

FAT Covid19 Response: Phase 2 Report

26th April 2020 to 25th June 2020



Project Areas:

South Delhi

Yerwada - Pune

Giridih - Jharkhand

Patna, Buxar, West Champaran, Muzaffarpur - Bihar

Highlights Of Phase 2 of Covid19 Response

- “Corona Nahi, Karuna!” campaign continued while action requiring field work slowed down due to concerns regarding community spread;
- Covid19 Relief Fund extended till 31st August 2020 with provisions for basic essentials, rent, utilities, medical costs for most urgent needs;
- Previous system of stipend to participants of YWLP Level 3 discontinued and scholarship system for all girls in our network started;
- Device purchase and internet recharge facility are being provided to those who want to join online programs but need this support;
- Steps taken to restart Young Women’s Leadership and Girls in STEM programs with online sessions adapted to the needs during the pandemic;
- External support received for staff capacity building and psychosocial support.

Corona Nahi, Karuna! Campaign Status

- 22 campaign meetings held. Topics discussed:
 - Understanding Covid19: What it is, how it spreads, precautions, latest news on status of spread, treatment, vaccine development and related fake news;
 - Escalation of violence during lock-down: Hearing each other out, peer support conversations, sharing strategies to counter and helpline numbers to reach for help;
 - Campaign actions: Sharing experiences, strategies, challenges and successes, reminding the campaign philosophy, values and actions.
- On an average 60 girls participated in campaign meetings. Challenges faced:
 - Time management with online college classes, exams, agricultural work and household chores;
 - Not having phones, problems in phones, poor connectivity or power failure;
 - Frequent physical health issues, psychosocial stress, increasing violence at home;
 - Displeasure due to discontinuation of stipend system (in some cases in Delhi).

Campaign Actions in Phase 2

- Campaigners continued to share information on Covid19 with their community members to counter fake news and superstitions. (Reach 765 people);
- Besides arranging donation of essential food items through other NGOs and private donors (Reach 696 families), campaigners also facilitated donation of masks and sanitation products in their community (Reach 325 people);
- Campaigners gathered information on government as well as non-profit schemes in their locality, broadcasted information within their community and filled forms where anyone needed help. (298 forms filled);
- Campaigners intervened in instances of violence they saw against girls, women as well as muslim community members. They also faced backlash in some cases.

Additional Actions by Bihar Campaigners

- Called local government authorities to find out about government schemes in the state, report gaps in implementation and follow up to ensure proper implementation;
- Supported village heads to manage quarantine facilities for returning migrant workers, intervened in violence against them and ensure safety of women and children in quarantine centers;
- Supported villagers access medicines, ambulances, treatment for encephalitis and other illness. Supported leprosy and TB patients receive financial aid from government schemes which they were previously not receiving;
- Shared information on MNERGA schemes and fill forms for people to get work.

Spreading Compassion, not Corona!

- Campaigners are regularly engaging in conversation about compassion and equality with people in their network. They have been able to gain support from some of their family members, friends and neighbours as well. Some have even encouraged others to spread small acts of kindness and compassion.
- Many campaigners have been helping us reach girls in our network who do not have phones or whom our team is unable to reach for other reasons.
- Campaigners have been checking on vulnerable girls and women near them, their friends, to check on their well-being and psychosocial health.
- Small acts of kindness like helping people open bank accounts, sharing phones with children unable to join online classes, are regularly shared with us.

Some Action Stories

Varsha Sinha (Giridih, Jharkhand) made and distributed 108 masks after she saw that people around her either did not have any masks or were reusing single use masks.

Kajal Kumari (Muzaffarpur, Bihar) gathered the ward member and some elderly villagers to intervene when a woman in her neighbourhood was being beaten up and thrown out of her house during lockdown for demands of balance left on dowry. They threatened of police complaint under dowry act if the woman is hurt again. The woman is now not being beaten.

Sushmita Mandal (West Champaran, Bihar) called the BDO in her location multiple times to get all information regarding MNERGA schemes started in Bihar during Covid19, shared them with all other girls of Bihar and helped 20 people in her village get work through MNERGA.

Priya Kumari (Parsa, Bihar) helped migrant workers returning from cities reach quarantine facilities, volunteered in quarantine centers to cook and serve food, and then helped them get work through MNERGA.

Some Stories of Resilience

Despite being beaten by her brothers demanding money, **Neelam** refused to let them take the support received from FAT's Covid19 Relief Fund. Her parents have stood by her but they have also faced violence from their sons.

Komal was hospitalised for Typhoid and Jaundice treatment when the Covid19 lockdown started. After getting back from hospital, she has faced verbal and physical abuse from her brothers who cannot tolerate that she has more control over money at home as the only earning member of the family now. Her mother broke a rib in an attempt to protect her.

Despite being always tired, sad and sleepy, **Nirmala** attends all online sessions regularly because she wants to keep connected with her peers and find the courage to break out of abuse at home. As the only girl at home, she has to do all the house work and take care of her sick mother round the clock.

Pooja is facing constant pressure from her family members to get married, which is mentally stressful for her, but she keeps fighting back. In the campaign meetings, Pooja regularly discusses her challenge with other girls facing the same pressure.

Financial Updates

Covid19 Relief Fund Used till 25th June 2020

Location	No of families	Basic essentials	Rent and utilities	Medical costs	Total amount (INR)
Delhi	45	2,63,655	26,800	10,958	3,01,413
Pune	30	1,35,869	0	2,000	1,37,869
Jharkhand	39	2,75,610	2,000	14,300	2,91,910
Bihar	72	5,23,784	2,219	19,558	5,45,561
Total	186	11,98,918	31,019	46,816	12,76,753

Other Financial Updates

- 33 participants received a total of 2,05,000 INR as stipend in April 2020;
- 7 participants received a total of 7,592 INR as emergency educational support in June 2020;
- 13 participants have taken telehealth consultations from DocOPD supported by FAT;
- 15 phones have been purchased so far for participants and phone recharge support has been provided to all girls joining online sessions;
- 4500 USD received from Kiran Anjali Project for Covid19 Relief Fund;
- 3500 USD received from Empower Foundation as Emergency Grant;
- 10000 USD received from Global Fund for Women as Crisis Funding.

