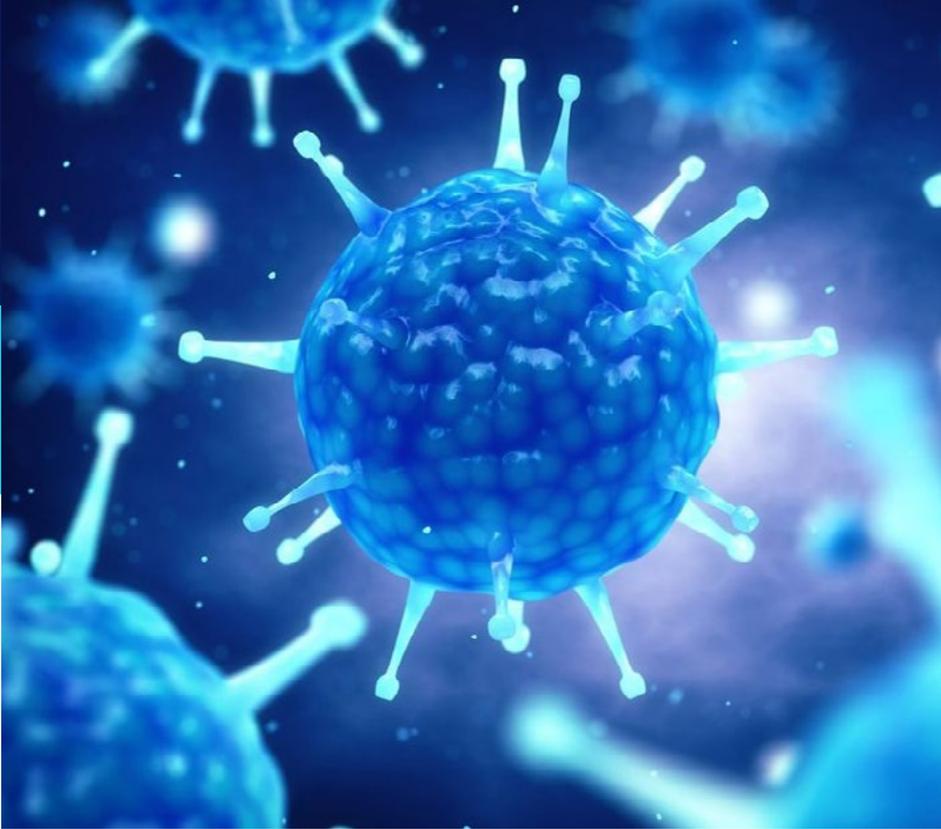


CORONA CRISIS: PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES



A Humanitarian Crisis & A Humanitarian Response

Paul D'Souza

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**A Humanitarian Crisis
&
A Humanitarian Response**

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FOREWORD

The COVID 19 pandemic took the world by surprise from the end of 2019 and it continues to infect and affect millions of people all over the world. In order to contain the spread of the virus, many countries introduced a partial or complete lockdown, which put the lives and livelihoods of millions of people at risk. As the world comes to terms with this pandemic, the events that are unfolding in the year 2020 is becoming one of the defining moments in the history of humanity. In India, the national lockdown announced by the Prime Minister on 24th March resulted in undue hardships to vulnerable populations, particularly the migrant workers. After over two months of lockdown, the economy came to a grinding halt, but it failed to stem the spread of the virus. Facing the prospect of a failed lockdown, the government had no option but to gradually open up the economy irrespective of the extent of the spread of the virus. Civil Society organisations, faith-based organisations and other humanitarian organisations were also taken by surprise by the sudden turn of events after the lockdown. Many of them had to come to terms with a new emerging reality of physical distancing, temperature screening, regular hand washing and constant use of sanitizers in their daily routine. Similarly, they had to come to terms with new ways of working, such as working from home or having online meetings and programmes. Some organisations had to revise their plans to engage in COVID relief work and provide for food and other essential items for the survival of the affected populations. In order to capture these radical changes in organisations and understand the perceptions of people working in the NGO sector, in particular, faith-based organisations, Indian Social Institute undertook this study during the national lockdown period in May 2020. I commend Dr. Paul D'Souza SJ for creatively using the time during the lockdown to undertake an online survey and come up with a report of its findings. I hope that this research titled "Corona Crisis: Perceptions and Practices" will be a useful testament on ways in which faith-based and other humanitarian organisations can emerge in a post-COVID era.

Dr. Denzil Fernandes SJ
Executive Director
Indian Social Institute, New Delhi

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 outbreak came to light on December 31, 2019, when China informed the World Health Organization (WHO) of a cluster of cases of pneumonia of an unknown cause in Wuhan City. The outbreak of the novel Coronavirus leading to the COVID-19 outbreak starting from China raised alarm bells across the world. The disease spread to other provinces in China, and the rest of the world. The WHO subsequently declared it a pandemic. Ever since then, it has become a crisis for the entire humanity.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) describes the COVID-19 pandemic as the defining global health crisis of our time and the greatest challenge we have faced since World War II. But COVID-19 is much more than a health crisis. By adversely impacting every one of the countries it touches, it has the potential to create devastating social, economic, and political crises that will leave deep scars. Over the last five months, the pandemic has caused global social and economic disruptions. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that 195 million jobs could be lost.

The world is feeling the crisis on many fronts and is responding to it in many and varied ways. Those in governance, are attempting to control the disease and effectively manage its fallout to minimize its impact. Those on the frontline – health professionals and other service providers are trying their best to curtail the tragic loss of life by reaching out to those who have fallen into the grip of the virus. Those in research, science, and technology are fully engaged in finding ways to control it and find a cure. The communication channels and media are trying to narrate the story, providing facts and figures about all that matters, to whomsoever it matters. The philanthropists are reaching out to the poor and marginalized - providing food, shelter, and other necessities of life; and those with resources are contributing to the common funds for relief. Those locked down behind closed doors have opened many possibilities of reaching out.

The present situation arising out of COVID 19 has given rise to many perspectives and views regarding the corona crisis and how different sections have perceived and responded to the same in their respective

points of view. On the other hand, the corona crisis has raised many existential and practical questions affecting every domain of human life, to which we do not have answers. Two sets of questions have been raised in the minds of the people. The first set of questions is related directly to the coronavirus: with the sudden arrival of the virus people began to question “Why is this happening?” (51%) and when people were not able to understand and grasp what was happening around them, they wondered “What does it mean?” (43%) and “How could this happen?” (31%).

An online survey on ‘Corona Crisis: Perceptions and Practices’ was undertaken by the Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, to document how humanitarian organizations perceived, understood, and responded to the crisis emerging due to coronavirus. The survey was conducted between May 3 to May 17, 2020, the lockdown phase III.

As many as 140 individual respondents representing 104 organizations in different capacities, covering nearly 20 states across India, from Kashmir to Kerala and from Assam to Gujarat, and a few having a pan-Indian presence participated in the survey. A few states were represented by a larger number, whereas a few other states were represented by a single respondent providing the organizational perspective of their operational areas. As many as 91% of the respondents identified the organization they belong to as either affiliated to a particular faith or not, certainly engages in contributing to humanity; one that works beyond one’s community of faith for the development of all. Thus, the main objective of this survey was to present a humanitarian perspective across India on the perceptions and practices regarding the corona crisis by organizations engaged with people at the grassroots.

In this context, this research aimed at understanding how humanitarian organizations in India perceive the present situation of the corona crisis in our society and respond to the conditions confronted by the people in their areas of operation. The research tries to capture and make sense of things that happened due to the corona crisis and how people perceived it and how they responded to it, in the given situation, up to lockdown phase III across India. The survey has also made an effort to comprehend a way forward suggested by different stakeholders, especially the humanitarian organizations with regards concerted actions in their attempt to face the crisis in the coming days.

PART - I

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The coronavirus, unknown and unfamiliar to this generation, has raised many questions and taught many lessons. We have faced new situations and been confronted with novel conditions in the experience of the unfolding of various dimensions of the corona crisis. Documenting the perceptions, processes, and responses to the corona crisis, as a sociological fact, is an important exercise.
- 1.2. This online research aimed at understanding how humanitarian organizations in India perceive the present situation of the corona crisis in our society and are responding to the conditions confronted by the people in their areas of operation, during the lockdown period.
- 1.3. The composition of the respondents has some limitations as regards the religious affiliations of the organizations to which they belong. However, this also has many important positive aspects, like: it provides a humanitarian perspective, a nationwide representation, they belong to different religions of India, they bring along age and experience in the organization they work in, holding various positions.
- 1.4. The corona crisis has raised many existential and practical questions affecting every domain of human life to which we do not have answers. Two sets of questions have been raised in the minds of the people. The first set of questions is related to the situation in which people were not able to understand and grasp what was happening around them; and the second set of questions troubling many people are the questions that are beyond our reach or have no easy answers.
- 2.1. The coronavirus has created a situation of crisis in personal, professional, and public life. The situation confronted is new, and some are not sure what it is. The crisis has given rise to new situations, new behaviour, and ways of living like staying at home and social/physical distancing. In addition to everyday steps to prevent COVID-19, like washing hands regularly, avoiding close contact with others, and covering mouth and nose, people were mindful in adhering to the recommendations and directives of

social distancing by limiting close contact with others outside their household to avoid being exposed to this virus and slowing its spread.

2.2. The COVID-19 pandemic is perceived as much more than just a health crisis but has the potential to create devastating social, economic, and political crises that will leave deep scars. Over the last five months, the pandemic has already caused social and economic disruptions. The government, which is in chaos, imposed an unplanned and abrupt lockdown from the 24th of March and continues its extension, impacting the lives of people in multifarious ways.

Many got stranded away from home and loved ones and were not even able to procure food and other necessities for themselves. The lockdown impacted usual business and overall economy to the extent that on one hand, the daily wage labourers were not able to feed themselves and their families a full meal every day, and, on the other, employed people started losing their jobs.

2.3. The corona crisis has put our well-being at stake. Fear, worries, stress are the common symptoms appearing on every face and life so to say. The fear of getting infected, death, losing someone, and financial problems due to pay cut and loss of a job, along with living in isolation, has led to worry taking precedence over physical and mental well-being.

2.4. The pandemic gave a golden opportunity to hatemongers to escalate the Hindu-Muslim divide by naming the Tablighi congregation as a super spreader of the virus, because of the unfortunate initial rate of infection among the group collective for a religious gathering. This caused a great deal of worry over communal tension amidst the crisis situation among people in general. It is important to note how even during a health emergency, communal politics plays a key role in creating social distancing of a different type.

3.1. The corona pandemic is perceived differently by different people. Some have looked at it positively while some perceived it more negatively. Adversity compels people to learn ways to fight and survive. This is held true in the COVID-19 pandemic. While

people accepted the pandemic as a natural phenomenon, they showed signs of resilience by looking at the pandemic positively, as an opportunity to learn for their own and nature's betterment.

