

Journey of Relief work by HID Forum and Partner organisations

## **HID Forum**

Founded in 2002 Human and Institutional Development Forum (HID Forum) a Bengaluru based not for profit works in the Karnataka and Telangana region with most marginalised communities such as Women, Dalits, Muslims, Farming Communities, Informal Economy Workers Sexuality Minority and Sex Workers. We engage with civil society organisations, informal groups and people's organisations that are headed by and who work with these vulnerable communities. We strengthen and empower poor, marginalised and discriminated sections of Indian society to live a life with dignity.

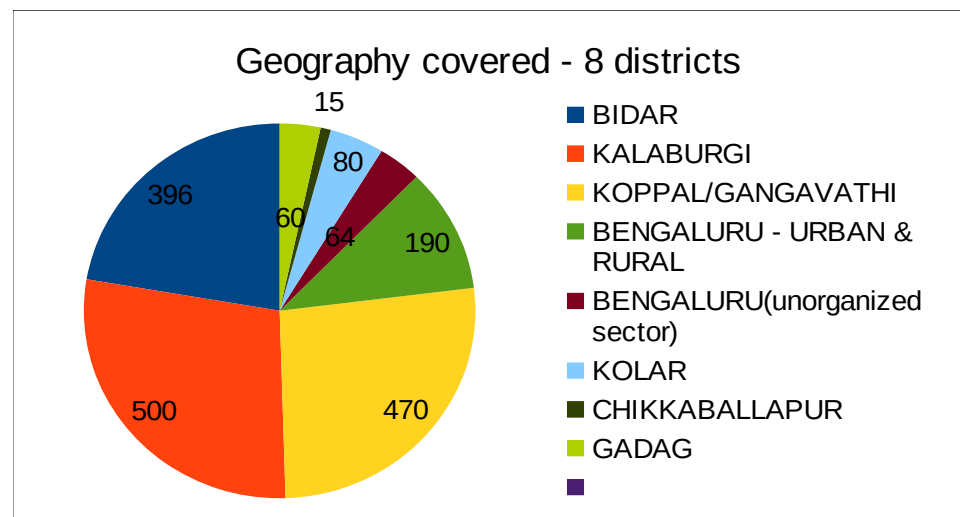
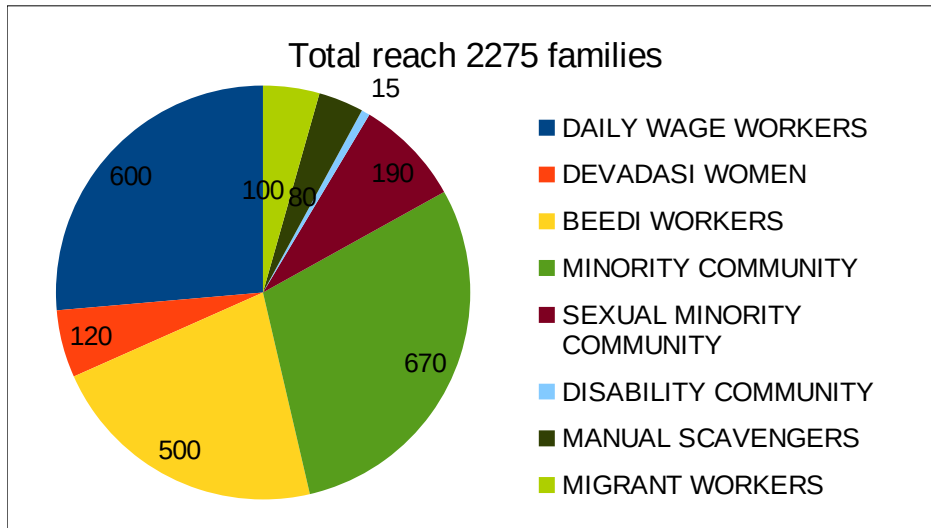
HID Forum engages on the issue of Identity, Dignity and Diversity and works along side community and civil society organisations.

### **Our Partners**

- Most backward, vulnerable and marginal communities.
- Civil society organisations and NGOs engaged in implementation of development projects and advocacy work.
- Networks and alliances that pursue development objectives.
- Unions and large systems in the informal sector such as construction, beedi rolling, manual scavengers, sexuality minority forums, that organise large numbers of workers struggling at the margins of existence.
- Platforms and people's organisations.

During the month of March 2020, when the nation went into a lockdown, HID Forum and its partners discussed the impact of pandemic and lockdown on the marginal communities. HID Forum decided to respond to the vulnerabilities of the communities whether ration or emotional well-being. Initially the aim was to mobilise resources for 100 families in Davanagere but soon the situation was deteriorating in many districts where HID Forum's partners were working. Calls started pouring in from many districts and this lead to HIDF responding to Davanagere, Bidar, Kalburgi, Koppal, Bengaluru urban and rural, Gadag, Chikkaballapur and Kolar districts. Families such as beedi workers, daily wage labourers, sexuality minority, Devadasi women, manual scavengers, migrant workers and disabled were identified.

## Journey of Relief work by HID Forum and Partner organisations



Over the period of 2 months i.e. April and May HID Forum reached out to as many as 2275 families supporting around 11,000 individuals from all these districts.

