efficiently,



at the Citizen Information and Support Center in Nuh, Haryana, and Samastipur, Bihar, received over 1,400 calls on queries related to COVID-19 prevention, government schemes during the pandemic, and operating government helpline. The physical interface with students of digital literacy classes has transitioned to online training with over eighty-five students attending classes online. With support from partner organizations, Sehgal Foundation teams have provided relief materials (dry rations, 30,000 masks, 2,500 sanitizers) for 400 families of East Champaran to be distributed by the KVK of the district.

## COMMUNITY RADIO SPREADS AWARENESS

Despite the remarkable increase in communications networks and internet-based connectivity, a vast majority of rural people remain

especially while hand-washing. For increasing access to safe drinking water at the household level, Sehgal Foundation promoted a low-cost bio sand water filter (JalKalp) for rural population that doesn't require any energy or spare parts replacement. JalKalp is capable of filtering all biological contaminants, suspended particles, iron, and even arsenic with some customization.

Sehgal Foundation has conducted a series of webinars on sustainable water management, including rainwater harvesting and WASH practices for sharing know-how on good water management practices.

## PROPELLING GOVERNANCE AWARENESS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

The youth club of village Mubarikpur in Alwar, Rajasthan, decided to spread their awareness further. They contacted 280 women to share information on COVID-19 in the project area. Girls from the

foundation's Taruni centers stitched masks at home and distributed them in the village. The toll-free helpline operated by Sehgal Foundation





agriculture, and governance that have helped resolve community queries on COVID-19 and share information about precautions to be taken in those sectors.

Sehgal Foundation's response to COVID-19 continues to expand. #TogetherWecan`

Conclusion: With the efforts being made, and measures taken, Sehgal Foundation was able to address the basic necessities of the rural people for staying safe and protected against Covid-19. The awareness exercise and relief measures have definitely boosted the morale of the people and received with thanks and appreciation. But the journey is not over, and there is still a lot to be covered along the way. With utter dedication and the spirit of giving, the foundation moves forward with its initiatives and hope to bring further changes in pursuit of a strong India from within. (Published Data as on May 15, 2020.)



disconnected from the national mainstream in every respect. In rural India, oral means of communications, i.e. radio, still hold the highest penetration. Community radios have played a unique role on the front lines of the pandemic by disseminating vital, accurate information, fighting misinformation, and dispelling myths and rumors. These stations are often being managed by just one staff person daily or carry on broadcasts remotely using technology.

about the new normal and how to cope with it. Programs address feature community members who share about their changed routines. Live sessions include experts on water,

Community radio Alfaz-e-Mewat in Nuh, Haryana, has been on air with two hours of fresh programming related to COVID-19, which includes campaigns on spreading positivity in lockdown, social distancing that can be practiced during farming, and expert interviews sharing information



## COMPILED BY

Ms Pooja O. Murada- Director, Communications & Arti M Grover, Program Leader at S M Sehgal Foundation. To know more about the authors, kindly write to us at: [info@thewaterdigest.com](mailto:info@thewaterdigest.com)