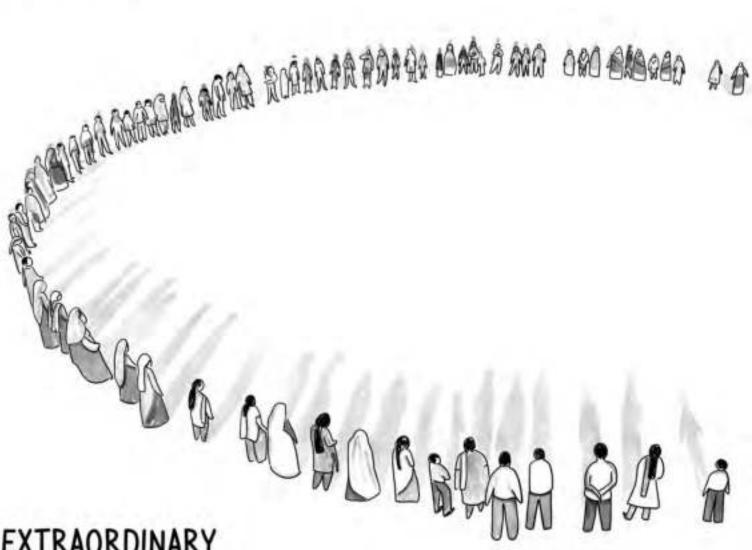
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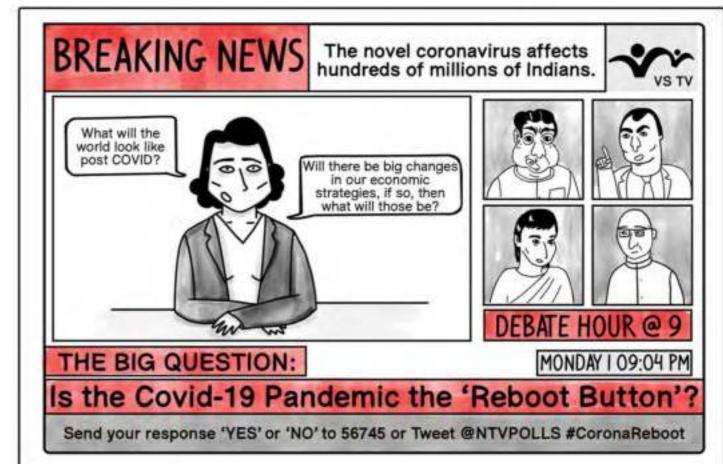




EXTRAORDINARY
WORK OF
'ORDINARY'
PEOPLE
(A GRAPHIC NOVEL VERSION)

BEYOND PANDEMICS AND LOCKDOWNS

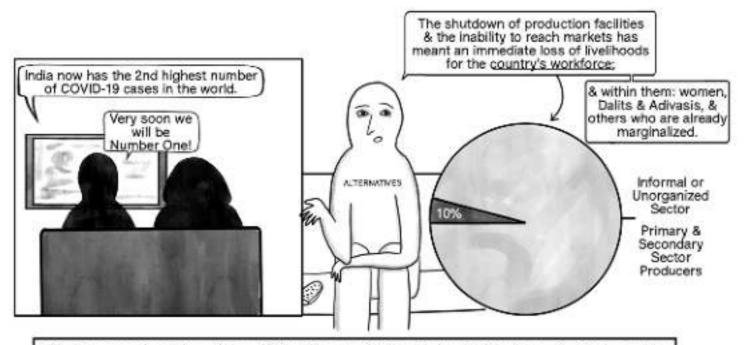
Examples, lessons, and specific recommendations for communities, civil society organisations, and government agencies