As a first step, a team of volunteers were mobilised by partners in each district. A strong and enthusiastic 5 members team went through a basic orientation on what is covid19, how it spreads and precautions to be taken during relief work. Simultaneously team put together a list of most needed groceries for the communities and were agreed upon. Needs assessment was initiated during this period to understand the needs of the communities that were affected by covid and lockdown. Criteria was developed in identifying most vulnerable families and accordingly each

## Journey of Relief work by HID Forum and Partner organisations

partner in the district identified the families that needed immediate support.

Volunteers was involved in the day to day relief work and were exposed to all vulnerabilities of the families. This had serious impact on their well-being and emotional state. HID Forum reached out to Dr. Anuradha Prasad, consultant and board member of HIDF to provide counseling support to these districts. This initiative of providing emotional well-being sessions were done district wise every week. All the relief volunteers appreciated this support offered and helped them to stay emotionally fit and available for the community to respond to their needs.

This document is an effort to trace and highlight the critical experiences of team members across all districts. In this attempt, we try to bring forth their journeys and through their eyes capture the relief work during covid 19 lock-down. We have categorised the journey district wise. We thank Ms. Aisha Khader, student at TISS for supporting us in writing this document and making it useful to share.

## Through the eyes of the relief volunteers

### Koppal

COVID-19 has created havoc across the world. The story of India is no different, the lockdown has further led people from marginalised backgrounds especially those belonging to the informal sector and those who are daily wage labourers into a dire situation. Shaheen Kausar who belongs to Gangavati in Koppal district was deeply saddened by the prevailing situation and being a committed social worker, she felt she should do something to improve the prevailing situation. As a step towards this, she approached the mosques in her neighbourhood and requested whether the income of the mosques can be contributed towards the relief of those suffering due to



## Journey of Relief work by HIDF Forum and Partner organisations

the lockdown. Unfortunately, she couldn't derive anything concrete out of this.

She was deeply disappointed with this. This is when she received a call from HIDF explaining to her about the relief activities HIDF was planning. Shaheen has been associated with HIDF for the last three years by participating in various capacity building programmes of HIDF. She is a lawyer who is actively engaged in the issues faced by those in her community, and she runs Huma Women Minorities Rural Development Society and Huma Women's Trust aimed at the empowerment of women in her community for many years. For the underprivileged in her community, Shaheen also started a school to ensure no one dropped out of school due to financial issues. All these made Shaheen's access to community easier, and this helped her in mobilising the volunteers as well. As mandated by HIDF to conduct the need assessment survey of the community to identify those who require relief support, she formed a seven-member team. Her team members were Rahamat, Ameena, Junaid Akhtar, Manjunath Swamy, Shakeel Ahmed, and Jafar Sadiq.

They together as a team conducted the survey to find those who were affected by the lockdown. Priority was given to persons with disability, widows, single women, single mothers, daily wage labourers, and those who are unemployed currently. At the end of the survey, they found two hundred and fifty families who require support. The volunteers throughout the survey were careful about not informing these families about the support that would be given to them. For this they tried gathering information from the neighbours of these selected families. The prepared list was then forwarded to HIDF.

The next task before the team was to look out for shops from where they could get the materials for the relief kits, as guided from HIDF, they looked for the best quality products. They took around four days to procure the materials for the relief kits. In two days through sustained team effort, they were able to complete the packing of all 250 relief kits. The following day they started the distribution. While they delivered the relief kits to the elderly and those persons with disability at their homes, rest were asked to come to Shaheen's home to collect it. The volunteer team made sure that only one person came at a time to ensure physical distancing was maintained.

During the relief work, they faced a lot of challenges starting from the fear of going out during this time of COVID-19 and interacting with different people. But through the sessions HIDF organised, they were

## Journey of Relief work by HID Forum and Partner organisations

able to overcome these apprehensions and fears. This equipped them to take adequate precautionary steps like wearing a mask, using sanitisers to ensure their safety and not to be the carriers of the virus. Another challenge they faced was with respect to obtaining the pass for movement, they had to visit the police station several times and took over a week to acquire the pass. One major challenge, all the volunteers equally felt helpless was when the people who were not there in the list of two-fifty families that was prepared came asking for relief packages. They didn't have enough resources to provide them with relief pack. They tried to make them understand, while some did, others left angrily. Sometimes, even local politicians called the team asking to provide the relief packages to those they were suggesting, which she didn't agree to. Shaheen and her team throughout the relief activities strongly believed that being unbiased is of utmost importance, but admits that these incidents were emotionally tiring. During these times of crisis, the mental health support and wellbeing conversations from HIDF helped them build more confidence and overcome these situations.

Engaging in the relief work exposed the team members to varied experiences. In the list prepared there were two beggars, who lived on the streets and didn't have a place to cook food. To ensure their well-being, the volunteers approached the families who were living in the surrounding area asking them if they could prepare food for them for a month, and they agreed to it. The volunteers also kept following up on this. After providing the relief package to one of the women in the community, she held Shaheen's leg, cried, and thanked her for providing relief in times of such difficulties. Most of the people received relief packages with teary eyes because they were clueless about their survival, and this was a huge support to them. The volunteers also shared that the families were very happy and thankful, which gave them immense



satisfaction, happiness, and also a sense of how important the work they were doing. There were also incidents where two of the families returned the relief kits, stating that they received it from the government and asking the

volunteers to give it to others in need. The honesty they showed really

## Journey of Relief work by HID Forum and Partner organisations

surprised the volunteers especially when a lot of people were panickily taking all the relief packages they received.

