While the entire global population is gripped by the pandemic, COVID-19. West Bengal and other Eastern part of India faced yet another wrath of nature, Cyclone Amphan on May 2020. Swanirvar, one of our partnered projects, worked relentlessly to provide relief, medical care and resources to the displaced families in North Praganas 24 district of West Bengal. However, the support given by Swanirvar, has been beyond relief and raising funds for one-off donations to feed the hungry. In temporary shelters of displaced families, Swanirvar provided training on water treatment to help the affected families to prevent water borne diseases and distributed as well as planted trees in the affected areas. For water treatment, they followed the guidelines recommended by WHO on chlorine treatment methods for domestic usage of water.

To know more about Vibha-Swanirvar partnership, click here.

#Education Can't Wait

2020 arrived and brought with it the onslaught of COVID-19 and natural disaster along with the restrictive environment to carry out all the carefully worked out plans and dreams. Unexpected situations caught many of us unprepared especially for an education scenario where everything turned uncertain. Schools were shut down, lockdown progressed in phases 1,2, 3,4,5 and continuing. However, this crisis has also empowered many of us to push our limits and surpass the hurdles. At ground level, our partners have relentlessly worked towards the education of children with lot of courage and grit, designing alternative strategies in-spite of closure of schools because #Education Can’t Wait. We have some stellar stories of our partners and volunteers to lift the spirit during this difficult time ensuring continuity of the work to provide the brighter future for children.

Welcome, Subhash and Cathirine!

As you receive emails regarding the Finance and Legal Matters of Vibha India, you will notice a new name, Subhash J Pillai. He has joined Vibha India as our Office Accountant in June. He will take care of all financial and legal matters of Vibha India ensuring compliance with laws. We are also excited to have Ms. Cathirine Francis on board as our Office Administrator who will be taking care of administrative matters and working closely with Subhash.

They will be found in our new office: 37/81 Varthur Main Road, Thubarahalli, Bangalore 560066
While everything came to standstill due to the COVID-19, organizations that depend on the rural community for children’s education got affected the most because classes shifted to digital platform, and telephones and computers are yet a luxurious dream for the community members in rural areas.

One of our partnered projects, Rachana works in rural areas near Pune where the villages are at distance and scattered in the hilly mountains. Due to the lockdown and unavailability of staff, Rachana decided to make a paradigm shift at its strategy level to keep children engaged at home during the lockdown. Hence, they decided to involved parents to engage the children in studies as the latter started spending all the times with the children due to the lockdown. Senior staff, Coordinator & Supervisors of Rachana made many efforts to create parents’ friendly teaching materials and interesting activities. The teachers’ hat was eventually shifted to parents by the Rachana team members. Few teachers, who stayed in the same community, managed to get the parents’ phone numbers through villagers, other parents by making home visits, and finally formed Parent groups on Whatsapp. Now, another biggest hurdle was the digital divide in rural areas because not all parents had smartphones. This was the time when the community came foward collectively to build a resilient community. The parents who did not have a phone collected the study plans from the neighbor students who had devices. As a result, a total of 46 groups for 1st to 4th grade and a total of 17 groups for the Kishor Dal (Adolescents) were formed. Teachers posted daily study plans and assignments with regular feedback from the parents, and all the doubts raised by students were addressed immediately with all the support and guidance of the teachers. Gradually, parents picked up the techniques and effectively engaged the children in studying.

Amidst the uncertainty during the time of the pandemic, teachers and parents have collaboratively pushed their bars and thought “out of the box” to ensure that learning does not stop for the children.

To know more about Vibha-Rachana partnership, click here.

Image Source: Rachana

Learning in the time of COVID: Eklavya

One of our long term parnters, Eklavya’s approach of strengthening community participation, particularly those of parents, in children’s education reached an interesting high in recent time. Eklavya was approached by parents from the communities where they work, with a barrage of questions, “How long are our children going to just roam around? What will happen to their education? What is Eklavya thinking about doing? What is stopping you?” When Eklavya explained that the current situation with Covid19 does not allow for gathering of children, school are closed, the government has explicitly ordered that all educational establishment including non governmental centers cannot be operated during this time. It is therefore difficult to conduct activities. To this, the parents and community leaders emphatically stated that they would take over any coordination of the centers and will be the ones to answer to any government authority, but learning should not stop. “Eklavya need not worry on that front”, added the community leader.

What an incredible answer!! A brainstorming session with parents were called by Eklavya. In the session, a new centre for teaching came up, named “Mohalla Gatividhi Kendras” (MGK), which was run by parents or designated community leader. Within a short while 163 MGK had been set up reaching out to over 2164 children. Eklavya provides the materials and some guidance. (Training materials, videos, worksheets etc.). Each MGK bring in 8-10 children and classes are conducted by a student, “Bal Guruji” (Child teacher). Parents/elders/ohers took charge of extra-curricular activities: storytelling, poetry, singing, dancing other activities which are common across all children.