However, there are also elements in society who have used the pandemic to pursue vested interests and reports of how the coronavirus outbreak brings into focus elements of blind faith and bigotry in society. Thus, religious leaders who want to keep people in fear have brought in religion to explain the corona crisis.

- 3.2. Many believe that the coronavirus pandemic has changed our ways and attitudes to a great extent. One of the reflections shared commonly is that the coronavirus has provided humanity many opportunities to think, act, and feel differently. The pandemic offered the opportunity and provoked people to start reflecting again about existential questions regarding their lives, death, and God.
- 3.3. The crisis situation in the lives of self and others reiterated that although empathy is a learned behavior, the capacity for it is inborn. People showed concern for the poor, going beyond self-convenience to respond to the needs of people adversely affected by the pandemic and lockdown. This could be considered one of the biggest attitudinal changes in modern times, where self-centeredness and self-interest are the way of life. It appears that the virus which has caused mass destruction has sent out a powerful message to the world: "Be more considerate; be more compassionate".
- 3.4. The continuation of the lockdown has worsened the conditions of migrant workers and urban poor across big cities in India. They have begun to feel overwhelmed by the pressures as they are finding it difficult to make ends meet. There is a big challenge 'to ensure a lockdown with a human face'.
- 4.1. When respondents were asked to choose the three most important lessons that they have learned from the corona crisis, it was revealed that, though many lessons are unique and specific to each respondent, there is a commonality of learnings among most respondents. The story behind the closed door is the same.

- 4.2. The respondents expressed that “humanity is above the divisive forces like caste, class, race, religion, etc. COVID-19 has shown that we all are connected, like the strands of a single thread. At a deeper level, despite our differences and diversity of caste, class, culture, relations, region, and religion, we share one story.
- 4.3. The unfortunate and agonizing pandemic has reinstated the faith that the world is a good world despite the suffering and the evil in it, and strengthened the belief in common humanity, which is one of the primary needs for the realization of human rights. The belief towards common humanity is reiterated.
- 4.4. Another lesson learned is the deeper understanding, respect, and care for nature. Failing to take care of the planet meant not taking care of ourselves and our common home. There was a shared realization that humanity was placing too many pressures on nature with damaging consequences, and it is better late than never to respect and care for nature for our own good.
- 5.1. On 24th March 2020, at short notice, the government of India announced and implemented the lockdown - one of the largest in history. Organizations were unprepared to face such situations and responded differently. It was clear that people who want to help and make a difference, do it in whatever state the world is. Their commitment towards their vocation for social good leads them to find ways to contribute to help the disadvantaged and people in general. Most humanitarian organizations promptly engaged in reaching out to the people in need in their working areas.
- 5.2. Despite the risk of getting infected, people started and continued to serve as front-line workers for humanitarian aid and assistance, while protecting themselves by following health care directives by the government and agencies like WHO.
- 5.3. Working from home during the lockdown period was the only viable alternative to continue with the business of work. People showed a great deal of flexibility in adjusting to the new normal of ‘work from home’.

- 5.4. Technology played a major role in interconnecting people to respond to the crisis at personal as well as professional levels. Tools for text messages, audio/video calls, online polling, and digital campaigns were used like never before. This was done in many spheres, including communications, to deliver aid on time, connecting with people in need, consensus building, digital advocacy, and health communications.
- 5.5. The citizens were respectful of the government directives to help contain the spread of infection by adhering to them in their personal as well as professional settings. “We followed the government directives” was the surprising response from a large number of respondents where “traditionally” anything coming from the government or state authority would be seen negatively and people, in general, would hesitate to follow the instructions issued by the authority.
- 5.6. Organizations teamed up with government and other organizations in planning for humanitarian assistance, supervision of services in response to the pandemic, and working together to reach out to the people in need. Together Everyone Achieves More – TEAMing in the time of adversity was one of the best ways of achieving the goal.
- 6.1. The answers of the respondents on the government’s response to COVID-19 was mixed. At least half raised concern over the sudden and unplanned lockdown, financial packages, relief assistance, raising health care infrastructure, and providing health professionals and services to the needy by the government. The people at large expected a much better response from the government in the form of appropriate interventions. This became evidently clear as days passed by at the end of lockdown 3 and the crisis of migrant workers and informal labourers became a national tragedy.
- 6.2. There was typically a mixed response on the government taking care of the vulnerable groups, viz. older persons, persons with disabilities, women, children, homeless, frontline workers, migrant workers, and refugees, while responding to the corona crises. In spite of the dramatics of the government to appreciate the work being done by the health professionals, concerns were

raised over the crisis of PPEs, assaults on health professionals, and the abysmally low number of ventilators and testing kits. Another mammoth negligence was that of migrant workers being left to fend for themselves, receiving little assistance or attention in the cities away from their homes during the lockdown, without any source of income which indeed intensified the crisis.

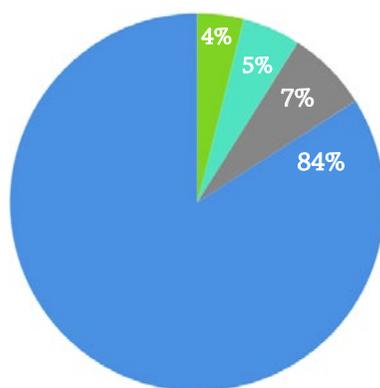
- 7.1. Where will the coronavirus take us is the question in our minds. Most of us have realized that we have no control over the situation as there are no solutions at hand. There is consensus that there is still a long way to go before the end is in sight. However, living with passion and purpose cannot be abandoned, at least the poor and the marginalized cannot afford to do so. A necessary step is to find answers to our anxieties and worries we face in the present and find solutions. Amid deaths and dying, we must learn to live with the hope that we will win over the crisis soon. For that to happen government and society require massive efforts of concrete actions to come out of this crisis.
- 7.2. The five major activities in which many respondent organizations have been engaged and/or plan to continue engaging during the coming months are: in relief work, in advocacy and awareness-raising, in development activities, in permitting employees to work from home, in accompanying government to reach out to the people in need.
- 7.3. Through this brief report of the online research, we share major highlights of how the humanitarian organizations have perceived and responded to the corona crisis. Derived from the findings the report finally charts out some specific ways forward for organizations, especially those engaged in humanitarian activities.

PART - II

1. A HUMANITARIAN PERSPECTIVE

The online survey followed the “restricted open access method” of collecting responses from the wider universe of the study. The questionnaire in google form was circulated to a select group of people associated with humanitarian organizations across India who were requested to fill the form and to circulate the same to their contacts who could be part of this research. Though the form was mainly addressed to people associated with faith-based organizations, it was open to all other organizations that work with a humanitarian approach in reaching out to people in their operational areas. It is important to note that since the data was collected in an open access method, the exact number of people who received the form is not known, the total number of respondents was 140.

How will you primarily characterize your Organization



- that engages with the respective faith community for faith-based activities (4%)
- that engages with the respective faith community in human development activities (5%)
- secular organization working for humanity (7%)
- that contribute to the development of humanity beyond one's faith community (84%)

Hence, when asked to identify the primary characteristic of the organization they are associated with, 84% of the respondents listed their organization as being religiously motivated/affiliated, that contributes to the development of humanity beyond one's faith community. As many as 7% characterized their organization as secular, working for humanity irrespective of caste or creed. Another 5% of the respondents identified their organization as being religiously motivated/affiliated that engages with the respective faith community in human development activities.

Only 4% of the respondents mentioned that they were associated with an organization that is religiously motivated/affiliated which engages with the respective faith community for faith-based activities.

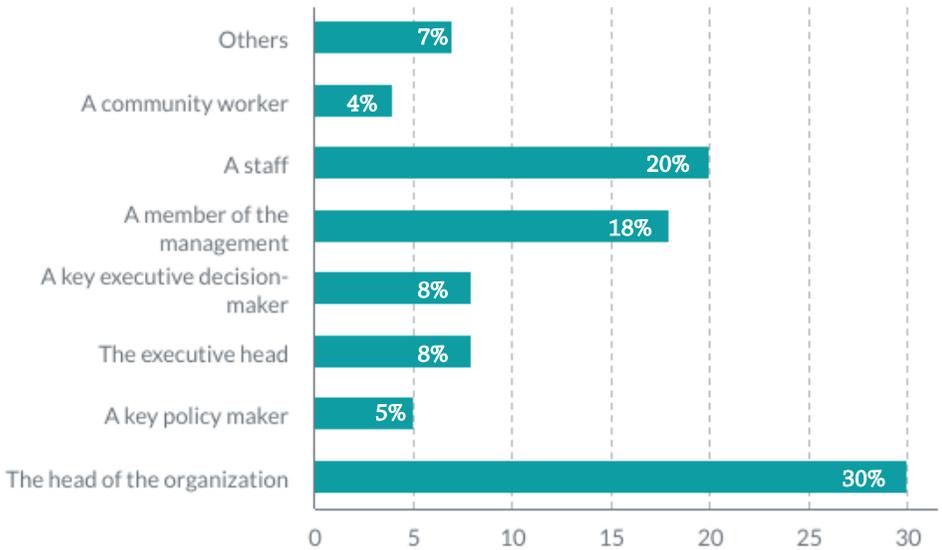
When asked about the faith to which the organization is affiliated nearly 76% indicated affiliation or motivation by one or other religion in India, i.e. Christianity (64%), Islam (5%), Hinduism (3%), Buddhism (2%), Jainism (1%), Judaism (1%). However, 24% mentioned that the organization is inter-faith, drawing its motivation from humanity. Hence, though there are organizations representing other major religions in India, a large majority of the organizations are affiliated to the Christian religion. This is one of the major limitations of the online study that, as intended, the sample respondents were not proportionately distributed over different religious affiliations.

Similarly, the respondents who represented various organizations belonged to different faiths and, in varying degrees, represented all the major religions, i.e. Hinduism (21%), Islam (11%), Christianity (58%), Buddhism (2%), Jainism (1%), Sikhism (1%), Judaism (1%), and no religion or humanity as religion (4%).

Nearly 50% of the respondents represented the organization that has been working in the field of human development for 50 years and more. As many as 26% said the organization has been working for 25 years, and the same number of respondents belonged to an organization that has been functioning for 10 years or less.

The respondents of the survey were people associated with the organization in different capacities. When asked to introduce their association in the organization, the respondents revealed that they were members holding various positions in the organization. If clubbed together, those holding key positions, like executive heads and decision-makers, account for 51% of the total respondents, and the other members like staff, community workers etc., account for 49% of the respondents.

How would you introduce yourself regarding your position in the organization?



As many as 60% were associated with the organization for more than ten years, and 40% for less than 5 years.

