

‘SAHAYAK’

A PROPOSAL FOR THE SUPPORT OF THE HELPLESS COVID AFFECTED PEOPLE

Period of Proposal

June - July - August, 2021

Area of Implementation

**Twenty Villages of South 24 Parganas District,
West Bengal, India**

(Project area of Night Shelter, Jagaran, Usha)

Proposed By

NISHTHA

Subuddhipur, De Para, Baruipur, Kolkata 700144

Supported By

ASHA FOR EDUCATION

BACKGROUND:

ABOUT NISHTHA

Nishtha is a grass root level women's organisation working unabated to uphold the dignity and rights of women and ensure equal opportunities for them. The organisation was established in 1974 with the sole aim of women empowerment. Starting with small steps, Nishtha at present runs projects in 300 villages covering a network of one and a half lakh population. Currently Nishtha boasts of a minimum of 30,000 members which in itself is an achievement. There are various groups comprising of girls, women, youth and farmers like Balika Bahini (age- 8-11 years), Kishori Bahini (11-18 years), Mahila Mandal (Above 18 years age) and Barista Mahila Dal (above 55 years). These groups are the main strength of Nishtha, the rock solid pillars where leadership is built for supporting the grave causes or concerns of women. Women empowerment which is the basic concern of this organisation would have never been achieved without education—when Nishtha realised this hardcore truth then it started working towards the same goal. Youth and girl children were retained in schools, dropouts were checked and child marriages were resisted. Now this phenomenon did not happen overnight and the organisation had to brave the howling winds and rough weathers before success could be achieved.

Nishtha firmly believes that if the voices of women and their opinions are not heard then development of the society would never take place. Therefore this women's organisation worked towards building leadership qualities of the women and girls by forming various aforementioned groups, conducting incessant training programmes so that they could raise their voices and be heard in the community paving a smooth way for their income generation. Along with such rigorous activities, stakeholders and families were also sensitized to create a proactive and friendly environment for the women. This kind of congenial environment aided the girl children to pursue their education unhindered. Such congeniality led to a less gender biased discriminative society and helped the women to raise their voice of protest against any kind of violence, child marriage and trafficking. They came forward to negotiate with the block and GP administration about their distress. Now this entire process of forming the groups, building leadership and supporting women empowerment is in itself a wondrous achievement and the magnificent result of working unflinching for years together with a strong determination.

Nishtha is standing beside these poor women who are daily wage earners but have not lost hope in the law of the land. Besides all these marvellous achievements, Nishtha has successfully reduced trafficking, child marriage and child labourers in these parts. Nishtha has also been successful to retain the students to formal education.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT

On April 2020, the whole country came to a standstill due to strict Lockdown imposed by the Government because of Novel Corona Virus Pandemic. The place where Nishtha works is predominantly occupied by the daily wage earners like agricultural laborers, artisans, fishermen, cobblers, blacksmiths etc. These are those people who have no savings to keep aside for their future; until they work for a day, they will have nothing to earn. As last year they had nothing to earn; they were left in a penniless condition. Hence there was a scarcity of food and other essential materials. Their fortune went to an impasse when the Super Cyclone, Amphan hit the South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal all of a sudden, this is the same place where Nishtha carries out its activity. It was the most severe cyclone that people of West Bengal had ever come across. The severity of it was as much that it devastated almost 80% of the houses in this district; besides this it also uprooted gigantic trees, electric posts, telegraph posts, etc like a toy. It not only took the roof from the head of the people dwelling here but also tossed up their cattle, beddings, kitchen utensils, educational materials of the children; almost everything. Everything was lying hither and thither; the life of the people till now had entirely collapsed because of this dual disaster. Owing to the situation Nishtha appealed to Asha for Education for quick intervention; fortunately Asha for Education has always been active and was ready with its helping hand. Immediately they arranged some funding, with which we were able to help 4000 families with dry foods and hygiene kits twice. Apart from this they were also provided with Mosquito nets and other essential stuffs with the help of other organizations and individuals. Giving mosquito nets and other essential things was very necessary as most of those people were left with no shelter; and was living under open sky. In fact living in such conditions is never safe, as there remains a risk of the poisonous reptiles and insects.

