

# Concept Note

for Collaborative Action to  
address Vulnerable groups in Rural Areas  
in response to COVID-19



## ***Concept Note for Collaborative Action to address Vulnerable groups in Rural Areas in response to COVID-19***

COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by WHO on 11th March, 2020. In India also, clusters have appeared in multiple States, particularly Kerala, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Punjab, Karnataka, Telangana and UT of Ladakh. 211 districts are now reporting COVID-19 cases and the risk of further spread remains very high.

### **1. RATIONALE OF THE PROJECT**

Agriculture, the largest employer in the country, which is largely informal, is severely affected by distortions in the food supply chain induced by the pandemic. In the wake of the nationwide lockdown, empty aisles of stores and out-of-stock images of essential food items on online portals give the appearance of the country running out of supply.

Farmers who grow perishables, especially fruits and vegetables, are already facing the heat of the situation with prices plummeting, reduction in bulk demand from hotels and restaurants, and uncertainty over exports.

The current farm-gate realisations will play a significant role in rationalising the cropping patterns for the next season. If the normalcy in the movement of goods is delayed further because of the pandemic, lower farm-gate realisations will percolate to other commodities that are about to be harvested. In such scenarios, the most affected in the chain would be small and marginal landholders. It is very important to ensure that the livelihoods of the small and marginal farmers are sustainable in this tough times.

The spread of COVID-19 comes with a tragic outlook for vulnerable communities in rural India which majorly includes:

- a. Low level of awareness about COVID-19
- b. Disrupted livelihoods of Small and Marginal Farmers and Reverse Migrants in villages
- c. Shortage in supply of Personal Hygiene Kits(PHKs)

***There is a strong need for coordinated and collective actions to combat COVID-19 for vulnerable communities in Rural Areas. This can be mitigated through a collaborative action approach.***

### **2. ISAP STRENGTH FOR COLLABORATIVE ACTION**

- 2.1 Reach to 1 million Rural Households in 18 states and 8000+ villages
- 2.2 Reach to 7 lakh farmers, FPOs, researchers and other stakeholders through social media platform and APPs
- 2.3 Treated 1 lakh rural families in healthcare domain
- 2.4 Incubated/supported more than 65 startups in agritech and healthcare

### **3. PROPOSED PATHWAY**

**In collaborative action plan, ISAP proposes to:**

- Address the immediate challenge that COVID-19 represents to the vulnerable communities through building trust and awareness.
- Knowledge dissemination and training for sustainable livelihoods especially Small and Marginal Farmers and Reverse Migrants in villages
- Making Personal Hygiene Kits(PHKs) available to rural communities

### 3.1 Building trust and awareness amongst rural community

Designing customized communication campaigns that focus on symptoms identification and provide simple hygiene and sanitation directives - while remaining particularly mindful of local language, culture and customs – would be key for trust and adoption. The message needs to be carefully tailored to the audience as global prevention advice might not apply to the most vulnerable.

ISAP collaborative action approach to address this will be as follows:

1. **Creating awareness amongst Community Leaders about COVID-19:** This will be done by
  - Identifying everyone in chain of communication at village level such as volunteers, key community partners and stakeholders and establishing systems for sharing information.
  - Maintaining up-to-date contact information.
  - Identifying multiple methods, such as a hotline, automated text messaging, WhatsApp messages, to help disseminate information to those at community level. It will be important to create a back-up method is important in case services are interrupted, such as when internet access is down.
  - Designating an experienced person or persons who can take calls.
  - The mode of knowledge sharing will be digital modules, multimedia and animation videos.
  - ISAP team will be disseminating the content developed by Ministry of Health and Family welfare on:
    - i. Do's and Don'ts
    - ii. How to wear mask and when to wear?
    - iii. How to maintain social distancing
    - iv. COVID-19 and managing pregnancy etc.

The training material will be translated in regional languages for the ease of understanding.

#### 2. Knowledge Dissemination from Community Leaders to the community

This can be done in three ways:

- a. **Through Community Leaders:** Once the Community Leaders will be trained. They will then disseminate the knowledge gained to the community members.
- b. **Community Radio Stations (CRS):** ISAP is currently running a CRS station in Sironj, MP. Though this CRS station more than 50000 farm families have been connected. This medium can also be leveraged to spread awareness about COVID-19.
- c. **ISAP social media presence and downloaded apps where videos of the Community Leaders could be uploaded for mass dissemination in their local communities and beyond**

#### 3. Village Corona Shield for COVID-19 Preparedness in Indian Villages

The project implementation of the project will be undertaken through the following activities

- Identification of Village COVID Warriors (VCWs)
- Development of VCW training modules in local language
- Training of VCWs on COVID-19
  - i. Cause of the disease
  - ii. Method of infection
  - iii. Early signs of infection in an infected person
  - iv. Prevention of contamination
  - v. Do's and Don'ts to prevent COVID-19 infection in villages
  - vi. How to prepare Sodium Hypochlorite Solution for village sanitization?
  - vii. Usage of PPEs while conducting sanitisation sprays in the village
- Distribution of PHKs to VCWs