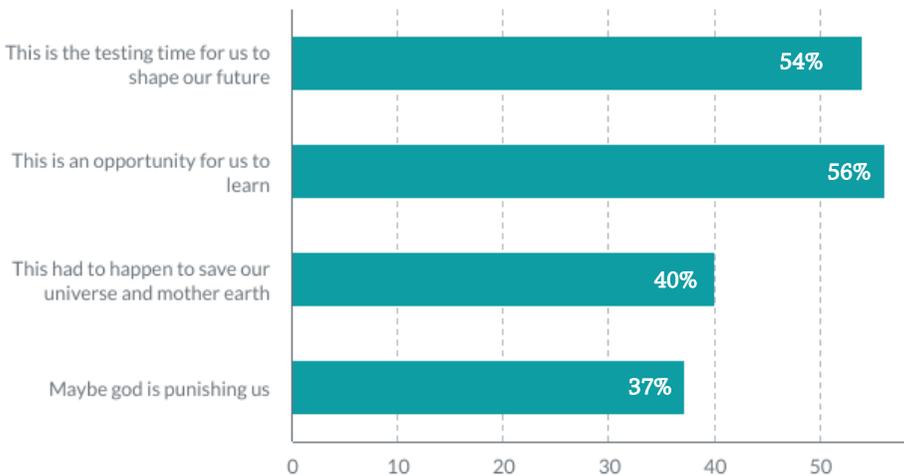
Thus, though the composition of the respondents has some limitations as regards the religious affiliations of the organizations, it still provides us with important information from: a humanitarian perspective, a nationwide representation, a spectrum of affiliations to different religions of India, a range of experience in the organization the respondents work with and positions they hold.

2. THE PERCEPTION OF THE PRESENT SITUATION

How do people perceive the coronavirus and the crisis thereafter? The virus was new (novel) and the situation created by it was unknown and unfamiliar to this generation. How do they perceive the situation of lockdown and how did it affect the conditions of the people at the grassroots? How do people look at the coronavirus itself and how do they understand the pandemic? What sort of questions were raised in their mind and what attitudinal changes are observed among the people, if at all that are taking place? The new situation and the conditions confronted by the people have taught us many lessons, what are those lessons? This section deals primarily with documenting the responses related to the perception of the people regarding various dimensions of the corona crisis.

2.1. ABOUT THE CORONA PANDEMIC

How do people in your operational areas perceive the corona crisis – what have you heard during this time of corona pandemic (Multiple responses)



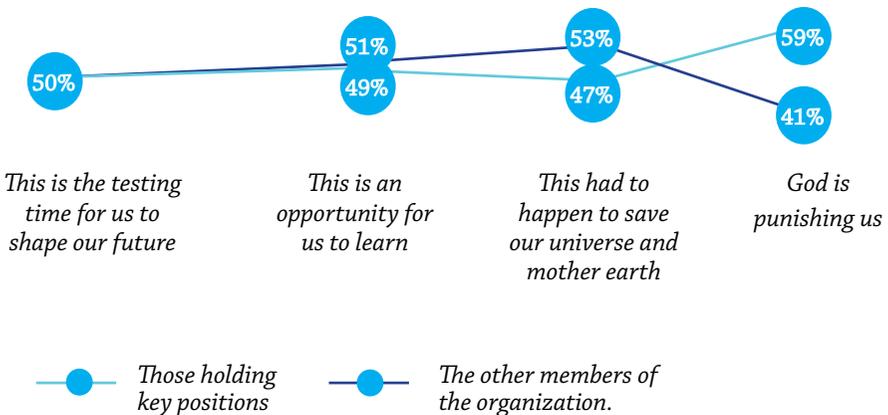
When asked how do people in your operational areas perceive the corona crisis – what have you heard during this time of corona pandemic, 56% of the respondents surprisingly hear people say that “this is an opportunity for us to learn”. Similarly, almost the same

number of respondents (54%) perceive that people see the corona crisis as a testing time for them to shape their future.

On the other hand, 40% of the respondents do not see people perceive corona crisis time as positively as others; but, rather, perceive the hand of destiny and a punishment dimension in the existing situation. They say, “This had to happen to save our universe and mother earth”. Another 37% of the respondents see people in their operational areas perceived this as possible punishment from God for the wrongdoings.

Further analysis of these perceptions indicate that those holding key positions (executive heads and decision-makers), and the other members of the organization (members of the management, staff and community workers) vary in their perception about the corona pandemic. Though they share equally the positive perceptions like “this is the testing time for us to shape our future” and “this is an opportunity for us to learn”; they differ on negative perceptions about the corona pandemic – 59% of those holding key positions in the organization seem to perceive that people in the areas of operation see the pandemic as “God is punishing us” whereas only 41% of the other members of the organization see the people at the grassroot perceive the pandemic as “God is punishing us”.

The perceptions about the corona pandemic (Multiple responses)



The corona pandemic is perceived differently by different people. Some have looked at it more positively and some perceived it more negatively. However, there are elements in the society who have used the pandemic to pursue vested interests as there are reports of how the coronavirus outbreak brings into focus elements of blind faith and bigotry in society.

Religious leaders who want to keep the people in fear and trembling have brought in religion to explain the corona crisis. On the other hand, there are counter views that say, “dealing with corona virus there is no place for blind faith” and we must invest our faith in science to tide over the Covid-19 pandemic.

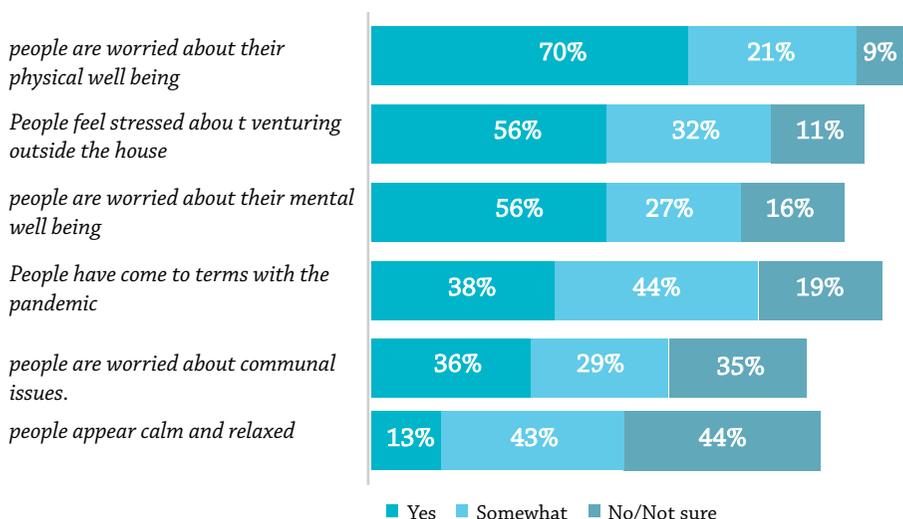
2.2. ABOUT THE CONDITIONS OF THE PEOPLE

The coronavirus is strongly associated with fear – fear of being infected, fear of death, fear of losing someone, fear of moving out etc. Capturing this situation, the respondents who represented various organizations, provide an in-depth understanding of their perceptions regarding the conditions of the people in their operational areas.

The corona crisis has put our well-being at stake. Fear, worries, stress are the common symptoms appearing on every face and life, so to say. 70% of the respondents observed that people in their operational areas are indeed very worried about their physical well-being and 21% of them said that they did harbour some fears, indicating nearly 91%

of the respondents agree that people at the grassroots were indeed worried about their well-being due to coronavirus as well as the crisis. On similar lines, as many as 83% of the total respondents perceive the people in their operational areas are worried about their mental well-being as well. Similarly, 88% of the respondents perceive that people feel stressed about venturing outside the house.

How do you perceive the conditions of the people in your operational areas in the present situation?



Almost after four months of its presence around in India, only 38% of the respondents feel that people in their operational areas have come to terms with the pandemic, and 44% of them feel that people in their operational areas have not really come to terms with the pandemic. This is further reflected where only 13% of the total respondents said that people at the grassroots appear calm and relaxed. This response corroborates the responses that indicate people are worried and stressed. This could be further emphasized today, that as time passed the severity of the pandemic in its spread as well as the number of deaths has increased manifold in India. At the time when the survey was conducted (end of the lockdown phase III) and by the time the report is published there are clearly disturbing indications in India that the pandemic seems to move to the second phase of the spread of virus in its worst form. Hence, people are more worried and stressed about the situation now.

As many as 65% of the respondents do perceive that people are worried about communal issues troubling the people in their operational areas, but nearly 35% did not see it as an issue or are not sure of the same. This development of communal issues in some parts of the country needs to be seen in the context of religious events that took place and how they were perceived to be associated with the spread of the virus.

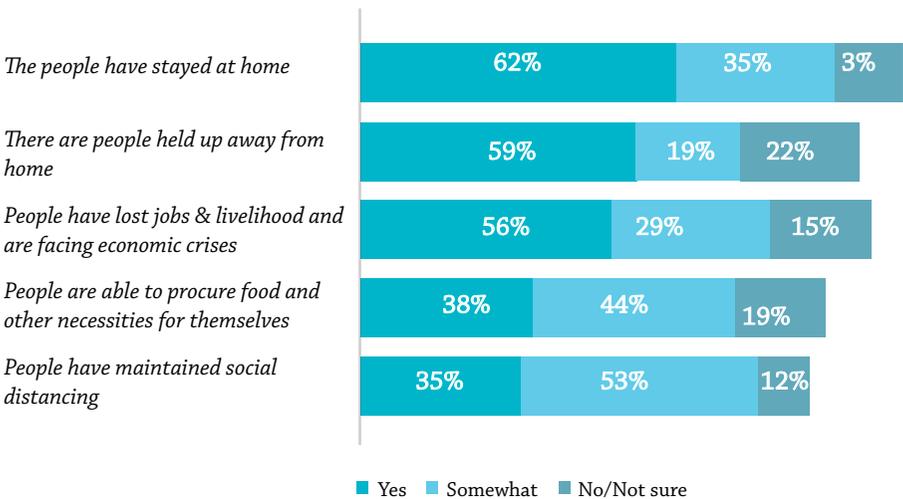
It is important to note how even during a health emergency communal politics plays a vital role in creating social distancing of a different type.

When India was grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic, many chose to make desperate attempts to communalize the human tragedy along Hindu-Muslim lines.

Troubling developments brought unnecessary fear and insecurity among the minorities, especially the Muslims. Thus, hostile propaganda was spread that the Tablighi Jamaat congregation, at Delhi’s Nizamuddin Markaz Mosque, is a “super spreader” of the coronavirus across India; Muslim patients infected by the virus in Gujarat hospitals were being segregated; officials were urged not to give relief materials to Muslims; at many places Muslim small vendors and traders were not able to do their business etc. These developments have made the Muslims scared of their safety. In that context it is appropriately reported in The Hindu that “The communal virus is more dangerous, more infectious and more harmful for the nation than coronavirus” (<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/> APRIL 02, 2020).

