

INTEGRATED DECENRALIZED
DISTRIBUTION

WAGE PLAN FOR INFORMAL
WORKERS

ADDRESSING FARMERS'
NEEDS

STRENGTHENING HEALTH
INFRASTRUCTURE

ENSURING SAFETY NET FOR
THE FRONTLINE

GENDER SECURITY

ACCESS TO UNINTERRUPTED
EDUCATION AND CHILD
SAFETY

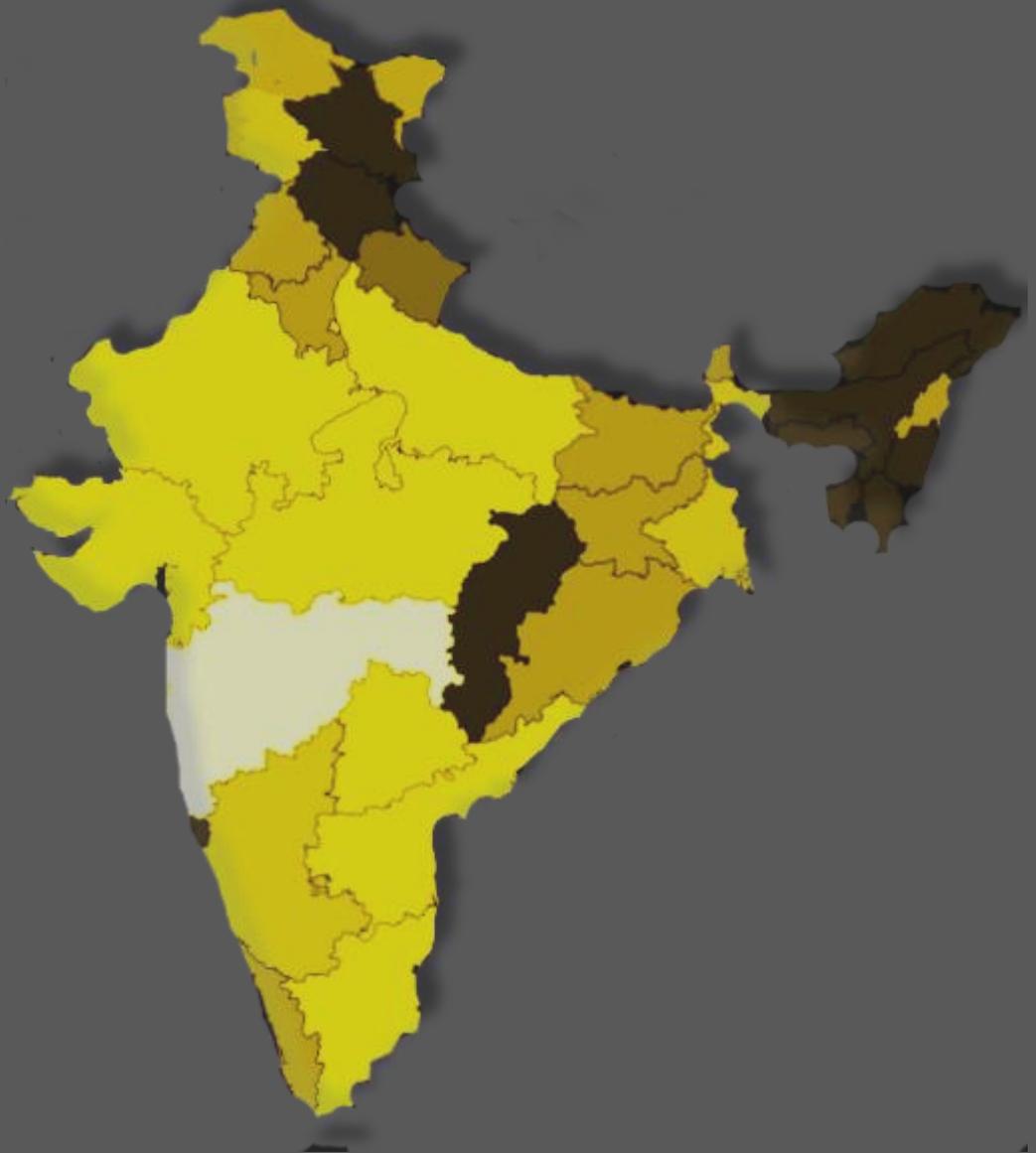
INCREASE IN NUMBER OF
SHELTER HOMES

FORTIFYING CYBER SECURITY

NEUTRALIZING POTENTIAL
CONTAMINATION ROUTES

BUILDING RESILIENCE
THROUGH LOCAL ECONOMY

CORONA CRISIS: CHARTER OF ACTIONS TO MITIGATE & PREPARE



Diseases have been inevitable for the humankind and have perished millions of people since times immemorial. Humans, over the years, have stepped higher from the traditional fatalistic approach to a modern solution based approach to fight the problems. The modern man definitely did not eradicate the occurrence of threats but has been able gain control over them in the past. From immense efforts in establishing economic and social reforms to strides in science and technology, man has derived a cure for almost all illnesses that has hit the face of humans. (Harari, 2015).

But the time is far more testing now than ever. The world today is amidst one of the worst pandemics it has ever seen in decades. COVID-19 and its devastating effects have been felt across the globe. It has infected more than 1.5 million in more than 200 countries, instigated more than 1 lakh deaths all over the world and rendered millions jobless. The first case of Corona Virus infection in China appeared in December 2019. Before China could give any acknowledgement to the issue, it already had crossed the border infecting Europe, Thailand, and America. Despite having the finest health infrastructure, developed nations like France, United States and United Kingdom have given in to the sudden misery that has come up due to lack of preparedness. India's response against the issue has been a vigilant and proactive one so far, particularly by declaring nationwide lockdown to prevent the spread.

Yet, there are ripple effects of this crisis. A nation's way of response in the current situation could dramatically influence its future. Also, its reaction could serve as a reference to other nations to either imitate good practices or prevent from what has not been fruitful. Nobel Laureate, Amartya Sen said that fighting a pandemic in itself is not fighting a War (Sen, 2020). The impact of the crisis has to be studied well, particularly for countries with high populations and high poverty levels.

Lessons, however, are the key to win this war. Connecting the dots reveal several scopes for improvement as in planning, mitigation and preparedness to shield the world against future outbreaks.

1. Integrated decentralized distribution

The constitution (Article 47) enshrines that right to food is inherent to life with dignity. When in crisis, the foremost priority after ensuring the safety of the people is to make sure that no individual dies of hunger. The last person residing in the farthest area should be easily reached.