The volunteers while distributing the packages, engaged in conversations with those who came to collect the relief kits. They checked on how the situation of their family was, extended emotional support to them and also kept following up on whether they needed any more support. The volunteers also shared every piece of information they got about COVID 19 with them, aimed at creating awareness, making them overcome fears, and spreading positivity. The volunteers also had a lot of learning throughout this journey. The counselling sessions where they talked about themselves, rather than others helped them reflect more, and made them realise the importance of self-care even during the pandemic, with a hectic work schedule. For some of the volunteers, this was a first-time experience, and the interactions with the people in the community also made the volunteers better understand the community they were supporting. closer towards understanding them. The meetings organised by HIDF helped the volunteers to learn how to interact with people, and how to better support them. Working under a situation of lockdown was completely a new experience to all of them which exposed them to different realities, which added onto their learnings and shed newer perspectives to poverty and marginalisation. When realised the impact this relief had on the lives of the marginalised, it motivated the team to work more, and they are looking forward to extending support to other families who are in need.

For the volunteers, this journey was completely a new learning filled with challenges and heart touching experiences. In times like these, the entire team of volunteers who worked in relief activities displayed immense commitment towards the community and showed the importance of coming together and collective action.

## Kolar

With the outbreak of COVID-19 and the unexpected lockdown, those belonging to the community of manual scavengers lost their employment and their means towards earning a livelihood. Padma had been closely working with the community in the Kolar region for years now, she is an active member of Safai Karmachari Kavalu Samithi (SKKS), a statewide federation of Manual scavengers. Padma was the first person members of the community reached out to in Kolar. She has always supported the

## Journey of Relief work by HID Forum and Partner organisations

community and stood by them in times of distress. With the lack of work and hence no food, the members reached out to Padma for help. This impacted her emotionally and she felt that it was necessary for her to take up and formulate some measures to support the community. Padma and HIDF have a couple of years of association through SKKS. HIDF provides institutional strengthening support to SKKS for the last 3 years. She is also a member of the Mahila Kattay programme initiated last year. When she engaged in a discussion with her mentor in the programme about the effect of COVID-19 and the lockdown, she mentioned to her about crises the manual scavenging community was facing.

With no employment, the community members didn't know how to



manage the situation. They didn't have food to eat, and many in the community, because of the work they are engaged in, faced health issues. The hunger made their situations worse, they showed symptoms

like hand shivering, and shaking of the head. At the same time, they were completely unaware of the present situation in the country, they didn't know about the COVID-19 outbreak or its impacts. Because the electricity and DTH bills were not paid, their connections were cut. Belonging to the Dalit community, again falling in the lowest hierarchy among the Dalits, made them further marginalized in the society. Hence other people didn't allow them to their houses. Over the calls, Padma explained to them about the prevailing situation and also the precautionary measures they had to take to ensure their safety. But they were more worried about dying of hunger than from COVID-19. They told Padma they need money, and were ready to do any work, also asked if they can get some credit facility. Padma's mentor from Mk reached out to HIDF and updated the challenges that Padma was faced with. HIDF and Padma discussed the situation in her region and identified the support that could be extended to the community.

## Journey of Relief work by HID Forum and Partner organisations

Based on the discussion and the criteria outlined collectively, Padma went ahead and prepared a list of eighty people, of whom most were elderly, and hence highly dependent. She forwarded the



list and received the financial support to buy the materials for the relief kit. Padma didn't have a volunteer team; she got the relief materials packed by the shopkeeper himself. She also hired an auto to distribute the relief kits. Every day she had to travel around forty kilometers to distribute the relief kits, and it took around two hours. It took her around eight to ten days to distribute the relief kits to all the listed people.

The process had a lot of constraints, even though Padma had a pass, the police stopped her several times which was extremely time consuming. She had to resort to taking long routes instead of shorter ones while going to those areas that were sealed down. When she went to distribute the relief kits to the families in the sealed down areas, the upper caste people created issues, saying that Padma was coming from the city and she would be a carrier of the virus. Though there were many hurdles, Padma was determined and patiently convinced them so that she could reach the vulnerable and give them support. The sealed down situation restricted the accessibility and mobility of the community members, and this resulted in the worsening of their condition.

When Padma went to the homes of these people to distribute the relief kits, she engaged with them, offered them emotional support, and also made them more aware about COVID-19. Though there were provisions to get rations through the Public Distribution System, the experiences of the community members were that they were provided only rice, that too in lesser quantities. While on the field Padma realized that these people were only having one meal a day, and with whatever was remaining they made *Kanji* with it on the next day morning. When they got relief kits, they told in a long time this is the first time that they are going to have three meals a day. They blessed Padma and showered her with words of gratitude with teary eyes. They even told they survived because of people like Padma, and looked upon Padma as an angel who came for them



## Journey of Relief work by HID Forum and Partner organisations

when they had merely nothing to eat. This made Padma happy, she felt the work she was doing made an impact. She was thankful to HIDF for supporting her and giving her the strength to be there with the community in difficult times. The regular meetings to share day to day updates, the discussions, and peer learning facilitated by HIDF were also of great support to her.

