The Silent Soldiers : Combating the pandemic

In this issue

Sakhi Mandal led rural emergency services during Covid time

Mindful of environmental impact, Sakhi Mandal ditches plastic plates

Didis leading in Covid -19 response

Dear Dayal Antyodaya Yojana or The National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY/NRLM) was launched with the aim of organizing women and empowering them so that they may support each other when required. Today this objective has been fulfilled, as the rural women are not only supporting themselves but are also supporting their state in the time of crisis.

In the fight against coronavirus, the women of Sakhi Mandals are playing a vital role in the rural areas of Jharkhand. Under the Rural Development Department, Sakhi Mandal members of Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society (JSLPS) are supporting the state administration in every possible way.

The battle against Coronavirus pandemic requires every stakeholder to take charge and deliver. Among those working on the ground, the women-led self-help groups (SHGs) have emerged as effective front line responders, reaching out to the last-mile and ensuring immediate relief and socio-economic protection to the country’s most vulnerable.

Mukhyamantri Didi Kitchens (MMDKs)

Due to the prolonged lockdown, the biggest challenge facing by the government is unemployment of daily wage earners. Unable to buy foodstuffs, the poor are facing acute food shortages in the rural areas. To tackle the problem of hunger, the Sakhi Mandal members were given the responsibility of operating MMDKs. The SHG members are working under this scheme since April 3, 2020. They are also providing food to other helpless people and disabled persons who are finding it difficult to fend for themselves. Over 3 crores plates of food have been served through the MMDKs. As many as 6580 such kitchens are being operated across all the panchayats in the State of Jharkhand and more than five lakh people are being provided food daily.
In a span of two months, Sushila managed to earn Rs 41,114 from the cultivation of tomatoes and cucumbers through MDI; earning 90% profit. Next, the profit earned in three months through the cultivation of peas was Rs 33,556, triple the labor cost, manure cost and mulching cost. Initially, Sushila sowed tomatoes and cucumbers together in her field of 25 decimal. She has not only carved a name for herself but is helping her son set up a tailoring business. Her son Akshay Kumar Sahu, after being trained under DDU-GKY programme of JSLPS and own or lease small farmlands. The project adopts a holistic approach wherein farmers are provided with MDI system, poly nursery house and vermicompost unit along with technology. Jharkhand is a state which faces being trained under DDU-GKY programme of JSLPS and own or lease small farmlands. The project’s objective is to enhance household income with diversified farming and on-farm activities, capacity building of community on intensive training on horticulture and marketing. JSLPS and own or lease small farmlands. The project’s objective is to enhance household income with diversified farming and on-farm activities, capacity building of community on intensive training on horticulture and marketing. JSLPS with the help of the state administration started Didi Helpline numbers with the objective to provide 24-hour assistance to the migrant laborers and helpless people of Jharkhand stranded far away from their villages due to the lockdown. The 24-hour helpline is being run by the Sakhi Mandal members and provides important information and counseling to the state’s migrant population.

Cost Benefit Analysis

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<th>Sl. No.</th>
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</table>

Cost of MDI system: Rs. 15,000

Banking Services

About 1476 Banking Correspondent Sakhis are helping home-deliver the Centre’s financial relief packages to the rural community facing socio-economic distress, pensioners, and those who are dependent on the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. They are also delivering bank related services like Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojna, pension and cash withdrawal facilities at the village and panchayat level. So far, they have provided banking services to more than eight lakh people while over 169.790 crore banking transactions have been done through them.

Aajeevika Farm Fresh mobile app

SHG women are using the Aajeevika Farm Fresh mobile app to sell vegetables, ensuring that social distancing guidelines are not flouted. They also use their networks to identify vulnerable households, flagging to the administration the pockets in need of food.

Didi Helpline

JSLPS with the help of the state administration started Didi Helpline and issued Didi Helpline numbers with the objective to provide 24-hour assistance to the migrant laborers and helpless people of Jharkhand stranded far away from their villages due to the lockdown. The 24-hour helpline is being run by the Sakhi Mandal members and provides important information and counseling to the state’s migrant population.

