



ARISE-TGI team update

Supporting India's poor and vulnerable during COVID-19



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The ARISE-TGI team has been working very closely with its partners, Safai Mazdoor Union (SMU), Dalit Bahujan Resource Centre (DBRC) and Hasiru Dala, who have been spearheading the relief efforts, for the most vulnerable communities, especially waste pickers and sanitation workers. The team has also been involved in other initiatives, with colleagues from various civil society groups and other organisations. The on-going work has been detailed below:

Shimla, Himachal Pradesh

The ARISE TGI team has been in regular touch with Balbir Singh, the General Secretary of the Safai Mazdoor Union* (SMU) in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh [*our partners in Himachal Pradesh]. In light of the increase in coronavirus patients in India, and Himachal Pradesh's recording its first coronavirus case on March 21, 2020, Balbir has been negotiating with the Municipal Corporation (MC) in Shimla for the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) and sanitisers to the sanitation workers and door-to-door garbage collectors.



A safai karamchari sweeping the streets while wearing the monsoon-specific uniform and PPEs

The MC has distributed 100 ml sanitisers to 5000 workers.

Supervisors at SMU have been at the forefront of creating awareness within the community regarding the importance of adhering to government advisories, by personally talking to the workers in small groups. Many of the workers, who were finding the ill-fitted gloves cumbersome in their work, were persuaded to wear them nevertheless, for protection. In addition, most of the workers are wearing their monsoon specific uniforms, such as raincoats, for greater protection.



A safai karamchari disinfecting the streets, Shimla

The ARISE team has been communicating regularly with SMU over telephone, and also sharing resources with the SMU members over WhatsApp, including coronavirus-themed comic strips and videos (in Hindi and Punjabi).

[Click here to know more](#)

Bengaluru, Karnataka

The ARISE TGI team and Hasirudala* (*our partners in Bengaluru) have been coordinating efforts in supporting waste pickers and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic. During multiple meetings, various strategies have been developed to tackle the detrimental impact of COVID-19 on the waste picking communities in Bengaluru.

A decision was made to facilitate the door-to-door awareness campaigns that were being spearhead by the volunteers at Hasirudala, and supplement these efforts by developing and distributing posters in the informal settlements. The purpose of these campaigns is to spread awareness within the communities, regarding handwashing, etiquette for sneezing and coughing, etc. In addition, various videos (developed by WHO, MoHFW, etc.) on precautionary measures have also been shared with the waste pickers. Considering that these videos may not be appropriate and fully comprehensible to waste pickers, Hasirudala has developed context-specific resources, including stories and cartoons. The volunteers during the door-to-door campaign are demonstrating how to wash hands and practice physical distancing.

In spite of lockdowns in the country, and in Bengaluru in particular, waste pickers continue to work, in even more precarious conditions – without PPEs or sanitisers. Hasirudala has requested waste pickers to use cloths to cover their faces, wash them after use, and dry them in the sun before re use. Since, there are no provisions for safe drinking water, or facilities to wash hands or use sanitisers during work, it was suggested that soapy bins (plastic bins with soap water) be installed at various places in the informal settlements. However, this intervention did not gain much momentum and since procuring sanitisers for all waste pickers has been difficult (due to low supply and high prices), Hasirudala has attempted to purchase iso propyl alcohol in bulk.

As a corollary to these efforts, Hasirudala is also creating awareness among the public about taking extra precautions, such as masks, gloves, and tissues, while segregating waste and treating all waste like sanitary waste. Understanding the limitations of being able to cook food and buy food from government subsidised food outlets, attempts are also being made to distribute cooked food to the families of waste pickers.

They have also started a fundraising campaign to support the families of waste pickers by providing them care kits (comprising of 25 kgs of rice, 5 kgs of lentils, 2 litres of cooking oil, salt, chilli powder, 500 gm ground nuts, 500 gm jaggery and soaps, to last for 21 days. These relief kits cost Rs 1600, including transport. [Click here to know more](#)

Hasirudala has been actively distributing the kits all over the city using its vehicles, which have permission for movement during the lockdown. They are also the nodal organisation responsible for running the logistics across Bangalore. Hasirudala's community radio, Radio Active 94.1, and social media channels are the media in use for their awareness measures.

