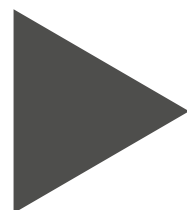
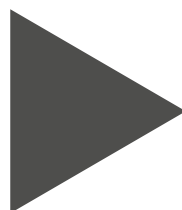




STORIES OF RESILIENCE

Rural India in Pandemic Times



Foreword

Agriculture is a critical anchor of the Indian economy and well over half of India's 1.3 billion people depend on it for their livelihoods. The uncertainties and challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic tested the resilience of the sector and of the rural communities. **Farmers faced unprecedented disruptions to the value chains, lack of access to markets and labour, as well as the spectre of food waste.** At the same time, rural communities were faced with a situation of a returning workforce from urban areas. But the long-standing experience of India's farming communities' ability to deal with the vagaries of weather, fluctuations of markets and other forms of uncertainties seemed to have prepared them well to deal with the challenges presented by COVID-19.

Rural India rose to the challenge admirably, demonstrating courage and resilience, driving frugal innovation, and pointing to a new way forward. This was enabled by the government's quick reaction and identification of agriculture as an "essential" sector. A feedback loop through the **Empowered Group 5 set up by the Government of India on Logistics and Supply Chain**, allowed the Government and farmers' organizations to respond to challenges the farmers were facing in access to seeds, fertilizers, machinery services as well as the marketing of the produce.

This collection of stories, jointly published by IFAD and ASCI, draws from the experiences of the IFAD supported projects across India and captures the remarkable tales of grit and optimism, innovation and collective efforts of local women and men in the face of an enormous pandemic.

From Nagaland to Uttarakhand, from Tamil Nadu to Maharashtra, rural communities came together to support each other and to ensure an uninterrupted supply of food from their farms to the country's plates. **Grassroots organizations reinvented themselves and worked with the local administration to play an important role** in spreading critical information throughout the lockdown as well as in organizing the immediate response. In many ways, the pandemic jumpstarted local innovations with the constraints imposed during the lockdown leading to increased digitization of agricultural practices as well as several direct-to-consumer models.

Above all, the importance of the people's organisations emerged as central to the response. Prosperous and productive rural areas are key to a shared sustainable future. As the country emerges stronger from this crisis than before, there are many emerging lessons, both in terms of what exists within rural systems, and what more can be done to strengthen these systems to tackle future shocks. **IFAD remains committed to partnering with rural people and working with the Government to fulfil the promise of the Sustainable Development Goals** — leaving no one behind.

I hope you will find the case studies inspiring and motivating.



Han Ulac Demirag
Country Director
IFAD India

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The Road Ahead

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic gave rise to serious economic and livelihood challenges, especially for the rural communities of India, since they face a unique set of challenges that deserve special attention.

The agriculture sector in India is naturally prone to many challenges due to climate change, insufficient knowledge of farmers, broken logistics, etc., resulting in poor productivity, and extensive wastage. Yet, this challenge posed by the lockdown and the virus was completely new because of its scale and nature. The virus didn't differentiate between the rich and the poor, but the measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 were increasingly difficult for the poorest and most vulnerable groups in the rural areas who tend to depend on livelihoods that cannot be performed remotely. Some of the immediate ramifications were i) reduced prices for the produce ii) limited access to labour and machinery for harvesting rabi crop and preparing for kharif crops; iii) loss of earnings from wage labour and remittances from migration. Selling and buying of agricultural produce and inputs require traveling to markets and access to public spaces. The restrictions on the movement of people and goods during the early stages of lockdown had impacted the lives of producers, as well as the consumers. Agricultural value chains and food systems were disrupted, which were essential not just for rural communities and marginal farmers but also for all of us who depend on the harvest for their food source. Reacting swiftly to this, the Government had also labeled the agriculture sector as "essential" and allowed lifting of partial restrictions on movement of the vehicles and people related to the sector. But there was an urgent need for massive collaboration, swift adaptation, and supreme innovation at every stage of the agricultural operations to ensure

