

COVID-19 Relief and Humanitarian Response Program, Pune (2020)

During the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide lockdown in 2020, MASHAL implemented a large-scale humanitarian relief and migrant support initiative to assist vulnerable communities whose livelihoods were severely affected by the crisis. Drawing upon its long-standing engagement with urban poor communities, slum settlements, migrant workers, and marginalized groups, MASHAL mobilized resources, volunteers, donors, and institutional partners to provide emergency relief across Pune and surrounding regions.

MASHAL began precautionary closure of its offices on 18 March 2020, ahead of the Maharashtra State lockdown and the subsequent nationwide lockdown. Recognizing the severe hardships faced by migrant labourers, daily wage earners, workers in the informal sector, commercial sex workers, transgender communities, elderly persons, and children residing in institutional care, the organization initiated emergency relief operations on 27 March 2020.

Emergency Relief Mobilization

The first phase of the intervention involved identifying vulnerable households, assessing immediate needs, and launching a public fundraising campaign. MASHAL appealed to individuals, philanthropic institutions, corporate donors, and community networks for support. The response was overwhelming, with more than 60 individuals contributing within the first 72 hours of the appeal. Subsequently, several institutional donors and hundreds of individual supporters joined the effort.

Through collective contributions from philanthropic organizations, corporate donors, and citizens, MASHAL mobilized financial and in-kind resources valued at approximately ₹93 lakhs for relief activities.

Cooked Food Distribution

To address immediate hunger among vulnerable populations during the strict lockdown period, MASHAL partnered with organizations including I-PAC, SAAD, community kitchens, and local Gurudwaras to distribute freshly cooked meals across Pune's slum settlements and labour pockets.

Over a period of fifteen days, the initiative successfully distributed **22,320 cooked meal packets** to migrant workers, homeless individuals, daily wage

earners, commercial sex workers, and other vulnerable populations affected by the lockdown. The food distribution network reached numerous informal settlements and labour congregation points across Pune city.

Dry Ration Kit Distribution

Recognizing that prolonged lockdowns would continue to affect household food security, MASHAL launched a large-scale dry ration distribution program. The organization prepared and distributed **7,332 family ration kits**, each designed to support a household with essential food supplies for a defined period.

Each ration kit contained staple commodities including rice, wheat flour, cooking oil, sugar, tea powder, pulses, salt, flattened rice (poha), bathing soap, washing soap, and other essential household items. These kits were distributed through MASHAL's extensive community network in slums, informal settlements, and vulnerable neighbourhoods.

Healthcare and Protective Equipment Support

MASHAL extended support to frontline workers, healthcare institutions, sanitation staff, and police personnel by supplying essential protective and medical equipment during the critical phases of the pandemic.

The organization distributed:

- 100 litres of hand sanitizers
- 100 boxes of protective gloves
- 100 N95 and T-filter masks
- 50 surgical gowns
- 200 litres of sodium hypochlorite disinfectant
- 2,050 face shields

These supplies were provided to hospitals, police stations, hostels, sanitation workers, municipal staff, and other frontline service providers across Pune.

Support to Children and Vulnerable Institutions

To provide emotional support and encouragement during the pandemic, MASHAL distributed approximately **2,040 Cadbury Dairy Milk chocolates** to

children residing in orphanages, institutional homes, and selected healthcare facilities.

The initiative aimed to bring comfort and positivity to children and vulnerable groups facing isolation and uncertainty during the crisis.

Surakshit Safar Sewa – Migrant Assistance Program

One of the most significant interventions undertaken by MASHAL during the pandemic was the **Surakshit Safar Sewa (Safe Journey Service)**, a comprehensive migrant support initiative designed to assist stranded migrant workers and vulnerable individuals returning to their native places.

The program established a dedicated helpline and support mechanism through which migrants could register their travel needs, receive counselling, and obtain logistical assistance.

The initiative facilitated the safe return of approximately **3,000 migrant workers and vulnerable individuals** through various modes of transportation.

Key achievements included:

- Facilitating train travel for approximately **2,300 migrants** to Bihar and Jharkhand.
- Supporting bus transportation for around **500 migrants** travelling to Rajasthan and Jharkhand.
- Arranging air travel for **160 individuals** returning to Odisha.
- Providing travel guidance, documentation support, counselling, and coordination with government authorities.

Special support was extended to vulnerable categories such as pregnant women, mothers with young children, senior citizens, students, and individuals with health conditions. Journey kits, hygiene materials, and food support were provided wherever required.

Community Partnerships and Collaborative Action

The success of MASHAL's COVID-19 response was made possible through strong partnerships with community organizations, local leaders, volunteers, donors, government departments, and citizen groups.

The initiative received valuable support from:

- Community leaders and Residential Community Volunteers (RCVs)
- Local elected representatives and municipal authorities
- Police departments and railway authorities
- Civil society organizations and volunteer networks
- Health professionals and social activists
- Philanthropic foundations and corporate CSR partners

Organizations such as Global Rights Foundation, SAAD, community kitchens, and numerous citizen groups collaborated with MASHAL in implementing various aspects of relief distribution and migrant assistance.

Volunteer Mobilization and Community Leadership

A dedicated team of MASHAL staff members, volunteers, social workers, community mobilizers, and local leaders worked tirelessly throughout the relief operations. Teams coordinated fundraising, procurement, packaging, transportation, beneficiary identification, documentation, and field-level distribution activities.

MASHAL's long-standing presence in urban poor communities enabled the organization to rapidly mobilize volunteers and establish trust-based mechanisms for reaching the most vulnerable households.

Key Achievements

The COVID-19 Relief and Humanitarian Response Program achieved the following outcomes:

- Mobilized approximately **₹93 lakhs** through donations and in-kind support.
- Distributed **22,320 cooked meals** to vulnerable populations.
- Distributed **7,332 dry ration kits** to affected families.
- Provided healthcare and protective equipment to frontline workers and institutions.
- Distributed **2,040 chocolates** to children and vulnerable groups.
- Facilitated the safe return of approximately **3,000 migrant workers and vulnerable individuals** through Surakshit Safar Sewa.

- Established a collaborative relief network involving community organizations, volunteers, donors, and government agencies.

Impact

The COVID-19 Relief and Humanitarian Response Program demonstrated MASHAL's ability to rapidly respond to emergencies through community-centered approaches and multi-stakeholder collaboration. The initiative provided critical food security, healthcare support, protective equipment, and safe transportation assistance to thousands of vulnerable individuals during one of the most challenging humanitarian crises in recent history. The program reinforced MASHAL's commitment to serving marginalized communities and protecting the rights and dignity of the urban poor during times of crisis.