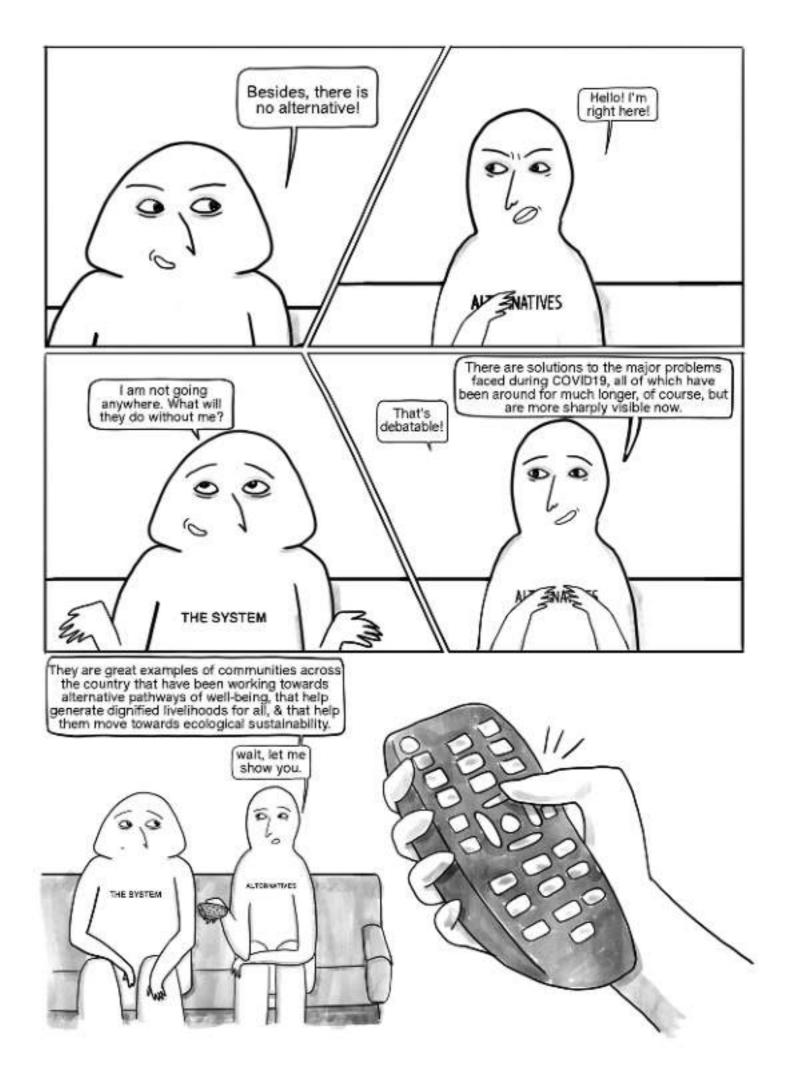












DALIT AND ADIVASI WOMEN FARMERS OF DECCAN DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY, TELANGANA





The families of these women who were themselves facing hunger till 3 decades back have had enough food not only for themselves, but also have shared with landless families. donated for district relief measures, and provided 1000 glasses of millet porridge every day to municipality, police & health workers in Zaheerabad town.

Through women's collectives in over 70 villages, and membership of Deccan Development Society, they have:



Revived traditional seed & livestock diversity (especially millets) in their dryland fields, turned completely to organic & local inputs.

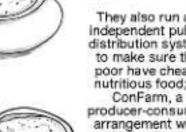


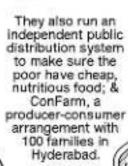
Created grain banks in each village for easy access, & fought for land rights to women.



In the process, conditions of food insecurity & malnutrition have been transformed into adequacy & nutritional

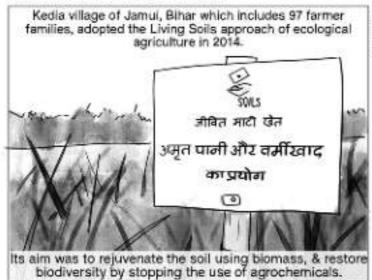


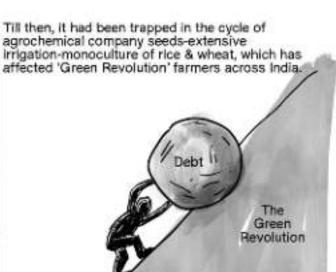






KEDIA ORGANIC VILLAGE, BIHAR





The community, in collaboration with Greenpeace India & the state agriculture department transformed their entire farming operations in 4-5 years.



They have rejuvenated open wells, now adequate for household & irrigation purposes round the year, & stopped using borewells.





Now they grow all the food they need (except salt & sugar) organically, without using any inputs from outside.