At one side these ill-fated people lost the roof above their shelter; simultaneously on the other side they had lost their livelihood too as more than 70% of the people living here exclusively depended on agriculture and its allied sectors. The cyclone had demolished their agricultural lands, orchards, ponds, etc.; nothing now was left with them through which they could raise their livelihood. The condition was more severe in one of our working areas, Namkhana. This is the coastal area hence it suffered the most. The sea water entered the nearby lands and orchards, making it unfavorable for cultivation. It probably might require 5 to 6 years to revive entirely, that too if there is adequate rainfall. Therefore there's no way left for an individual to turn around and they too have given all their hopes. In such situation, the adolescent and women group members of Nishtha came forward. The Women groups; especially under Jagaran and Usha went to the houses of the well to do families for collecting some grains, vegetables, etc. and distributed it among the most vulnerable families of the village. Besides this they took the entire responsibility on their shoulders to distribute Nishtha's relief materials among the 4000 ill-fated families. They visited each homes and made a list of the most vulnerable and badly affected family and submitted this list to the local Panchayat. The Panchayat provided the police surveillance so that there remains no chance of unnecessary conflicts and the distribution process is done without any interruption. This was required as people too might understand the importance of the situation and themselves let the most deprived persons to get the advantage.

The other most sufferers at this time were also the migrant laborers as having no jobs and income they had to quit the cities and return back to their native land. As a result thousands of migrant laborers were

returning back; that too walking through the highways and railway tracks as trains and other modes of transport were completely ceased. Till now whoever has seen that incident, may have Goosebumps as in spite of being human they were treated like animals. Many of them had even lost their lives on the way itself, mothers were seen carrying their kids on their laps, crying for milk and dying hungrily. Seeing such shivering incidents, Nishtha's little warriors were extremely pained and they came forward for their help. Not fearing for their own lives, they went to every nook and corner of the village and collected the whereabouts of the Migrant laborers. Later they called them in their contact details and requested them not to get out of their houses; they were assured to be brought back to their villages safely with the support of the local authority. Moreover they were also assured that their family would be taken care about until they are brought to their native land safely. Thus they helped more than 1000 migrant laborers to return back safely.

This was also the time when Government had started to provide free ration to the people; but all the GPs were not getting the equal proportion of ration stuffs. The members of Nishtha girls and women groups started campaigning on equal distribution of ration. They prepared big flexes and installed them to each corners of the villages in order to bring public awareness about their rights to access the correct amount of those ration items. These campaigns were done in Ration shops, intersections of the village, markets, etc. This campaign came out to be very helpful for the people; they started demanding for their rights. Implanting such type of activities in such villages is never easy but these little brave hearted girls did it very articulately; that to avoiding every conflict. It was a non-violent movement. The best thing was that within 15 days people started getting equal proportion of ration materials. These girls also helped 21 families who did not have any ration cards by arranging food coupons from the Panchayat. These were those families who were fear-ridden after the discord of CAA and NRC. They were going without any food for three days, our little warriors fed them and took them to the local administration and requested the administration to provide them with food coupon. The group ensured that they too get the equal amount of ration stuff from the Government ration shops.

They worked unflagging to help the vulnerable souls from dying. They fed the starving people, resisted illegal trafficking by creating innovative protection circles and stood against domestic violence. At this time the cases of violence against girls and women had increased a lot, the situation was extremely complex. Most of the men were very frustrated and started to consume liquor. Having no money to buy such things they started selling the ration items that they received from the government ration shops and other organizations. With those money they consumed more and more liquor and started to abuse and physically torture their wives and daughters. In order to reduce such violence the youth leaders created a protection circle to save the women and other girls from violence. If ever there was any suspicious shrieks of any girl or a woman, or if there was any violence happening against any woman; the leaders or groups whoever was nearby will raise their voice; hearing such shrills the neighboring group too will join them and raise their voice all together; the loudness of their voice will enable the whole village to rush to the place of mishap. After this the leader immediately called the police and contacted Nishtha. This became extremely successful in the village. Out of 125 cases only 5

cases required the intervention of the police. However it was the loud voice through which the violence and atrocities against the women and girls could be reduced to a great extent. These little warriors also worked in attempt to control child trafficking. They were extremely busy with such disaster management activities which are why they were not able to do their normal activities with which they are used to. However through this Nishtha has set a big platform; Nishtha is fortunate enough to have such dedicated, strong and capable leaders, inspite of being very small girls. They were fearless and working exclusively on a mission to bring these people out of such melancholy.

Soon people began to take a sigh of relief with the beginning of unlock phase. Slowly the trains and other means of transport just began to start. People started to move out of their houses and gathered around the cities in search of jobs. But this they time they were unfortunate as the pandemic had till now ruined out everything. Now there was no opportunity. Moreover till now the farms and orchards had not revived; thus there remained no chance of any production. The construction laborers who till now used to work in the cities as daily wage earners, were also roaming workless. A lamentation could be seen everywhere; still everyone were tried to make understand through counseling sessions so that they can turn around with some alternative income options; instead of giving up their hopes. The people were made aware of the different Government work schemes. The Nishtha leaders had till then prepared a list of such works. They took those lists and negotiated with the local Administration so that the Migrant laborers, daily wage earners and other jobless people could get some alternative livelihood to support their family at such time of distress. The Panchayat soon offered many of them jobs under MGNREGA.

