

# CITY OF PUNE COVID-19 EMERGENCY FOOD RESPONSE

## A Municipal Authority and Social Sector Partnership Approach

### BACKGROUND

On 24th March, the Government of India, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, ordered a nationwide lockdown restricting the movement of 1.3 billion citizens. This lasted until to 31st May. The Government started to ease lockdown measures at the start of June. On June 10th, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare reported 133,632 active cases and a running total of 7,745 deaths.

On March 26th, the Government announced a \$22.6 billion relief package with a major food scheme built into the Public Distribution System (PDS). This provides 5kg of rice or wheat and 1kg of preferred pulses per month offered in two instalments. This is in addition to the pre-existing entitlement of 5kg low-cost wheat/rice per person per month. The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) reported that rice, wheat and pulse stocks were adequate to feed the country and the imminent harvest of rabi crops provides additional security.

In addition to the above, the Government has put together a package of support for vulnerable people (Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package) which includes insurance cover for health workers, gas cylinders for the poorest families for three months and Rs500 - Rs1000 rupees (£5.29 - £10.59) to specified vulnerable groups.

The impact of lockdown in India on the most vulnerable has been reported in the national and international press. It is reported that many of those affected are informal sector workers who live on day-to-day earnings.

The following case study provides information about how the municipal government in the city of Pune has responded to support the most vulnerable during lockdown. Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC), under the leadership of Additional Municipal Commissioner, Rubal Agarwal, provided shelter for migrant workers and labourers and worked in partnership with a third sector/voluntary organisations to ensure that those who are reliant on daily wages also have access to food and other essentials.



### PMC PROVIDES FOOD AND SHELTER FOR VULNERABLY-HOUSED/HOMELESS COMMUNITIES

PMC opened 30 shelters across the city for labourers and migrant workers within a week of lockdown being announced. In addition to shelter, they were also provided with tea, breakfast and other food. The shelters housed approximately 1,000 citizens from Maharashtra State and a further 554 migrants from other States.

Two weeks later, a further 15 shelters were opened for women only to provide a safe haven and reduce incidence of abuse. Within the first week of opening, 1,300 women accessed these shelters. These shelters are managed by PMC employees.

Local politicians (known as 'corporators') also co-ordinated efforts in their own districts to provide emergency food relief. This included collecting donations and distributing food parcels to labourers and slum communities. In some cases, activity was organised through housing 'societies' (a couple of examples are provided later).

### PMC PARTNERS WITH THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR TO DELIVER FOOD TO SLUM COMMUNITIES DURING LOCKDOWN

Pune City Connect (PCC) is a section eight non-profit organisation established in 2011 to enable social and

economic development amongst slum communities in Pune. In November 2015, PMC and PCC entered into a partnership to enable large scale social change through collective action in Pune city. There are three main areas of work under this partnership: sustainable livelihoods, digital empowerment and quality education.

Over the past four years, PCC has worked with over 60,000 people from socially and economically vulnerable groups. Within the first 10 days of lockdown they were able to reach out to 250 slum and low-income communities and make an assessment of their immediate needs. This listening exercise continued throughout the lockdown period and approximately 7,000 citizens were consulted in total.

Ruchi Mathur, CEO of PCC, said that initially, officials thought emergency food relief would not be required i.e. people have enough food for the immediate future. The consultation found that, on the contrary, most people could specify the day (within a week) when they would run out of food. In addition to this,

1. The majority (90%) had less than one week's worth of food rations.
2. 60% of callers reported a higher than 50% impact on income. Those who are daily wage earners may have lost total household income.
3. The majority experienced some form of emotional distress. People were unaware of why lockdown was happening.

So, PCC-PMC set-up three levels of support for vulnerable communities. PMC also allocated a nodal officer, Mr Sakpal, based in the Urban Social Development Department, to support PCC to implement the emergency response to lockdown. As transport was no longer available, a dedicated vehicle with a driver was provided to help purchase and distribute food. Ruchi said that a single point of contact within PMC was key to the rapid implementation under lockdown and to respond to community concerns in real-time. For example, when NGOs needed to travel across the city to distribute food, travel permits were organised by the nodal officer.

### 1 A HELPLINE TO SUPPORT LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES

Thirty Lighthouse alumni were employed by PCC to establish the helpline. Ruchi said, 'they were trained in the art of listening' and to 'absorb emotional distress' whilst noting all the issues experienced by callers. A sample 'Q&A' was provided to support call handlers to respond to citizen requests for additional assistance. A city directory was also compiled to signpost to relevant services such as the nearest available medical assistance facility. 99% of the calls were related to access to food. As the volume of calls increased, a second tier of helpline management was set-up through



the support of citizen volunteers. This meant that an initial two-three minute call could be followed up by a more in depth conversation. As most call handlers belong to the communities themselves, they were able to respond with sensitivity and a level of awareness of concerns which was naturally reassuring for callers. PCC has been inundated with offers of help from the community.

During the first week of May, 50+ corporate volunteers from a well-known chartered accountancy firm based in Pune participated in the helpline work. As a result, verification of callers was ramped up and food distribution occurred at a faster pace. This proved to be a stellar example of the potential of a citizen-volunteer network in aiding relief during an emergency.