Hasirudala is a member of the Alliance of Indian Waste-pickers (AIW), a national network coalition of member-based organisations, aiming to organise waste pickers who are working in the informal sector. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, they have been at the forefront of raising the demands of waste pickers to various government bodies and seeking immediate action towards the same. Given the presence of multiple organisations and their initiatives to reach out to waste pickers, the alliance is creating a platform to unify all the activities of the organisations in order to effectively manage and distribute resources.





Packaging of relief kits in Bengaluru

The alliance has drafted and communicated the following demands to different government functionaries:

1. providing personal protective equipment;
2. providing public facilities to wash hands, and waiving user fees for public toilets;
3. providing ration including sanitisers (to be provided for the next 3 months for all the waste pickers and their families);
4. conducting regular health camps, given the close proximity among residents in the informal settlements; and
5. compensating waste pickers' families in case of fatality.



Distribution of care kits among waste pickers

Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh

The ARISE TGI team in partnership with the Dalit Bahujan Resource Centre (DBRC) have been organising awareness programs for the DBRC field staff and the waste picking communities in Guntur and Vijayawada.

As a part of these awareness programs, the communities are being in-formed about the various precautionary measures they can take in relation to COVID-19. The ARISE TGI team has been sharing all relevant resources, including important IEC materials such as coronavirus-themed comic strips and videos (in Telugu) with DBRC.

DBRC has also been raising funds in order to support waste pickers and their families by providing them with 'provision kits' and distributing meals. [Read more here](#)

In addition to this, DBRC has also extended its support towards migrant workers from Jharkhand – by providing them with essential provisions and linking them to various state government departments. Their efforts have been recognised by Hemant Soren, the Chief Minister of Jharkhand in his twitter post.

[Read more here](#)

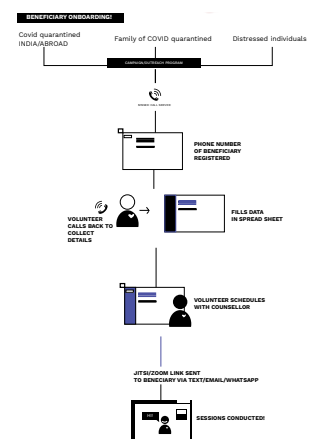
Subsequently, DBRC has been appointed as the Nodal Agency, by the Government of Jharkhand, to provide services to the migrant workers from Jharkhand, who are living and working in Andhra Pradesh.

In addition to the aforementioned initiatives, the ARISE TGI team members are also engaged in the following efforts:

Mental health support

Prasanna Saligram and Surekha Garimella from the ARISE team, along with some software engineers and colleagues from SOCHARA, Bengaluru, are involved in the setting up of an online mental health tele-counselling system.

A missed call system has been set up with a number given for potential counselling seekers. Missed calls will get recorded in a Google form. The numbers from where the calls were received will be called back, and appointment slots provided. At the slotted time, a trained counsellor will do one-on-one Tele-counselling. This is hosted on a partner: www.sochara.org/sahay



Flowchart of the mental health tele counselling system



Community awareness program, Guntur

Advocacy at health systems level

Surekha Garimella and Prasanna Saligram as members of Jan Swasthya Abhiyan (People's Health Movement) are involved through providing inputs to the larger movement advocating for system level interventions and human rights approaches to deal with the community impact of Covid-19, specifically in relation to (a) isolation and quarantine of patients suspected of, or diagnosed with Covid-19 infection.

[Read more here](#)

(b) tapping into the private health sector to support the public health system responsibilities and duties of care in the current crisis (draft under consideration).

Prasanna Saligram has co-authored a newspaper article of popular interest, on the importance of strengthening public health system with primary health care orientation. [Read more here](#)

Fund raising for partners

ARISE team members are supplementing the efforts and enhancing the outreach of their partner organisations – Hasirudala, and Dalit Bahujan Resource Centre – to collect resources and distribute essentials to waste pickers through volunteers from the partner organisations. This is to ensure that the waste picking communities do not go hungry during this crisis.

Communications/ Awareness

Prasanna Saligram was enlisted as a public health expert by the Sarathi community radio station (based out of Bengaluru) on a phone in program, in order to raise awareness about the preventive measures that can be taken by communities during Covid-19. The program was conducted in Kannada.



Distribution of essential provisions to migrant workers from Jharkhand, Guntur