Importantly, this turn-around is due to changed mindsets of both the farmers & of government officials.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, noticing that livelihoods of daily wage earners & farmers were threatened by the lockdown, it distributed dry rations to 426 families in surrounding villages, which aren't eligible for the government ration distribution programmes. The community engaged with local media, panchayat members, & civil society groups to identify & reach these families.







SATARA 'DIRECT TO HOME' EXCHANGE DURING COVID-19

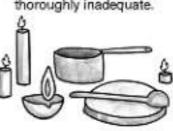
With the onset of corona outbreak right after the Rabi harvesting season, farmers in Satara were faced with 2 challenges-

There's no migrant labour to cut & lift the \ yield.





And the response from the Central Government to such situations across the country was thoroughly inadequate.



Satara local administration, along with farmers, local mandi retailers, civil society & social innovators started looking for local solutions.

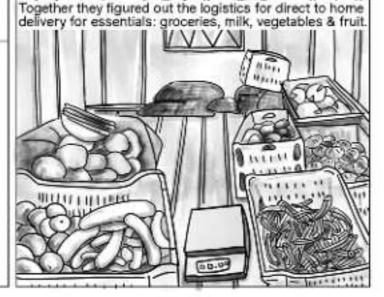
Corona is making all of us reflect & bring in systems which are for the benefit of the oitizens

Sanchit Dhumal, the deputy chief officer & head of

health department at the municipal level

This is a great chance for the farmers not just to serve people during the lockdown, but to address a long-term business opportunity where they can build direct bond with their customers.





Around 38 farmers in the area, with the support of the Satara municipality, are aggregating their perishable produce, carrying them to select locations, & using loudspeakers to attract attention from



Similar initiatives are taking place in different parts of the country, connecting rural areas with neighbouring villages, towns & cities, with farmers, pastoralists, fishers, forest-dwellers, & craftspersons being facilitated to set up markets where they can directly reach consumers, or where small scale traders & aggregators that have fair practices can set up stalls.





NAVADARSHANAM, a small community in Tamil Nadu about 50km from Bengaluru, has been exploring alternatives to the modern way of living & thinking, seeking both ecological balance & inner peace. It has experimented in the areas of eco-restoration & wilderness preservation, alternative energy, sustainable organic farming, water harvesting, health & healing, as well as in promoting traditional foods.



Supported Agriculture (CSA) initiative, which helps local organic farmers plan their operations based on commitments from urban subscribers in Bengaluru for a weekly box of vegetables, fruits & groceries (with ecofriendly packaging).

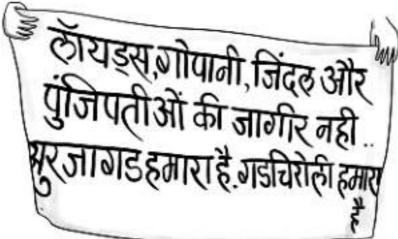


With very limited market access in the red zones of Bengaluru, urban subscribers have been hugely thankful that the CSA has managed to come through with fresh local organic produce.

FOREST BASED LIVELIHOODS IN KORCHI, MAHARASHTRA

In north Gadchiroli (Maharashtra), in 2016, 90 gram sabhas (village assemblies) came together to form a federation called the Mahagram Sabha (MGS). This emerged from the need of a forum that could effectively resist mining that threatened their livelihoods, as also create secure local livelihoods.





The MGS has been working towards asserting direct democracy, localising the means of production, restoring ecological balance, reviving cultural identity, & challenging gender inequity.



Through all this it is questioning the existing model of development, including conventional systems of health & education in particular as they relate to a predominantly adivasi region.

The collection & trade of non-timber forest produce has enhanced family incomes, & community based forest protection & management. Importantly, it has enabled a village level fund to be set up.



Using the Forest Rights Act 2006 & Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act 1996, 87 of these gram sabhas have gained their rights to govern, use & conserve their forests. This inverts a couple of centuries of centralized government control.



KUDUMBASHREE, KERALA

Kudumbashree was launched in 1998 as part of the Kerala State Poverty Eradication Mission. It is a community organization of neighborhood groups of women, its vision is to empower every woman to be part of local decision-making processes. Government initiatives on food security, health insurance, housing & enterprise development, the National Wage Employment Programme & the Jagratha Samiti depend on Kudumbashree to provide community interface & hence ensure local self-governance.



