

Civil Society Organizations

The response, Support, and Challenges in the Period of Pandemic

The current pandemic has a huge effect on everyone especially on people at the margin. It has changed the entire stature of the socio-economic spectrum. A large number of civil society organizations (CSOs) have come up with quick responses along with government intervention and individual effort. This has also indicated the need to research to find out the effect, sustainable and long term solutions.

In this regard, one of the studies done by PRIA International Academy (PIA) which is the research, training and advisory wing of Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) that took the lead to conceptualize collates and analyses the data shared by 160 CSOs working with the communities across 14 Indian States. This study has underlined the hardship faces by various sections, responses of CSOs, the challenges faced by CSOs, and the kind of support they needed to be adaptive in this “New Normal”.

The summary is divided into four segments

Who is most affected?

This crisis has affected differently to each group of people in the society, the effect on the venerable group is being surveyed in this study. Women, men, children, and persons with disabilities specifically from the marginal category are the most affected in any kind of emergency. The challenges faced by Women included the inaccessibility of health services, irregular check-up, and lack of iron/calcium tablets for pregnant women, also the compromising needs of menstrual hygiene. The immobility of women in general and during lockdown resulted in a lack of nutrition. Closed Aanganbadicentres also lead to non-availability of Nutrition supplements and vaccination, particularly for pregnant and

lactating women. The effect on the single, widow, and elderly women are even worst as they do not have the entire supporting document that can make them eligible for govt. relief packages. The financial stress on women has also increased as they were majorly in the unorganized sector, daily wages work, and MGNREGS employees. Along with all the above challenges women is also subjected to domestic violence more than usual which is also a reason for mental stress.

The lockdown and pandemic have affected the men in many ways specifically who are daily wage earners, as they lost their jobs/income which causes financial stress and mental stress. Many of these men are returnee migrants, the low rate of testing and unavailability of testing labs near to them makes them more vulnerable, they have to walk till medical centres for check-ups and other medical emergencies. The loss of the current source of income, the uncertainty of future income, and the lockdown altogether causes the financial and psychological stress among vulnerable men.

The children from the marginal community are homebound and lack of technological devices, are not favourable for the knowledge building and wellbeing of children. The condition is worst for Persons with disabilities as they are not able to access their regular pension during the lockdown and the relief measures are not being delivered at their doorsteps.

How CSOs supported?

The study indicates the different levels of support provided by the CSOs in their intervention area. The role of CSOs is majorly in the distribution of relief material, cash, and awareness generation. The relief packages from govt stick to the protocols such as ration cards, APL/BPL/Antyodaya cards, etc. however those vulnerable who are left because of no supporting document, are largely being reached out by CSOs. The relief packages from CSOs include distribution of dry and cooked meals, hygiene kits, safety gears for medical professionals, and operating of community kitchens and shelter homes. The CSOs are also assisting the local government in the distribution of the same. A few CSOs are distributing agriculture seeds to lessen the burden on marginal farmers. Along with relief packages the CSOs are also involved in providing medical support to the community by delivering medicine, psycho-social counselling, operating/supporting quarantine facilities, and supporting people with a general illness.

One of the important aspects of the current time is the delivery and collection of the right information from the community in which the role of CSOs is very crucial. The study suggests that around 47 % of the CSOs are engaged in awareness activities such as sensitization on COVID -19, precautions, and relief, linking the eligible people to govt. schemes, generation of IEC material, and one to one assistance on call or in person. For

effective support and long-time impact, the CSOs are also collecting the data from the field through various means, which is about the listing of vulnerable, monitoring of PDS, and other govt. responses, hygiene, and Rashan needs of the community, the support needed in filling forms for entitlements, the requirements of other essential such as spices, oil sugar, etc. CSOs rely on govt websites, guidelines, circulars, and orders or directly coordinating with various govt. departments. Training of staff/volunteers, rapid survey for listing needy/migrant people, and using CSOs network for accessing the information were done by CSOs. For accessing and delivering the information, both online and offline methods were used.

What are the challenges for CSOs?

The complete situation has come up with a set of internal and external challenges that CSOs are facing for being adaptive to this New Normal. With limited financial support, the CSOs are not being able to provide the essential such as PPE material to volunteers, staff, and frontline workers, The demand of relief package is higher than supply, the slow response from administration in getting travel passes is also a challenge in working smoothly. This lockdown also means an inadequate flow of appropriate information to the volunteer and non-printing of IEC material also becomes a hurdle. Lack of funds to carry response activates was also a challenge for around 60 % of the organization. The challenge related to access and disseminate the authentic information to the community is also faced during this time.

What next?

This pandemic and lockdown have indicated the need to change or adapted the unique strategies to work in the community. The survey has opened up some of the proposed action by CSOs for the next 2-3 years, considering the “new normal “situation. Some of the major areas of work would be the distribution of hygiene and relief material, engagement will local governance institute, facilitation of govt. schemes, training, and capacity building of PRI members, ASHA, ANMs, and Anganwadi workers. Creating livelihood and income-generating activates will also be an important aspect of their planning. To respond more efficiently the CSOs expressed the need to build their capacity around psychosocial counselling, knowledge building for community intervention as well as handy with technology for accessing with the appropriate knowledge.



विकास शिक्षण संगठन

जी-1, 200, आज़ाद सोसायटी, अहमदाबाद-380015

फोन: 079-26746145, 26733296

email: psu_unnati@unnati.org,
publication@unnati.org

वेबसाइट: www.unnati.org

राजस्थान क्षेत्रीय कार्यालय

650, राधाकृष्णन पुरम, लहरिया रिसोर्ट के पास, चौपासनी-

पाल बाई पास लिंक रोड, जोधपुर-342014, राजस्थान

फोन: 7425858111

email: jodhpur_unnati@unnati.org

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