- **Revamping and Integration of essential service schemes:** The PDS should be channeled in a decentralized manner, removing the compulsory biometric PoS verification at every outlets. Home delivery of PDS, meals, dry-ration and essential nutrients should be taken up by integrating the ICDS and MDM. For those who lie outside the ambit of PDS such as the destitute, stranded migrants, extremely marginalized and the most vulnerable can be reached through a system of community kitchens stretched across areas. Besides, the food should be provided with due dignity. (Bhaya & Kurup, 2020). In areas of acute water shortage, water tankers should be supplied.
- **A mega recovery package:** More is less when it comes to planning a recovery package for the indirect victims of a pandemic. The stranded labourers, particularly the unregistered construction workers and daily wage laborers, those without *Jan Dhan* Account and those who lie beyond the ambit of social security of any kind are the most vulnerable. The urgent need is to make amends for food through community kitchens, increase the temporary shelter homes adhering to the spacing norms and increase immediate cash transfers for all those informal workers who are stranded as long as they do not go to their respective homes.

2. Compensatory wage plan for informal workers

The informal workers should not be bereft of wages for the days of livelihood lost. About 90% of the total workforce constitute the informal. (Economic Times , 2020). The closure of MGNREGA work due to social distancing needs should not cost the workers. Hence, considering the current period as work done and providing their wages is important. Meanwhile, the government can look for alternative work options along with arrangement of essential protective equipment for them. There is a need to take them under the umbrella of unemployment insurance in the long run.

3. Addressing Farmers' needs

The supply chain of farm produce gets hit hard. The small and medium farmers bear the brunt of it. It is a dystopian scenario for people who are solely dependent upon agri and forest produce for livelihood. Specially, the producers of perishable commodities. Additionally, if the current situation poses a threat to farmers' livelihood, the future would be miserable to the end consumers. High demand and limited supply will lead to sky-rocketing prices of these products.

- **Supply chain and crisis Management:** Confarm (Consumer-Farmer Compact), an initiative by Deccan Development Society and Disha Consumer Alliance has been exemplary to fight this gap even in times of crisis. They have built a partnership wherein demand and supply of agricultural

products reach an equilibrium point. The rural and urban government bodies have a role to play in assisting and supporting the groups and organizations involved (Dantuluri & Sebastian, 2020). It has been noticed that when free markets fail, local solutions emerge and thrive. Therefore, participation of Farmer groups and the Agri-based organizations together can ensure a sustainable solution to food availability even during times of crisis. The states can take a cue from such stories.