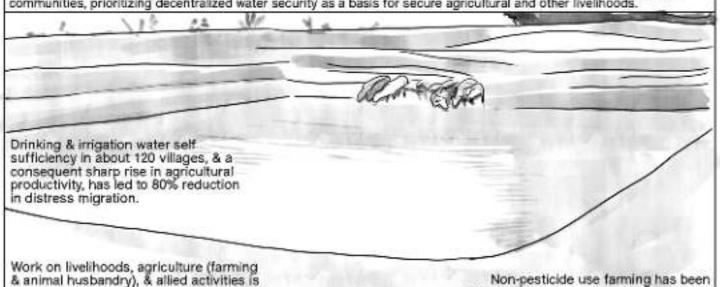


In times of Covid, Kudumbashree has emerged as an important link between government's relief work & communities. Its members actively participated in disseminating information on Covid awareness, government instructions, connecting people through help lines etc. in villages as well as cities.

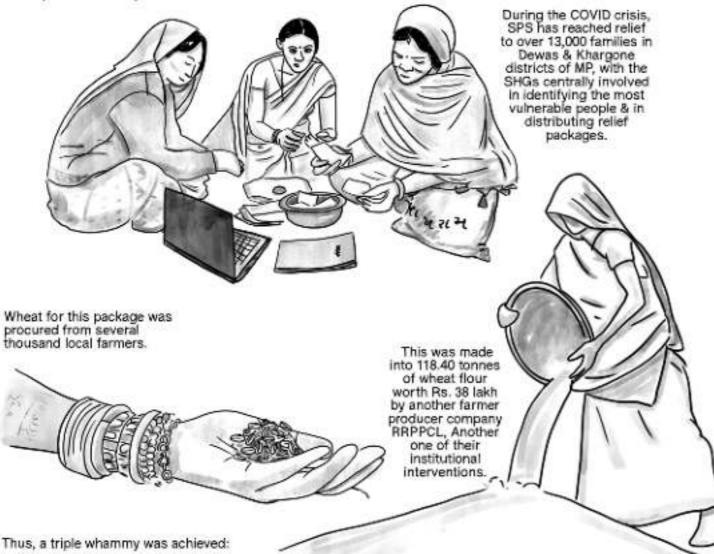


LIVELIHOOD AND WATER SECURITY IN CENTRAL INDIA

Headquartered in Dewas, Madhya Pradesh, the Samaj Pragati Sahayog (SPS) work with its partners on a million acres of land across 72 districts in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Equity, sustainability, empowerment, prioritizing the most marginalized including women, are core principles. Much of its work in the last three decades has focused on Adivasi communities, prioritizing decentralized water security as a basis for secure agricultural and other livelihoods.



The organizational foundation for the work is women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs), formed in over 500 villages & 15 towns (as of end-2018).



Support to farmers through purchase of wheat at a good rate helped them avoid distress sale in the middle of the lockdown.

spread across over 120 villages.

Income for farmer shareholders of RRPPCL through sale of wheat flour. Relief to the most vulnerable families through free supply of the package of essentials.

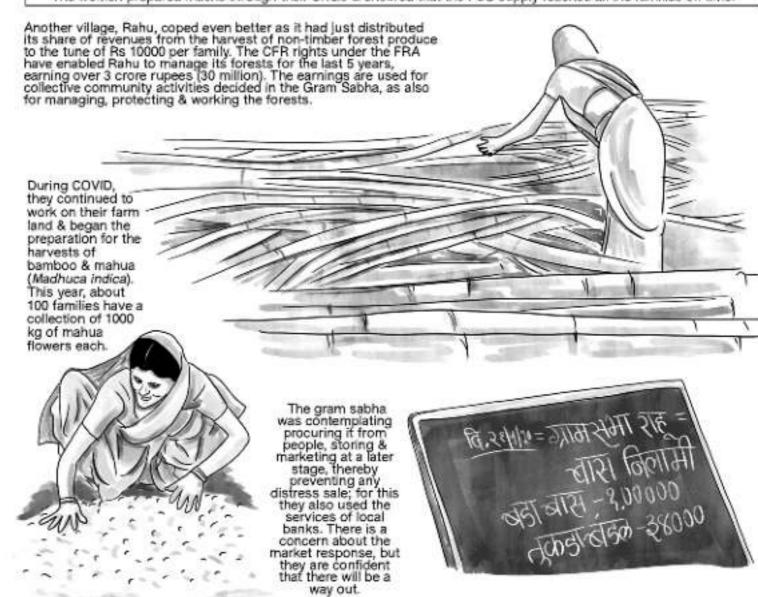
promoted over more than 9000 hectares.