Take Home Ration (THR) Initiative

SHGs are engaged in the task of production, packaging and distribution of take-home ration (THR), as Anganwadi centers across the country are shut due to the lockdown. The members of Village Organizations are responsibly carrying out their duties of procuring and packaging ration and ensuring that the beneficiaries have enough food during the crisis. The members are ensuring hygienic packing, accurate quantity and timely delivery of the ration. They are using face masks to ensure safety during packing. They are also following the norms of social distancing. The ration is packed in cloth bags to avoid the use of plastic bags.
Sakhi Mandal women provide yeoman’s services during pandemic

The members of Akash Gram Sangathan of Hisri Panchayat of Kisko Block in Lohardaga district of Jharkhand have been providing Take Home Ration (THR) to the Anganwadi centers which are located in far flung hilly areas during the lockdown.

Transporting THR material for the total 20 beneficiaries residing in RangraKhaban village was proving very challenging. Transporters were demanding a hefty amount for ferrying THR from Hisri village to RangraKhaban village. A meeting was called, and it was decided that the women will carry the goods by themselves on foot in the daytime to ensure the Anganwadi Centre received the THR on time.

The road to the village is in a poor condition. During the month of January, the THR material was transported by bicycles with the help of the men in the village. However, this time the women took the lead and travelled 10 to 11 kilometers on hilly paths, with the THR ration on their heads, and provided it to the Anganwadi Centre.

Sakhi Mandal members distribute dry ration to the needy

Due to the pandemic crisis, many people are facing hunger. For helping these needy people, 21 Sakhi Mandal women from Sira Sita Village Organization, Badla, of Sneha Block in Lohardaga district of Jharkhand, decided to distribute dry ration among 270 helpless people of their village. The important thing was that these members of the Sakhi Mandal distributed the ration without the help of any external people or institution.

For this work, the women used the money collected from their savings, interest and income for building of toilets under Swachh Bharat Mission. They identified the people of the village who needed the ration. Each family was provided 10kg of rice, 1kg of pulses, 1kg of gram, 1 liter of mustard oil, 2 soaps, 1kg of washing powder, 300g of soya chunks and 1kg of salt at a cost of Rs 615.

In this time of crisis, this unique effort of the Sakhi Mandal members is really commendable.
Mukhyamantri Didi Kitchen: Combating Hunger

From serving nutritious food in quarantine centers, to the stranded and the needy in their community, for the Sakhi Mandals no adversity is a deterrent in the way of selfless service.

The Polytechnic College situated in Eranda village of Sadar Block, Khunti, has been transformed into one of the biggest quarantine centers in Khunti district. It has a combined accommodation facility of 100+ beds and the Kamal Mahila Mandal of Eranda village has been given the charge for preparing meals for the people quarantined in the center. The total number of people quarantined is 20 (since April 9). Sanju Devi of Kamal SHG has taken the responsibility of cooking three-time meals. Sanju is also the Active Woman for Eranda village. She said, “I try to serve variety in food to the people keeping in mind the nutritional requirements as well. I also carry the food to quarantine center three times a day.”

MMDK – To the rescue of the stranded

During the lockdown period many people got stuck in various parts of the state while they were out for different purposes. Radha Devi, a resident of Bichna Panchayat, Murhu Block, Khunti, was visiting Naudhi village of Arki Block along with her 3 children to attend a wedding, when the national lockdown was announced. Radha along with her children and 12 other people is being fed by Maa Sharda SHG of Naudhi village who are running MM Didi Kitchen in the panchayat. Members of Maa Sharda SHG are serving food to 100 needy people daily.