Continued in Page 3
In the past 5 months, our volunteers have directly supported 11 NGOs/organizations such as CORP India in Mumbai, Door Step School in Pune, Door Step School in Mumbai, Aid et Action in Hyderabad, Earth Angels Welfare Foundation in Mumbai, Three Municipal/Govt-aided schools in Mumbai, Samavesh in Bhopal, Swanirvar in West Bengal and BTS in West Bengal. They have dispersed close to INR 28,00,000 to this cause enabling distribution of 2,300 ration kits, rebuilding of housing infrastructure of 300 families in the Sundarbans area affected by Cyclone Amphan, and several hundreds of essential hygiene kits and nutritional supplements to children, seniors, and pregnant women.

Our volunteers from Mumbai also formed a food relief coordination group with 10 NGOs/philanthropists distributing ration kits in urban and rural Mumbai. The members of this collective have contributed to streamlining the process of dry food grain distribution by mapping food demand using online platforms, sharing resources and knowledge, reducing overlap, and trust-building.

Rise Infinity Foundation and our volunteers have been driving the coordination of this group. They were invited to partner with UNICEF India on its Jeewan Rath initiative to serve migrants and people of underserved communities with food and essentials while they combat the disastrous effects of COVID-19 and lockdown. This team was also invited to partner with DataOgram (a leading data-technology company) on its pro-bono initiative called Sahaj collective, to understand the extent of socioeconomic issues faced by people of the underserved communities in Maharashtra. Several well-known NGOs are a part of this initiative. They are also coordinating the survey efforts which is being conducted by CORP India, one of our partnered project.

An interesting point to note is that the area where Eklavya works in Shahpur is totally Covid free. Nevertheless, children and community have been practicing all precautionary measures. Children who come to these Mohalla centres are made to frequently wash hands and feet, wear masks and maintain distancing. MGKs are flourishing, with more demand coming in from parents! Eklavya is now working towards system to capture how learning is happening and what are the outcomes. To understand where the children need help, Eklavya has taken a baseline test of all the children of the Mohalla Activity Center in July.

Great participation by the community and a greater excitement amongst the peer teachers is evident till date. A public acknowledgement of their abilities and a feather in the cap is being called ‘guruji’ by the other children. Learning can never stop when all the stakeholders, including community and children come together and take the ownership of learning like the incredible community members did in Shahpur.

To know more about Vibha-Eklavya partnership, click here.

Volunteer's Desk

"My Vibha volunteering journey of 12 years as been awe-inspiring and my passion for the cause is growing stronger by the day. Volunteering has enhanced my leadership skills, strengthened empathy, and channelled my compassion; all while thoroughly enjoying the company of driven individuals from all walks of life. Vibha has given back to me immeasurably more than the efforts I have put in." (Ashwini Kumar, Co-ordinator of Mumbai Action Center)

Our Corona Warriors:

In the past 5 months, our volunteers have directly supported 11 NGOs/organizations such as CORP India in Mumbai, Door Step School in Pune, Door Step School in Mumbai, Aid et Action in Hyderabad, Earth Angels Welfare Foundation in Mumbai, Three Municipal/Govt-aided schools in Mumbai, Samavesh in Bhopal, Swanirvar in West Bengal and BTS in West Bengal. They have dispersed close to INR 28,00,000 to this cause enabling distribution of 2,300 ration kits, rebuilding of housing infrastructure of 300 families in the Sundarbans area affected by Cyclone Amphan, and several hundreds of essential hygiene kits and nutritional supplements to children, seniors, and pregnant women.

Our volunteers from Mumbai also formed a food relief coordination group with 10 NGOs/philanthropists distributing ration kits in urban and rural Mumbai. The members of this collective have contributed to streamlining the process of dry food grain distribution by mapping food demand using online platforms, sharing resources and knowledge, reducing overlap, and trust-building.

Rise Infinity Foundation and our volunteers have been driving the coordination of this group. They were invited to partner with UNICEF India on its Jeewan Rath initiative to serve migrants and people of underserved communities with food and essentials while they combat the disastrous effects of COVID-19 and lockdown. This team was also invited to partner with DataOgram (a leading data-technology company) on its pro-bono initiative called Sahaj collective, to understand the extent of socioeconomic issues faced by people of the underserved communities in Maharashtra. Several well-known NGOs are a part of this initiative. They are also coordinating the survey efforts which is being conducted by CORP India, one of our partnered project.

We can't help everyone but we can help someone-Ronald Reagan