2.3. ABOUT THE SITUATION OVER THE PERIOD OF LOCKDOWN

How can you best describe the situation over the last few weeks of the people in your operational areas due to corona crises...



The coronavirus has created a situation of crisis in personal, professional, and public life. The situation confronted is new and some are not sure what it is. When asked to describe the situation over the last few weeks of the people in their operational areas due to the corona crisis, the respondents from various organizations described five different situations faced by their people in the operational areas during the period of lockdown.

1. People have stayed at home:

As many as 62% confirmed that by and large people responded very positively to the call for lockdown and have stayed at home. However, 35% believed people did not stay at home all the time.

2. There are people held up away from home:

One of the serious impacts of lockdown on the people in the operational areas mentioned by 78% of the respondents (59% yes and 19% somewhat) was that people were held up away from home. This large number of the respondents' perceptions indicate the seriousness of the impact of the sudden lockdown on lives of the people.

3. People have lost jobs and livelihood and are facing economic crises:

Another serious implication of the lockdown and the corona crisis is the impact on the economic life of the community. As many as 56% of the respondents have mentioned that people in their operational areas lost their jobs and livelihood and were facing economic hardships during this corona crisis and 29% of the respondents partially agree that people have lost jobs and are facing economic crisis. This accounts for nearly 85% of the total respondents seeing the impact on the economic conditions of the people during the lockdown period. Only 15% did not see the lockdown impacting the economic life of the people in their operational areas by seriously losing jobs and livelihood and facing any economic crises.

4. People are able to procure food and other necessities for themselves:

Affected by the lockdown and as people have stayed back home trying to maintain social distancing, the situation has impacted their routine by not being able to reach places and get daily essentials and necessary

services. Around 19% of the respondents mentioned that people in their operational areas were not able to procure food and other necessities for themselves. On the other hand, 81% of the respondents believed people in their working areas were not affected much and were able to procure food and other necessities for themselves.

5. People have maintained social distancing:

When it comes to the question of people maintaining social distancing, 53% responded that people were not seen as serious as they should have been about maintaining social distancing. Further, as many as 12% mentioned that people have not maintained social distancing. However, 35% described that people have maintained social distancing during the lockdown period.

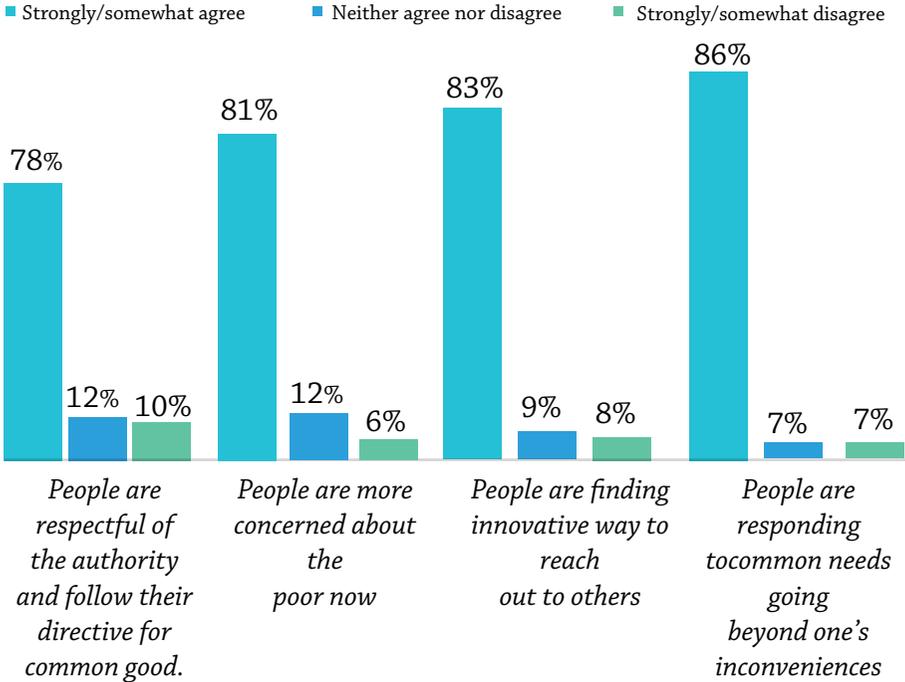
2.4. ABOUT THE ATTITUDINAL CHANGES DUE TO CORONA CRISIS

The coronavirus pandemic has gripped the world all over, making it one of the most tragic events the entire humanity has ever faced. Many believe it has changed our ways and attitudes to a great extent. One of the reflections shared commonly is that the coronavirus has provided humanity many opportunities to think, act, and feel differently. Has the corona crisis brought attitudinal changes among the people? What sort of changes are perceived and practiced?

When asked about the attitudinal changes they observe among the people, most of the respondents either strongly agree or somewhat agree to the attitudinal changes observed among the people in their respective areas of operation during the corona crisis.

Seeing the responses to the lockdown announced by the government and the standard operating procedures (SOP) to be followed by the people, 78% of the respondents thought that people were respectful of the authority and follow their directives for the common good. As observed, in many instances, the change is forced upon the people and has not come from within. There was also the dimension of “no alternatives” other than following the SOP, rather than become a victim of the brutality of the law and order machinery.

Which of the following attitudinal changes do you observe among the people in your operational areas due to corona crisis



However, the responses draw our attention to the other set of attitudinal changes which are worth noting down. Looking at those respondents who agree (strongly and somewhat) as many as 86% of them perceive that people are responding to common needs, going beyond one's inconveniences during this period of the corona crisis.

Secondly, 83% of the respondents are of the opinion that people are finding innovative ways to reach out to others, especially those in need, and 81% of respondents think that people are more concerned about the poor now than before.

This could be one of the biggest changes in modern times where consumerism is at its peak and self-centeredness and self-interest are the way of life. It appears that the virus which has caused mass destruction has sent out a powerful message to the world: "Be more considerate; be more compassionate". The world is feeling the impact of

COVID-19 pandemic. One of the key learnings is to nurture a concern for others.

Those locked down behind closed doors have opened many spaces and lifted us to several possibilities to reach out. Over the past few weeks, we have seen ‘Let’s make kindness go viral’ becoming a reality globally: Governments delivering financial assistance packages; frontline workers and service providers going beyond personal comfort and concern; philanthropists reaching out to the poor and marginalized - providing food, shelter and other necessities of life; rich and those with resources contributing to the common funds for relief.

What is being witnessed is an experience of many. The acts of compassion are becoming a pattern, going beyond one’s homes to communities, to regions, and beyond boundaries of nations. We have been hearing and reading about many individuals and communities, institutions and universities, experts and officials, governments and citizens coming forward with creative initiatives, expressing compassion and kindness. These outreach programs are not just to people who matter to me, but to those who are “faceless” - just in need.

‘Never in our lifetimes has there been a call for compassion like this’, writes Chema Vera, the interim executive director of Oxfam International, describing the need to reach out to the vulnerable. All this indicates that, now more than ever before, we are being called to be more compassionate and considerate, especially to those in need and those vulnerable.

Of course, it would be too naïve to imagine there are no exceptions to what is being said. There are numerous instances where self-interest and selfishness still govern the day. The continuation of the lockdown has worsened the conditions of migrant workers and urban poor across big cities in India. They have begun to feel overwhelmed by the pressures as they are finding it difficult to make ends meet. There is fear that more people will die in India not with Corona infection but from starvation. There is a big challenge ‘to ensure a lockdown with a human face’. Much of the crisis during and after the lockdown 3 and 4 is focused on the plight of the migrant workers in our cities. The corona crisis has left us with many unanswered questions and challenges. The lockdown has impacted the migrant workers so negatively that the nation is today grappling with the economic survival of the poor in

different parts of our country.

There is an urge on all fronts that the trend of being considerate and compassionate must continue and become the practice of the day. Our storehouses must be opened to the poor and hungry. Our wants must be controlled to satisfy the needs of those at the margins. Those who have in abundance must share with those in need. Indeed, coronavirus is showing the way that another world is possible; the world must be a better place to live, for all.

2.5. ABOUT THE LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE CORONA CRISIS

When respondents were asked to pick up the three most important lessons that they have learned from the corona crisis, it was revealing that the lessons learned were so common to many respondents. Though many lessons are unique and specific to each respondent, there is a commonality of learnings among most respondents.

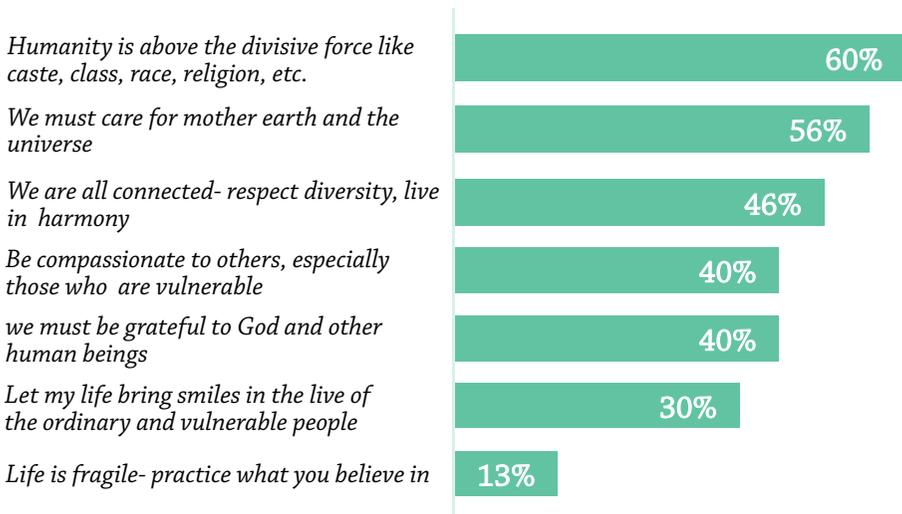
The story of Wuhan of December 2019 was replicated across the globe, one country after another. Given the scale of the challenge and the danger to human lives, nation after nation responded to the invasion of COVID-19 in their way. Some were caught unawares and thus their response was lukewarm, whereas some, promptly learning from the experience of the others, responded more seriously and strategically. This one single story narrated and experienced differently provided a platform for common learnings.

As one reads social media and other communication channels, one feels the sense of the echoing “my story” being narrated by others. “This is what I have learned”. “This is what I reflect”. So, in each narrative one discovers an expression and experience like mine. Every person has something to say, something to learn, something to share. The same story, of course; but, a different version.