Scarcity of water no deterrent for didis serving in MMDK

The women members of Token Aajeevika Mahila Gram Sangathan namely Basanti Kongaari, Bilasi Kandulna, Aasiyaani Kongaari and Elisba Kongaari have not let the shortage of water dampen their enthusiasm to serve the people. They are fetching water from a perennial water source situated a kilometer away from the cooking and distribution spot of the MMDK. Majority of the population residing in Token village fall in the BPL category and are struggling to find food during the lockdown. This tireless effort of these 4 VO members has resulted in more than 2700 meals being served to the needy people of Khatanga Panchayat of Rania Block.

Through programmes like institution building, financial inclusions, livelihood upliftment and social development, the team has been able to bring significant changes in the lives of the rural women in past half decade. In the crisis scenario, these empowered women have become an important asset for their community and are helping the needy selflessly.

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<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Profit</th>
<th>Profit%</th>
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Serving Meals of hope to the last mile

An initiative named Special Dal Bhat Movable Centers was launched by the District Administration, Deoghar, with the support of JSLPS on 21 April 2020, to fight the food crisis situation in the lockdown period. These Special Dal Bhat movable centers are being run by Sakhi Mandal members with the joint support of Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society and District Administration in faraway villages of all the 10 blocks of Deoghar District namely Deoghar Sadar, Mohanpur, Sarwan, Sarath, Karown, Margomunda, Madhupur, Devipur, Sonaraithari and Palojori.

The objective of this program is delivering food cooked in a hygienic environment to the doorstep of the vulnerable people residing in faraway areas of Deoghar and unable to reach CM Didi Kitchen. Under the programme, so far, a total of 37,500 vulnerable people have been provided food in the remote villages of Deoghar district. Those covered and benefited under this program include daily wage earners, laborers, rag pickers, single parents, widows, elderly, disabled people, and other needy groups.

Lakhan Soren, 82 and Yaladi Tudu, 80, an elderly beneficiary couple from Saltar village in Karown Block, appreciating the Sakhi Mandals running the Special Dal Bhat Movable Centers said, “In the faraway areas, these Sakhi Mandals have been at the forefront in the battle against the food crisis. We have only one daughter who cannot come to see us due to the lockdown and we have been left with no food. In these critical circumstances we are blessed to have our Sakhi Mandals and Special Dal Bhat Centers that are feeding us two free meals daily at our doorsteps.”
Mindful of environmental impact, Sakhi Mandal ditches plastic plates

The members of Sakhi Mandals and Village Organization, supported by the Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society under the Rural Development Department, Government of Jharkhand, are participating in the nationwide battle to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and the emergent food crisis due to the lockdown. While the government and district administrations are taking important steps like production of masks and sanitizer, Chief Minister Didi Kitchen and Special Dal Bhat Kendra to fight these challenges, the members of Sakhi Mandals are making optimum contribution to the success of these initiatives.

In their fight against the pandemic, the Sakhi Mandal members are not only working on the special initiatives launched but are also making all possible efforts to follow the Panchsutra rules issued by the Ministry of Rural Development to prevent the spread of coronavirus while working outdoors. An important initiative in this direction was taken by the Sakhi Mandals working in the Chief Minister Didi Kitchens to maintain hygiene and cleanliness. These kitchens are serving food to the villagers in plates made of Palash and Banyan tree leaves in a bid to eliminate plastic use and be environment friendly and also cost-effective.

Sonody Marandi associated with Maa Parvati Aajeevika Sakhi Mandal along with four other members of her group is running the Chief Minister Didi Kitchen in Tulsi Tand village of Nagadari Panchayat. Sonodi says that initially she started feeding the needy people in plastic plates which cost them about ₹300 per day. Also, disposing the used plates and keeping the village clean was a major challenge. Therefore, the next day, the members took a joint decision to serve the meals in plates made of Palash and Banyan tree leaves because these plates are more hygienic and easier to dispose. Also, as all the materials required for making of the plates are available in their village free of cost, this would lead to considerable cost saving. The five members started making the plates while working in the kitchen without charging a penny for this work. Later, other women of the village associated with the SHGs inspired by their selfless work joined them voluntarily in the work. Every day, 5 to 7 members from neighboring SHGs join them to make the work manageable and effortless. Now it takes barely 20 to 30 minutes to make 300 to 400 plates per day.