## 2 DISTRIBUTION OF FOOD PARCELS

9,000 young people have participated in PMC-PCC 'Lighthouse' initiatives and nearly 50,000 people have been trained in digital programmes. So, as well as having significant reach within communities, PCC is trusted by them. This reach and community trust helped establish where the need was most urgent.

7,500 food parcels were delivered throughout the lockdown period. Each parcel contains enough food for a family of four for two weeks and includes 5kg rice, 5kg chapati flour, 1kg toor dal (split yellow pigeon pea), 1 litre oil, 0.5kg sugar, 0.5kg peanuts, 0.5kg gram flour, tea powder and chilli powder.

The involvement of young people throughout the process has been empowering and transformative for themselves as well as their communities. As well as boosting self-esteem, instilling agency during the crisis has prevented the escalation of mental health issues. This skill will be useful emerging from lockdown as communities continue to face social and economic challenges.

## 3 A DIGITAL LIVELIHOOD PROGRAMME TO PROVIDE CONTINUITY FOR THE PRE-LOCKDOWN PROGRAMME OF SKILLS SUPPORT

PCC has always integrated digital initiatives into their programmes to promote digital literacy. As lockdown rules prohibited the face-to-face contact service users relied on, PCC-PMC relaunched the existing livelihood and digital empowerment programme as an online skilling and digital learning programme. The pilot involves 500+ people and the intention is to scale-up as soon as possible. Pilot participants receive additional mobile data to support participation and minimise drop-out. PCC are also looking into supporting children by providing access to digital learning resources whilst schools remain shut.

### Citizen initiatives to support the emergency food relief effort in Pune

When rumours started spreading that markets were going



to close, Additional Commissioner, Rubal Agarwal, hosted a meeting involving corporators to motivate a community response. Ten corporators organised the distribution of 50,000 food parcels through community donations. In total, 70,000 food parcels have been delivered in slum communities during the lockdown period. 10-20% of this food is paid for by PMC and the rest is a result of voluntary sector and citizen contributions.

Residents of housing societies (large apartment complexes) have been described by the local press as 'Covid warriors' after co-ordinating efforts to support PMC deliver emergency food relief. Cooked food parcels and ration kits (i.e. containing store cupboard items like rice and flour) have been prepared for nearby labourers, workers and those who have lost their jobs due to lockdown and economic inactivity. Almost all housing societies in Pune have been asked to pay their domestic helpers the full salary for April and May and most responded positively.

Two examples of housing society initiatives were reported by local press and summarised below.

Blue Ridge in Hindawaji, the city's IT district, contains 4,000 apartments spread over a large area. The management committee agreed a number of initiatives to support those facing the brutal consequences of lockdown. The society's security guards have been given access to vacant flats and supplied with essentials. Residents have also donated money for ration kits supplied to nearby villages. In addition, a number of volunteers started feeding stray dogs who typically survive on food discarded by the hospitality sector.

Residents of the Swiss County society prepared one extra meal when cooking for their families. This was packed and

then picked up by volunteers supporting a local corporator. 8,000 food parcels were distributed from this society alone.

### Planning the exit strategy

PMC and PCC will continue to collaborate as India emerges from lockdown. There are concerns that Covid-19 cases will rise as the population starts moving again. The partnership between local government and third sector organisations was key to the successful implementation of an emergency food response. PCC will continue to play a significant role protecting the health and emotional wellbeing of slum communities as the crisis continues.

## COVID-19 TIMELINE

DATE	EVENT
24 <sup>th</sup> March	<b>Government of India orders nationwide lockdown</b> This was extended to 31st May.
31 <sup>st</sup> March	<b>PMC opens 30 shelters across the city</b> 1700 homeless citizens access shelters.  Tea, breakfast and food is organized through the help of local workers and volunteers.
5 <sup>th</sup> April	<b>PMC and PCC distribute food to families</b> Food parcels are distributed by rikshaw to families in need in two districts.  500 litres of disinfectant are also distributed by a local politician.
	<b>PMC and Pune City Connect launch a helpline for low income communities</b>  Three phones are managed by three volunteers daily.
7 <sup>th</sup> April	<b>Maharashtra State Government Approves Expansion of the Shiv Thali Scheme</b> Multiple sites offer food to citizens for five rupees (usually 10 rupees).  This programme is extended for three months and aims to serve 100,000 meals.
14 <sup>th</sup> April	<b>PMC opens 15 shelters for women only</b> 1,300 women accessed the shelters and female employees have been recruited to maintain the shelter.
29 <sup>th</sup> April	<b>Number of calls made to the helpline reaches 2,519</b> 1,000 individuals were recommended for food distribution. 500 food parcels were distributed.
8 <sup>th</sup> May	<b>50 Corporate Volunteers support the helpline</b> As a result, verification of callers was ramped up and food distribution occurs at a faster pace.
13 <sup>th</sup> May	<b>Total number of calls reaches 6,923</b> Nature of calls: 98.4% require food rations. 3,037 food parcels delivered.