The deserted lanes and guarded streets, the watchful security guards and surveillance of police personnel, the quarantined localities, the sound of the siren, the COVID-19 hotspots, the number of new cases, the death toll, the recoveries etc. are all familiar in every sense. The story behind the closed door is the same. What is being cooked over here is no different from that at the neighbour’s place.

It is a borderless imagination of living in the same reality, with hearts hiding a shared pain and minds being preoccupied with identical thoughts. This provides a possibility for common learnings that would change the way the world thinks, acts and behaves.

Corona virus and its fallout has taught us many lessons. Three lessons that I have learned from the corona crisis are...(Multiple responses)



In this context, it is important to note that as many as 60% of the respondents expressed that “humanity is above the divisive forces like caste, class, race, religion etc. COVID-19 has shown that we all are connected, like the strands of a single thread. At a deeper level, despite our differences and diversity of caste, class, culture, relations, region, and religion, we share one story. There is a realization that we need to recognize and respect the uniqueness of the experience and expression, to be more humane.

“We must care for mother earth and the universe” say another 56% of the respondents. The fundamental ethos expressed in our Constitution is expressed by 46% of the respondents who have learned that “We are all connected - respect diversity, live in harmony”. Nearly 40% of the respondents asserted: “be compassionate to others, especially those who are vulnerable”. “We must be grateful to God and other human beings” said another 40% of the respondents.

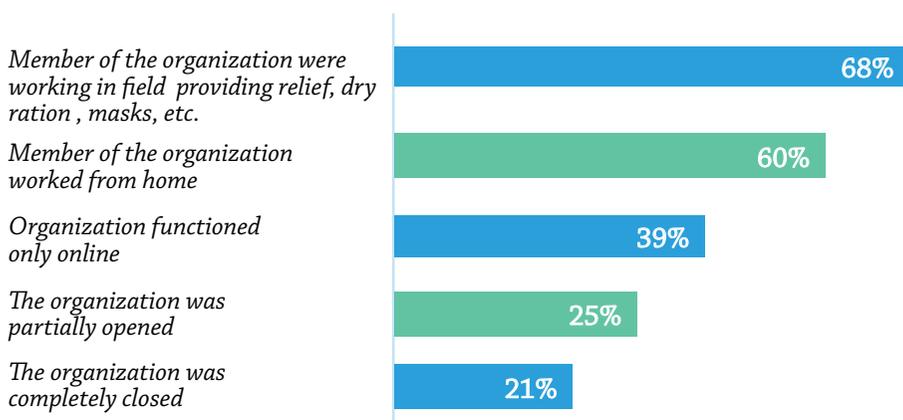
3. THE RESPONSES TO THE CORONA CRISIS

This section deals mainly with responses of the organizations to the corona crisis and the situation that arose thereafter. How did the organizations respond to various situations that emerged after the lockdown period and during the lockdown? What activities did organizations initiate and how did they engage in reaching out to the people in their operational areas? How and with whom did they collaborate for such initiatives? These are some of the questions that will be dealt with in this section.

3.1. ORGANIZATIONS RESPOND TO THE LOCK-DOWN

On 24th March 2020 at short notice, the government of India announced and implemented the lockdown - one of the largest in history. Organizations responded differently to the situation as they were unprepared to face such situations. When asked how the organization responded to the lock-down there were multiple responses from the respondents of different organizations.

How did your organization respond to the lock-down? (Multiple responses)



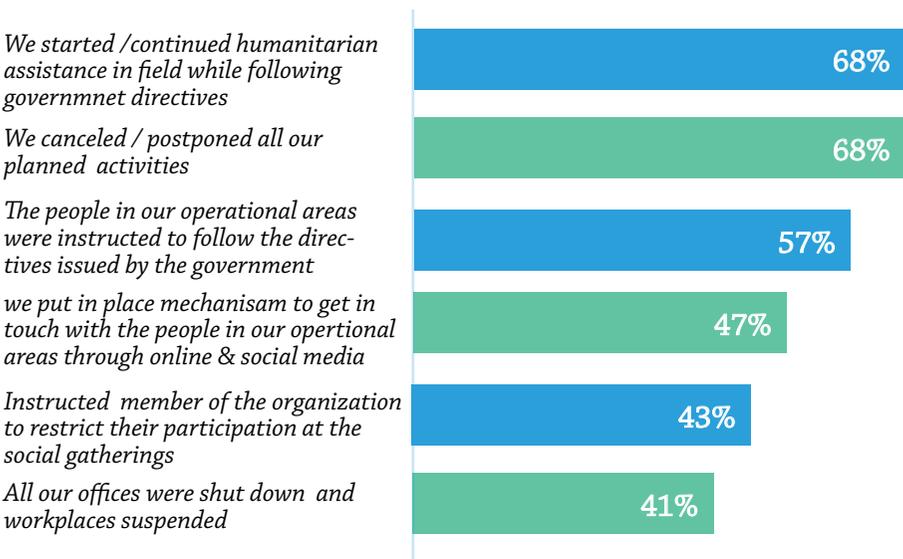
As a response to the lockdown, as many as 21% of the organizations decided to completely close the organization; whereas a little over 25% of the organizations were partially opened - those who were able to come to office spaces were allowed to function. Depending on the nature of work and the availability of necessary facilities, there were

two types of responses that elaborated on the ways of functioning of organizations in the lockdown the situation. Nearly 39% of the organizations managed to function only online and in a large majority (60%) of them, the members of the organizations worked from home

As the lockdown occurred, 68% of the respondents said that the members of the organization were working in the field: providing relief, dry ration, masks etc. in their operational areas. This clearly indicates the nature of the organization and the primary characteristic as mentioned earlier was humanitarian. Hence most of them were promptly engaged in reaching out to the people in need in their working areas.

There is an interesting contrast in the responses. On the one hand, the organizations, in a way, were forced to respond promptly to the lockdown; and in that situation, the office functioning related to work was suspended or partly continued or staff were allowed to work from home. On the other hand, the response of many organizations was to get out, reach out, and engage in humanitarian activities, to provide relief assistance to the needy.

Considering the seriousness of the corona crisis, which of the following activities did your organization initiate (Multiple responses)



Considering the seriousness of the corona crisis, the organizations initiated several activities promptly as their response to the situation. The response can be categorised into three types:

1. They promptly shut down or suspended activities:

41% of the respondents said that their offices were shut down and workplaces suspended. At the organizational level, 68% of the organizations cancelled/postponed all their planned activities.

2. They promptly got in touch with the people:

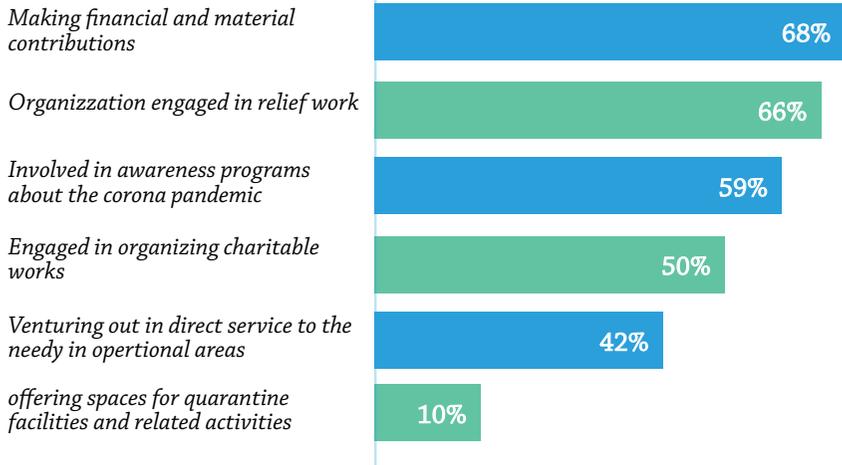
57% said that the people in their operational areas were instructed to follow the directives issued by the government. At the organizational level, 47% of the respondents said their organization promptly put in place mechanisms to get in touch with the people in their operational areas through online and social media.

3. They promptly engaged in humanitarian action:

43% of the respondents were of the opinion that their organization instructed members to restrict their participation at social gatherings to maintain social distancing. And as many as 68% of the organizations said they started/continued humanitarian assistance in the field, while following government directives, reaching out to the people in their operational areas.

When asked how the organization was engaged in reaching out to the people in their operational areas as a response to corona crisis, the respondents emphatically mentioned five main activities: making financial and material contributions (65%), organization engaged in relief work (66%), involved in awareness programs about the corona pandemic (59%), engaged in organizing charitable works (50%), and venturing out in direct service to the needy in our operational areas (42%). Only 10% of the respondents mentioned that they were engaged in offering spaces for quarantine facilities and related activities.

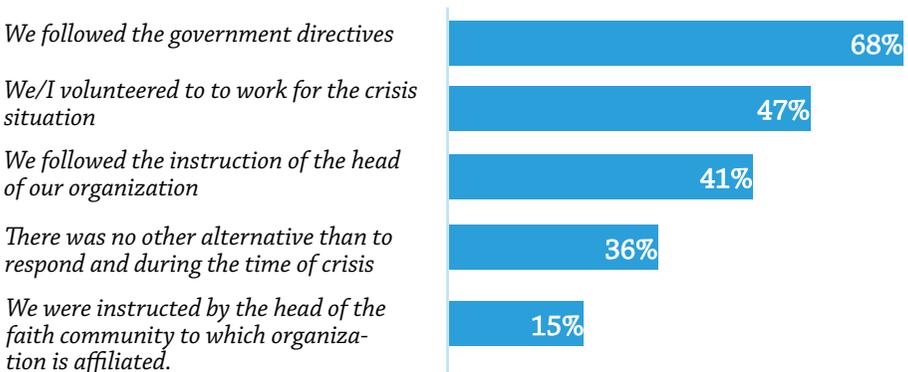
How was your organization engaged in reaching out to the people in your operational areas as a response to corona crises? (Multiple responses)



One of the key responses of most of the organizations was to get engaged in the humanitarian activities as soon as the lockdown occurred. The members of the organizations reached out to the people in the areas of operation in many and varied ways, overlooking their own comfort and risk to life. The government as well as other sectors must recognize this contribution of the organizations during the time of crisis irrespective of which faith or religion they belong.

3.2. THE MOTIVATION TO RESPOND TO THE LOCK-DOWN

What motivated your organization to respond to the lock-down the way you responded? (Multiple responses)



As seen from the responses above, the organizations responded to the lockdown situations differently and most had to respond promptly as they were confronted with the corona crisis. Interestingly, the response was on the one hand to shut down or partly stop the regular work; and, on the other, to engage in humanitarian activities reaching out to the affected people in the working areas. With such responses, respondents were asked what motivated their organization to respond to the lockdown the way they responded? From the various responses to the lockdown that came from the organizations, four main sources of motivation or force were highlighted:

1. The state authority:

“We followed the government directives” was the response from 68% of the respondents. This response of a high number of respondents comes as quite a surprise in the Indian context, where “traditionally” anything coming from the government or state authority would be seen negatively and people, in general, would hesitate to follow the instructions issued by the authority.