Talking about the benefits of the leaf plates, Sonodi says, “First we use these free of cost leaf plates to serve food to the needy people and then the used ones are served to feed their pet animals such as cows and goats. It is saving money on the one hand and on the other hand there is no risk of pollution from its disposal.”

According to Sonodi so far, approximately 10,000 plates have been made by them and meals served in those plates to the needy villagers.
Supporting small farmers during covid-19 Pandemic

Women farmers associated with Sakhi Mandals are working diligently to ensure food security amid nationwide lockdown. They are not only taking all precautionary measures to control their exposure to the virus but are also educating their villagers on the Panchasutra rules to be followed on farms and in haats.

When the whole nation is facing a crisis situation amid the national lockdown, SHG members have come forward to work at the forefront to help the administration in its endeavor to ensure the safety and security of the people. The Sakhi Mandals in the state are working on various programmes that have been launched to combat Covid-19, like mask production and Chief Minister Didi Kitchen, sanitizer production, etc. Not only this, the women farmers associated with Sakhi Mandals are also actively participating in agricultural activities taking all necessary precautionary measures to ensure food security in their panchayats.

Gudia Devi, 27, is one of the women farmers of Navadih Village in Sankari Panchayat who is working in her fields and supplying agricultural products to the local haats along with three other members of Ma Saraswati Sakhi Mandal of Nawadih Village. They are working diligently to ensure the availability of fresh green vegetables like tomato, potato, watermelon, ladyfinger, brinjal and creeper vegetables to shopkeepers of various haats in Deoghar Sadar Block. Apart from this, they are also educating the villagers and customers about the Panchasutra rules to be followed to control exposure to coronavirus while visiting open markets or when working outdoors.

Gudia says that Aajeevika Krishak Mitras have always helped farmers in ensuring optimum agricultural produce from their fields. “But now, as we are facing hard times, they are playing a vital role in disseminating information about Panchsutra rules that are to be followed while working in the fields. These rules have been issued by the Ministry of Rural Development to prevent the virus from spreading among farmers. The farmers are taking all necessary precautionary measures like wearing masks, maintaining social distancing and cleanliness etc., while working on their farms.

Gudia says that at a time when most people are facing financial crisis and rising unemployment, four members of Maa Saraswati Sakhi Mandal namely, Rukmini Devi, Mansari Devi and Purnima Devi including her have earned around Rs 5000-6000 per person during the lockdown from the sale of vegetables. Apart from contributing to a noble cause, farmers like her are also earning well and are able to meet the expenses of their family.
Pashu Sakhis- Exemplary services in animal care

Livestock are a prized possession for villagers and need the same care during the lockdown as before. Pashu Sakhis are providing them the services putting their own selves aside.

Lockdown notwithstanding, animals need the same care if not more. Pashu Sakhis are actively working in the villages to provide timely services to the animals in their villages.

Taking all precautions like social distancing and ensuring cleanliness while carrying out their duties, Pashu Sakhis are boldly serving the needs of the villagers.

Kiran Devi, a Pashu Sakhi in the Hukuwa Village of Chainpur Block in Palamu District, is providing services in her village as she understands that the loss of a livestock, say a goat during the lockdown, can be devastating for a villager.

Whenever a goat gives birth to a kid in the village, she is there to take care of the mother goat and the kid and feed them vitamins to improve their immunity. Recently, during the lockdown, her own goat gave birth. Kiran ensures that the goatshed is clean and washes her hands after being with the goats. Kiran is feeding moringa leaves to her goats inside the shed itself so that she does not have to take them out for grazing. Moringa leaves are rich in vitamins and minerals and provide a nutritious diet to the goats.