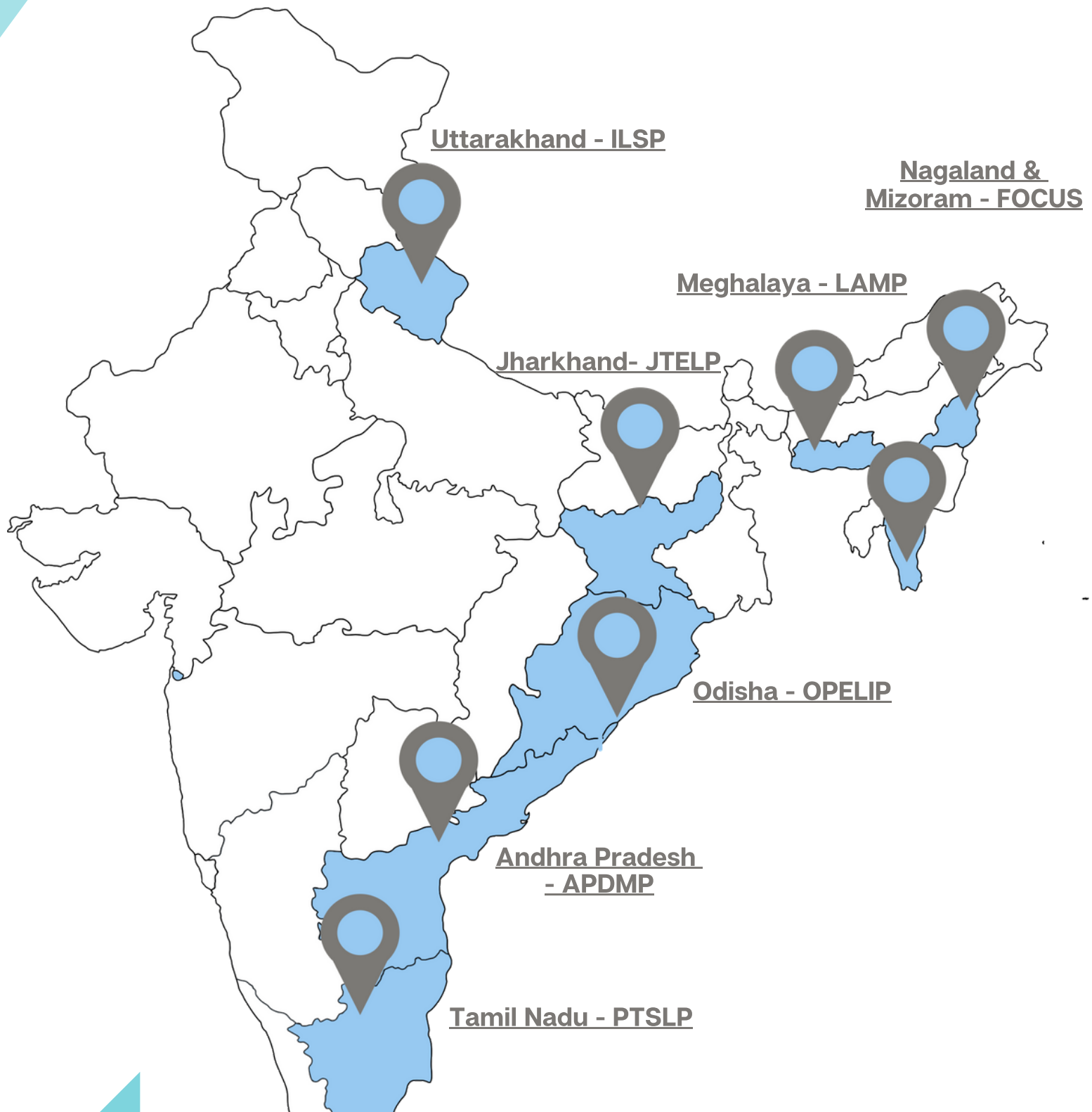
an uninterrupted supply of foods and other perishable produce. Migrant workers in urban India were also among the most vulnerable groups because of the lockdown-imposed restrictions. Loss of jobs and income had driven thousands of them to travel on foot to their hometowns which further intensified the existing challenges for the hometown states. By seeking opportunities in adversity, the rural communities rose to such challenges with agility, resulting in a unique ecosystem that could generate local employment for the returnee migrants.

We have seen many stories of resilience and innovations in rural India, driven by frugality, adaptability, and inclusivity. Many of these have resulted in successful business models for the new normal. This publication attempts to document some such stories, germinated from the IFAD-supported livelihood projects in the most remote and fragile parts of India. The stories are results of a primary survey done by ASCI in the project states. Effective utilization of state machinery, community engagement through digital platforms, and convergence with parallel agricultural institutions are just a few important aspects of the initiatives. The power of grassroots organizations was leveraged to drive transformational change in information and knowledge dissemination during various stages of their response to the pandemic.

India is a vast country with distinct region wise challenges. In an attempt to standardize the stories in terms of their impact created along with their relevance and effectiveness, we have classified them into 4 major themes:

1. COVID-19 Prevention & Relief Efforts
2. Efficient management of Agricultural Operations
3. Marketplace Innovations
4. Reintegration of Returnee Migrants