2. The organization authority:

Nearly 41% followed the directions or the instructions of the head of their organization. These were taken as administrative orders to be followed. Whereas, just 15% said “they were instructed by the head of the faith community to which the organization is affiliated”. This is coming more from the religious authority which governs the functioning of the organizations.

3. Authority from within:

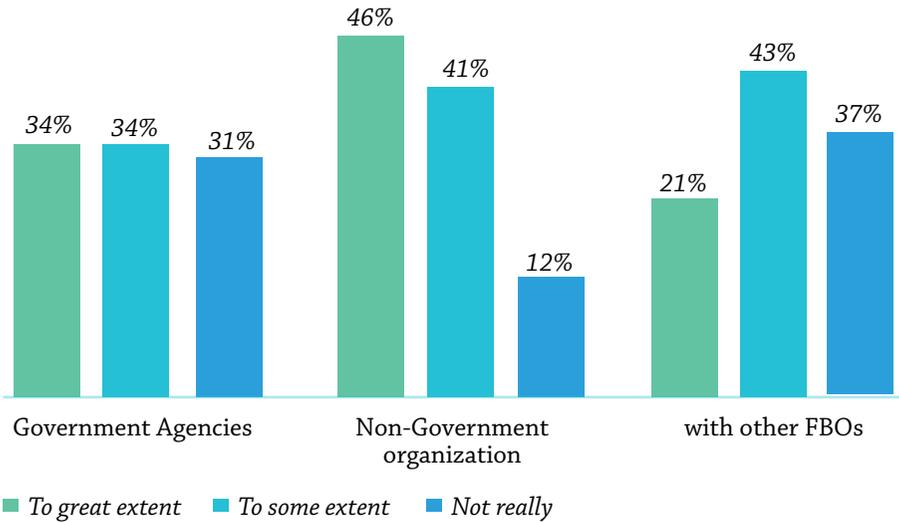
As many as 47% of the respondents have mentioned that their motivation did not come from any external authority or force, but from within: “They volunteered to work for the crisis situation”.

4. Forced upon:

Some of the respondents believed that “there was no other alternative than to respond to the lockdown as they have responded during the time of crisis”. Their response did not come voluntarily from within, neither was it a normal process of administrative functioning. The lockdown and the situation emerging out of it had almost compelled them or was forced upon them to respond. This opinion was expressed by as many as 36% of the respondents.

3.3. COLLABORATION FOR REACHING OUT TO THE PEOPLE

Was your organization able to collaborate with others in your engagements of reaching out to the people in your operational areas as a response to corona crises?



The respondents are divided over the issue of collaboration with government agencies in their engagements of reaching out to the people in their operational areas as a response to corona crises. As many as 34% of the respondents said that their organization was able to collaborate with government agencies to a great extent, and an equal number (34%) said to some extent. However, 31% of them were not able to collaborate with government agencies.

On the other hand, the better collaboration has taken place among and with the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), as many as 87% of the respondents expressed that their organization was able to collaborate to a great extent (46%) and to some extent (41%) with NGOs in their engagements reaching out to the people in need during the lockdown period.

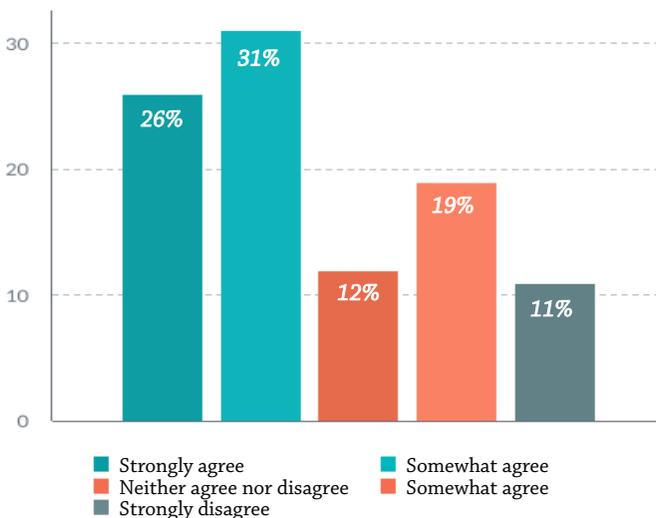
Similarly, when it came to collaboration with other FBOs, as many as 37% of the organizations were not able to collaborate; whereas 43% said their organization was collaborating with other FBOs “to some extent”, and only 21% said their organization collaborated with FBOs to a great extent.

The issue of collaboration brings out important dynamics working among different stakeholders.

- The collaboration with and among NGOs seems to be the most effective channel and provides a better platform to reach out to the people affected during crisis for providing humanitarian and other assistance.
- On the other hand, when it is usually said that working or collaborating with government and government agencies is a difficult task, the response seems to be indicating incredibly positive perceptions. Many FBOs and humanitarian organizations have collaborated with government agencies in their engagements of reaching out to the people in their operational areas as a response to corona crisis.
- It is quite surprising that many organizations were not able to collaborate with FBOs. This perception indicates that either the FBOs are not collaborative among themselves for some reasons, or the other humanitarian organizations are not comfortable working with the FBOs.

3.4. THE GOVERNMENT’S RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS

Do you agree the government response to the coronavirus outbreak is appropriate?



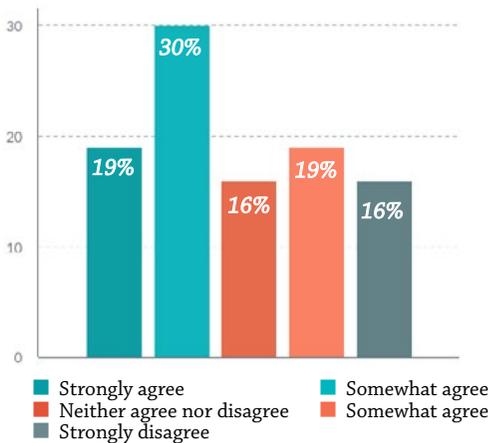
The government responded to the coronavirus and the situation that the nation was confronted with in various ways. Some of these responses were: lockdown, financial packages, relief assistance, raising health infrastructure, and providing health professionals and services to the needy.

As many as 26% of the respondents were of the opinion that the government response to the coronavirus outbreak was appropriate and another 31% of the respondents supported that view. On the other hand, 11% of the respondents did not share that view at all. They believed the government response to the coronavirus outbreak was not appropriate and 19% of the respondents shared similar view saying they partially disagree with the view that government response was appropriate.

Overall, there was no clear opinion on the government response to the coronavirus outbreak. 12% of the respondents were also non-committal to the government response. The people at large expected a much better response from the government in the form of appropriate interventions. This became evidently clear as days passed by at the end of lockdown 3 and as the crisis of migrant workers and informal labourers became a national tragedy.

3.5. THE VULNERABLE GROUPS AND THE GOVERNMENT'S CARE

Do you think that the government has taken care of the vulnerable groups irrespective of caste, creed, class, or gender while responding to the corona crises?

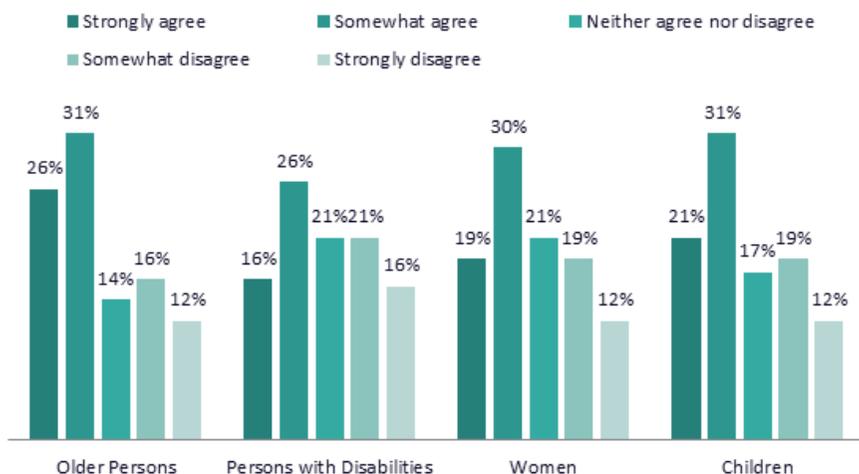


It was revealing that , only 19% of the respondents were of the opinion that the government has taken care of the vulnerable groups irrespective of caste, creed, class, or gender while responding to the corona crisis and another 30% of the respondents partially agreed with such opinion. On the other hand, 19% of the respondents strongly felt that the government has not taken care of the vulnerable groups and 16% of the respondents partially supported the view that the government failed in taking care of the vulnerable groups. 16% of the respondents were non-committal to the government response.

Looking at various vulnerabilities, 8 vulnerable groups were identified who needed special care by the government, taking into consideration their specific vulnerability.

The first set of groups whose vulnerability comes mainly from age, gender and physical conditions consisted of older persons, women, children, and persons with disabilities. The second set of vulnerable groups are considered vulnerable because of their poor economic conditions, poor health conditions, their specific role during the corona crisis, or are somehow victims of the lockdown due to the corona crisis. This set included the homeless, persons with underlying health conditions, health professionals – frontline workers and migrant workers/refugees and displaced people.

Do you think that the government has taken care of the vulnerable groups irrespective of caste, creed, class, or gender while responding to the corona crisis?



Older Persons:

As the corona virus began spreading across the countries, one of the most vulnerable groups that was the immediate victim of the virus was the elderly people. In most countries, the mortality rate among the population was higher among the elderly persons. Hence, this group was listed as the most vulnerable who needed special care. Though 57% of the total respondents agree either strongly or partially that the government has taken care of the elderly persons is a positive dimension, as many as 28% of the respondents either strongly or partially disagree with government taking care of the elderly.

