



Covid19 lockdown: Volunteer Driven Information Dissemination and Humanitarian Responses

This document records the humanitarian responses to the spread of Covid19 and lockdowns from March to May 2020 made by the Mahila Jan Adhikar Samiti in and around Ajmer district of Rajasthan. The organisation distributed more than 85000 food packets and other essential daily needs to 5000 families and took care of more than 1000 migrant workers and their families.



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Spread of Covid19 and lockdown

Spread of the viral disease became common knowledge in early March through reporting in media and social media messages. On 24 March, the government ordered a 21-day nationwide lockdown. Lockdown continues to be in place as of 25 May with some relaxations.

Around mid-March MJAS started working to address the problems arising out of the spread of the disease and disseminating official and correct information to people in the area of work of the organization. It was realized as soon as the lockdown was announced that a large number of informal sector workers including daily wage workers, migrant and local construction workers, domestic workers, self-employed street vendors would be most affected by the lockdown restrictions. Food was a priority these families needed in addition to correct information on the disease and lockdown measures and dos and don'ts. Food distribution among these needy families was a priority the organisation addressed in the early phase.

1. Food relief distribution

Citizens for Social Action – Volunteers Initiative started humanitarian food relief operations in Ajmer district of Rajasthan immediately after the first phase of lockdown was announced on 24 March. It worked with the district administration and other donors and civil society organisations to reach out to more than 85,000 poor families, daily wage workers, migrants who came back and migrants from other states. Our humanitarian operations included distribution of cooked food, uncooked rations, handwash soap, sanitary material, sanitisers, masks, gloves etc. Mahila Jan Adhikar Samiti (MJAS) facilitated the work of Citizens for Social Action in the relief operation and provided institutional support.

Our partners in this operation included:

Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan, Ajmer

Bhagat Singh Smriti Sabha, Ajmer

Samvedana Sansthan

CORO India Foundation

A snapshot of food relief	
Total days	50
Volunteers	20
Donors	10
Locations of food distribution	86
Total Food packets distributed	85214
Average per day distributed	1704

Our efforts to reach out to the poorest sections of the society was done by 20 volunteers who coordinated with and provided food made available by the District Supplies Officer (DSO). One MJAS staff provided to support data entry work to the DSO office. Volunteers distributed 85214 food packets in 86 slum locations between 30 March to 18 May. This included more than 1000 packets of dry rations.

2. Distribution of other essential items including food in villages

Tracking and distribution of nutritious supplements, iron tablets and sanitary material to beneficiaries including adolescent girls, young women, pregnant women and feeding mothers of Anganwadis in 52 villages of Kekri and Srinagar blocks.

Distribution done in 52 villages of Kekri and Srinagar blocks		
Target population	Items distributed	Numbers
All families	set of 12 bars of handwash soap	4330
Malnourished families	uncooked rations	297
Women headed families	uncooked rations	104
Severe Acute Malnourished children	nutritious food	570
Malnourished children	nutritious food	188
Adolescent girls	Sanitary pads (2 sets)	1701
All children	Stationeries and games kits	9745
Students	Study material	250
Frontline Service providers*	PPE including masks, gloves and sanitisers	270
PHC & CHC personnel	PPEs – Masks (200), liquid handwash dispensers (100), Bar soap (50)	2
*Anganwadi Worker, ASHA worker, ANM		

Sl.	Items	Total Distributed
1.	Soaps	43514
2.	Sanitary pads	2852
3.	Liquid Handwash	180
4.	Sanitizer	100
5.	Masks	200

Criteria used for selection of families for distribution of nutritious food:

- ✓ Families pre-identified of malnourished children
- ✓ Families of anemic girls, pregnant women, lactating mothers
- ✓ Very poor, living in kutcha houses and marginalized communities, migrants
- ✓ Landless families
- ✓ Families without any member in the earning age group
- ✓ Families with more than one disabled persons
- ✓ Families deprived of access to government welfare schemes (no identity documents needed to access schemes)
- ✓ Families of women and girls that suffered violence during lockdown
- ✓ Migrant workers found walking on the roads

3. Interventions in cases of Violence Against Women (VAW) and Children

MJAS intervened in 19 cases of VAW and child sexual abuse cases during the lockdown so far. Below are the types of cases and interventions made.

