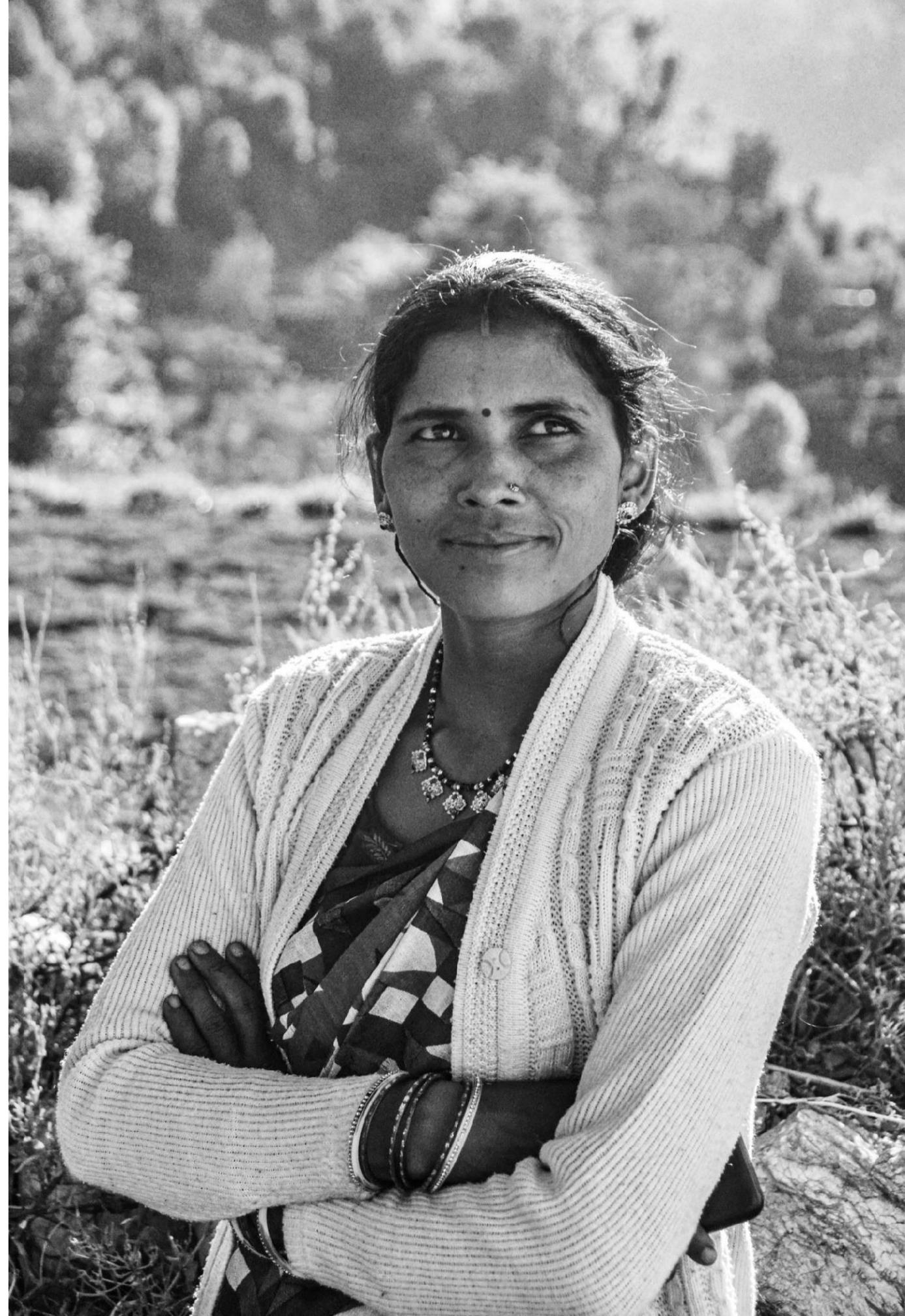




COVID19 RESPONSE

**Elected Women & Partners On The
Frontlines: Leadership In The Times of
Crisis**

April - December 2020





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Acknowledgements

Women's leadership and decision-making has never been urgent. Against the backdrop of a global pandemic, women leaders across the globe stood on the frontlines at national, state, local levels, engaging and organising communities, particularly the historically marginalised and under-represented groups. Their response and its preparedness demonstrates the impact and significance of diverse, inclusive and intergenerational leadership.

India's elected women representatives in local governance faced with a daunting task led with equal grit and determination. It is rather confounding that it took a pandemic to put a spotlight on the expansive leadership of elected women and gram panchayats (village councils), a job they have been doing for many years.

By way of this report, we would like to acknowledge and celebrate the courageous leadership of women in public office in panchayats (and across the globe). And reiterate how important it is to invest in women's leadership not only as a means to an end, but an end in itself.