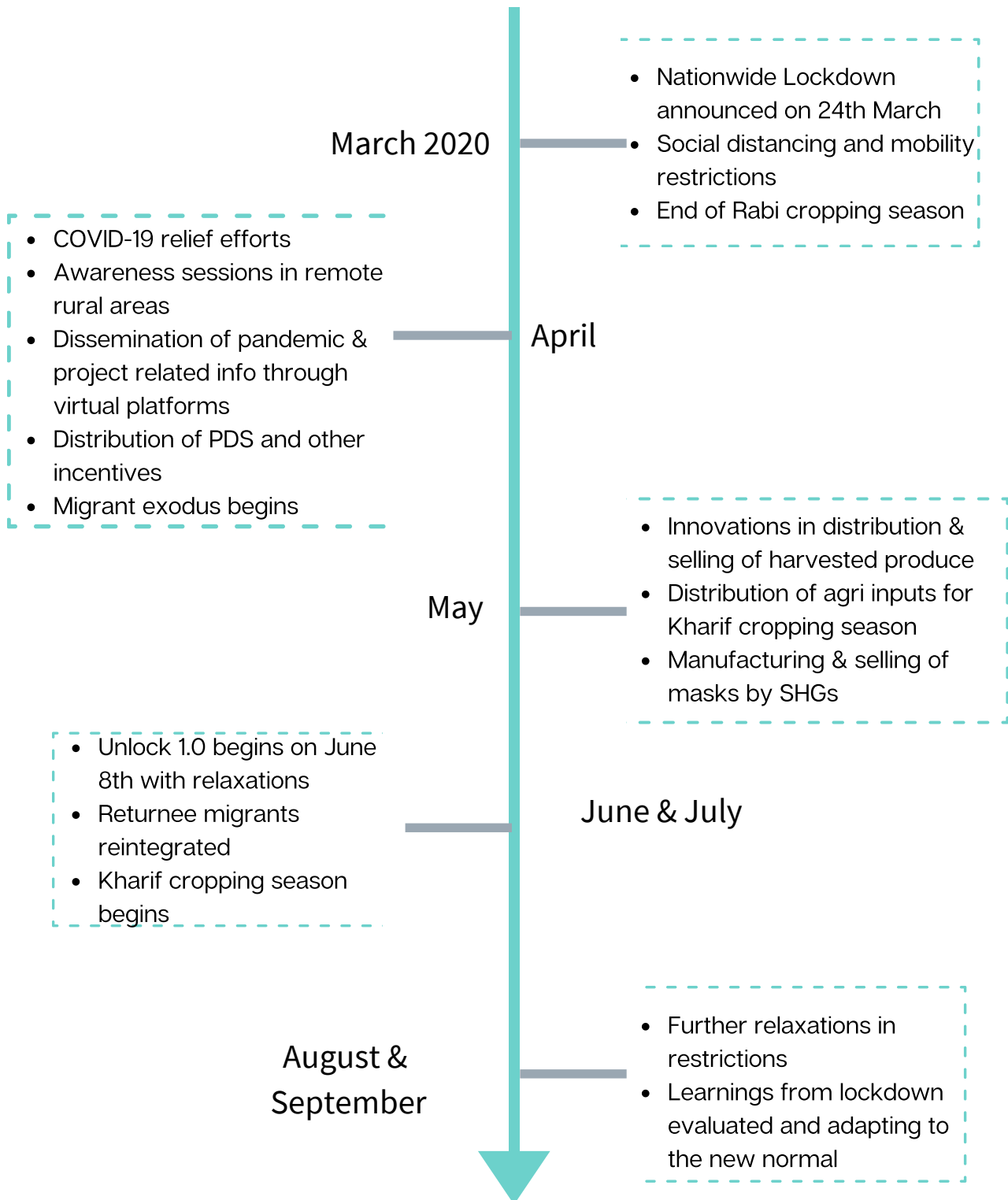
Ongoing IFAD-assisted projects in India



A concerted effort by the state governments of India and IFAD in empowering rural communities and enhancing their resilience through creation of sustainable livelihood opportunities

922,274
TOTAL IMPACTED
HOUSEHOLDS

Brief Timeline of events



1 COVID-19 Prevention & Relief Efforts

Jaan hai toh Jahan hai

The agriculture sector was already staring at a significant financial impact because of the lockdown. But there was an even more serious health risk looming when a pandemic of such large proportions was threatening our very existence. "Jaan hai toh Jahan hai" (If there is life, there is the world) was the new mantra, as

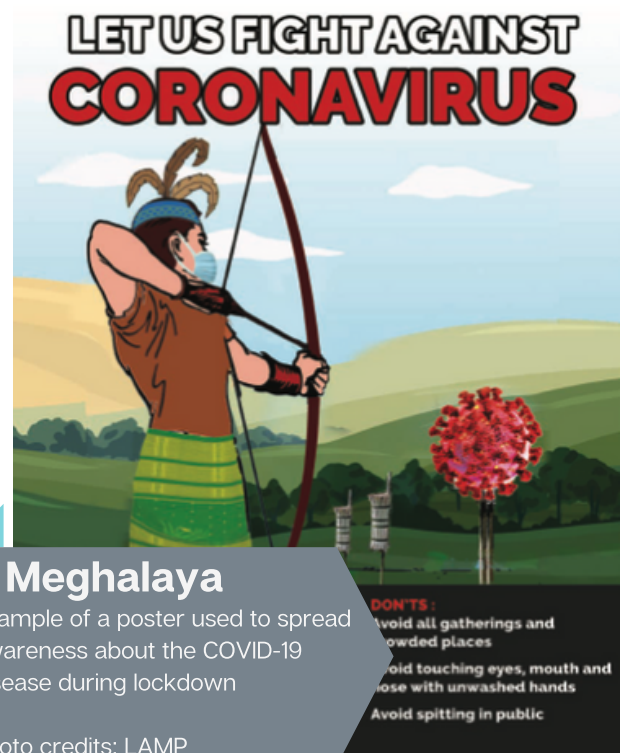
the focus was more on creating awareness about the virus and the preventive measures to be taken to stop the spread of it. Rural areas with poor network connectivity were facing communication hurdles, which further complicated the provision of important pandemic-related health information.