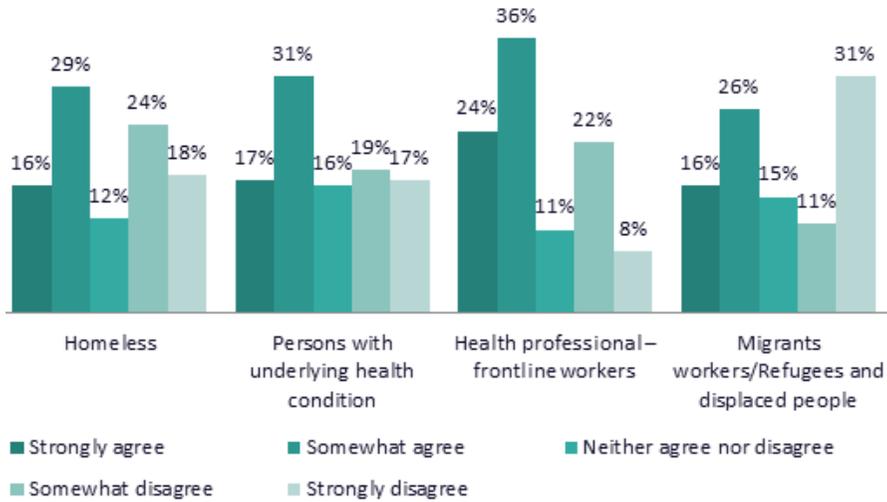
Persons with Disabilities:

There was no clear statement on the government's care of those with disabilities, as 16% of the respondents strongly agree, and the same number of respondents strongly disagree too. Though 26% of the respondents partially agree, equally 21% of them partially disagree. This unclear opinion might also be indicative of the exact nature of this vulnerable group and clarity about the category itself.

Women and children:

Women, especially pregnant women and children are being perceived as vulnerable groups who need special care in society. It was expected that during the corona crisis, the government pays special attention to their needs and they are looked after so that they do not become victims of the coronavirus. The opinion expressed by the respondents is very similar to both the vulnerable groups. Around 50% of the respondents tend to agree either strongly or partially, that among the vulnerable groups the women and children are taken care of by the government. Around 30% of them did not agree about the government being caring for the women and children.

Do you think that the government has taken care of the vulnerable groups irrespective of caste, creed, class, or gender while responding to the corona crisis?



Health professionals – frontline workers:

The coronavirus has provided the entire humanity an opportunity to be grateful for the sacrifices of frontline workers and all those who are caring for fellow human beings around the globe through their services and the systems they maintain, day in and out. It is being said that the crisis of the COVID-19 will certainly pass away with time, but humanity will not take the attitude of gratitude for granted anymore! Ever since the coronavirus appeared on the scene, the frontline workers were at the rescue, relief, and healing engagements without counting the cost. They were of course counted as one of the most vulnerable groups to be affected directly by their engagements associated with those infected with the virus. Hence, it was the responsibility of the government to take care of them. As many as 60% of the respondents agree (strongly - 24%, and partially - 36%) that they were taken care of by the government. There was also public acknowledgment and appreciation of the contribution of health professionals and frontline workers by citizens as the Prime Minister had given a call on 22nd March 2020, for day-long Janata curfew and to come to balconies to clap (taali), to beat the thalis to appreciate the work being done by the health professionals.

However, it does not speak well where 30% of the respondents disagree (8% -strongly, and 22% partially) that the government took care of them. It has been reported widely on social media as well as on national media how at many places the health professionals were either physically assaulted or mentally tortured even by stigmatizing them. Several states were helpless when frontline health workers were battling the crisis without protective gear and with an abysmally low number of ventilators and testing kits.

Migrants workers/refugees and displaced people

The lifeline of our economy consists of the often-invisible army of over 100 million migrant workers in India – 20% of the workforce – who leave their villages for jobs in cities (see [https://scroll.in/article/963251/May 30, 2020](https://scroll.in/article/963251/May%2030,%202020)). The situation of migrant workers across the nation exposed the government and its way of functioning. It is being widely perceived that the sudden lockdown announced on 24th March 2020 by the government was a decision in haste and without a thought-out strategy. The government failed to consider the poor and those at the margins, especially the migrant workers labouring across the nation in various cities who were held up away from home. In fact, it is well documented that the government was too late in responding to the coronavirus until it became a crisis. People at various levels were not consulted at all and they were not prepared for the nation-wide lockdown. As the days passed by, more and more details were revealed about the impact of COVID-19 and the lockdown on the migrant workers across the country.

It was absolute carelessness of the authorities to disregard the workers who toiled in our industries, keeping the economy alive. It is only when the lakhs of workers walked miles to reach home, leaving our cities and workplaces, that brought some realization of how we have taken them for granted. Rightly so, as many as 42% of the respondents who have a humanitarian approach in their reaching out and are in touch with the grassroots reality disagreed with the statement that the government took care of the migrant workers while responding to the corona crisis. It is important to note that as many as 15% of the respondents were not able to take clear stand or express opinion.

During the lockdown, hundreds of thousands of migrant workers were stuck in metro cities, far away from their homes. The plight of the poor,

especially the migrant workers who were largely abandoned by the government increased considerably when it came to providing them means to reach home from the cities. By the time the third lockdown was to be extended, migrant workers were experiencing tremendous uncertainty and insecurity. It was the most important moment of crisis and uncertainty where people expected the government to provide a sense of security and to stand by them. Instead, they were left to fend for themselves, which indeed intensified the crisis. As reported in *The Wire*, “The migrant worker crisis that we have been witnessing over the past few days could unfold into one of the biggest Indian tragedies, and the government only looked to push it under the rug (see <https://thewire.in/rights/28> March 2020).

The power of the ordinary cannot be taken for granted for too long and, when it explodes, it can be a reason for great worry. With the large-scale exodus of migrant workers to their hometowns, a massive workforce shortage has hit the operations in industrial, transport and other sectors. Many migrant workers have already sent messages that due to the treatment meted out to them in the cities, they have decided not to return to their workplaces post lockdown. Thus, due to the unprecedented manpower crunch, various factory units have also been hit.

4. FACING THE CORONA CRISIS: CONCRETE ACTIONS

Where will the coronavirus take us is the question on our mind. Most of us have realized that in no way are we in control of the situation as there are no solutions at hand. There is consensus so to say, that there is still a long way to go before the end is in sight. “Acceptance” of the fact that the coronavirus is here to stay is the last stage described in a philosophy called the “Kübler-Ross model” of death and dying (See: “On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss” Simon and Schuster, 2005).

The Kübler-Ross model, or the Five Stages of Grief, postulates a series of emotions experienced by terminally ill patients before death, or people who have lost a loved one, wherein the five stages are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (DABDA). The five stages are a part of the framework that makes up our learning to live with the one we lost.

Every country in the world is undergoing the corona crisis in its own way, for some it means ‘war’, for some it is a health emergency, and for some it is a do or die battle for survival. India as a nation is facing the problem of enormous proportions with her huge population already infested with the crisis. Many steps are being taken, and many more are the need of the hour. Hence, everyone knows they must fight the battle against the coronavirus. It is here that India like the world over is searching and finding creative solutions to respond to this historical pandemic.

Lockdown due to corona has brought many questions to our life and living. Suddenly goalposts have changed, or the field itself has changed for many. As a large majority of the people, especially the migrant workers and the labouring class in our country have been passing through the most difficult times that turn their lives upside down,

questions have been asked: “What is the future of the migrants”? Living with passion and purpose cannot be abandoned, at least the poor and the marginalized cannot afford to do so. A necessary step for living with passion and purpose is to find answers to our anxieties and worries faced in the present and find solutions. Amid deaths and dying, we must learn to live with the hope that we will win over the crisis

soon. For that to happen, government and society require massive efforts of concrete actions to come out of this crisis.

4.1. FUTURE RESPONSE TO THE CORONA CRISIS

Knowing that the corona crisis is here to stay for some time, the respondents were asked: “What concrete actions will your organization be taking during the next few months, keeping in mind the needs of the people in your operational areas”? The following are five major activities in which many of the organizations have been engaged with and/or plan to continue their engagements:

1. Relief work

Relief work can be understood as mostly temporary assistance, such as financial help, food, shelter, or services given to the needy and especially victims of a humanitarian crisis. Other than in socio-economic development, humanitarian organizations play a major role in times of humanitarian crisis. As many as 33% of the weightage by the organizations was given to relief work. They responded that they were already involved and have planned to engage in relief work in response to the corona crisis for the next few months, keeping in mind the needs of the people in the respective operational areas. One of the responses which captures the essence of engagements of the organizations in relief work responding to the corona crisis is: “We will ensure that people will not go through hunger and destitution”.

The major activities reported under relief work were: “being in frontline work”, “reaching out to the poor”, “ensure supply of food to the needy” and “providing daily essentials”, “making arrangements of transportation so that the stranded poor people reach their home”, “distribution of sanitizers, masks, gloves and other PPEs”, “fund raising” and “financial help” etc.

2. Advocacy and awareness-raising

Considering the nature of the corona crisis, advocacy plays an important role in raising one’s voice for inclusion of marginalised communities for proper socio-economic security net to deal with the pandemic and its aftermath. Awareness-raising is important to ensure that communities

are kept aware of the process of contamination, accurate information is shared with communities, and to counter and address misinformation.

Humanitarian organizations and especially FBOs have proven to be potential and influential stakeholders in the socio-political sphere to advocate, intervene and influence cultural barriers to disseminate awareness at the grassroots, far-flung areas where state institutions may be absent and among the masses, as they generally have their deep-rooted presence in local communities. Nearly 20% weightage by the organizations was given to advocacy and awareness-raising. They responded that they were already involved and have planned to engage in advocacy and awareness-raising in response to the corona crisis for the next few months keeping in mind the needs of the people in their respective operational areas.

Some of the responses specify it further such as:

- “Lobbying and advocacy with the government/ authorities for marginalized people
- “We will continue working to educate people to respect their and others well-being, and which would include best practices to manage transmission of the disease.”
- “We have plans to continue to make aware people, students about the pandemic, specially to people with disabilities, specifically the visually challenged.”
- “Giving awareness to the people through songs, dramas, leaflets etc. in schools, villages”

3. Development initiatives

The corona crisis, apart from affecting the immediate health of individuals and communities, is inevitably affecting the lives of people due to the lockdown. It has affected the functioning of industries and services, and thus resulted in loss of jobs. This has caused an increase in poverty to the extent that people are not able to feed their families. Educational institutions have been forced to close and even emergency services as important as health care have been affected.

Apart from working in poverty alleviation, the two major domains that humanitarian organizations worldwide contribute to greatly

are education and health care. The organizations have reported to have taken proactive steps in responding to the ongoing crisis and have planned to rigorously work towards generating alternate sustainable livelihood opportunities to strengthen and empower poor, marginalized, returning migrants and refugees who are badly affected due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Presenting plans for the coming few months, one of the respondents wrote:

“strengthening and empowering poor and marginalized who are badly affected due to coronavirus pandemic”. One of the respondents wrote: “We give more care for the refugee children and take care of their studies by supplying them study materials through WhatsApp and motivate the students to take part in online courses”.

11% weightage by the organizations was given to development initiatives. They responded that they were already involved and have planned to engage in development activities in response to the corona crisis for the next few months, keeping in mind the needs of the people in their respective operational areas.