Padma shared an incident that had a huge impact on her. She went to give the relief pack to a widow who lived in the last village of the district, she had two small children and her husband used to be a manual scavenger. Immediately as she received the relief kit, she started cooking, and once she was done, she asked Padma to join. For Padma, this was emotional and a heart-touching experience. Like all of us, the whole situation of lockdown was new to Padma. Amidst this lockdown as well, Padma stood for her community and worked for their cause. The relief work added on to her learnings, and her work was filled with challenges, but what motivated her was the plight of the manual scavengers and the need to be there for them, as a support system.

## Gulbarga

The first death due to COVID-19 in India was reported in the district of Gulbarga. Hence from March 12<sup>th</sup> onwards Section 144 was declared in the area. Even before the whole country went into lockdown, Gulbarga had already been in a lockdown situation. People lost their jobs, ran out of money, and food to satisfy their hunger. Gulbarga is one of the most



backward areas in the state and is also a drought-affected area.

Masthan Biradar had been actively involved with the community and had been working towards the empowerment of minority

community in the area. He had been working with HIDF since 2011. He

## Journey of Relief work by HID Forum and Partner organisations

is the coordinator of Sahara Rehnuma Law Center in Gulbarga. The center largely works on Muslim minority rights, and minority women's education. Through constant engagement with the community Mastan was able to build credibility among the members of the community. Realising that the community was facing a crisis, with the support from HIDF Mastan decided on starting work. For this purpose, he formed a team of five members from the community. Sahara has also initiated Mehnath Construction Workers Union, which was roped in for providing the list of daily wage labourers who needed support during the lockdown.

They started the process with a need assessment survey to map the people who required support. Persons with disability, adolescents, elderly, widows, women, and construction workers were given priority while preparing the list. Finally, they prepared a list of 500 persons who were need of relief support. Once the list was forwarded to HIDF, the fund was released to procure the relief materials. For the first delivery, the team purchased the materials from the local market, though they struggled to get food grains due to the lack of availability in the market. They got the materials packed from the shopkeeper.

Later, the situation worsened, due to black-market activities, and lack of food items in the area. With a lot of difficulties, the volunteers arranged the materials for the relief pack from around three places where the materials were being sold on a wholesale basis. This helped them in getting more materials for a lesser price. They took the materials to the office and packed it. Even the office area was sealed, and they distributed relief kits after 7 PM. The distribution was done in five phases, by distributing hundred relief kits in each phase.

The relief team in Gulbarga took an altogether different approach in distribution. They called the recipients of the relief pack to their office, as they had enough space to ensure that physical distancing was maintained. They set up a replica of a Bazar in the office area using round tables. So that people could go and pick up the materials. The volunteers felt just giving the relief kits would make the people feel that it is more like a favour. But arranging it in the form of a Bazar gave them a feeling of picking the items they needed. Each table had items with a standard quantity and the list of identified people was verified as they took the ration and proceeded. This method of distribution gained a lot of social media attention as well.

## Journey of Relief work by HID Forum and Partner organisations

Meanwhile, a lot of other organisations had also started the distribution of ration kits in the area, but the quantity of the items was less when compared to what Mastan's team was distributing. The volunteers observed that the other organisations weren't distributing the ration kits based on any area criteria, instead was giving it to anyone who came asking for or those who belonged to their constituencies.



During the distribution, one added challenge was the police restricting them from distribution as the lockdown was going on. In such instances, and in cases of people not being able to come to the office, the team went to their homes and distributed. They had to travel to the villages on the outskirts of the area, for which they hired an auto. While traveling and during the distribution process, in the minds of the volunteers there was a constant fear of being infected by the virus, especially because the first death happened in their area. The volunteers found the counselling sessions given by HIDF helpful in overcoming the fear, and the guidance helped them in taking adequate precautionary steps.

The people who came to collect the relief kits seemed really happy, and this made volunteers feel good, as well as motivated. The volunteers recalled an experience where they got to know about a widow who was living with her children who were disabled. Later they decided to go and distribute the relief pack to her. She was shocked to see the volunteers at her doorstep, at the same time she felt so happy. She was so overwhelmed that she was unable to speak. The volunteers felt very emotional at this point that tears started filling their eyes. On the way back, a shopkeeper nearby told the volunteers that they did a great job by helping the family. This reaffirmed their work and motivation. Another experience shared by the volunteers was about the cobbler to whom they went to give the relief pack. The cobbler was really sick, and couldn't go for work for the last two months, and he lived with his family in a small

## Journey of Relief work by HID Forum and Partner organisations

room. The smile on their faces, made the volunteers realise the impact of these relief kits on the lives of these people.

The volunteers shared though they were constantly on the field, working with the people in the community, this lockdown and a large number of people in the community being left with no food, was an unexpected situation they had to handle. The volunteers felt it was their responsibility to reach out to people and to be there for them. Even now daily the volunteers receive calls seeking help. They really hope they would be able to mobilise more resources and reach out to more people in need.

## Sexuality Minorities- Bengaluru

The transgender community, who were largely engaged in begging and sex work was one of the worst-affected communities during the time of lockdown. With no support from the government, and with no employment options, the lockdown put their lives off to a standstill. They didn't even have enough food to satisfy their hunger. Mallu Kumar, Uma, and Jeeva are part of three different organizations working towards the welfare of the transgender community, namely, Karnataka Sexual Minorities Forum, Jeeva, and Samara. They came together during this time of crisis to ensure the survival and welfare of the community members.