The challenge of rural hygiene & social distancing

The relatively poor rural areas mainly depend on the government for health-related services. The dependency increased during the pandemic as private services have become even more inaccessible. When WHO announced the usage of masks, regular hand washing, and social distancing as effective measures to stop the spread of the virus, it fell upon both government and non-government stakeholders to help people in rural areas and the particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTG) to adapt to these changes. In the **tribal village of Ghodabanda in Odisha**, where where it isn't always easy to access soap, and where water supply is severely limited, volunteers of the Odisha PVTGs Empowerment and Livelihood Improvement Programme (OPELIP) project took several measures to **create awareness on topics like social distancing and regular hand washing**. Community sensitisation programmes were held on safe hygiene practices, using posters and handouts. **Community-Based Organizations** also helped in assessing the preparedness of individuals at both personal and community levels.

In the north-eastern state of Meghalaya, the knowledge management unit of the state

government agency **Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (MBMA)** had developed innovative posters keeping in mind the **socio-cultural context of the region**. **Alternate mediums such as music and imagery** were also explored to resonate with the local population and build a connection with the audience. The posters were mostly pictorial and provided basic guidance on respiratory etiquettes along with a call to action for self-reporting in case of suspected infection.



Meghalaya

Example of a poster used to spread awareness about the COVID-19 disease during lockdown

Photo credits: LAMP



Odisha

Sulochana Bhukta is a frontline social worker spreading message on preventive measures to contain COVID-19 among the tribal groups

Photo credits: OPELIP

Masks as a means of livelihood

6

Promoting women empowerment and enabling rural livelihoods has always been at the forefront of IFAD's vision. During the pandemic, this aspect gained further momentum in terms of training for sustained livelihoods. **ILSP** is a project based out of **Uttarakhand** state with the primary objective of reducing poverty among the rural households by creating sustainable livelihood opportunities. The project is having a vocational training component in which more than 3500 women have already been trained on tailoring to maintain the quality and manufacturing standards of the masks.

A total of **2,30,000 masks** have been manufactured and sold till date, generating a revenue of **39.1 lakh rupees (\$52,000)** across all the districts covered by the project in Uttarakhand. Similarly, tailoring units were set up in various villages of Odisha by the women SHGs with support from Income Generating Activities (IGA) Fund. A total of 132 SHGs were directly benefited through this activity. In Andhra Pradesh, the Farmer Producer Organisations distributed over 5,552 face masks and sanitizer kits to the needy in five project districts.



2,30,000

The number of masks manufactured and sold by SHGs till date in Uttarakhand
Photo credits: ILSP

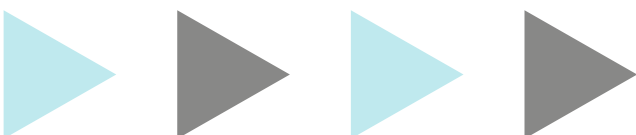
Together we can: Livelihood collectives in Uttarakhand

In **Uttarakhand**, ILSP's livelihood collectives, also known as LCs, play a critical role in boosting the income and employability of the farmers. Producer Groups (PGs) are affinity groups of 10-12 persons in a village and LCs are a federated structure of 40-50 PGs or about 500-600 members. Overall, the project has formed over 230 LCs and more than 13,500 PGs in the hill districts of Uttarakhand. Out of these, around **45 LCs & 2800 PGs** played a critical role in bridging the gap with communities and maintaining regular supply of vegetables, grocery, medicines and other daily need items in the remotely located villages of the Almora district.

During the lockdown period, a joint initiative titled **"Together We Can"** started collectively by the Almora district administration, and ILSP had provided an opportunity to each of the LCs and their PGs to act as a nodal agency for delivering grocery items at the villagers' doorstep in the district. LCs were able to get good prices for the group members by fulfilling the shortage in the market and also helped in minimizing movement by developing a centralized system. They also promoted 'vocal for local' by encouraging group members to sell fresh produce in their own villages and nearby areas to reduce transmission risks as well as travel costs.