VILLAGES WITH FOREST RIGHTS, MELGHAT AREA, MAHARASHTRA

Payvihir & other villages, at the foothills of Melghat in Amravati district of Maharashtra, have championed the conservation of their forests & reforestation of degraded lands after obtaining Community Forest Resource (CFR) rights under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006.



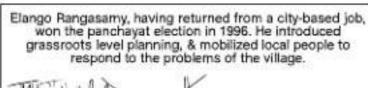
During the COVID crisis, Payvihir immediately closed its boundaries, organised essential supplies with vendors on a weekly basis, & ensured that farmers got labour for their fields. They rescheduled their other works in a manner that they didn't need outside workers. The work in farm & forest has thus continued most of the time during the lockdown. The women prepared masks through their SHGs & ensured that the PDS supply reached all the families on time.



ECONOMIC REVIVAL IN KUTHAMBAKKAM, TAMIL NADU









The larger vision was to provide decent housing for all, form more self-help groups, create employment through panchayat activities, create livelihoods based on local resources, & build an economy on the principle of abundance instead of scarcity.



Nearly 150 families were able to get local employment in small-scale manufacturing units.

The Panchayat
Academy was started in
order to spread good
practices & to educate
& build capacity in
panchayat leaders in
Tamil Nadu.



Being an engineer & inventor, Elango worked on energy

including a reasonably priced solar kit.

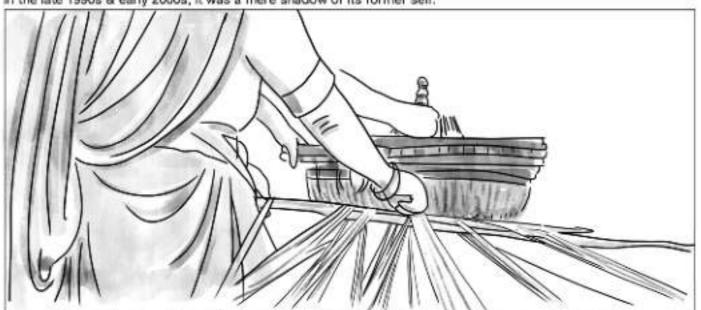
saving solutions for both the public space & households.

Using a state government housing scheme, he managed to convince several dozen families to live in a mixed caste housing colony.



REVIVAL OF HANDLOOM WEAVING IN KACHCHH, GUJARAT

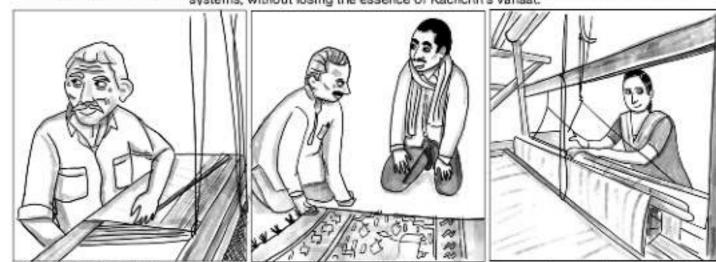
As is the case with crafts in general in India, about two decades back handloom weaving in Kachchh was in severe decline. Hit by the entry of cheap mass-produced industrial substitutes, & by a series of natural disasters in the late 1990s & early 2000s, it was a mere shadow of its former self.



As part of a coordinated civil society effort to rebuild Kachchh after the devastation, a crafts facilitation organization Khamir along with some enterprising weavers made innovations to revive vanuat (weaving). It now has an established presence within & outside India.