4. Strengthening health Infrastructure

Government hospitals and health resources therein are fully packed due to the pandemic. Rural dwellers are unable to avail the health necessities in times of emergency as all the accessible hospitals are working for COVID relief. Patients who are on a long term medication cannot avail themselves of medicines and eventually fail to complete the course which leads to even bad consequences. Generally, in such situations the rates of MMR and IMR increase specially for rural areas, due to reduced reach for institutional delivery. Also, cases of pregnancies skyrocket due to lack of contraceptives which results in the family planning measures going in vain (Chatterjee, 2020). Our country has been working relentlessly for the cause of WaSH in general and menstrual hygiene in particular (Rukmini, 2020). If during such times, one goes back to traditional usage and disposal approach once again, it will render all the strides taken over awareness creation for years useless. It is important to fulfill the newly generated hygiene oriented necessities to rural women and adolescent girls.

In India, with 8 doctors per 10000 people, the doctor to patient ratio is below the WHO standards. (Taneja, 2020). Emergency procurement of health staff is an essential step towards balanced distribution of services. The Government of Himachal Pradesh has taken appropriate steps to fight this by called upon volunteers from the retired medical staff, the paramedical staff and also the undergraduate medical and nursing students.

- The procurement of PPEs and ventilators in view of the rising need should be enhanced. Many organizations are addressing this need in India under their CSR activities. (Shaheen, 2020). The state should address the need of repairing of non-functional ventilators and ramping up the manufacture and production of more ventilators, PPEs to increase its capacity. Lab-to-market process must be made fast-track for cost effective innovations in medical technologies
- The shortage of sanitizers, soaps and masks for the general public should also be addressed and the state should enforce measures to restrict sellers from charging exorbitant prices for the same.
- For each Panchayat there should at least be one health institution with adequate resources dedicated to daily emergencies even in the times of crisis. The government of Uttarakhand, in order to ease the pressure, has reserved 25% beds of private hospitals for COVID-19 patients which is a exemplary move to utilize the private healthcare. (Sinha, 2020).

5. Ensuring safety net for the frontline

Apart from the insurance cover that has been announced, the frontline health workers of the society (from doctors, nurses to ANMs and Anganwadis) should be provided with incentives, reimbursement of all expenses and appropriate protective equipment. Their safety should be given utmost priority and hence measures should be taken to minimize their risk to infection. It is important to include all workers in the formal work structure and address to their social security needs in the long run.

- Women constitute 70% of the global healthcare workforce and 50% of the sanitation workers in India. Each state government should issue an advisory specifically for their cause and to address their security.
- Sufficient efforts to training and capacity building of ANMS, ASHAs and AWWs should be undertaken with respect to use of PPEs.
- An enhanced gratuity for these warriors is essential for their service.
- The sanitation workers and the scavengers have a very important role in this war. Delivering safety equipment in the short run is an emergent need.

6. Gender Security

According to Census of India data of 2011, there are as many as 480.2 million workers in India. Of these, 93 percent are in the informal sector. Dr. Tedros, the Director General of World Health Organization (WHO) and Michael Moller, Director General of the UN have highlighted the cases of domestic violence since the COVID-19 outbreak started. The former has called on countries globally to address this grave issue and for the essential service in its response.

- In India, the National Commission for Women (NCW) reported to have received 257 complaints related to offences against women including 69 cases of domestic violence in the first 10 days of the lockdown, which is an upsurge of 161 cases from the first week of March. Women belonging to rural areas face the issues of marital rape. The fact that alcoholism still largely prevails in the country, during such times it becomes even more difficult for women who bears the brunt of all aggression. (Chowdhry, 2019). It is of pivotal importance to address the situation through 24*7 helplines and operate fast-track redress.
- The gender implications of COVID are yet to be understood. The impact upon women, LGBTQ, persons affected with disability should be investigated thoroughly. Special personnel should be deployed at every area to look into the matters of discrimination and violence.

7. Access to Uninterrupted Education and child safety

About all schools across the globe have fully or partially closed the schools. In India, MHRD has declared to promote students of all classes except the one who have appeared for their 10th and 12th board examinations. The academic calendar has to be revised for the upcoming session. This

will cause much disturbance and widespread planning is required to compensate for the days lost. Syllabus has to be shuffled by the central to ensure each student learns and grows. The focus shouldn't be exam centric but knowledge centric. Almost all the private schools have started online classes. The dependency upon technology has increased ever more now. There is an observable disparity among the haves and the have-nots with respect to internet accessibility and affordability.