Fittingly, the March 8th 2021 theme "Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world" furthers this endeavor of upholding women's rights and fully leverage the potential of women's leadership.

Moving forward, as a feminist, rights-based organisation we are committed to building back better!



1 Introduction



March 24, 2020. India announced one of the strictest and harshest lockdowns to contain the spread of COVID19. The country came to a grinding halt with only select government departments, health services, public utilities, essential commodities, permitted to function. A curfew like situation took effect restricting movement to the bare minimum.

Like everybody else in the world navigating and negotiating the

massive challenge posed by the pandemic, we at The Hunger Project (THP), India were also faced with a conundrum. With a sudden imposition of a complete shutdown, no access to offices, field, and the many lingering uncertainties came the overwhelming realisation of what it meant for the communities we work with. The moot question for us as an organisation was - **What Can We Do?**

What was an essentially health crisis

very quickly evolved into a humanitarian crisis and so did our comprehensive response. Resolve unshaken, every effort thereafter focused on mitigating the negative impact of the pandemic on the communities, especially the most vulnerable.

THP India swung into action well aware of the existing structural inequities which were bound to be exacerbated by the pandemic, unleashing various forms of violence - hunger, gender-based, caste-based, psychological, and many others. This understanding was also accompanied by the knowledge that **THP India was in a unique vantage position. Situated in the rural heartland, its response and action were guided by an already functioning**

well-grounded strategy. The pandemic put this strategy to test and in the end it ran on its own legs. Leveraging a bevy of critical actors it worked with – a strong and capable cadre of elected women representatives (current and former), the partner organisations, adolescent girls, and other collective networks – THP India rolled out a two-phased intervention primarily informed and shaped by the critical needs on the ground and the core tenets of its work - *gender equality, social justice, human dignity, transparency and accountability.* The planning primarily focused on the following elements - *creating awareness campaigns and undertaking a massive relief effort (a first in the history of THP India).*





2.1 Raising Awareness and Building Trust

We immediately recognised the significant role of gram panchayats (village councils) and especially the elected women representatives in how quickly they organised, mobilised and displayed remarkable leadership in action. However, to enable them meant communicating correct information to dispel myths and any sense of panic that was already doing the rounds. **Raising awareness was the key to ensure access to basic information regarding COVID19 and contain the pandemic spread in the rural areas.**

To this effect, THP India got strictly working on creating messages that

would address the what, how, where of the pandemic, given the disquiet and uncertainty in the early months. The guidelines of the World Health Organisation were picked up, sifted through and adapted to a language that was simple, spelt the DOs and DONTs, and emphasised the need to be cautious but kind. The initial phase saw immediate rolling out of three crucial messages –

- ✓ [Corona Samachar \(News\) for General Awareness](#)
- ✓ [Busting Myths, Stating Facts](#)
- ✓ [Safe Harvesting during COVID19](#) [1]

These were shared with **8000** elected women representatives trained by THP India via phone calls, text messages and