Type of violence	Interventions made
Forced marriage	2
Forced remarriage (nata)	1
Child marriage	1
Domestic violence (DV)	10
Child sexual abuse	2
Sexual assault	1
Witch hunting	1
Denial of ownership of land	1

Six of the 19 cases intervened concerned children while 13 cases concerned adult women. MJAS keeps monitoring child marriage cases and it was shocking that even during the times of covid lockdown child marriages continued to be performed and girls sent to their in-laws homes. MJAS intervention focused around counseling the families against marriages and sending their daughters to their in-laws homes.

As was being feared the lockdown resulted in increase cases of child abuse. We intervened in the case of sexual abuse of an eleven-year-old child and another seventeen-year old. In both cases the perpetrator was known to the survivor. In one of the cases that resulted in severe injuries on genitals of the survivor the perpetrator has been charged under

POCSO and has been arrested. With our intervention the survivor has been granted an interim compensation of Rupees one lakh. She was admitted to hospital and surgery was performed to treat her.

In most cases of DV the police refused to intervene giving their busy work under the lockdown. Cases could be registered only after intervention was done at the higher levels in the police department.

4. Relief to Migrant Workers and their families and supporting them in getting back to their homes

Rajasthan Government announced that they would provide free bus ride



to migrants within the state as well as outside.

COME FORWARD AND HELP US WIN THIS FIGHT AGAINST CORONA

'BYE BYE CORONA' ABHIYAAN

AN INITIATIVE BY JAN PAHAL
(Citizens Alliance), AJMER (Rajasthan)

Documenting people's voices and the effects of lockdown in their lives.

IN THIS CRUCIAL TIME OF #COVID19 PANDEMIC, LET US STAND WITH THOSE WHO ARE THE WORST AFFECTED

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Digital Payments, Cash (only Indian currency)
Kind (any item mentioned in the list)

NAME:
Mahila Jan Adhikar Samiti

ACCOUNT NUMBER:
8469101011991

IFSC CODE:
CNRB0008469

BRANCH:
Sophia Sr. Sec. School, Ajmer

UPI ID:
8800201352@ybl

This is your chance to help us, a group of **35 YOUTH VOLUNTEERS** while we continue to work on the field in **AJMER DISTRICT** with a target of **5000 FAMILIES**.

The areas covered include:
Ajmer Town, Kekdi Block and nearby villages.

SERVICES AND SUPPORT:

- Collaboration with government (DSO Office) and other donors for supply of around 2000 food packets a day
- Supply of Protective Personal Equipment: mask, gloves, caps, hand sanitizers, soaps, etc.
- Ensuring supply of essential food and grocery items (including medicines, sanitary napkins, fruits and vegetables, etc.)
- Supporting senior citizens without family
- Milk and biscuit for children below 12 months of age/ children suffering from malnutrition
- Supporting people with no Aadhaar/Ration cards, other families in distress
- Volunteering in District Supply Office (DSO), Ajmer

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The migrant group supported during the lockdown shows the distress levels of of migration happening in the country. We supported agricultural workers, brick kilns workers, construction

workers and small industrial workers. It's truly astounding why workers come from far away states even while the local workers also migrate?

Below are the different groups supported

Two groups of agricultural workers came from Dhaulia in Jodhpur via Ramdevara in Barmer district. Home of one group consisted of tribal families from Manoharthana in Jhalawar district in the extreme east of Rajasthan on the border with Madhya Pradesh and another hailed from Guna in Madhya Pradesh. Both groups had reached Jodhpur in western Rajasthan around 10 March and they got to know of the lockdown on 22 March. They continued their work and finished on 14 April and left their work

places on foot on 15 April. They had hoped to find transport but they failed and again set out on foot towards central Rajasthan. They reached Kekri in Ajmer district after seven days being stopped and screened for infection by the police in four places. They also got food support at different places on the way from charity groups.

MJAS activists found them walking in Kekri on 22 April and assured them of food support and transport. The local administration, when contacted, took a very long time to respond with the result that the workers moved on by a private vehicle and on foot again. In the next stop at Deoli in Tonk district MJAS activists were able to get the administration to provide them dinner and place to stay the night. After they set out on foot again they were not allowed to enter into Bundi district by the police, but MJAS was able to get a private vehicle owner to ferry them close to their destination in Jhalawar district.