- The online ed-tech giants are in much demand and so are their intentions of profit making, they should be governed from charging high during such times through appropriate measures. Data privacy, parental controls and cyber security should be ensured. Education should be free and stringent action should be taken against any school or institute charging inflated fees. The Central and state education departments should develop free portals with education materials, enabling self-study and self-testing. The time is now to revamp the SWAYAM portal and upgrade, professionalize and popularize this state run online learning platform.
- The need of the hour is to ensure teacher-student communication takes place such that children who face abuse at home are gauged and protected. It is also important to keep a check on any kind of child labour.
- Schools should not be converted as quarantine centers at any cost. The reopening too should be planned only once the risk is mitigated completely, after disinfecting the complete school premise.
- Child's mental health needs must not be over-looked at any cost. Needful guidelines must be aired for parents to deal with the situation as a number of parents would be needing some help during the times of limbo, especially in metropolis societies where off-home work culture never allowed the parent-child mutual understanding to develop. Incorporating appropriate counseling for students is of pivotal importance once the school reopens. The teachers too should be trained in this regard. Pressure of any kind from the school authorities should be criticized and action should be taken. This can impact the mental health of the children.

8. Increase in number of shelter homes

During times of crisis, the most vulnerable happen to be migrant laborers and the homeless populace (Pandey, 2020). Gender specific shelter homes should be constructed in every city and big towns.

- The model of *Ren Basera* (common shelter home) can be extended to a large scale near to every junction, in the railway owned swathes of land. The Government of Uttar Pradesh has capacitated its shelter homes and community kitchens to accommodate and serve ten lakh people. This will not only strengthen crisis management but also become instrumental in supporting migrant/ homeless workers in usual times.

- The shelter homes should have adequate space to follow the social distancing norms and also have safe and hygienic sanitation facilities.

9. Fortifying Cyber Security

During the times when internet of things is keeping the systems and societies together, it is more important than ever that Government must fortify its cyber securities and contingency plans. Defense wings can be deployed for the protection of the cyber net of the nation. Citizens Guideline must be aired for potential threats and ways to dodge them. The Centre of excellence institutions must be involved to develop 'made-in-India' versions for necessary app-based systems and services required by the people or would be required in the post-COVID world for better preparedness.

10. Neutralizing potential contamination routes

As public health concerns are more severe now, it is the time we must not forget to prepare for the post-COVID world. Extensive research must be initiated to identify and neutralize the potential threats in the lifestyle and public health systems that could be a cause to spread of an outbreak. For example, urban-planning, water treatment, waste management systems, waste disposal mechanisms, packaging and delivery standards, promoting digital payments rather than cash transactions, disinfecting procedures at public places, especially closed spaces like cyber café, restaurants, schools, etc.

Water is a potential contamination source. And we are highly vulnerable to future outbreaks considering the state of water treatment affairs (if we could recall the cholera outbreak in the last century). In India, there are 234-Sewage Water Treatment plants (STPs) and are located in just 5% of the cities/ towns along the banks of major rivers (CPCB, 2005a). According to Water.org, 21% of communicable diseases in India stem from unsafe water. An estimated 30% of sewage water from major cities is treated and only 60% of the industrial waste water is treated, proving the non-compliance of the standard. (H. Balasubramaniam, 2014).

11. Building Resilience through local economy

Resilience is a relatively new, complex yet integral part of public policy sphere. Economy is at maximum risk during the times of globalization. Greater openness and interdependence in the global economy has left local economies more exposed to systemic shocks that originate outside their remit, in various sectors. A resilient economy can be built with decentralized and de-globalized markets insulated from external and internal shocks. Had here been a strong local economy, supply chain would be more adaptive, more cost effective and more manageable.

The main policy questions to be addressed include:

- How sustainable is the local economy's development path?

- How did the local economy perform during and after the crisis? What type and degree of resilience did it display (reduced volatility; resistance to shocks; rapid recovery)?
- What risks is the local economy exposed to as a result of its growth profile, the state of its key resources and the long-term trends affecting it?
- What policy levers are best adapted for building resilience given the specificities of the local development path?

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AUTHORS: G.GEETA AND KUSHAL K. MAURYA

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