2 | Response & Impact

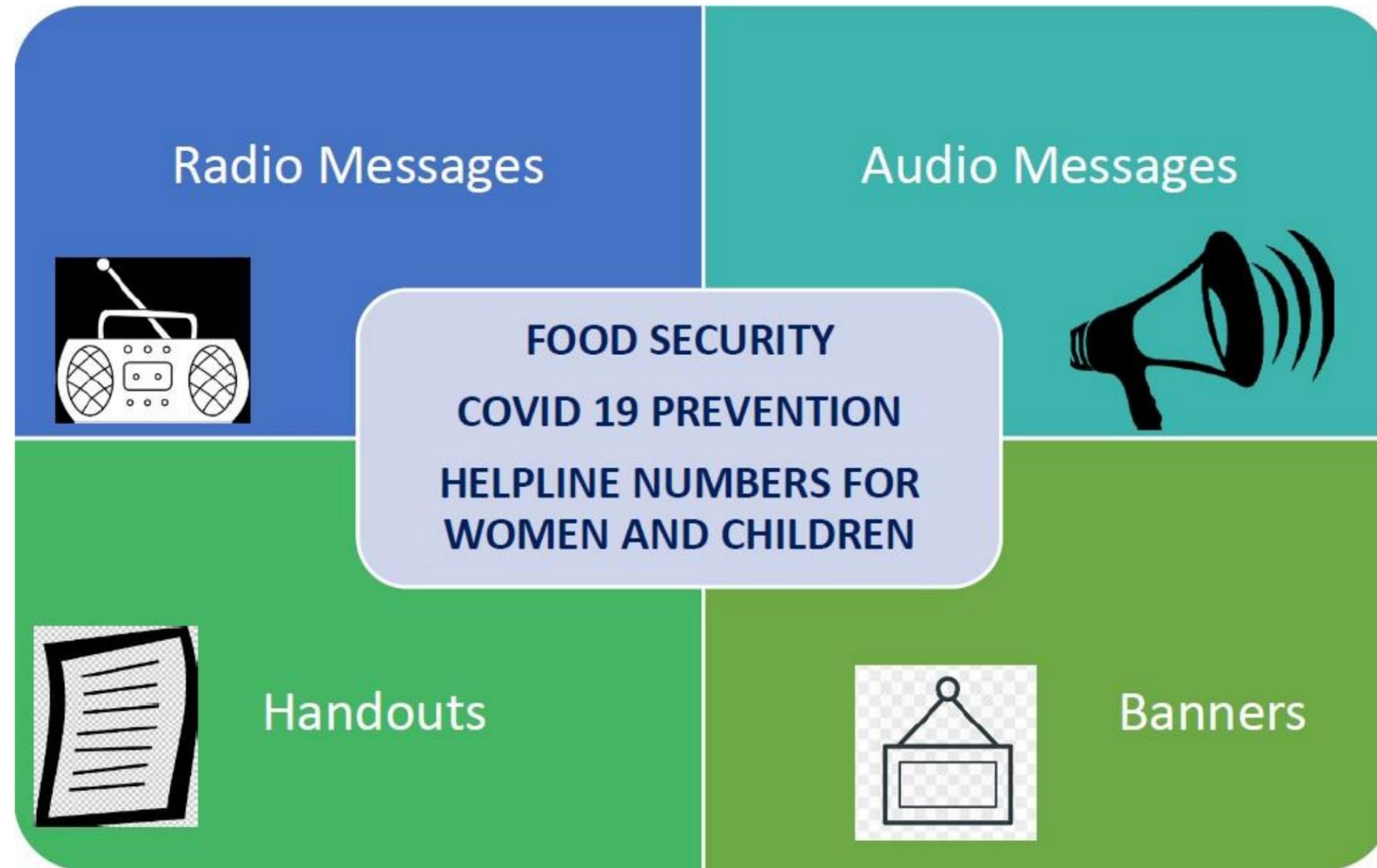
WhatsApp. In addition, our **42** partners across states were engaged with in preparing posters and pamphlets in vernacular languages to make information more accessible. Elected women took the initiative of writing letters and memos and put them up in public spaces to raise awareness. All efforts were strictly geared to ascertain as much critical information about the virus as possible is available in the public domain so that each one is well-informed and equipped to tackle the situation on the ground.

This had a cascading effect in all directions. Starting with reaching out to partners and elected women who further shared the messages with their constituencies including the federations, women's collectives, self-help groups, farmers' groups, ASHA workers (female community health workers), anganwadi workers (female workers at govt. run creche centres), and youth groups. 500,000 people were reached, between April - June 2020, as a result of a series of rapid but focused actions.

By mid year, as the extent of the multiple crisis exposed by the virus became more sharp and bare, it also became imperative to ensure that people were aware of the several government measures in place as well as new initiatives introduced specifically in response to the current situation.

In the latter half of the year, efforts on sending out critical messages related to entitlements and schemes and to counter myths, superstitions and misinformation about COVID19 were accelerated. While all states committed to some level of enhanced awareness generation throughout the period, THP teams in the states of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, in particular, planned intensive awareness campaigns as they emerged to be among the worst hit by the pandemic.

Awareness Campaigns: Themes and Mediums



The second round of awareness campaign reached out to its immediate working areas and beyond. The messages focused on the following themes – COVID19 prevention, food security, and helpline numbers for children and women. It had a total outreach of over 24,000 people through the Mobile Van Campaign and more than 36 million through the radio messages, covering 17 of the 38 districts in Bihar. Similarly, in Madhya Pradesh, proactive role played by partner teams enabled better access to information, reaching to 17800 people via Mobile Van Campaigns and 38 million through radio listenership in all 52 districts.

How Was This Information Put To Use?

In Jamui district (Bihar), the provisions under **Mid-Day Meal (MDM)** were not being provided to children in 43 primary schools. After receiving the information about the MDM provisions through the radio, people got together and demanded that this issue be addressed immediately. The service was started from the next day.

Young girls (part of THP India's adolescent girls' programme in Bihar) who received the information from the campaign used it actively to **dispel myths and access entitlements**. 158 adolescent girls reached out to about 1,200 people to spread awareness against 'Corona Mai' (myth that women who pray to 'Goddess Corona' will receive protection against the infection for themselves and their families).

Mobile Van Campaign enabled at least 6 women to access **helplines to receive counselling** in violence against women related cases in Balaghat, Rewa and Satna districts, Madhya Pradesh.

