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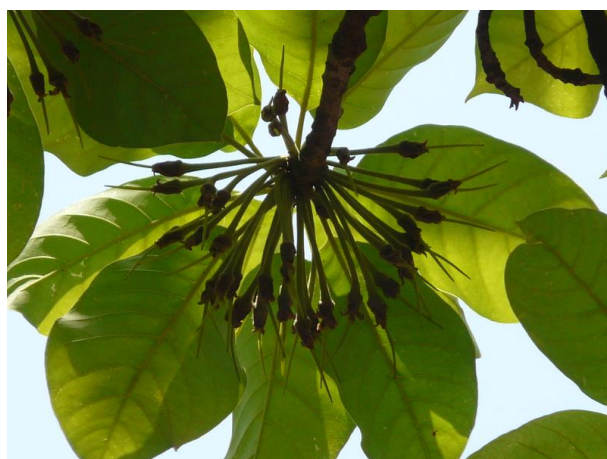
Covid-19 in India: How the GRTA project is responding to the challenge

The Covid-19 crisis lockdown is affecting India's rural peoples in many ways. The [local markets have been shut down](#), [planting and harvesting](#) of crops is difficult, and [migrant workers](#) without work are not allowed to return to their villages. Daily wage workers and self-employed people are struggling to earn money and purchase food for their families, due to the soaring price of food items. Amid these uncertain times, our Indian partners have refocused their family nutrition knowhow to help rural communities in this unprecedented crisis.

Pre-lockdown prevention campaigns

Since the early stages of the lockdown in India, our GRTA team has been working to enhance community awareness about Covid-19. GRTA partner PRADAN (Professional Assistance for Development Action) carried out door-to-door awareness in Bihar, giving advice on prevention and communicating symptoms and transmission facts to counter misinformation.

In Chakai, PRADAN hosted an awareness session with leaders of women's federations, who learnt how to create masks using tissue paper and rubber-bands. They also made hand sanitizer using the locally-available [Mahua flower](#) (*Madhuca longifolia*) an Indian tropical tree.



Madhuca longifolia var. latifolia (CC BY-SA 2.0)
by Dinesh Valke



Hindi comic about transmission of Covid-19

In addition, the team prepared some comic strips in Hindi to highlight the importance of social distancing and virus prevention, circulated online.

Supporting communities from home by phone

With planned work with communities currently on hold because of lockdown, our GRTA teams are working from home and harnessing the power of smartphone phone networks and social media.

[Mobile Vaani](#) is a network of voice-based community media platforms and mobile apps operating across a number of states in India. Created by GRTA partner Gram Vaani, a participatory social tech company, the Mobile Vaani app reaches over 1 million people in remote parts of India where communication is more difficult. Mobile Vaani enables users to share their views and create their own content.

The GRTA teams are using the mobile app and the Interactive Voice-based Response Systems (IVRS) to let people in rural areas know about government schemes for assistance during the pandemic. The teams have created audio tutorials on how to use the IVRS, and they are regularly updating content due to the constantly changing situation.



Social distancing in practice

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Gathering information to understand the impact of the crisis

The teams are sending out Calls to Action for users to record [clips and interviews](#) about how the pandemic is having an impact on livelihoods. People are responding with many serious concerns. Food prices are soaring: one person from Tamil Nadu said onions currently cost Rs 130 per kg (about £1.37). He would normally earn £1.69 a day but is out of work due to the lockdown. State governments started rolling out relief measures such as an increased ration allowance and cash assistance for women, people with disabilities, and those with Below Poverty Line ration cards. However, people responded to say they still didn't have enough money to purchase the subsidised provisions. One construction worker in Dindigul city in Tamil Nadu says: *"I can only dream of eating vegetables. It looks like we can only survive on porridge"*.

Some migrant workers are suicidal, out of work but not able to travel home, and without access to rations. The teams are using this evidence to advocate for an appropriate response by local and regional authorities. In the period March 24 and April 7 the GRTA teams managed to solve over 70 reported problems, including contacting authorities to get food to migrant workers considering suicide.



#1weekoflockdown

Our crop is ready for harvest but we aren't able to go to the field to work on it. Policemen chase us away and beat us if we try to go. We have no money left for anything.

**Bakrijan, A farmer in UP
GHAZIPUR MOBILE VAANI**



#1weekoflockdown

We aren't able to go to the markets to sell our produce. Shops that sell fodder are also closed, and our animals are going hungry and falling ill.

**Ajaykumar, A farmer in Jharkhand
JHARKHAND MOBILE VAANI**

Further comments from Mobile Vaani users, shared on the Gram Vaani Facebook page

Re-focusing our research question

PRADAN have newly launched a Covid-19 task force, which will report back to the GRTA project. They aim to use surveys on the IVRS platform, in-depth phone interviews and analysis of secondary data to look at how lives and livelihoods will be affected by the pandemic, maintaining an emphasis on Sustainable Food Systems. Specifically, they will investigate four aspects of this crisis: 1) preventative protocols, 2) basic needs (e.g. food, shelter, healthcare), 3) livelihoods (e.g. agriculture, forestry, markets), 4) migrants and labour.

The GRTA team at Kalinga Institute for Social Sciences (KISS) are redrafting policy advice for legislators to reflect the current crisis, while also writing newspaper articles to raise awareness around the likely impacts of Covid-19 for longer-term sustainable food systems and food security in India.

Find out more on these Twitter and Facebook channels:

- Gram Vaani: [@GramVaani](#) | [FB GramVaani](#)
- PRADAN: [@PRADAN_India](#) | [FB PRADAN](#)
- Kalinga Institute for Social Sciences: [@kissfoundation](#) | [FB KISS Foundation](#)



Blog written by Elettra Spadola, GRTA Project Administrator, and Hannah Gray, GRTA Project Officer at University of East Anglia, UK on 21 April 2020.

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[Click here to return to the Sustainable Food Systems webpage.](#)