Neither Mallu, Uma, nor Rajasekar didn't have enough resources to support them. Initially, few organisations came forward to provide ration kits, unfortunately, they provided low-quality ration kits and distributed it only

## Journey of Relief work by HIDF Forum and Partner organisations

in certain areas. When the volunteer team got to know about HIDF providing relief support in different districts in Karnataka, they decided to get in touch with HIDF. All three organizations they are part of had been closely working with HIDF for over three years. As they got a positive response from HIDF, they listed the items to be added in the ration kit, estimated the expenses, and prepared a budget. Simultaneously they conducted a need assessment survey focusing on how many transgender persons were there in each area, what was their financial situation and made a list of people who were in a dire need of support. The list had around five hundred transgender persons.

With the advance money they received, they went to the wholesale market, bought the materials for the ration kit, packed the ration kits, and distributed these relief kits to thirty people. They took a goods vehicle to distribute it. Later they received financial support for around sixty kits, with the money received immediately they purchased the materials and distributed the kits. HIDF also helped in bringing on board various donors who could provide financial support for the relief activity. When it comes to seeking financial support from various organisations one major limitation the volunteer team faced was with regards to proposal writing. They felt they didn't have the competency to write proposals, so they tried to overcome this challenge by directly calling the organisations. But with this limitation also they were able to reach out to various organisations who eventually supported. The volunteers emphasized that the support they got from HIDF helped them build more confidence to approach other organisations seeking financial support.

With the support from the donors, and other organisations they were able to distribute two thousand and five hundred kits to the transgender persons in Bangalore Urban and Rural areas.

The volunteers struggled with obtaining the travel pass from the police to go for the



## Journey of Relief work by HID Forum and Partner organisations

distribution of relief kits. Their request got rejected two times and were stopped by police while they were travelling to distribute relief kits. Their previous experiences of interactions with the police, helped them to better negotiate and to put forward their demand strongly. Later through the Women and Child Department, they were able to obtain a ten-day pass and this again was a long process. The team faced space constraints to pack and store the materials for distribution. It was also a struggle for them to manage the money for transportation, for this again they had to reach out to their friends and near ones.

While on the field, people often offered them tea and food, but they respectfully declined it by making them understand that, to ensure the safety of both the parties, it was necessary to maintain physical distance. Hence, they distributed the relief kits at the entrance of their residences. They took care of their safety by using masks and hand gloves. Being at the forefront of the relief work, the volunteers felt putting their safety at risk would put the whole community currently dependent on them at risk. Volunteers were in a conflicting position while they had to take pictures of the recipients of the ration kits, on one side they felt they are just giving them ration kits, and why should they take a picture of it, but on the other side they felt it was necessary for the documentation process as proof. The volunteers ensured that these pictures won't be used anywhere without their consent. This helped in building trust among the community members.

The community members were really thankful when the team reached out to them with support. They told that even when no politicians who otherwise comes during the election time didn't bother to care about them, the only one who gave them support and ensured their survival was the volunteer team, and they will forever be indebted to them. These words of gratitude gave them the motivation to work more and also happiness, as they could be there and do whatever was in their capacity when the community needed them the most. Those people in the community who were taking medications struggled without getting food, this had chances of causing them side effects, and they felt these relief kits were life-saving for them.

During this relief work, the volunteers learned to manage unexpected crises and they were able to navigate through it as well. One of the volunteers also shared that previously they did monitoring work wherein they gave directions to others, but during the relief work and getting

## Journey of Relief work by HID Forum and Partner organisations

field experience helped them get better insights about the transgender community and their struggles.



The community also had HIV positive members who were in a furthermore grave situation. The volunteers from their conversations with the community realized that the relief kits were not enough to meet the current needs of the community, they didn't have money to buy gas cylinders and pay their rents. The

volunteers themselves not getting salary found it difficult to support them out of their pockets. Generally, donors were also not ready to give cash transfers. The volunteers felt helpless about the situation, but the fact that they didn't sit in their offices comfortably, instead came on to the ground, kept them motivated to move forward exploring more opportunities to extend support to them.

The volunteers felt the processes and methods adopted by HIDF were supportive, and created an enabling environment for them to work. Sharing the regular updates about the relief activity and also the counselling sessions helped the volunteers to reduce their work stress, as working continuously from morning to evening was mentally and physically tiring for them. This way of coming together and collective work boosted their morale and trust. The emphasis on the volunteer's feelings and experiences, and the suggestions they got, helped them to overcome the mental stress they were facing.

For the transgender community, their needs and the struggles are different, often this gets ignored by the mainstream society. When their only means of employment is at a halt, the volunteers felt that there should be more concrete steps from the side of the government towards the welfare of the transgender community. As they are always pushed to the margins, there is a lack of awareness among the community, hence

## Journey of Relief work by HID Forum and Partner organisations

the volunteer also feels it is necessary to conduct an awareness session on COVID 19 with them. The lack of a proper plan from the side of government is pushing the already marginalized communities in the society to further marginalisations. Even after the lockdown is lifted, the volunteers feel there won't be much betterment in the situation of the transgender community as their work whether it be sex work or begging involves physical contact. The team feels they have the onus to support the community with access to more resources as compared to them, they are exploring further options to support more transgender persons who are in need of support. And they felt working together as team with shared responsibilities is something that they will take forward and this will help them in developing a support mechanism to the transgender community.