4. Working from home

Most of the humanitarian organizations work on activities that are either essential to the community, like development, education and health care, or play a vital role in responding to the needs of communities, like social cohesion, advocacy and awareness-raising, peace-building etc. Closing of any institution, including these organizations is a great loss in terms of suspension of the multifarious activities these institutions are involved in, the socio-development initiatives, and economic growth.

Working from home mainly suits white-collar jobs, and even then, not all such jobs. It also cannot be done indefinitely, since at some point most employees need resources from their peers or at their offices. But, under circumstances like the COVID-19 pandemic, working from home is the only viable alternative to continue with the business of work worldwide. It also comes with other issues like being able to keep oneself actively engaged in work in a healthy way, creating a discipline and not abusing the liberty of not being in workspace while working from home; something that the employees and the employer need to

figure out how best to deal with during the present unprecedented time, so that this can work at present and later if required.

The advice of physical isolation, quarantining and other practices were reported to be followed by many respondents. Nearly 10% weightage by the organizations was given to changing the mode of working from the office to working from home. These organizations reported that they either changed or have planned to change organizations' current approaches to employee engagement and management by engaging their employees working from home.

As the government initiated the lockdown without giving any time for preparation regarding making arrangements to carry on the work organizations were involved with, most organizations had to suspend work initially. Though, quite a large number of humanitarian organizations resumed their work after the extension of the lockdown by engaging their employees working from home; this was not possible with the organizations which work in direct contact with people, especially educational institutions. Some of them reported that they had to suspend all activities until the lockdown and further government orders regarding opening workspaces and educational institutions.

5. Accompanying government

Governments have the primary responsibility to protect the rights and well-being of their citizens and have mechanisms to do so. Non-profit organizations, also called 'the third sector', by the very nature of their existence are to fill in the space between the public sector i.e. the state - its organizations and enterprises, and the private sector i.e. profit-making private enterprises. Although the third sector is independent from the government, apart from raising funds and generating financial surpluses in order to invest in social, environmental, or cultural objectives without seeking to make profits as an end in its own right, one of their main engagements is often to work with or alongside government agencies in development activities, advocacy and holding them accountable for the rights of the people.

Nearly 8% of weightage by the organizations was given to accompanying government. They responded that they were already involved and have planned to engage in accompanying government in response to the corona crisis for the next few months keeping in mind the needs of

the people in their respective operational areas. The main engagement of the organizations involved with the government were supporting the supervision of government services in response to the pandemic and working with the government to reach out to the people in need.

Apart from the 5 major areas of engagements mentioned by the organizations, another 20% of the responses have mentioned various activities like capacity building, mental health support, research, collaborated with other NGOs, continue supporting the staff, policy advocacy, faith-based activities, healthcare support, peace-building, and support in cases of domestic violence.

Some of the organizations reported that they have not been able to come out with concrete plans for their further actions and it is all in limbo due to the uncertainty about the government policies regarding the lockdown and restrictions. It was noted that apart from the concrete action plan as many as 27 organizations reported that they are and will continue to follow the practice of physical/social distancing and maintaining hygiene for their own and the community's well-being.

5. A WAY FORWARD

The brief report of this research presented here highlights some of the outcomes of the survey of how the humanitarian organizations perceived and responded to the corona crisis. First, it is of great value to disseminate these findings among concerned organizations for further reflection and action. Second, going beyond the participating organizations, the findings will help provide insights to many other like-minded organizations working and reaching out to the people in need during this crisis. Third, looking beyond the ongoing circumstance of the crisis situation, the findings of this research invite various stakeholders to look at the lessons learned from the corona crisis to respond better and positively during similar crises arising in our ways of living and functioning.

Based on this research (phase I) we intend to carry out another survey (phase II) after some time to capture the progress in the understanding and responses of the organizations to the crisis. This would enhance our knowledge about the workings, coping mechanisms, and sustainability of CSOs during the extended phase of lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and will also indicate the further possibility of research to help the civil society document and learn for preparedness of the unseen and unfortunate crises.

Derived from the findings of this study the following are some specific ways forward for organizations, especially those engaged in humanitarian activities.

5.1. TOWARDS PERSONAL AND COMMUNITARIAN WELL-BEING

The coronavirus has destabilized the normal functioning as well as the behaviour of the people to a great extent. It has brought a sense of stress and fear – of the present conditions as well as the fear of the future, raising many questions in our minds. The corona crisis has put our well-being at stake, both the physical as well as mental well-being. Along with losing personal peace, people are losing communal peace with the dangerous development of communal politics, bringing more fear and insecurity.

Peace building for social well-being

Peacebuilding is a process that facilitates the establishment of durable peace and tries to prevent the recurrence of violence by addressing root causes and effects of conflict through reconciliation, institution building, and political as well as economic transformation. Civil society is conceived as a critical sector in peacebuilding and FBOs, especially, have tremendous potential to contribute to peacebuilding across communities and nations. This can mainly be done by participating and contributing as a complementary mode of governance, re-building trust in societies, asserting its role as a key pillar in a democratic system, providing access to justice, and keeping a check on political corruption, and communal politics of hate.

Reducing trauma and improving mental health

The fear and stress of the pandemic, the anticipated, internalized, and experienced stigma experienced by those directed towards testing and treating, and the traumatic experiences of the health professionals, frontline workers, families of infected and survivors has started and will continue to take a toll on mental health of the masses.

Cases of stress, depression and suicide are already on the rise, and with India's mental health care system, and attitude towards seeking and having sought mental health care, both dismal at best, the battle to contain the pandemic goes beyond the physical health implications of COVID-19. The civil society has already started taking baby steps for mental well-being of people, but there is an immense scope for creating awareness and mental health literacy in the country. Engagements of leaders to encourage seeking help for mental health issues like anxiety and stress would greatly aid in reducing the social stigma around mental health and the burden of mental health problems in the times of COVID-19. Also, existing resources like ASHA and anganwadi workers, and instituting mental-health self-help groups can help in providing support across all strata of the society. The society as a whole needs to stand by each other, especially those who are vulnerable.

5.2. TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC LIFE

The coronavirus has created a situation of crisis and it was further intensified during the lockdown period. Due to the lockdown, people were not only forced to stay at home but also a large number of people,

especially the poor and the marginalized were held up away from home. Thus, the sudden lockdown has created a serious impact on the lives of the people and the economic life of the nation.

COVID-19 pandemic has jolted the world economy to the extent that men and women of all classes, ages, and skills are losing jobs and struggling daily, trying to find employment to gain at least the minimum living wage. In India, the lockdown and the corona crisis has paralyzed the economic life of the community, especially the urban poor and rural masses. Many people have lost their jobs and livelihood and are facing economic disaster during this corona crisis.

Localization of economy

The issue of lopsided development and migration of a large population from rural to urban areas has once again come to haunt us. We have witnessed the pain and agony experienced by the migrant workers across the country due to mismanagement of the steps necessary to control the coronavirus. The corona crisis reiterated that localization of economy, production, and consumption is important for communities to survive in the humanitarian crisis and for the development of rural economies. The civil society needs to partner, advocate, and intervene in localizations of economies for the greater good of poor in rural communities and symmetric growth with an emphasis on autonomy, and community.

Training in self-employability skills

One of the important lessons in imparting employability skills to people and especially youth in general and particularly for preparedness of economic crisis is self-employability. These businesses can be home run, socially embedded, and motivated for profit. A few CSOs has already considered the importance of training for self-employment and have proven useful to individuals and their business to sustain and grow. Some of the basic self-employment skills with proven benefits to sustain and grow in the self-employed setting are entrepreneurial, financial, self-management and planning, and communication skills.

5.3. TOWARDS A MORE HUMANE WORLD (HUMANITARIAN)

We have learned many lessons from the corona crisis. One of the important lessons common to a large majority is “humanity is above

the divisive forces like caste, class, race, religion etc. COVID-19 has shown that we all are connected, like the strands of a single thread. At a deeper level, despite our differences and diversity of caste, class, culture, relations, region, and religion, we share one story. On the other hand, COVID-19 has impressed on our minds that there are vulnerable individuals and groups among us who share the same story yet have special needs due to special conditions they live in. This calls to be more humane and respond to the needs of the vulnerable with a humanitarian approach.

Continuing with relief activities

COVID-19 pandemic has called for the need for one of the biggest humanitarian assistances globally. In India, this is especially required for the much-ascertained needs of individuals and families locked down without necessities, including food and essential supplies to live in dignity. CSOs working with a humanitarian approach are reported to have a tremendous role in providing people in need with humanitarian assistance during the ongoing crisis and this must be continued with all efforts.

On the side of the vulnerable

The lockdown and its extensions have brought a tremendous experience of uncertainty and insecurity among the vulnerable groups. People expected the government to provide a sense of security and to stand by them in the moment of crises and uncertainty. In some cases, it was found that the government made efforts to reach out to them, and in the case of some groups like migrant workers, homeless, persons with disabilities etc, they were left to fend for themselves, which indeed intensified the crisis. One of the key responses of civil society organizations was its engagement in humanitarian activities as soon as the lockdown occurred, by reaching out to most vulnerable groups in society. The CSO must continue their engagements not only of reaching out to the vulnerable groups but to demand their rights through alternative forms of civic engagements, fighting to combat irregularities and corruption in COVID-19 relief packages for the poor, advocating for the rights of the poor, vulnerable and marginalized.

5.4. TOWARDS ORGANIZATIONAL EFFICIENCY & EFFECTIVENESS

Building new alliances

The way forward that has been proposed demands building of new alliances among the CSOs for creating a proper and strong platform to fight for the rights of the vulnerable. It was noted that the current situation has provided CSOs the opportunities to engage with other types of civil society organisations beyond NGOs, such as community-led organizations, FBOs, religious institutions, and professional associations (like doctors and nurse unions) and other membership-based organisations.

Increase legitimacy

Questions have been raised mainly by the state on legitimacy, accountability, and relevance of CSOs working with a humanitarian approach in India. This is especially done to hide the states' inefficiencies, failures, and political agenda. The ongoing crisis has offered opportunities for CSOs to build broader participation in communities where they have served. This along with taking the aid and development activities further, if put in forms of evidence-based web reports across networks would add to rebuilding legitimacy, accountability, and relevance of CSOs working with a humanitarian approach in India. The government as well as other sectors must recognize the tremendous contribution of the humanitarian organizations during the time of crisis, irrespective of which faith or religion they belong.

Increasing presence in digital civic engagement

Civic engagement and accountability have moved online. Digital civic engagement varies from using mobile phones, internet, television, and radio as media. While it seems, this can be done only in urban areas, deploying a combination of these media helps to reach a far wider geographically spread audience. Innovative channels for communicating health promotion and disease prevention information and running digital peace building activities could be extensively used for a greater impact. This, when done with a proper framework and made known to the right audience, has potential to ensure accountability from stakeholders for their commitments.

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