They had reached their homes on 25 April. Each had spent Rs. 3000 from the 18,000 they had earned out of agricultural labour they did in Jodhpur. Their arduous journey has forced them to vow not to venture far away again in search of labour but to work on their own lands and earn whatever was possible. Both groups had travelled more than 800 kilo meters; most of it on foot and survived on food, water and shelter wherever they could get.

Provided Relief to Migrant workers' and their families Passing through Our Area of work										
Coming from	Going to	Total Persons			Children			Mode of travel	Date left from destination	Date in Ajmer
		M	F	T	M	F	T			
Barmer, Rajasthan	Manoharthana, Rajasthan	21	15	36	0	0	0	On foot	15 April	22 April
Barmer, Rajasthan	Guna, Madhya Pradesh	35	29	64	0	0	0	On foot	15 April	22 April
Ajmer, (Jalia) Rajasthan	Baran, Rajasthan	12	10	31	5	4	9	Tractor	23 April	23 April
Gandhidham, Gujarat	Chhapra, Bihar	36	0	36	0	0	0	Truck	25 March	19 April – 3 May



Community Consultation Meeting in Progress



Food Packaging in Process



Migrant Workers Leaving Ajmer



PPEs for distribution



Migrant Workers waiting for Buses

Thirty-one members of six nomadic families including nine children belonging to Sindhi Muslim community were stuck in Sarwad area of Ajmer district during the lockdown. These nomadic worker families migrate every year before winter from their villages in Baran district in eastern Rajasthan towards Ajmer on foot and bicycles and undertake making and repair of tin boxes in villages. They live outside the villages on the way to Ajmer and return to their villages in Baran during summer. Youngest member of these families was three-year old and the eldest was 65 years.

In March and April, they were stuck in Sarwad area of Ajmer and were supported by MJAS in accessing government food relief as they had lost the work they were doing. However, this support was inadequate for them and they wanted to go back to their villages. The administration did arrange private transport back to their villages in Baran district for which the families paid Rs. 7,500 out of the 10,000 they had earned in four months of migration and work. They were put in 14-day quarantine after they reached their villages.

Study on the impact of covid19 and lockdown on daily wage and migrant worker families

MJAS initiated in April 2020 a study to understand the impacts of covid19 and lockdown on daily wage and migrant worker families. The study focused on following aspects:

- migration status,
- educational levels
- knowledge of government welfare schemes,
- occupations before the lockdown and what occupations they think they will pursue after the lockdown is lifted
- status of education among their children
- housing (own or rented)
- key sources of information on covid19 and lockdown provisions
- credit / loan status and sources

The survey covered 324 households across 24 locations in Ajmer urban areas and 205 households across 33 urban and rural locations of Kekri block. The study will be useful in planning services and supports the working families will need post covid lockdown.

Thirty-six young male workers from Chhapra, Bihar, working in shipyards of Gujarat left Gandhidham on 25 April in a mini-truck and were stopped in Kekri (Ajmer) and put into quarantine. At the Rajasthan border also, they were stopped and screened but were allowed to go on their way. By the time they reached Kekri, the government had issued orders to stop migrants wherever they were and hold them in camps. So, they were stuck in a school building with food being distributed twice a day, but the workers wanted to go back home. With administration not allowing them and even the Bihar government asking migrants to stay where they were, the workers threatened to go on hunger strike. But even this desperation was not enough to move the administration.

It was at this point in time that MJAS took up the issue with highest levels of decision making in Rajasthan to arrange for transport of these workers back to their state. This took over two weeks to finally result in these workers being allowed to travel by train to Patna on 3 May. They reached their homes on 5 May and they reported that they were put in quarantine outside the village in school building.

Men from Chhapra in Bihar migrate to work in Gujarat ports as and when the employers call them. Usually they migrate every year and earn about Rs 8000 per month and live in rented accommodation in Gandhidham town.