Kiran has been advising her villagers to provide food to the goats in the shed itself and not take them outdoors. Despite the challenges, the Pashu Sakhis are fearlessly serving their communities.
Sakhi Mandal led rural emergency services during Covid time

The members of Sakhi Mandals are playing a major role to support the government in its fight against coronavirus crisis. In Palamu District, Sakhi Mandals have teamed up with the district administration to spread awareness about the disease and to suggest measures to fight against it. One member of Sakhi Mandal has been made a part of each Rapid Response Team (RRT) at the village level along with the Sahiya and Aanganwadi Sewika. They have been provided training at block level about their roles and responsibilities as a part of RR Teams. Total 2244 RR Teams have been formed in the whole district.

The members of RR Teams are conducting door to door survey in the villages. The survey format contains questions regarding members of family who have come from outside the village, members of family who are in home quarantined, etc. The RRT members have also been given the responsibility to report to the ANM and block administration if any person in the village shows COVID-19 symptoms, like cough, cold, fever and breathing problem. After the survey, the house surveyed is marked. This is to ensure that no house is left out. If a COVID-19 positive person is found in a village, they repeat the survey in the radius of 7km from the place where the COVID-19 positive person resides. The RR Teams also ensure that people of any area where a person is detected with COVID-19 symptoms are quarantined.

Apart from the survey, the RR Teams are also making people aware of the measures to be taken to protect themselves from COVID-19.

The RR Team is following strict safety protocols while conducting the survey. They wear masks, maintain social distance and frequently sanitize their hands.

To survey an area where a COVID-19 case has been found, they arm themselves with PPE kits to prevent the contagion.

These corona warriors are fighting the battle against the virus to protect their villages.
In a span of two months, Sushila managed to earn Rs 41,114 from the cultivation of tomatoes and cucumbers through MDI; earning 90% profit. Next, the profit earned in three months through the cultivation of peas was Rs 33,556, triple the cost of production. Overall, in a span of 6 months, Susila managed to earn Rs 53,066 as profit (excluding the contribution cost of Rs 15,000 for MDI system).

Achievements

Sushila is very happy with her achievements. She has not only carved a name for herself but has also helped her son set up a tailoring business. Her son Akshay Kumar Sahu, after being trained under DDU-GKY programme of JLS, has commenced a stitching business in the village. He has set up a small factory with 8 sewing machines and 8 to 10 workers. He has taken a loan of Rs 21 lakh under Prime Minister Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP). Sushila is helping him in paying the EMIs.

Sushila said, “Earlier I was helpless. Now, I have something of my own and I can support my family as and when required. I will continue doing farming through MDI and now I will be cultivating pumpkins. The good thing about MDI is that it reduced the cost of production, as in one sowing we can harvest three to four different types of vegetables in a year.”

The unique thing about Sushila was that she had never done farming before. This was the first time she ventured into farming and that too by adopting modern techniques. She took a loan of Rs 10,000 from her SHG and invested Rs 5,000 from her own pocket to deposit in her Itki Siyartoli Village Organization to avail the services of MDI system, poly nursery house and vermicompost from JHIMDI project of JSLPS.

Work Implementation

Initially, Sushila sowed tomatoes and cucumbers together in her field of 25 decimal. Cost of production included infrastructure cost, labor cost, manure cost and mulching cost. Next, Sushila planted peas, this time the cost was incurred only on seeds, while the other things remained.

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Cost Benefit Analysis

Sakhi Mandal members of Ganga Ajeekra Gram Sangathan of Itkori Block of Chatra District were assigned the responsibility of making cloth bags by the district administration. The bags are being used for packing ration for distribution to the vulnerable groups during the lockdown period. Nine women who know sewing, were involved in the stitching of the bags. They were provided a sample of the bag that they had to stitch by the administration. They cloth for the bags was locally procured.

Cloth bags are eco-friendly and can be reused. The women stitched total 1900 bags in just two days. The reason behind assigning such work to Sakhi Mandals is the trust of district administration in the Sakhi Mandals to finish the work on time along with providing quality products. The district administration bought the bags from the members at the rate of Rs 24.50 per bag. The members earned a profit of Rs 3 per bag. The total profit earned was Rs 5700.