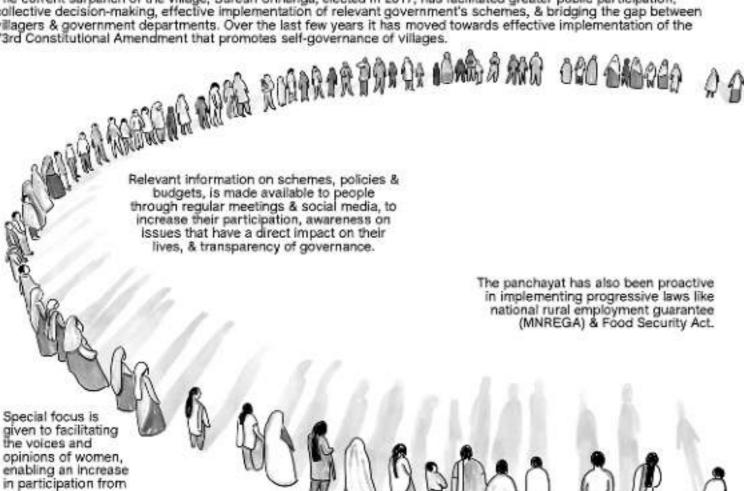
Equally important is the satisfaction of expressing their own creativity, working at home with their families, & being their own boss. Linked to this has also been a significant reduction in casteism (weavers have traditionally been considered 'untouchables'), greater role & voice for women & youth, even as elders still pass down skills & knowledge to new genrations. There is a flowering of innovation & creativity, & hybrid knowledge & learning systems, without losing the essence of Kachchh's vanaat.



With the COVID crisis, its vulnerability to the ups & downs of global trade has become sharply evident. This is likely to affect the less well-to-do amongst the weavers, such as many 'job workers' who produce for the 'entrepreneur' weavers. On the whole, though, the vankar community seems to feel that it has survived previous crises, & will outlive this one also, with customary adaptation & innovation.

PANCHAYAT-LED COVID RESPONSE IN KUNARIYA, KACHCHH, GUJARAT

The current sarpanch of the village, Suresh Chhanga, elected in 2017, has facilitated greater public participation. collective decision-making, effective implementation of relevant government's schemes, & bridging the gap between villagers & government departments. Over the last few years it has moved towards effective implementation of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment that promotes self-governance of villages.



During the COVID crisis, the panchayat made full use of social media to raise awareness about COVID & relevant safety measures, & facilitated a house to house health survey. Only identified traders & producers could enter the

Over 115 awareness programmes reaching 16,000

cleanliness, employment & environment.

people have been organised on health, education, agriculture, animal husbandry, women's participation,

zero to 50%.