2.2 Elected Women and Partners on the Frontlines

Expansive Leadership

None of THP India's efforts would have been possible without the extremely critical role played by the elected women representatives and the partner organisations. They became the primary vehicle, as demonstrated earlier, and carriers of information. The success of awareness campaigns, in that sense, was also mirrored in how elected women stepped up efforts and took a number of initiatives. It was heartening to see how each combined modern technology (use of WhatsApp predominantly) with other more conventional mediums of dissemination.

Speaking of elected women, they practiced expansive and compassionate leadership [2] as they went about performing their mandated roles and in many cases went beyond the call of duty. **They have the constitutional mandate to serve the citizens better and more effectively in rural areas. They are decisively positioned to deploy resources of the local self-governing councils to respond to an unprecedented crisis. They have been intuitive and intentional in the manner in which they continue to respond to a rapidly changing situation. Presidents and Ward Members leveraged existing structures, local level knowledge, resources, power of collectives, support of former elected women representatives, adolescent girls to ensure last mile delivery.**

One of the first tasks they undertook was to disseminate

critical information especially on the need for maintaining physical distance and wearing masks whilst accessing ration under Public Distribution System (PDS), undertaking farm work, work under MGNREGS, and accessing panchayat related services that were still open. From Uttarakhand to Karnataka, they organised 'sewing armies' making face masks using material left over from stitching clothes. Panchayat task forces were also created as per government order which also enabled elected women to monitor ration shops and ensure cooked food was served and distributed to the most vulnerable families. Coordinating and supervising government schemes went hand in hand with ensuring people had access to the many government orders and updates on schemes available to them.

In addition to elected women representatives currently in office, former elected women also demonstrated exemplary leadership, empathy, and courage in addressing the COVID19 pandemic in their communities. **THP India's continuous and long engagement with elected women in gram panchayats, has paved the way for strong and capable cadres of women leaders at the grassroots level irrespective of whether they are in office or not.** Their participation as active citizens demonstrates, to reiterate, the strength of the strategy as envisioned on the ground.

From organising awareness drives to monitoring service delivery to assuming care-giving roles for the old and marginalised to supporting elected women in public office and local partners in carrying out relief distribution activities to activating informal support structures such as the *Jagruk Manch* (women's collectives) to promote

prevention of domestic violence, former elected women have been astute and proactive in playing an equally critical role. During the reporting period, approximately 1300 former elected women representatives and 3000 *jagruk manch* members actively engaged on the ground.

Increasing food insecurity remains a top concern across the states. In Odisha, in each block, former elected women worked hard to ensure some degree of food security for households severely impacted by the lockdown. They monitored relief schemes such as - Rs. 1000 for dry ration, extra 5kg ration for 3 months, delivery of mid-day meals to school going children, dry ration for children and pregnant women from Integrated Child Development Services, etc. Basanti Bhoi and Lochani Behera (former Ward Members, Odisha) who are also members of self help groups were involved directly. "Our involvement has ensured certain amount of regulation as people know and trust us. Some of us also took the responsibility of preparing cooked food and distributing it to the needy people."

Accessing resources and funds to effectively implement COVID19 measures has been a particular challenge. To address this, Nirmala, Sukhiya, Sita and Anita (all members of the Sema Panchayat, Rajasthan *jagruk manch*) stepped up and assumed roles as fund raisers. They approached individuals and groups and mobilised fund drives towards various activities – procuring sanitizers, essential food items, masks, etc. "Our main aim was to provide immediate relief in areas with extremely vulnerable communities where the govt. hasn't reached yet. We have been able to support 20 families in distress so far."



“

I am happy to see people earn a dignified income in these challenging times. At the same time, some assets are created for the community.

”



Young and fiery President Hema Negi of Pachissi Panchayat, (Uttarakhand) is a newly elected panchayat representative of an all-women panchayat. She recently donated part of her family land for construction of an anganwadi centre. It was not an easy process, she tells us, as it required many rounds of discussion with her family members. "We urgently needed a proper, safe structure for the centre (which is currently being run in a temporary rented shelter). Money was sanctioned by the block but there was no land available. After much negotiation, my family finally agreed to donate the cowshed area for building the centre."

Hema's steady resolve would benefit children from four villages in the panchayat. Since half the budget was sanctioned under MGNREGA, she and the other elected women representatives (Ward Members) helped 44 people access work to construct the centre.



Advocacy: Demanding Accountability

A second major element of the whole process included **active advocacy** on part of both the elected women as well as local partners. Elected women and partners' interventions advocated right, left and centre, at various levels depending on the need, guaranteeing people's basic right to dignity was upheld at all times. In that sense, demanding transparency and accountability were integral to the whole process to ensure effective delivery of basic services.