The members of Sakhi Mandals are using their various skills for the welfare of the community during the pandemic. It is also providing them livelihood opportunity during the lockdown.

Sakhi Mandal members entrusted with the task of stitching cloth bags for packing dry ration.
Leading the way towards better tomorrow

Engaged in the production of safety gear on a war footing, these women are not only discharging an important role in the battle against the virus but also earning their livelihood.

The contribution made by Sakhi Mandals of Jharkhand through their large scale production of masks and security gear has earned them the title of “SHG Corona Warriors”.

The exponential increase in COVID-19 cases and the resulting panic raised the demand for protective gear. This also led to increase in the price of these products making it difficult for the poor to access them. To fix the demand-supply gap and ensure affordable safety equipment, the Sakhi Mandals in all the districts of the state with the help of the local administration got into mass production of masks and other protective gear. The war level production taken up by the Sakhi Mandals to meet the demand in the market is commendable.

In Ranchi, the main center for the production of these safety gears is the Training & Production Centre (TPC), Ratu. Around 37 women of different Sakhi Mandals are constantly working to meet the demand. For the women, this activity is also a source of livelihood at a time when economic activities have come to a halt.

Kiran Devi from Chatakpur Village of Ratu Block is engaged in the production of PPE kits in the TPC. She says, “We receive Rs 70 on production of each PPE kit. In a day, on an average, we make around 20 PPE kits. We are earning a decent income and also contributing to the fight against coronavirus.”

Similarly, women receive Rs 3 on each mask and face shield produced and can easily manufacture nearly 150-200 masks and face shields daily.

Special care is taken to ensure safety of women engaged in the production work. Social distancing and wearing masks while working is prioritized and women are directed to wash their hands regularly. The final products are also sterilized before packing.

Renu Devi, another SHG member from Chatakpur Village, explaining the entire production process said, “The spread of the pandemic can only be stopped by awareness and responsible behavior. It is important for everyone to abide by the rules of the lockdown and follow social distancing. Wearing a mask should be the first task while moving out of home. By following these small yet important details and caution, we can definitely win the battle against coronavirus.”
Sakhimandal at forefront in fight against Covid-19

Sanitizing villages to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Sakhimandal have emerged as a powerful community institution in the fight against COVID-19. The women of Sakhi Mandals are executing various activities at the grassroots level to help the administration contain the spread of coronavirus.

Sakhi Mandals from Patratu Block of Ramgarh District are engaged in sanitizing villages. Members prepare simple sanitizing solution made using bleaching powder and water and spray it in the village.

Sunita Devi, a member of Jai Maa Durga AajeevikaMahila Swayam Sahayata Samuh, along with four other members of her group is sanitizing her village Sauliya in Talatand Panchayat. Sunita says, “We received detailed training over telephone on how to prepare the sanitizing solution and its use from the field level staff of JSLPS. Proper and detailed instructions were provided to us on how to maintain all the safety standards and carefully execute the work.”

Anita Toppo from Talatand Village of Talatand Panchayat is a member of Anmol Aajeevika Mahila Swayam Sahayata Samuh and is also engaged in sanitization work in her village. Explaining her task, she says, “The spread of coronavirus and its after-effects are a concern for all. It is not the duty of an individual or a governing body alone to mitigate this crisis. The spread of pandemic can only be stopped if we think about it as a society. Along with sanitizing the village, we are also making the locals aware of the causes of virus spread and the ways in which it can be prevented.”

This one-of-a kind initiative by Sakhi Mandals is being entirely pulled off by their own efforts. They are motivating the villagers to abide by the rules of the lockdown, stay at home as much as possible and maintain proper social distancing.

These women epitomize how rural women can be empowered to take charge of the welfare of their community.

An Initiative of Knowledge Management & Communication Cell

Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society

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