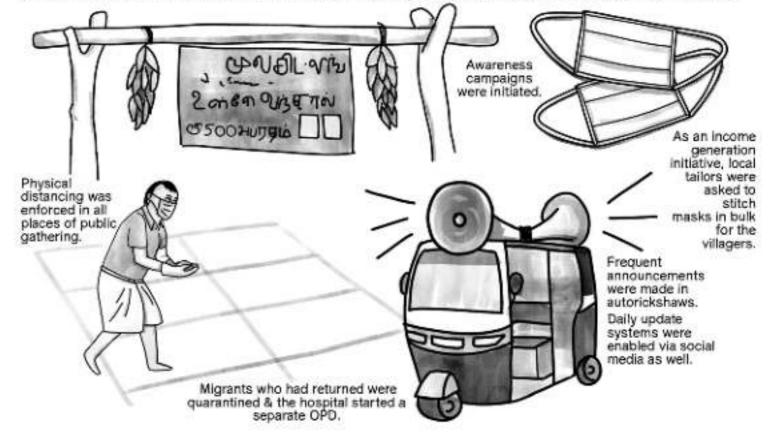
HEALTH EMPOWERED PANCHAYAT'S PROMPT RESPONSE TO COVID, SITTILINGI, TAMIL NADU

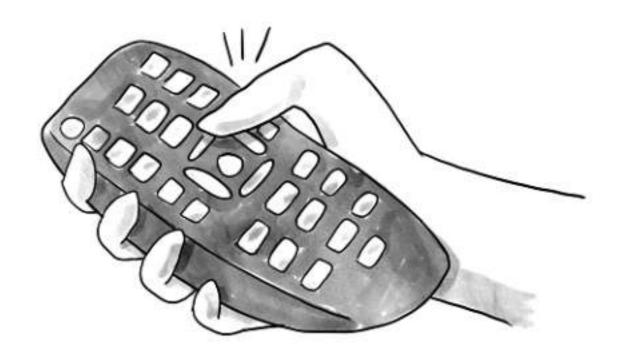


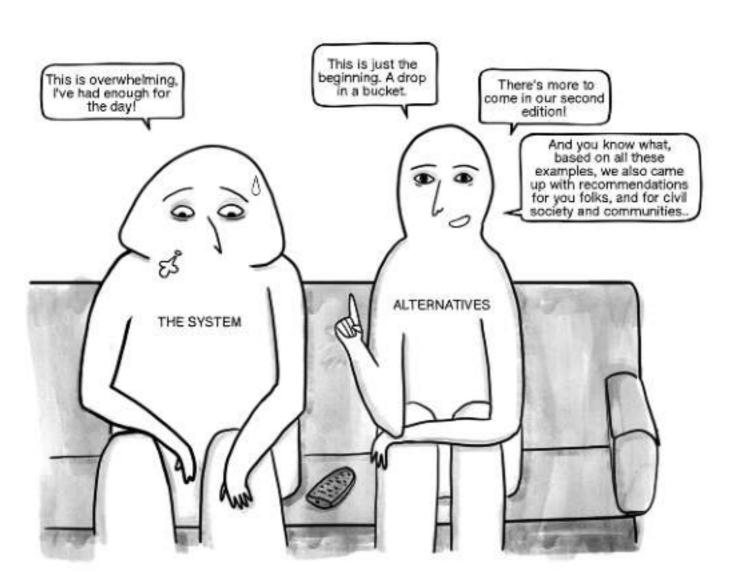
With their consistent effort & with the cooperation of the locals, the initiative has made the following possible:



The Sittilingi Panchayat's response to COVID19 was prompt; as soon as it found out about the pandemic, panchayat president Ms. Madheswari met with the PHC, THI, and relevant govt departments, & went into disaster control mode.







RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOOD INSECURITY IN VILLAGES

- Prioritise small producers (who constitute most of the producers in India), including farmers, pastoralists, fishers, forest-dwellers, craftspersons.
- Facilitate the formation of collectives of such people, especially the more vulnerable sections, at village and village cluster level; ensure that they have adequate access to land and other productive assets.
- Support, promote, practice organic, biologically diverse, locally ecosensitive agriculture, with food as the highest priority. Promote the
- setting up of Community Grain Banks, build on traditional systems of storing and passing on local genetic material of crops and livestock.
- Ensure optimal use of water, giving high priority to dryland and rainfed farming; dis-incentivise use of bore wells and water intensive crops, and incentivize the rejuvenation of open wells and other traditional and new systems that optimize water use.
- To enable small producers to switch to such agriculture, transfer chemical fertilizer and any other Green Revolution related subsidy to organic inputs and other facilities to help in the transition period; but such support must help reach self-reliance and sovereignty, not become a perpetual dependence on government.
- · Actively disincentivize big producers, especially corporate ones, through taxation and other means.
- Prioritise procurement of local produce in PDS, mid-day meals, anganvadi and other such programmes (empowering local communities to run them), in relevant public institutions such as hospitals, schools and colleges, and in private institutions; incentivize crops, livestock, fisheries that are suited to local agroecological conditions and small producer systems.
- Do not further compromise food sovereignty and security, by signing on to more trade deregulation/free trade agreements; get out of any existing such agreements.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LACK OF MARKET ACCESS FOR FARMERS & INADEQUATE OR UNHEALTHY FOOD AVAILABILITY IN CITIES

- Facilitate the setting up of local producer markets in decentralized manner, enabling easy access both to primary producers and to consumers. These can be between two rural areas (including through fair barter), or between villages and towns/cities.
- Incentivise organic, small-holder or artisanal based produce in these markets; if big producers are also allowed, ensure that they do not dominate.
- Do not allow corporate companies to enter such markets.
- Facilitate fair price-setting by making full information available to producers and consumers; facilitate mutual negotiations in a transparent setting amongst them.
- Enable access to low-income families to organic produce through cross-subsidies, ethical investments by consumers and others, making special arrangements in fair price shops/PDS, and absorbing some of the producers' costs like infrastructure at the market and/ortransportation of produce.
- Remove GST and any other such taxes that make the playing field even more unequal for artisanal and handmade produce, including handicrafts.
- Proactively make arrangements for regular visits of urban consumers of all ages to the where primary producers work, to see, understand, and participate in production processes, and transition from being passive consumers to becoming sensitive partners.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RURAL LIVELIHOOD INSECURITY LEADING TO OUTMIGRATION