For instance, in Madhya Pradesh, we saw the elected women's federation stepping in to open mobile banking kiosk facility at the panchayat level to ensure easy access to banking services. In Odisha, like in other states, accessing food grains and other ration distributed from PDS has been a top priority of gram panchayats to ensure food security, especially when it comes to non-ration card holders, children, and pregnant women. Federation members met the Block Development Officer directly and ensured the critical service of providing door-to-door rations resumed right away in blocks where it had stopped functioning.

We would like to take a pause and acknowledge the vital critical participation of THP India partners, the ears and eyes on the ground, and **reiterate how crucial and significant is the presence of local community-based organisations in organising disaster response to an essentially a humanitarian crisis and demanding accountability through advocacy.** Rooted in the fundamental principles of equality, dignity and solidarity, and values of empathy and care, the partners have been pivotal in mitigating the negative impacts of COVID19 on the communities, especially the most vulnerable.

In Karnataka, local partners who are also members of the district task force successfully raised the issue of non-availability of sanitary pads, a major concern voiced by the adolescent girls. In response, the administration ordered disbursement of 300 sanitary pads across three blocks of Bidar district. Another partner in Madhya Pradesh has been consistently engaging with the block administration to start the timely process of applications and implementation of MGNREGS to bring economic relief to thousands of daily wage workers.

Their continuous presence in the field, closely monitoring government announcements, supporting elected women in turn, helped THP India as an organisation in grasping the pulse of the ground realities, what issues needed more focus, which message required amplification, so on and so forth.

Speaking of individuals within the partner organisations, one such story that comes to mind is that of Sabita De (Bihar) who has been a fearless leader in her own right. In a sensitive case of four children who had been recently orphaned and were found to be on the verge of getting trafficked, Sabita De (also runs the ChildLine in the area) intervened at a crucial moment and ensured their rights and safety were paramount in any decisions taken. The children were immediately taken to their uncle's family.

“I made sure the children were brought before the Child Welfare Board. The ChildLine decided on an eligible guardian and monitored them regularly to ensure they were doing their bit as per laws. The Child Development Protection Officer was also asked to take steps towards providing benefits under Parvarish Yojna (a foster care scheme for children in need). These are difficult times, and we are making sure to reach as many vulnerable people as possible.”





In Madhya Pradesh, **Sangeeta Yadav (President, Devgaon Panchayat, Madhya Pradesh)** has been extremely vocal about the poor quarantine arrangements for returning women migrant workers. “I was shocked to see Vandana (a migrant worker who returned with her family from Bombay after an 18 day journey on foot) and her daughter having to spend 2 nights under a tree while the husband was taken to a quarantine centre largely for men.” She approached the Panchayat Secretary about the untenable situation and demanded immediate arrangements for all returning women migrant workers. In the meantime, Sangeeta contacted the headmaster of the primary school and managed to get a room cleaned for Vandana and her daughter to stay.



Supporting Migrant Workers

The lockdown exacerbated the precarity of a vast section of the migrant workers who continue to face added uncertainty due to work loss, lack of food, shelter, health, and other basic needs. As reverse migration to the villages began in the hope that they will be safer in their homes, elected women also sprang into action and worked round the clock to ensure:

- ✓ all safety measures are put in place
- ✓ quarantine centres have all the basic facilities
- ✓ the workers are adequately screened for infection and quarantined where necessary
- ✓ no stigma, discrimination or harassment takes place in the process.