With the blown away items during Amphan, the leaders had made a material bank. These items were provided to the people to reconstruct their houses; besides this they forced the Panchayat to accept their recommendation for helping the destitute old grannies, single mothers and other most vulnerable families to rebuild their houses by providing money. But the situation was not that easy; people were made understand that though the situation is not at all favorable, it will take almost 3 to 4 years to get back to normal but it shall surely turn around and they must not lose their hope.

The present circumstances seem to be more adverse than what we had seen last year. None of us had ever thought that we will have to come across such dreadful situation. The second wave of Covid has taken everyone in India with a surprise. Even in West Bengal the situation is pathetic. Only in the place where we work, we witness hundreds of death every day, living lakhs of people affected by the deadly bio-virus. It's hard to read and hear the news that even in the crematorium there's a long queue of dead bodies; moreover it has no space to offer to perform their last rites. Every nursing home and hospital is reporting about the scarcity of Oxygen,

vaccines, lifesaving drugs and shortage of general beds, ICUs and ventilators. Till now we have lost many of our own near ones who were not even lucky enough to get a bed in the hospital for treatment; wherever one's eyes could see and ears could hear, one would only see dead bodies and loud wails of their dear ones. The situation right now is such that, it can't be explained in words. The dead bodies now are just lying like a garbage dump; with no minimal courtesy of being human. If this situation prevails only god can say what's there in our destiny in future.

The Government right now has imposed partial lockdown strictly. No local trains are running right now; whereas the markets too are just opened for a couple hours in the morning and couple of hours in the evening. Apart from this other modes of transportations such as buses and auto rickshaws have also been reduced to 30%. These measurements are being taken to avoid gathering and break the chain of the Covid strain. But the question is what the people will eat if such lockdown is imposed. Having no money, how will they be able to visit the doctors or do their medical tests when required. They can't buy medicines, they can't take any preventive measurements, and absolutely nothing can they do to save their lives. Even though the city dwellers know the situation quite well; but due to lack of awareness the people living in the villages are almost ignorant. There are only few hospitals in the villages, but those too are filled with Covid patients. The hospitals have even stopped doing the tests; people are in extreme confusion and panic stricken. Each individual thanks the almighty if he sees the sun next day. The major problem comes here when people start looking down upon the patients who get Covid affected; these patients and their family are ostracized by the entire community and treated as untouchables. Because of this the affected family feels very lonely and disheartened; till now so many have died because of such social negligence. In villages such things were never seen before. The village people are often regarded as more courteous in comparison to the city dwellers. Whenever there's any problem with a person of the villages, the entire neighborhood comes forward to help him or her. Earlier when anyone became sick and required hospitalization, his neighbor would rush with a van to take him to the hospital; but such was not the case this time! Now there's no unity and this is not at all a good sign.

THE PROJECT

To bring out people from such dreadful condition, Nishtha has come out with some plans. Last time too we had faced the challenges with our massive dedicated force and once again we are ready to face any amount of adversity and challenge. All the leaders of Nishtha are standing strong and united to support the helpless people in their time of distress; at least by providing p0pp with the first aid treatment, before they need to be hospitalized. It will help them as like a support system; especially who are unaware that they are Covid affected. Their Oxygen level would be checked with Oxy-meters and temperature would be checked with the help of Infrared Thermometers; whereas if the situation demands, they shall be hospitalized immediately. A massive campaign would be held to make people abide the health protocol and beside this they also would be sensitized not to look down upon any people; rather they must be supported and never left alone in such difficult times.

OBJECTIVE OF THE PROJECT

- ★ Conducting a training for the girl leaders so that they can handle the provided instruments without any hesitation and use it properly to detect the patient suffering with COVID Infection.
- ★ Making them updated by providing information and knowledge through which they can campaign in order to create awareness among the people to abide with the health protocols which might be helpful for them to take preventive measures before getting admitted to hospitals.
- ★ Will provide Dry foods to the ostracized COVID patient and its family.
- ★ Provide some monetary help to the COVID patient's family as soon as his/her disease is detected so that they can arrange for a vehicle to take the patient to the hospital immediately; moreover they shall be assisted by one or two trained leaders of Nishtha so that they can help the patient's family by negotiating with the Hospital officials in order to get their patient admitted.
- ★ Possibly trying to test all the people dwelling under the project supported villages of our Usha, Jagaran and Night Shelter. The cost for this test shall be taken from its project head.