## Davanagere

The unplanned lockdown that was implemented in the country on March 22nd had significantly impacted the informal sector. The story of the beedi workers and domestic workers in Davanagere was also no different. They struggled without a source of income, and they were left without food to feed themselves and their families. Karibasappa and Jabeena had been working with HIDF for the past 7 years. Karibasappa



got involved with HIDF through Community Learning Movement (CLM). HIDF and the beedi workers been working towards the strengthening of beedi

workers' union and construction workers' union in Davanagere and have also been instrumental in mobilising the minority women in the community along with a CBO HELP which started by both of them. The two unions are well established in the community and have a good grasp of the issues of the community. HIDF informed him about the relief work



## Journey of Relief work by HIDF Forum and Partner organisations

they were planning. Karibasappa and Jabeena formed a five-member volunteer team with the community members that included Jabeena, Sabrin, Zabiulla, and Mohseen. Karibasappa and Jabeena are currently fellowship holders of HIDF, and they have been working towards the strengthening of beedi workers' union and construction workers' union in Davangaree.

As they were closely working with the Dalits and the Muslims in the area, they identified five hundred families from among them who needed support. The prepared list was then forwarded to HIDF. With the fund they initially received from HIDF they bought the materials, packed it, and distributed the relief kits to hundred families. The families were worried that the lockdown will continue and they will run out of food grains again. Unfortunately, the lockdown extended and the situation of these people worsened. The volunteers reached out to fifty more families and distributed the relief kits.

After the hundred relief kits were distributed, the volunteers conducted a need assessment survey among twenty-five members selected from twenty-five different families. The volunteers ensured that the selected members included children belonging to the age group of 13-18, 18-25, beedi worker, Muslim, Dalit, Single woman, Widow, Senior Citizen, Devadasi Women. They also made sure that there was proper gender representation. During this survey, the volunteers engaged on an individual basis with them and tried to get insights on the current situations of their work and family, also their thoughts on coronavirus. The volunteers also focused on creating more awareness about COVID-19 during the need assessment survey to help them overcome the fears and build more confidence among the community.

Meanwhile, as there were no cases reported, on April 18th Davanagere was declared as a green zone. On the very next day, a COVID-19 positive case was reported in the



## Journey of Relief work by HID Forum and Partner organisations

area. The total COVID-19 positive cases went up to one hundred and twenty-one, and Davanagere was completely sealed down.

At this point, the volunteers were left three hundred and fifty relief kits that had to be distributed. Through negotiations with the police, they were able to get permission to distribute the relief kits. Then the team of volunteers started distributing relief kits to the three hundred and fifty families who were identified during the need assessment survey. With the areas being categorized as containment zones, the volunteers found it difficult to transport and distribute relief kits. People were not able to go into these areas, and the people living there were not able to come out as well. The volunteers also struggled to buy the materials due to sealed down situation, and as the area was categorized as a red zone, even basic materials were not available in the shops.

One major challenge the volunteers faced was with regard to their identity. The media propaganda of Muslims being the carriers of coronavirus created an aversion towards the volunteers. Several times this came up as a hurdle in the distribution process. Some people even got into a fight with the volunteers, saying they don't want to take the relief kits from Muslims, even when they didn't have enough food to ensure their survival. This had an emotional impact on the volunteers as well, as they had been working with the community for a very long time. In these areas, people belonging to different religions and castes had been living together, and the volunteers felt that the sole reason for the troubles among the community members was the fake narrative created by the media. The volunteers tried to engage and convince the people, as they felt in these difficult times it was important for them to provide support.

On one side the sealed down situation was going on in the area and on the other side, this targeting of the Muslim community made the emotional state of the volunteers deteriorate. One of the volunteers quoted that she was not even able to sleep for a couple of days. During these times, the weekly counselling sessions from HIDF gave moral support to the volunteers. The volunteers also got guidance on how to handle these kinds of situations. These sessions also emphasized on how the volunteers had to take care of themselves alongside working for others. Through this, the volunteers were able to understand their own qualities and were able to work towards strengthening them. This also helped them in overcoming their fears by openly speaking about it. The weekly meetings organized by HIDF with the district coordinators and

## Journey of Relief work by HID Forum and Partner organisations

the counselling sessions with the relief team helped them in improving their self-confidence. The volunteers also felt without these sessions and meetings their work would have been simply restricted to the distribution of relief kits. But all this enabled them in establishing a stronger relationship with the community and with themselves by better understanding the feelings of the community members as well as their own.

While the volunteers went home to home distributing the relief kits, they ensured that they took proper precautionary steps like wearing masks, hand gloves, and using sanitizers. When the number of cases went up in the area, the volunteers also went to the district hospital to test whether they had been infected with COVID-19. The results of all the volunteers were negative. They did this to make sure that they wouldn't become carriers of the disease. As the word Corona itself instilled a lot of fear in the minds of people, the volunteers oriented them about how to stay away from the risk of coronavirus.

The smile on the faces of people when the volunteers went to distribute the relief kits gave the volunteers a lot of happiness. During this time, Ramadan was going on and Muslims were fasting, they didn't even have the money to buy milk. So, they just had black tea while breaking their fast. When they received the relief kits, they told the volunteers at least for a month, we will be able to have food happily. Witnessing the happiness and the blessings these people expressed, the volunteers felt whatever be the situation, however severe it gets, they must be there with the community members supporting them. The volunteers also felt indebted to HIDF for facilitating the whole process.