- Working out the sanitisation schedule in the village in consultation with the Gram Panchayat
- Monitoring of sanitisation and adherence to sanitisation schedule of the village
- Maintaining regular supply of Sodium Hypochlorite (NaOCl) in the villages
- Awareness generation about COVID-19 amongst Rural Population through animated short video clips in local language pushed through village WhatsApp and other social media groups
- Formation of COVID Village Action Committees (COVACs) involving women SHGs, PRI members, farmer and other social groups present in the villages
- Preparation of COVID Village Action Plans (COVAPs) involving COVACS in which plans will be put in place for action in the event if COVID-19 infection arrives in the village.
- Development of Android based monitoring and evaluation tools and web based project MIS

### **3.2 Knowledge dissemination and training for sustainable livelihoods especially Small and Marginal Farmers and Reverse Migrants in villages**

Food Supply chain is a complex web of interactions and of actors: producers, inputs, transportation, processing plants, shipping, etc. It is again very important to ensure that the hygiene from farm to fork is maintained to avoid any risk of contamination across the food supply chain.

There have been advisories and notifications issued by the government agencies pertaining to cautions to be taken on the farms and on movement of commodities during the lockdown period. Most of these things are passed down to the target community through social media as a mix of other non-relevant advisories and information. There is need to establish a system for decoding and segregating the useful information from the government notifications for the farming community and setting up a reliable system of outreach to convey the right messages to different stakeholders. Also, information should be passed on to the needy/target community in the vernacular languages.

This can be done by:

#### **3.2.1 Knowledge dissemination about hygiene practices in farm operations**

In this time of dealing with the impact of the COVID-19, protocols are useful to cross-train farm workers and build some resiliency into the farm operation. Whether the farm uses only family labour, family plus non-family labour or only nonfamily labour, protocols can be used to improve communication and expectations about how a specific task should be accomplished.

ISAP in partnership with its sister concern ISHP proposes to carry out awareness program on Do's and Don'ts on the farms amongst farmers/Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) to help in preventing the further spread of COVID-19 and to ensure smooth supply of essential commodities to the consumers in this trying time. ISAP has 46 custom hiring service centres and 12 Agribusiness Village resource centres, these physical establishments can be leveraged to provide trainings to farmers on COVID-19 awareness as well as guidelines for farm and farming sector as released by GOI for farmer and farming operations.

#### **3.2.2 Facilitating Farm Gate to Food Plate**

ISAP will be helping FPOs to get their passes from State Departments for retailing/selling their produce in the local market or organizations in this lockdown period. ISAP Team has created webpage for educating farmers ([www.isapindia.org/COVID19](http://www.isapindia.org/COVID19)) as well as android App for FPO. WhatsApp groups can be made State-wise wherein FPOs/ISAP team update on retailing their produce. This is already in practise. ISAP can facilitate the farmers through:

- Listing the FPOs involved in supplying of vegetables and fruits in different states with their Contact numbers



- Web links for getting e-Pass in different States and towns
- Important Notifications pertaining to movement of essential commodities and farm operations
- Important Messages/Advisories

### 3.2.3 Training of the workers across the food supply chain

Food Supply chain is a complex web of interactions and of actors: producers, inputs, transportation, processing plants, shipping, etc. It is again very important to ensure that the hygiene from *farm to fork* is maintained to avoid any risk of contamination across the food supply chain.

ISAP proposes a large scale training and certification ecosystem for Food Businesses across the food value chain in the context of COVID 19. This training will enable the gap of skill registry for safety, security concerns of COVID-19 spread through food items and related industry. Persons successfully trained & certified under this will be termed as Food Safety Supervisor (FSS). These Food Safety Supervisors in turn will train other food handlers in their premises, to create an ecosystem of trained persons. This participatory program of training and capacity building, designed to enhance public awareness while simultaneously training food handlers across the value chain. Its success would rest on forging of partnerships amongst all stakeholders, since food safety has to be a shared responsibility. ISAP collaboration has trained 1000+ food safety workers under FOSTAC training so far. All these candidates can be remobilised and trained on prevention under COVID-19.

### 3.2.4 Addressing the problem of Reverse migration

During the COVID-19 lockdown India has seen reverse migration happening in huge numbers. Thousands of daily wage labourers belonging to the informal sector have been leaving big cities in large numbers. They have no other alternative but to return to their villages though their future there is also bleak. Migrants who return home have few alternatives of livelihood. Their small pieces of land if they have any, also cannot sustain them. The states are still grappling with the enormity of the situation as the reverse migrations are still continuing. The numbers are stated to see a steep rise as soon as the lockdown ends and public transportation systems resume in most parts of the country. Since lockdown, the workforce which got stranded either in their place of work, but now jobless or at various parts of the country enroute in isolation or quarantine centres or in temporary rehab centres setup at State borders will be returning back to their native places in large numbers.