Supporting migrant workers' groups for travel back to home state										
Working at	Home location	Adults			Children			Mode of travel to home state	Date left for home state	Date in Ajmer
		M	F	T	M	F	T			
Kekri Block (Ajmer)	Madhubani Bihar	31	0	31	0	0	0	By bus and train	11 May	22 April
Ajmer city	Panna in Madhya Pradesh	227	156	383	85	57	142	On foot	14 April	22 April
Ajmer city	Malda, West Bengal			15				By train		
Ajmer city	Katihar and Arra in Bihar			13				By train		

Thirty-one young male first time migrants from Madhubani in Bihar were stuck in Kekri town of Ajmer district. They had arrived from Bihar on 20 March to work in a local oil mill and the lockdown was declared just after two days of their starting work. In the first phase of the lockdown they thought to stay on but after the second phase was announced 23 of them started on foot to go to Jaipur from where they hoped to find transport back to Bihar. After walking sixty kilo meters, they were stopped by the police near Malpura town and made to wait without food. With intervention of MJAS activists, local volunteers in the town provided them food. Meanwhile the oil mill owner found sent a vehicle to Malpura and brought back the workers with the assurances that he will facilitate their return to Bihar. MJAS also advocated with the government to facilitate their return with the result that on 11 May they boarded a train to Patna from Ajmer. During the more than twenty days of their stay in Kekri they could only haphazardly access cooked meal scheme of the administration.

A very large group of **migrant workers in Ajmer assisted by MJAS volunteers were a group of 525 persons including 142 children of worker families from Panna, Madhya Pradesh.** They have been living in Ajmer for more than 12 years and working mostly in the construction industry. Our volunteers provided them cooked food and rations in the first and second phase of lockdown. At the announcement of the third phase they decided to go back to their homes in

Bihar. Even as we prepared their lists and submitted to the local administration and state government to arrange road transport, a group of more than 150 of them left on foot to walk their way home to Bihar. They were under pressure from the local urban middle-class people and from the police, who many times beat them up. There were reports of police entering their *jhuggies* and beating up the workers including women. Six workers were also arrested from the location during this period.

It took MJAS great efforts and coordination that lasted more than fifteen days at the top levels in the government to get free transport to these persons upto the M.P. border. Our efforts resulted in the Rajasthan government arranging 13 buses on 16 May and transport the migrants to M.P. border. There was coordination with the government of M.P. that resulted in migrants being picked up from the border and transported to their villages in Panna. The migrants had reached their native villages on 17 May and were screened by medical team and later accommodated in quarantined for 14 days.

Brick kiln workers in and around Ajmer formed another major group of migrant workers and their families. Most of these workers are from different districts of Chhattisgarh. They normally come in November every year and go back in June as there would be no water after that and no work is done during the rainy season. Their work stopped in the first lockdown phase and the families were living on little they had saved and cooked food and rations they got from charities and the government though none of them had valid ration cards. On the end of the second phase they all decided to go back to their villages in Chhattisgarh. MJAS and our volunteers are advocating with the government for their return.

5. Conclusions and Learning

For MJAS and our volunteers the entire exercise of data collection, identification of vulnerable persons, distribution of food and other essential items and facilitating and supporting the migrants' travel back to their native villages in Rajasthan and other states has been an immensely encouraging and learning experience. This humanitarian relief operation spanning over two months and continuing was performed under conditions of total curfew like lockdown and need for maintaining physical distance and mandatory wearing of facemask. These conditions made it so much more difficult to identify the most vulnerable and reach them and posed logistical challenges. We also experienced discrimination and police brutalities against minorities and migrant labour perpetrated by some local people, private food donors and officials. Volunteers were often at loss how to counter this discrimination.

Volunteers also did not have training in understanding international standards on humanitarian work. Most operation was treated as charity. Recognition of humanitarian relief as a right of the affected population was lacking. Volunteers team needed better understanding of child protection and Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) under lockdown conditions.

This whole exercise also revealed the importance of mobile connectivity and internet access and skills for all so that people living under lockdown can be contacted, consulted and relief can be

timely and appropriately tailored to their needs. Internet access and skills are also necessary for the affected to connect to GO/NGO services and access rights.

Needs of children were largely ignored in relief distribution. Food distribution items suited the needs of adults while there was very little food distribution aimed at children. Elite schools were able to reach out to their students through internet-based teaching, children in government schools and low-cost private schools were left without any support in learning and accessing entertainment.

While the humanitarian relief exercise as helped build the capacities of MJAS volunteer team to address crisis situations with data collection, vulnerability assessment, mobile telephony and digital skills needed for coordination, timely and appropriate distribution etc, the team needs focusing training to understand the international norms such as Sphere Protection Principles and Core Humanitarian Standards.