Engaging in the whole relief work, the volunteers realized that the community and they are not two separate entities. Earlier the volunteers only thought about the community and always kept it before themselves. Now they understood, that the better they know themselves; they will be able to know more about the community and connect to them better. Before the relief work, the work of the volunteers with the community was largely advocating for labour rights, organizing protests and union activities. The relief work facilitated in binding the union strongly and volunteers felt there was new energy among the union members.

While the volunteers are continuing the relief work, they feel they have been able to grow individually as well as community organisers. They are still determined about extending maximum support to the community. At the same time, they feel this distribution of relief kits is a short-term

## Journey of Relief work by HID Forum and Partner organisations

solution. The responsibility of coming up with a long-term solution to the difficulties that are being faced by workers in the informal sector is ultimately on the government. The volunteers felt when the workers have lost their jobs, and are in the constant fear of coronavirus, the government on one side is implementing anti-worker policies. In the community, the union came together and organized two protests against this during the lockdown. The volunteers also expressed that the COVID-19 reached the country through the rich, but the working class is suffering because of this, and they strongly believe the government should come up with measures that are in favour of the working class.

## Bidar

In the district of Bidar, initially, Section 144 was declared, and no one was able to get out of their homes for one week. Mamatha, Nalini, Surekha, Babu Sangram, and Ratnaprabha had been working with Ebenezer for few years and have were associated with HIDF through the Rehnuma initiative for the past 3 years. Surekha had been initially

involved in the Rehnuma project, as she was a part of another project of HIDF, Nalini took charge of Rehnuma project. Likewise, all the members of the team we active community organisers, and had been working towards the welfare of the community members.

During this period, members from HIDF contacted the volunteers in Bidar district to know the situation there. A lot of members from the community had already contacted the volunteers seeking help. They had lost their jobs; they didn't have money nor food to eat. Volunteers tried consoling them and told them they will



## Journey of Relief work by HIDF Forum and Partner organisations

look out for options to support them, as they didn't have enough resources to meet the demands of the community members. They conveyed the situation to the HIDF team. They suggested the volunteers to get the travel pass for social workers so that they could go to the houses of the community members, talk to them, and support them.

To obtain the traveling pass, the volunteers had to go to several officers. Initially, the officers declined it by saying that the government is providing the ration and people have materials to fulfill their basic needs. Nalini, who went to meet the officers told that the government is providing only rice, and people require various other amenities and that they are distributing it to the most marginalized in the community. Then she was asked to get permission from the Panchayat to distribute in the village, and permission from the Municipality to distribute in the city. Finally, with a lot of effort and support from some of the officers, they were able to obtain the travel pass for the village. This took around one week.

Meanwhile, the HIDF team asked whether they will be able to distribute relief kits to the community members. Without a second thought, they said yes because they were aware of the difficult situation the people in their community was facing. Especially those persons with disability, women, and the elderly. Some families had around five to six children, and without job and money, they struggled to feed their children. The HIDF team asked to prepare a list of the community members who needed to be supported.

The team of volunteers has been working in the community for the past few years, hence they are more or less aware of the situation of each family in the community. They knew who were the most



## Journey of Relief work by HID Forum and Partner organisations

marginalized, and who were suffering the most during this lockdown period in the community. They identified these families as the ones to whom the relief kits had to be distributed. More priority was given to widows, persons with disability, elderly, those belonging to SC/ST category, those who are homeless, those who had lost their employment, and also had children dependent on them. The total number of families who were identified was three hundred and ninety-six. The list of identified families was sent to HIDF. Once the pass was obtained, the fund to buy the ration was transferred to the volunteers.

A meeting was conducted before they started the distribution of relief kits. It oriented the volunteers on how to maintain physical distance, and how to ensure their safety as well as that of the community members. In the meeting, they were advised to wear masks, hand gloves, use sanitisers, and how to be on the field. The volunteer team bought the materials from both the wholesale market and retail outlets. All of the five volunteers together packed the relief kits and went to the villages for delivery.

These villages had a population of around one thousand to two thousand, and they had identified only ten to twenty families from each. When they reached the villages for delivery, a lot of people who were not there in the list came asking for relief kits, the volunteers found this as a challenge. Sometimes political leaders and community leaders gave threats to the volunteers and got into fights with them asking why the relief kits are only given to certain families. To avoid these fights, volunteers distributed the relief kits from nearby mosques, temples, and other common places. In situations where people were not able to come to these places, the volunteers ensure that it was sent to their homes. The volunteers tried explaining the criteria behind choosing these families. When there were people who came asking for help and was in genuine need, the volunteers gave them relief kits. Volunteers recalled once when they visited one of the villages, and they called ten members to whom they had to give the relief kits, fifty members turned up, and the volunteers found it difficult to maintain the physical distancing. As they had no pass to travel in the cities, they had to hide from the police to distribute the relief kits.