NAME OF ACTIVITY / INITIATIVE	REVENUE GENERATED (in INR)	HOUSEHOLDS BENEFITED
Home delivery of grocery items	55,23,791	15,768
Mask production	15,13,474	5,231
Dairy enterprise & cattle feed supply	18,76,310	2,418
Take Home Ration (THR) kits	6,70,215	197
Seeds & seedlings distribution	6,58,341	5,340
Supply of Cooked meals	1,56,240	526
Sale of Others (including farm machinery, fertilizers, local produce, etc.)	3,23,166	2,569
Awareness & Sanitization Campaigns	NA	9,662
TOTAL	1,07,21,537	40,887

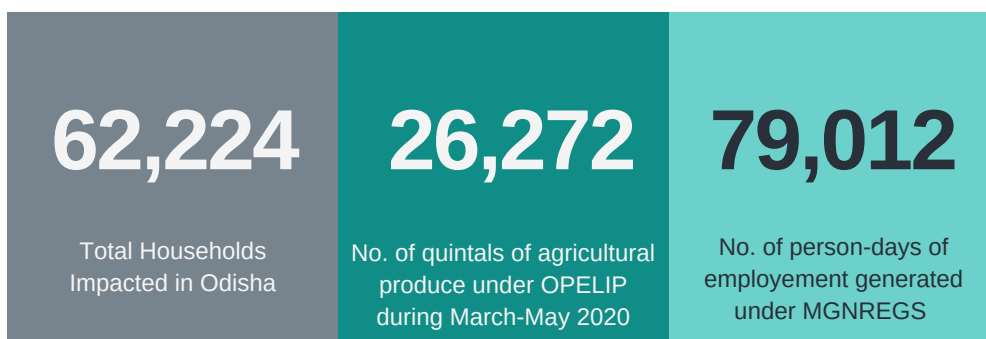
Source: Primary survey



Leveraging the power of communities in Odisha

IFAD-assisted OPELIP programme is based in Odisha which aims to achieve improved livelihoods and food & nutrition security mainly for the PVTG (particularly vulnerable tribal group) households. This is done through a series of **capacity building initiatives**, mobilisation of community based organisations, promoting income generating micro-enterprises and ensuring access to health services, education & basic infrastructure. **Community empowerment** being one of the key components for the project, the lockdown period was a real test to the community's collective ability to create awareness among the public and minimize risks for the most vulnerable groups of people. **Community resource persons** acted as frontline warriors with the help of village development committee members, health care workers & SHGs. Together they organized various initiatives, some of which are noted below.

- Spread awareness about hand washing and social distancing across **1125 villages** in the project areas.
- Setting up of quarantine centres for migrant workers and other people who were having symptoms
- Supply of take home ration kits to all households with pregnant/nursing mother & children along with immunization sessions were ensured by extending support to accredited social health activists and workers
- The members also blocked the exit and entry points of the villages in consultation with the villagers.
- Community kitchens were set up in various districts to provide cooked food to the needy people and those in quarantine at the village level.
- Community resource persons were also active in the distribution of govt. entitlements like cash incentive to the farmers, gas cylinder under the Ujjala scheme, and other entitlements.
- Setting up of grocery & meat shops under the livelihoods improvement programmes for the most disadvantaged households through the income generating activity fund supported by IFAD



Source: Primary survey

A kitchen for every community

In India, the problem of food shortage is real, but it became even more glaring during the lockdown period. People working in the informal sector like daily wage earners, sanitation workers and the poorest households who were dependent on the running of various businesses were the most affected. Without a regular source of food, many of them would have gone hungry if not for the tireless efforts of state governments, local institutions & SHGs. In Jharkhand, Community based organisations (CBOs) were instrumental in setting up community kitchens to feed the poor and migrant labourers across the 143 districts under JTELP - a project focused on empowering 136,000 tribal households

through usage of sustainable and equitable natural resources. Community kitchens had impacted around **13,000 households in total**. In addition to this, the bumper kharif and rabi harvests and zaid cropping have all supported food security of tribal households in the project areas. Even in Odisha, community kitchens were set-up. The district administration directed Micro Project Agencies in some areas to provide cooked food under community kitchen services to the needy, as well as those in quarantine at the village level. Some SHGs provided free catering service to the people of Ajayagada while following all COVID-19 precautions.