ISAP can work to address reverse migration in 2 ways

1. **Mapping of workforce coming back** - Baseline surveys and diagnostic studies will be conducted in the villages to determine the quantum of reverse migration, demographic profiling, skill profiling, socio-economic profiling, etc. of the reverse migrated workforce to prepare an authentic database of such workers. The database can be used by the policy makers and the industry to design strategies for them.
2. **Diagnostic study of workforce requirement in local industries** – Due to lockdown, a lot of industries, especially MSMEs have undergone closure. Those not closed fully are operating under highly reduced capacities, hence with highly reduced manpower as well. When these industries will start operations after lockdown and will gradually start working full capacity, they are expected to face acute labour and skilled manpower shortages. A diagnostic study of all such industries operating at the corresponding block/district levels with the quantum and type of skills required will prepare a repository which will enable the linking of workforce from amongst the reverse migrated available in the district with requisite or similar skill sets.

3. **Livelihood mapping, training and linkages** – In the post COVID-19 scenario, the economy is expected to see a major shift towards localization, especially for essential and strategically important commodities. The reverse migrants will also not be willing to go back to their earlier places of work due to uncertainty of revival of livelihoods in the same magnitude as was available before. In such scenario, a huge workforce will be available locally which will have to be engaged gainfully in some form or the other to keep them afloat. Given the limitation of Govt. schemes like MGNAREGA, Kisan Samman Nidhi, Public Distribution Systems, etc. special initiatives have to be designed to provide gainful employment to such classes. Based on the results of the Workforce mapping, a number of activities for such classes can be designed like
- a. Skill profiling will help linking the corresponding workforce with local industries in demand for such or similarly skilled workforce.
  - b. Refresher vocational skill training to upgrade the current skills of the available workforce to match the special requirements of the local industries
  - c. Forming Farm Worker Groups (FWGs) of those reverse migrants who have farming lands and are willing to take up farming as their livelihood activities. Such FWGs will be trained in farming of suitable vegetables / undertaking livestock rearing with handholding support to sell their produce locally in adjacent towns/cities and locally available processors.
  - d. In the long run, if the FWGs start working on a sustainable basis, that is, if the members of FWGs stay back in their villages for more than a year and continue with vegetable/livestock farming, possibilities of federating the groups and helping them rise in the value chain by starting small processing units may also be explored.

### 3.3 Making Personal Hygiene Kits(PHKs) available to rural community

ISAP collaboration envisage to address these concerns in two ways:

- 1) By acting as a logistic support to make the PHKs available to the rural communities
- 2) By enabling the rural communities to make face masks through local institutions hence, enhancing economic empowerment.

#### 3.3.1 As logistic support

With more than 17 field offices in 11 States, ISAP has its footprint in 8000 villages in 250 blocks across 100 districts in India. This expanse and outreach can be leveraged to distribute the PHKs to the rural community. These kits will include hand sanitizers, face masks, soaps etc.

- ISAP will collaborate with the empanelled PHKs providers of State Health Department and work as distribution channel to bridge the gap between production and distribution.
- The PHKs will be collected by ISAP from the manufacturers and in collaboration with the District Health Department will be distributed as per the allocation in various districts up to the village level RHs, PHCs and even to Community Workers, as per the requirement of the district administration.
- The entire operation will be monitored through Android based Mobile Applications to capture real time data of the PPEs received and distributed.
- The data collected through these Applications will be maintained at the backend server with online access to all stakeholders who are required to have the requisite information.

### **3.3.2 As enabler for production of face masks**

The decision of MoHFW to get face masks prepared locally through women of Self Help Groups is one major step towards localization of its production. Such initiatives are farsighted and serve more than one objectives. Face masks are just the beginning but going ahead, apart from face masks, women SHGs will have to play a major role in preparing other units of the PPEs also like full body Aprons (Coveralls), Head Covers and Shoe Covers. The initiative will also serve the purpose of providing gainful self-employment to these SHG women.

ISAP, has worked with more than 20000 women and youth and has well developed training infrastructure at village levels in the form of Village Resource Centres and Skill Development Centres. These facilities will be used to train the SHG women in preparing PPE components (face masks, head covers, full body aprons and shoe covers). Post training, the same centres will function as village level local production centres for the PPEs where production will be undertaken by the trained SHG women as per the orders placed by the District Health Department. Being localized production units, good control will be there on product quality and the products will be open to customization to suit the regional requirements, if any. The training and production of PPEs by SHGs will also be monitored through Android based mobile applications and data will be collated on web based online MIS and distribution will be undertaken as per the model already explained above.