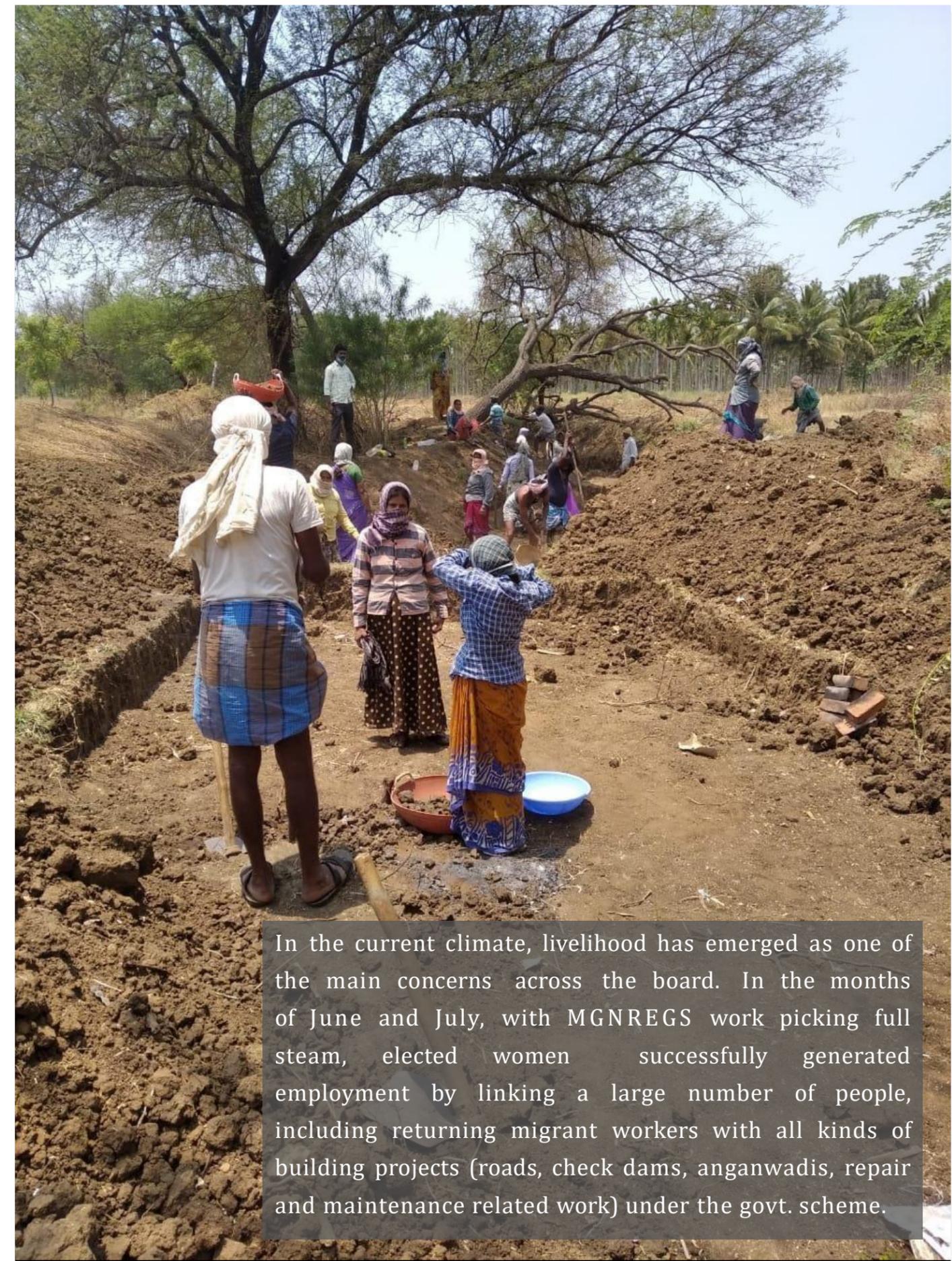
Many spoke of these efforts and some of the challenges they faced as they monitored the situation.



Expanded powers of elected women enabled them to engage empathetically with the large inflows of migrant workers. **Nirasha Harizan (Ward Member, Charbhati Panchayat, Odisha)** had been regularly meeting with migrant workers’ families, providing them with necessary information about Shramik train (special trains for workers) departure dates, registration at the quarantine centres, and counselling them as they waited with patience.

Collective efforts of **Prameela (President), Rathnamma and Lakshamma (Neralakere Panchayat, Karnataka)** ensured returning migrant labourers were not discriminated against or harassed. With support from the local MLA, migrants were quarantined in a hostel with proper facilities. They were also provided with masks and sanitizers and ASHA workers were asked to come on board to undertake routine health checkups. Prameela summed up, “It has been difficult to convince other people in the community that we need to take care of migrants. But we have managed to consolidate our efforts and put to rest any fears. Post quarantine, many were registered under MGNREGS to construct bunds and canals. Now there is work, people can start earning.”

All these efforts only go on to reiterate the earlier point about the preparedness, willingness and the determination of elected women in organising and educating the community, and working in partnership with the local administration to contain immediate impact of the pandemic as well as address the serious livelihood issues that were beginning to emerge.



In the current climate, livelihood has emerged as one of the main concerns across the board. In the months of June and July, with MGNREGS work picking full steam, elected women successfully generated employment by linking a large number of people, including returning migrant workers with all kinds of building projects (roads, check dams, anganwadis, repair and maintenance related work) under the govt. scheme.



Monitoring social security schemes has been an integral component of elected women's efforts. With no jobs in hand, a range of monetary benefits served as the only source of income for the most vulnerable groups. In the course of the implementation and disbursement, issues of delayed payments, pilferage and stalling due to technical issues were noticed.

Bharathi (Ward Member, Begur Panchayat, Karnataka) shared, "I got to know of some incidents of pilferage taking place in the accounts under *Jan Dhan* scheme. I sought the support of partner staff and all of us met the bank official who took action against the disbursing agent. We have to be constantly vigilant given the current situation."