Facilitating credit linkage to SHGs in Tamil Nadu

Coastal areas in Tamil Nadu are prone to natural calamities. The primary objective of Post Tsunami Sustainable Livelihoods Programme (PTSLP) is to build self-reliant coastal communities, resilient to shocks, and able to manage their livelihood base in a sustainable manner. It has so far strengthened 8532 SHGs spread in 236 village panchayats, in 12 coastal districts and these SHGs having more than **123067 members**. To help the poor in the area, PTSLP also developed the Vulnerability Reduction Fund, set up with project assistance and community contribution. From this fund, loans are provided at an interest rate of a mere 6% to the needy. During the lockdown period a total of **5115 people** benefitted to the tune of Rs.3.76 crore. The main objective of the IGA Fund is to

provide hassle free loan to the SHG members to strengthen the income generation activities by utilising their skills and available resources. During COVID-19 crisis, the Panchayat Level Federations (PLFs) have distributed a total of **2.94 crore to the 2459 SHGs members** to set up and strengthen their IGA activities. Additionally, the PTSLP has empanelled the federation of SHGs as Business Development Correspondent of Banks / NBFCs. This has enhanced access to credit for the member SHGs of the PLF during COVID-19. Under this initiative, **Rs.18.31 crore was given to 386 SHGs**. The project has also recently won the national level SKOCH award for the year 2019, for its COVID response and efforts in financial inclusion of the fish vending/processing women.

COVID-19 Prevention & Relief efforts

10



Impact

- Total of 9,22,274 households impacted across various projects
- Estimated 3,00,000+ masks manufactured across all projects
- 26,000+ households benefited through community kitchens
- Successful credit linkage for 7,960 Self help group members

Innovations



- Awareness sessions in remote rural areas
- Mask production by SHGs
- Setting up community kitchens
- Timely credit linkage for SHGs



Challenges

- Mobility restrictions because of lockdown
- Communication of vital pandemic related health information
- Lack of proper health facilities
- Loss of livelihoods
- Disruptions in Supply Chains
- Lack of essential commodities in far-flung areas

2

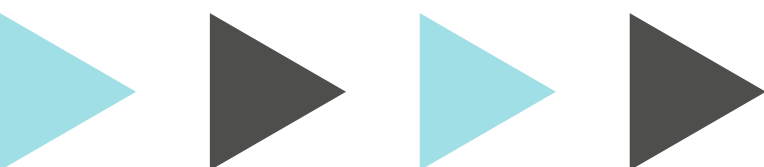
Effective management of Agricultural Operations



"If agriculture goes wrong, nothing else will have a chance to go right"

India has mainly 3 cropping seasons based on the weather conditions - Kharif in Monsoon (June - September), Rabi in Winter (October - March), Zaid in Summer (April - June). March-end, which is the time for harvesting Rabi crops and preparing the fields for Kharif crops, coincided with the announcement of the nationwide lockdown. The unprecedented crisis related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown had imposed severe mobility restrictions in the rural and urban areas, which brought face to face interactions to a complete halt. While the urban world was getting used to the new normal, rural communities were also not far behind, in spite of their lower rate of infection compared to the urban areas. Farmers had already begun field activities. Hence, there was a vital need to innovate on newer modes of virtual engagement with the farmer ecosystem who were dependent on recommendations of best farming practices.

Leveraging digital technologies remained the only viable option in order to minimize the disruptions caused by the lockdown. Harvest and post-harvest processes are critical phases in farming that need the highest care since they are crop-specific and play an important role in determining the market price for farmers. Also, the absence of farmworkers for harvesting at farmer fields, at processing units, for loading and unloading had created dire situations in the entire supply chain process. A community-managed response was needed in these areas as it had the power to adapt and value the unique characteristics of each community. Grassroots groups and Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) were mobilized to support the effective planning & redesign of the disrupted agriculture supply chain.



Seed distribution at speed

The recurrent spell of drought during past few decades has plagued agriculture and allied sectors in the southern state of India - Andhra Pradesh (AP) simulating an unpredictable climatic condition and resulting in vulnerable situations. **Andhra Pradesh Drought Mitigation Project (APDMP)**, an IFAD and GoAP funded programme, is a concerted and coordinated effort to address the overarching problem of repeated drought and to improve the incomes and strengthen the drought resilience of 1,65,000 farm households. The project aims at strengthening the adaptive capacity and productivity of agriculture in the 315 worst effected drought prone gram panchayats of the southern region. During the lockdown time, APDMP worked at the grassroots to create a hassle-free environment for the Farmer Production Units to work efficiently and conveniently. Under their community managed seed system **(CMSS) initiative, 42,000 quintals of groundnut seeds** worth around **Rs. 25.62 Crores** was procured from 1960 small and marginal farmers through 72 FPOs. The scheme created employment and income for about 1000 farmers and labourers. To make this programme a success, heavy reliance was placed on digital communication

modes and virtual review meetings through tools like Google Meet. The procured seeds were then provided to farmers through Rythu Bharosa Kendra (RBK) for timely sowing in Kharif 2020. In Nagaland, the various Project Management Units under FOCUS purchased quality seeds from recognized national agencies to deliver them to Dimapur during the lockdown so that the farmers didn't miss the sowing season. They obtained special permission to further distribute these seeds to 8 project districts while following all the necessary SOPs for COVID-19 prevention. Seedlings for some plants like plum and areca nut were also distributed to **2165 households in 7 districts**. Another interesting project was the collection of tree seeds for plants of commercial value like oak, neem, and yangchak. These were distributed to be sown alongside the main crops in April. The aim was to replenish the fallow area with economic or pocket-friendly plants subsequently and improve profits. In Uttarakhand, the ILSP provided each livelihood collective with the opportunity to act as a nodal agency for delivering essentials. Besides grocery items and take-home rations, seeds and fertilizers worth **INR 76,78,414** were distributed to about **20,000 farmers** in the region.