ACTIVITY TO BE UNDERTAKEN UNDER THIS PROJECT

1. Organizing three days training for the 50 leaders by providing them updated information and knowledge, including communication.
2. Every week they will raise 10 campaign, so that people might abide the health protocols and unhesitatingly come forward to do their Covid tests.

3. Enable them to handle all the provided instruments efficiently and check the Oxygen level, blood pressure, pulse, etc. For this they will raise weekly two campaigns in each village and then conduct one on one sessions with the stakeholders so that they can be involved actively.
4. The leaders will provide helpline numbers of themselves and Nishtha for the helpless family through which they can be contacted easily whenever there's any urgent need of hospitalization, dry foods, first aid treatment or medicine, etc.
5. The leaders of the adolescent and women group will visit each house of these 20 villages and through this they will collect information and provide with the required help.
6. Every help will be provided as per the requirement; viz ambulance or any vehicle will be arranged if a patient needs to be hospitalized, negotiate with the hospital authority to get the patient admitted, supply the medicine wherever necessary, help with dry foods when it is required, create an awareness in such a way that every individual stands beside each other following the health protocols and for this close relationship will be built with the youth clubs, Panchayat, etc.

IMPACT

Till now we have seen people behaving with the COVID affected patient and its family like an untouchable. Nobody speaks to them or even thinks of helping them by any means. In case there's any Covid death, the dead body remains in the house as nobody dares to lift it; until foul smell comes out from it and police or local administration intervenes the situation. Such things probably will stop to a great extent and will get a prompt help and response. Besides this villages will get trained health service providers. People will have courtesy for each other and once again the affection for each other will prevail.

Scalable Budget:

PROJECT TITLE: Sahayak (Emergency Support)

(Night Shelter -30, Jagaran-148, Usha - 130)

Project Period From 01.06.2021 to 30.11.2021

| SL .No | Particulars | Rate | unit | Time | Amount (INR) |
|----------|--|------|------|-----------------|---------------------|
| A | Food Programme Cost | | | | |
| | FOOD & NUTRITION (Scalable) | | | 1 to 12 | |
| 1 | Puffed Rice @ 1 kg per family | 50 | 308 | 1 | 15,400.00 |
| 2 | Sugar @ 2 Kg per family | 84 | 308 | 1 | 25,872.00 |
| 3 | Pulses @ 1 kg per family | 105 | 308 | 1 | 32,340.00 |
| 5 | Mustard Oil @ 1 litre per family | 190 | 308 | 1 | 58,520.00 |
| 7 | Soyabean @ 1 kg per family | 130 | 308 | 1 | 40,040.00 |
| 8 | Suji @ 01 kg per family | 50 | 308 | 1 | 15,400.00 |
| 10 | Biscuit 01 Packet per family | 32 | 308 | 1 | 9,856.00 |
| | Sub Total | 641 | 308 | 1 | 197,428.00 |
| B | Administrative Costs | | | | |
| 1 | Transportation cost for distribution Materials | | | | 2,000.00 |
| 2 | Misc. Expenses | | | | 572.00 |
| | Sub Total | | | | 2,572.00 |
| | GRAND TOTAL (A + B) | | | 1 time | 200,000.00 |
| | Max permissible budget | | | 12 times | 2,400,000.00 |

Government ration only provides wheat and rice. This is to provide other food items.

One time distribution will support for 2 weeks. Depending on funds, it can be given up to 12 times

| SL .No | Particulars | Rate | unit | Time | Amount (INR) |
|----------|---|--------|------|------|------------------|
| C | Awareness Programme Cost | | | | |
| | 03 days Training for information & Knowledge | | | | |
| 1 | Food - 50 heads Rs.60 x 50 head x 3 days | 3,000 | 3 | | 9,000.00 |
| 2 | Travel Allowance - 50 heads Rs.60 x 50 head x 3 days | 3,000 | 3 | | 9,000.00 |
| 3 | Resource Person fees Rs.3000 x 1 head x 3 days | 3,000 | 3 | | 9,000.00 |
| 4 | Training Materials | 2,000 | 1 | | 2,000.00 |
| III | Campaign Rs.4000 x 10 Campaign | 4,000 | 10 | | 40,000.00 |
| IV | IEC (information, educ., comm.) Materials | 10,000 | 1 | | 10,000.00 |
| 5 | T.A for Vaccination & Covid Test | | | | 10,000.00 |
| | Sub Total | | | | 89,000.00 |

Total Budget for Sahayak:

It will depend on the times food is distributed to the 308 families.

If it is distributed 1-time, total budget = 2,89,000 INR

If it is distributed 5 times, total budget = 10,89,000 INR

Max possible budget (distributed 12 times, 2 times every month for 6 months) = 24,89,000 INR