Program Updates

Young Women's Leadership Program

- Revision sessions on YWLP Level 1 workshops on feminist rights issues were started from 15th May, as the need to strengthen resilience was felt with this rising violence and pressure to get married at home. 12 sessions have been conducted so far with an average participation of 40 girls (17 to 27 years age range).
- 43 girls gave admission test for NavGurukul's skilling program in software engineering on 25th June 2020. Although all rounds of tests have not yet been completed, 37 have already failed in preliminary tests.
- While we have been able to reconnect with 827 girls from our database of previous participants over the phone, we have been able to restart regular engagement with only 79 girls so far. Even within them, very few are attending online sessions regularly. As a strategy to reach girls whom we are unable to engage with online, the collective building process underway before lockdown has been now restarted since June.

Girls in STEM Program

- Online sessions with girls (10 to 20 years age range) in GiSTEM program was started from 5th May and 14 sessions have been conducted so far. The sessions have focussed on teaching tech skills to join online sessions, catching up about online school education and building awareness on Covid19. STEM puzzles and games are done as icebreakers.
- While 44 girls have shown interest in the online sessions, only 20 girls are joining on an average. The main reasons behind low attendance are unavailability of devices and overload of online school classes.
- We have not yet bought phones or tablets for girls as we have concerns about online safety of children and misuse of the devices. Some parents have raised concerns about girls spending too much time in social media platforms and chatting with friends. We will be providing tablets in July after agreeing on parental monitoring guidelines with parents.
- A strategy to engage previous GiSTEM interns to support the children with online school education challenges is also being developed.

Feedback From Girls About Online Sessions

YWL Program

- Have been able to speak about coronavirus fake news & precautions with family members and reduce panic about Covid19
- Have been able to take leadership action during Covid19 which has boosted confidence
- Monsoon rains have affected Internet and increased power cuts, joining meetings has been very difficult
- Eyes and ears are hurting due to use of phones and headphones.

GiSTEM Program

- Participants are very happy to have reconnected with the program
- Learning about new apps like zoom has been exciting
- GiSTEM sessions have given more information about Covid19 than online school classes
- Want to learn electrical projects that can be made at home and about environment issues in future sessions
- Eyes are hurting because of too much screen time.

Team's Challenges & Reflections

Challenges Faced During Phase 2

- The Covid19 Relief Fund started in Phase 1 has brought some relief for families of girls associated with us who lost all sources of income due to lockdown. However, needs have increased beyond basic food supplies as lockdown was extended.
- We had to discontinue previous stipend system due to ethical concerns regarding equality and equity. Instead we expanded the financial support through the relief fund and started education support for all girls associated with FAT. This has caused unhappiness and anger in some participants in Delhi.
- While there have been few instances of taking support from relief fund when not needed, some are not taking any support from the relief fund despite need as they see it as alms. Taking decisions regarding the fund has been a dilemma for us.
- Despite support from our relief fund, some families have moved back to their villages from their city homes. We are concerned how this will affect the girls.

Challenges Faced During Phase 2

- Concerns for our staff members and participants safety has increased due to community spread of Covid19 and increasing confirmed cases in their communities. As lockdown has been lifted, people have started working for livelihood. But precautions from Covid19 are not being followed.
- Frequent illness in staff members and participants has been a big concern. This has meant irregular participation of girls in online sessions and overload on the team as well.
- There has been a sharp rise in violence on girls and women at home, pressure for marriage on girls and general frustrations as the lockdown increased. This has caused psychosocial stress on both staff members and participants.
- Cyber crimes during Covid19 has affected both staff and participants. Some families have lost all their savings due to unauthorised withdrawal from their bank accounts. Instances of cyber harassment of girls by strangers has also increased.

Challenges Faced During Phase 2

- Online operation is not inclusive or effective. Many girls are also dropping out of online sessions either due to inability to manage time with online classes, exams, agriculture, household chores, or due to lack of interest. Those who do join are facing technology challenges that disrupt online sessions and hinder fruitful engagement.
- Our staff (who are also young members of the communities we serve) are facing challenges adjusting to working from home with the small spaces, summer heat, illness, stress in family, online college classes and poor technical arrangements at home. Coping with increased workload, difficult working conditions and low human resources has been difficult for the team.
- Besides this, being inexperienced in responding to crisis situations and driving relief efforts, managing the Relief Fund has been extremely challenging for us. The need for the fund cannot be denied, but it's management is beyond our skill set.

Way Forward

- Although we had thought managing minimum operations in existing funds would be the best strategy to cope with the situation, we feel the need to build team capacity urgently for organisation's sustainability. Hence hiring of skills consultants as identified previously has already been started.
- Strategies to engage girls in collectives locally to reach those we are not able to connect with are being explored. Girls Advisory Councils, Peer Education Groups and Peer Support Groups seem to be a possible solution. However, prevention from Covid19 will have to be built in cautiously. And online communication with these groups will be challenging.
- Many older girls (20+) are in urgent need of livelihood source as they feel financial independence will help them delay their marriage and support their families right now. Conversations have been started with entrepreneurship development groups for support towards local livelihood generation strategies. Once again, online execution is challenging.

*Moving forward despite the challenges
is a necessity, not an option.*