42,000

The number of quintals of groundnut seeds procured and distributed for Kharif 2020 in AP
Photo credits: APDMP





Tamil Nadu

Fish vending women measuring the catch of the day on a traditional weight balance

Photo credits: PTSLP

Knowledge dissemination in new normal

The new normal called for innovation and new ways of working and collaborating. While the urban community quickly caught on to the virtual way of doing things, the rural community wasn't far behind, with several measures taken to disseminate vital information online. The members of the Livelihood and Access to Markets Project (LAMP) in Meghalaya were quick to respond by switching to WhatsApp and Zoom for knowledge dissemination, training, and capacity building during the lockdown. The project created a WhatsApp group of all the stakeholders in the farming process in one project to gather real-time information on the availability of produce. This included details like quantity and price that helped in facilitating the movement of essential goods throughout the state. The Fostering Climate Resilient Upland Farming Systems (FOCUS) project in Mizoram & Nagaland discarded the regular physical congregations for sharing information on best farming practices. It used virtual means like WhatsApp, short videos, and PDFs to share information with farmers. Documents were created on core agricultural practices, and even social media was used for knowledge sharing. One example is the awareness creation on the African Swine fever and the Fall ArmyWorm through social media in collaboration with the Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department.



Promoting Medicinal & Aromatic Plants in Meghalaya

With the focus on health and awareness, the farmers in **Meghalaya** were encouraged to grow medicinal and aromatic plants during the lockdown to supplement their income as they couldn't travel to markets to sell their regular produce. The **Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (MAPs)** cultivation was introduced in collaboration with the Meghalaya Institute of Natural Resource (MINR). MAPs are an ideal short term alternative for farmers since they have a high market value, can grow on degraded land, and have a long shelf life.

Farming on 2 Acres per district was set up under the project funding support. This initiative has provided wage support in terms of land preparation and income to farmers who supply the planting materials like lemongrass, citronella, and geranium. The project has linked the farmers to **Aroma Mission**, which is in the process of establishing a multiplication and processing facility to help entrepreneurs with technology demonstrations for bringing larger areas under cultivation.



Jharkhand

COVID-19 awareness session being organized in a village in Jharkhand

Photo credits: JTELP



Nagaland

Massive seed distribution initiative resulting in dispatch of 66.6 tonnes of quality seeds in 625 villages, impacting over 31,692 HHs

