

DEC Coronavirus Appeal – India Crisis

May 2021

In March 2021, it became apparent that India was facing a devastating surge in Covid-19 cases linked to a highly transmissible variant of the virus.



The death rate in India was topping 4,000 a day

As of the 29th May 2021, India had recorded a total of 27,995,457 confirmed cases of Covid-19 with 318,895 deaths. Close to 90% of India was witnessing a high coronavirus positivity rate, with just over 1.5million newly confirmed cases in the last 7 days of May alone. As testing capacity across the country was inadequate, these figures are likely to present a significant underestimation of the true scale of the crisis, particularly in rural areas. There were a record breaking 4,000 deaths a day recorded on multiple days in the month of May.

DEC Coronavirus Appeal and India extension

Early in 2020, concerns were growing about a novel coronavirus. The virus spread, the WHO declared a global pandemic, and countries around the world imposed unprecedented lockdowns of their populations and borders. On 14th July 2020, the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) launched its Coronavirus Appeal to protect vulnerable people living in some of the world's most fragile places: Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Somalia, South Sudan, Yemen, Syria and Afghanistan, and the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh. In the first six months, the appeal raised more than £34 million, including £10 million matched by the UK Government.

In late April 2021, it became apparent that India was being overwhelmed by the worst outbreak of Covid-19 yet seen during the pandemic. There are 275 million people who live below the poverty line in India and there was significant concern for marginalised communities, who often have poor access to healthcare and other forms of support. The devastating impact of Covid-19 in rural India was becoming apparent – health facilities in rural districts in states like Bihar were far less prepared for this wave of Covid-19 even than those in the capital Delhi, which were already being overwhelmed. Rates of Covid-19 in rural areas were thought to be three times higher than reported due to lack of testing.

Here it is not only oxygen and ventilators that are in short supply – even pulse oximeters to measure oxygen saturation levels and thermometers are commonly unavailable, according to HelpAge India, local partner of Age International.

DEC member charities have a long history of working with these communities and, together with their local teams and partners, were already playing a critical role in supporting overwhelmed health services in India by providing medical supplies, treatment facilities and logistics assistance. They were ready and able to scale up their activities, quickly getting support to where it was needed most.

Therefore, the decision was made to extend the DEC Coronavirus Appeal and raise life-saving emergency funding for India. Between 28 April and 9 June, donations were prioritised for India, and during this time the DEC and our member charities raised an additional £14 million, bringing the total funds raised for the DEC Coronavirus Appeal to over £55 million.

You can read about the areas of response that you have funded by donating to the DEC Appeal below – thank you for making this life-saving assistance to India possible.

Help for healthcare



CARE India set up a 100-bed Covid-19 care facility

CAFOD marked funds raised from the DEC appeal to urgently set up temporary treatment centres to support and quarantine people with coronavirus. They have also equipped frontline medical workers with PPE. CARE International has been using DEC funds to provide additional medical, paramedical & support staff to Covid-19 health centres.

Action Against Hunger has been working with local authorities and its partners to provide essential supplies to frontline workers including PPE kits, face masks, gloves and sanitiser.

DEC charities are working in a number of ways to alleviate the health crisis. More than 46,000 Red Cross staff and volunteers across 550 districts India are supporting Covid-19 response efforts – providing oxygen, ambulance services, first aid and PPE.

Oxfam urgently bought oxygen tanks, masks, and other medical equipment for hospitals where supplies are desperately low and supplied PPE to hundreds of frontline health workers. ActionAid has also been providing oxygen concentrators and other health supplies.



Healthworkers in PPE work at a temporary Covid Care Centre set up at Shehnai Banquet Hall attached to LNJP Hospital

Loss of livelihoods

Lockdowns and restrictions to prevent the virus are affecting casual workers. Informal workers relying on daily work to provide food for their families are being affected as society goes into a tailspin. Sandeep Chachra, Executive Director of ActionAid Association India says: “This devastating second wave of Covid-19 infections is leaving India’s army of informal and migrant workers more vulnerable than ever.”



Women from ActionAid’s Young Urban Women Programme in Dharavi receive food kits as part of Covid relief distribution.

Oxfam India’s CEO Amitabh Behar said: “There is building in front of us an even bigger disaster tomorrow. Millions of people have fled from unemployment in the cities to unemployment in their villages. Without help, their futures prospects will be bleak and short.”

Oxfam and ActionAid are helping the most marginalised people affected by the pandemic by giving them food rations and cash support. This includes help for migrant workers who are stranded at railway stations, bus terminals or at their place of work.

Hunger

One of the biggest secondary effects of coronavirus is hunger as food prices rise. Action Against Hunger is providing food and nutritional support to families and Islamic Relief is also providing food packs to households in the state of Kerala, where many people have lost their job or income as a result of lockdowns.

ActionAid is supporting thousands of people affected by the pandemic with emergency cash. Save the Children is providing additional support to the most vulnerable children through food baskets, while World Vision is supporting vulnerable children and families with cash distributions.



Packing food plates at a local restaurant kitchen in Gokulpuri neighbourhood of North East Delhi

Women and girls



A woman receiving oxygen for Covid-19 infection at a facility in Ghaziabad, New Delhi

Women and girls are being hardest hit by the second wave. ActionAid is seeing a further surge in vulnerability as movement restrictions, cramped living conditions, stress about jobs and the virus, are putting women and girls at risk.

Sion Kongari, ActionAid Association India's regional manager of programmes in Rajasthan and Gujarat, said: "Women and girls hadn't recovered from the impact of the first wave of the pandemic when they were hit by this rapidly escalating second wave. Since the start of the pandemic, we have seen rising violence against women and girls, increases in child marriage and sexual exploitation.

"As the majority of rag pickers, domestic workers and street vendors, women are either prevented from working due to restrictions or facing greater risk of infection."

Preventing the spread of the virus

Whilst the crisis is ongoing, prevention is still vital. CARE launched a behaviour change campaign to encourage people to wash their hands, socially distance, and wear masks, and is addressing vaccine hesitancy in the population. They have also distributed thousands of kits with masks and sanitiser to help people protect themselves and reduce the spread of the virus. Islamic Relief have also distributed hygiene kits to help keep people safe during burials and other essential activities.

Christian Aid has set up quarantine centres in rural Jharkhand to map, manage and mitigate the spread of Covid-19. CAFOD has set up information centres to raise awareness of how people can protect themselves from coronavirus and encourage people to get vaccinated when they are able to.



Rakesh leads awareness campaigns and helps run the helpline for counselling and assistance on Covid-19.

Thank you.