Addressing Violence Against Women

The outbreak of COVID19 has put women and girls at increased risk of domestic violence, sexual harassment and abuse. As first responders, elected women have been in continuous dialogue with the community members and have been vigilant in addressing the emerging “shadow pandemic”. They have advocated for essential services such as helplines, help-desks, increased patrolling, access to medical attention, effective police intervention. Once again they continue to use *jagruk manch* platforms and created whisper networks to provide refuge and safe space for women who are struggling to access help as restrictions on mobility continue.

For instance, in Odisha elected women in tandem with a local partner demanded for more effective mechanisms in place to report cases of domestic violence. As a member of the disaster management committee, the local partner also raised the issue with DG Police. All the district police HQs were intimated to activate women’s desks which could be accessed via the state government helpline.

Beyond elected women, adolescent girls who have also been experiencing extreme difficulties, found innovative ways to support each other. In Rajasthan, they initiated two online support groups via WhatsApp to share important information about various government help-lines to report any cases of domestic violence.

The pandemic has pushed more families into poverty, forcing many girls to work to support their families, to go without food, to become the main caregivers for sick family members, and to drop out of school. In still other cases, shutdown of schools and poor access to online technology is being seen as another serious reason for children dropping out of the education system. The precarious scenario has resulted in a surge of child marriages. Many gains made against child marriage being reversed are real as the most vulnerable are hit the hardest.

At the same time, it was encouraging to see **adolescent girls assume leadership roles** as gram panchayats grappled with COVID19 crisis. They stepped out to support elected women, anganwadi workers and ASHA workers; spoke up and demanded service providers to be more transparent and accountable to the needs of girls, women and the poor; used WhatsApp and government helplines to spread accurate information; coordinated delivery of food rations thus, ensuring the most marginalised were not left behind. For those without smart phones, elected women and adolescent girls organised listening groups raising awareness about schemes and services available.





“It has been challenging, but we are committed to ensure people are able to access their basic rights in this time of crisis. We don’t have to hold a position to be a leader. These are our communities.”

~ Neera Devi, former elected women representative, Rajasthan





In the context of a potential rise in food insecurity during COVID19, elected women representatives in 1000 villages (200 gram panchayats) across Uttarakhand organised plantation drives. They leveraged the occasion of a local annual festival Harela (which symbolises a new harvest of the rainy season) to initiate critical local interventions that would strengthen local food systems. They have planted a wide range of fruit trees (Guava, Mango, Lychee, Orange, Lemon, Mulberry, Apricot) to improve nutrition, medicinal plants (Basil, Aloe Vera, Ashwagandha (Withania Somnifera), Timur (Zanthoxylum Armatum), Gooseberry (Phyllanthus Emblica), Walnut, Bay Leaf (Cinnamomum Tamala)) to boost immunity, and fodder trees (Oak, Qweral) for livestock; thus replenishing forests, building resilient communities, and preserving much needed ecosystems. 2020.07.13 15:09



In order to mitigate the immediate threat of food insecurity, THP India reached out to friends of THP to raise additional resources. In collaboration with its partner organisations working in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Rajasthan it undertook a rigorous intervention to provide food packets to the most vulnerable households (women headed households, widows, single women, migrant workers' families, daily wage earners, elderly without family support, households with persons with disabilities).

Of the mentioned states, Bihar received the bulk of food relief given the higher number of most distressed districts. Ration kits with food materials such as wheat flour, rice, pulses, cooking oil, salt, turmeric, soya nuggets, roasted gram, jaggery, oral rehydration solution packets and sanitary products such as soaps were distributed to these households. Food materials were procured by partner organisations and distributed by its team members directly to the identified households.

2.3 Relief Interventions

A first such undertaking in the history of THP India's work, the decision to carry out relief work [3] was largely driven by the need to ensure people's right to life and human dignity.

The nationwide lockdown that was announced in March 2020 had led to loss of livelihoods and employment on a large scale. Among the most affected were vulnerable households, most of whom rely on daily wage labor for sustenance. Many of these households were also not linked to the various social protection schemes like pensions and ration (through the PDS). Though a number of measures have been announced by the Centre and state governments for food and income security during the lockdown, their implementation has been slow and uneven. Dire state of affairs and stories of despair and starvation pushed THP India to focus its resources and energies on its crucial next phase of distributing dry food ration kits.

An elderly scheduled caste widowed woman, Badki Hansda of Jhajha block (Bihar) lives with her son. Due to her age, Badki did not find any work in the village she lives in. Prior to the lockdown, both, the mother and the son, used to subsist on what her son earned through daily wage labour. Lockdown led to loss of jobs. Badki got by with some help from neighbours, but that didn't last long. The family, faced with starvation, had not eaten for three days prior to receiving the food packet. The food packet provided them much needed support to get back on their feet.