From the Muslim community, they heard stories of how people have been isolating them, and how they have been feeling distant from other community members. When there was no supporting hand extended towards them, the volunteers went to them with the relief kits. It was

## Journey of Relief work by HID Forum and Partner organisations

Ramadan time, and there were left with very little food. They thanked the volunteers from the bottom of their hearts. Volunteers also shared an experience where in a family, the husband had come from Dubai and he was in quarantine. Once he came, other community members started completely avoiding the family. There were small kids in the family, and none of the community members let their children play with them. When the volunteers went to distribute the relief pack to them, the wife cried and asked whether the volunteers would touch her kids. This was an emotional moment for the volunteers.

Some of the families told the volunteers, though many organisations were distributing relief kits, no one gave a relief pack with these many materials. The happiness on their faces gave a lot of joy to the volunteers. Volunteers had to travel for around forty to fifty kilometers to reach each village. One of the volunteers said it was more like a picnic when all of them went together. Some of the community members told never in their life have they gotten this much of rations. During the lockdown period mostly everyone was in distress, reaching out to them at this time, supporting them by providing relief kits and engaging with them, gave a lot of happiness to the volunteers.

Meetings organized by HIDF seemed really helpful for the volunteers. Initially, the volunteers had this fear while going out and interacting with people. One of the volunteers said on some days she struggled to sleep in the fear of getting infected with the corona virus. As suggested in the counselling session, she started doing meditations, relaxation exercise, and she was able to overcome these fears. The counselling sessions helped them in introspecting, strengthening themselves, and building more self-confidence. The awareness the volunteers gained through the session was imparted to the community members when they went for the distribution of the relief kits. The volunteers also shared that they eagerly waited for the counselling sessions.

The delivery of the relief kits was completed in twenty-five days. Through the whole relief activity, the volunteers learned that in times of difficulties, their presence as a support system in the community members played a vital role. The volunteers acquired the skill of communication, this helped them understand the community members better. They also learned how to handle a crisis situation like a pandemic outbreak and a lockdown. Though the volunteers were initially afraid to go to the sealed down areas, when they heard the difficulties the people there were facing, they felt they needed to go there and distribute the

Journey of Relief work by HID Forum and Partner organisations

relief kits. The volunteers also told that their family members were afraid as they were going out regularly, but they were successful in making them understand how important their support is to the community.

Presently, the volunteers are also working on providing skill training to the community members as a majority of them have lost their jobs. The volunteers feel this will help them in getting more job opportunities. On the other side, they are also trying to find jobs for them. Volunteers believe that this would help them on a long-term basis. They feel relief pack is a short-term solution, and its sustainability can't be assured. With a longer vision for the future, the volunteers are continuing to support their community members in all the ways they are capable of.

## Devadasi Community- Koppal

The Devadasi System still continues in Koppal district of Karnataka. With the lockdown, those belonging to the Devadasi community in Koppal are struggling to make their ends meet. Most of the families didn't have any male members, and also, they didn't have any vehicles to go buy the ration. This restricted their mobility as well as accessibility. These women were running out of money as well, as they were engaged in daily labour, and now they didn't have any work, hence no money.

Sowbhagya had been working with the Devadasi community previously and through a fellowship programme for the past two years with HIDF in Koppal district. Once the lockdown started Sowbhagya started getting



distress calls from the community members. One of the community members called Sowbhagya and told, she didn't have a job, and she was unable to feed her children, and she needed help. At this point, Sowbhagya felt it was important for her to step in and ensure that



## Journey of Relief work by HIDF Forum and Partner organisations

proper relief reached the Devadasi community. Hence, she contacted HIDF seeking support. HIDF came forward and released the amount required for the relief kits for one hundred and twenty families belonging to the Devadasi community.

The whole relief work took around three days. On the first day, Sowbhagya bought the relief materials from the wholesale market. A few of the community members and her husband helped in packing the relief kits. In the next two days, with the support of five volunteers, Sowbhagya was able to deliver the relief kits. They were able to cover fifteen villages and distribute relief kits to one hundred and twenty families. The local government officers and ASHA workers were supportive during the entire process. The first relief work in the district of Koppal was done by Sowbhagya with the support of HIDF. Later, many organizations also started relief kit distribution in the area, but the quantity was much lesser than the ones distributed by HIDF.

While going for the relief Sowbhagya and her volunteers made sure they wore masks, gloves, and maintained physical distancing. Sowbhagya felt happy seeing the smiling faces of the community members when they received the relief kits. All of them were very thankful to her and HIDF. They conveyed their gratitude through blessings. Sowbhagya faced a few challenges while distributing the relief kits. When she went for the delivery, the police stopped her and asked questions, but she was able to explain her work and make them understand. Finally, they let her go. When she went to the villages, some people came and asked for the relief kits. Their names weren't there on the list, hence Sowbhagya had to explain the whole procedure. She was successful in convincing them and she felt it was due to her experience with the community for the past two years.

Sowbhagya felt the support from HIDF helped her in completing the relief work at ease. She told members from HIDF was always a call away when she required



## Journey of Relief work by HID Forum and Partner organisations

guidance, or when she wanted to convey a problem she was facing. This helped her gain a lot of confidence on the field. She also tried engaging with the community members and creating more awareness among them.

Devadasi community is one of the most marginalized and worst-hit communities during the pandemic-led lockdown. Yet, they are widely ignored. With no job and no access to food, there are more members of the community who are in desperate need of support. Now, for the second of relief activity, Sowbhagya is working towards ensuring that four hundred more families will get relief kits.