- Promote localized livelihoods and local markets, giving priority to farmers, forest-dwellers, fishers, pastoralists, craftspersons, and other such producers
- Promote sustainable nature and natural resource based livelihoods, and the conservation of ecosystems and environment they are dependent on.
- Promote self-reliance and self-governance, empowering gram sabhas, mohalla sabhas, and other such local settlement based units of decision making. Give maximum priority to the full participation of women and other vulnerable sections/people.
- Enable creation of a Village Fund with appropriate rules of transparency, community benefit, and rotation of control.
- Prioritize local administration, leaders and workers for effective implementation of programs and policies.
- Support implementation of laws like Forest Rights Act, Panchayati Raj Act and Panchayat (Extensions to Scheduled areas) Act, and NREGA; connect programmes with them that create long-term local resources and capacities for communities to achieve self-reliance and self-governance
- · Phase out policies and programmes that incentivize or force long-distance market dependence for basic needs
- Review all development activities and policies that involve irreversible destruction of nature and natural resources
- Eliminate incentives and sops to big industries, for all products and services that can be produced and exchanged/distributed through local communities and distributed/decentralized entities
- Eliminate incentives for machine production of products that can be produced through labour intensive methods
- Stop weakening or dilution or sidestepping of laws that safeguard basic rights of people, and conservation of nature and the environment
- Stop unfair taxation, levies, etc (e.g. GST) on handmade products and processes; ensure MSPs for all such farm/ forest/fishery produce and handicrafts, while not forcing producers to only sell to government agencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL CAPACITY TO HANDLE HEALTH AND OTHER EMERGENCIES

- Ensure the establishment or strengthening of local health facilities (PHCs, etc), integrating diverse systems of medicine and healthcare, under the overall governance of institutions of local self-governance in association with relevant government departments and civil society organisations; use the principle of subsidiarity, i.e. what can be dealt with at this local level should be, and block/district/state level facilities should only be for specialized services beyond this.
- Enable institutions of local self-governance to make effective use of traditional and new social media for all kinds of information flow and transparency (schemes/programmes, rules/laws, emergency measures for crises)
- · Such institutions to have an updated roster of all vulnerable families/individuals and their specific needs
- · Ensure that there is a special focus to facilitate the views and opinions of women and children
- Enable the convergence of all relevant government staff, overcoming their departmental silos, NGOs and local self-governance instit tions
- Facilitate the understanding and planning of, and actions on, health, food, nutrition, livelihoods (agriculture, craft, entrepreneurship) in a holistic manner.
- Experiment with learning and education through life and throughout life, consisting of arts, music, dance, basic health and hygiene for everyone.

This graphic novel by Poorva Goel is an adaptation of a document produced by Vikalp Sangam in August 2020, available at http://vikalpsangam.org/article/extraordinary-work-of-ordinary-people-beyond-pandemics-and-lockdowns/ Inputs for this version were given by Ashish Kothari, Juhi Pandey, Sangeetha Sriram and Sujatha Padmanabhan.

Citation: Poorva Goel, Extraordinary Work of 'Ordinary' People - Beyond Pandemics and Lockdowns - Volume 1 (a graphic novel version), Kalpavriksh, for Vikalp Sangam Core Group, Pune, August 2020.

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Vikalp Sangam is a platform to bring together movements, groups and individuals working on just, equit sustainable pathways to human and ecological well-being. It rejects the current model of development are structures of inequality and injustice underlying it, and searches for alternatives in practice and vision. A movements and organisations around the country are members of its Core Group (listed below). For movements mation please see:

For more information please see: http://www.vikalpsangam.org/about/



- · ACCORD (Tamil Nadu)
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- · Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (Bengaluru)
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- · SOPPECOM (Maharashtra)
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- · Students' Environmental and Cultural Movemental
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- · Thanal (Kerala)
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(Andhra Pradesh/Telangana)

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