In course of the identification and distribution process additional information on status of their eligibility and access to primarily food and social security (PDS and MGNREGS), nutrition and health related schemes. This was a key component of the intervention since providing the food kits was a one-time thing and it was necessary that the impoverished and vulnerable households were brought into the mainstream delivery of essential services of local governance infrastructure.

On the whole, we distributed **5,34,849 KGs (535 tonne)** ration and reached out to **137,965 people** across Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Rajasthan.



The last leg of relief work focused on adolescent girls and children and in addition to dry ration packets **994 creativity kits** (drawing copies, crayons, stationary) and **648 reusable sanitary pads** were distributed. Once again, partners identified the most vulnerable and invisible sections of the population.

For THP India, relief work was a step into the realm of unknown but one that needed to be taken given the unprecedented situation. No stone was left unturned in managing what was a meticulous process of procurement, chalking out routes and sites, ensuring quality control, crowd management, etc. The whole exercise has been a huge learning curve, one of reimagining THP India's role and responsibility towards to communities it works with.

Itwarin Kushre, aged 38 years from Mana Panchayat (Madhya Pradesh) is a widow and the primary caregiver for her 3 school going daughters. She would receive widow pension and sometimes worked as an agricultural labour. She had an Antodaya card under PDS which allowed her free food grains each month from the fair price shop. With the nationwide lockdown, things became rather difficult. She has been one of the many recipients of the ration kit. However, Bhagwatin Uikey (ward member) sensed that it won't last the family long. She helped Itwarin to avail a govt. loan scheme amounting Rs. 25000 with which she has now started a grocery shop from home.



With shutting down of schools, access to continued education has taken a huge hit. From ensuring the government primary school does not close down in a Uttarakhand panchayat to opening 12 education centres for Kasturba Gandhi school girls in Rajasthan, to arranging locality level teaching for children who do not have access to smart phones for online classes in Madhya Pradesh, elected women representatives are working round the clock to ensure education needs of children, especially girls, are not ignored.





3 | Learnings

With COVID19 still raging, THP India has sought to re-imagine and re-strategise its way forward and embrace a new situation. To this effect, it held its first online Training of Trainers (TOT) for the Women's Leadership Workshop (WLW) in Karnataka, Rajasthan, and Uttarakhand.

Just like embarking on any new venture, holding an online training, a first ever for THP India in its 19 years, was a daunting task. The critical transition from the usual set up of a participatory training, to the virtual space which has its limits and confined parameters, revealed a significant realisation. That a new stage has been set, creating the need for new learning processes, while retaining the fundamental principles of participatory practice, and keeping its ethos and essence alive. One saw exactly that, a synchronised slow dance, over a period of three days, between the trainers and participants despite the barriers

created by the screen. Adapting to the world of online training is just a first of many such changes to come. But so is the quiet determination and resolve to ensure that the spirit of learning together and moving forward remains intact in these changing times.

Without the groundwork THP India laid over the last 19 years, it would not have been able to respond to this moment with agility and creativity rooted in relationships of trust. The strategies employed repeatedly illustrated the significance of the alliances and skills built over the years and the well positioned elected women representatives and how they were able to leverage the public office and their collective power for lasting change that benefits everyone.

In the early days of the pandemic, as the scenario unfolded, we at THP India also grappled with the question of how best we could respond to the multiple crises. It forced us as an organisation to look around us and re-think our priorities and responsibilities. With several stories of despair emerging from the field THP India team decided to be present in the moment and rise up to the occasion by way of stepping in with information dissemination, critical food support to enable people to cope with the fall out of the lockdown, and advocating at several levels to ensure varying access needs of people as well as government's accountability towards them.

Amidst a year of difficulty and grief, we found hope in the incredible ways that elected women held their communities together. Together we were able to organise to meet basic needs such as food, accurate information while addressing long-term issues such as violence, food insecurity, livelihood. As always, elected women played critical roles as first responders, bridging the gaps where social safety nets have been eroded, and systems have failed.

Endnotes:

1 COVID19 coincided with the harvesting period in March-April and we thought it was necessary to ensure safe harvesting practices were followed as it was still the initial stage of lockdown with very little information in public domain.

2 For more stories on elected women's expansive leadership, read our [exposure essay: https://thehungerprojectindia.exposure.co/leadership-in-the-times-of-crisis](https://thehungerprojectindia.exposure.co/leadership-in-the-times-of-crisis)

3 We would like to acknowledge the timely support of key donors and friends of THP in carrying out the urgent COVID-19 action on the ground. Without access to sustained resources the relief work on the ground could only go so far and local solutions would only last as long.



The Hunger Project, India
E 6/7, Vasant Vihar
New Delhi - 110057
Website: thpindia.org