Photo credits: FOCUS

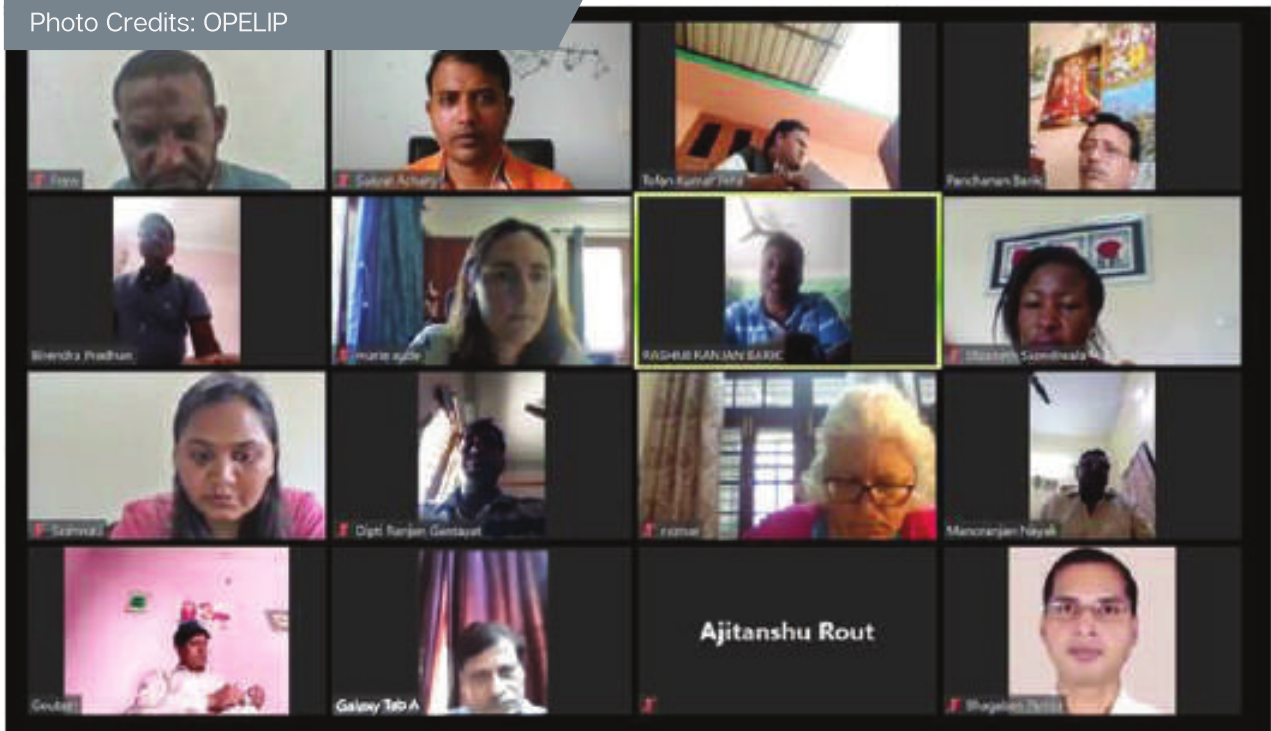
Awareness & Monitoring mechanism

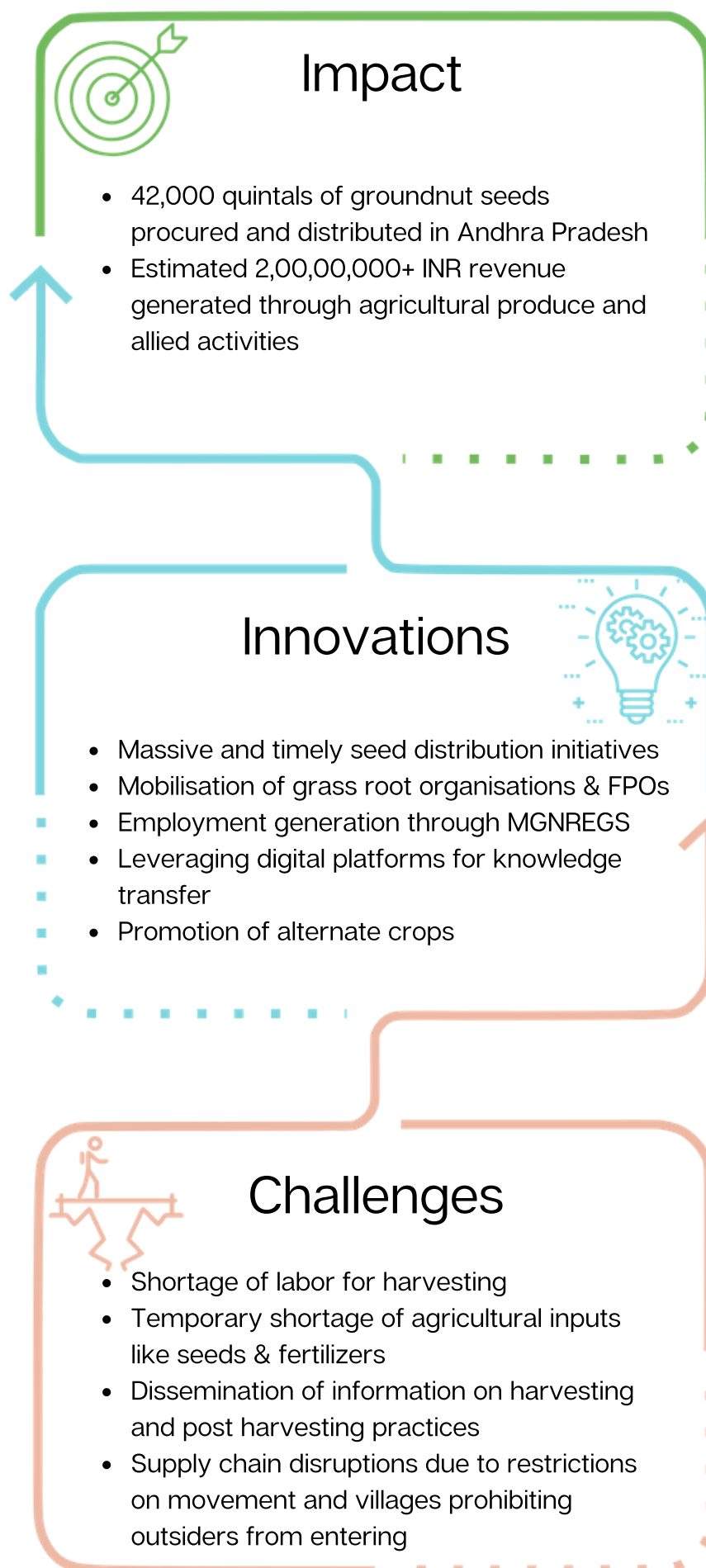
In Andhra Pradesh, timely and efficient usage of technology and IT Resources for remote supervision and monitoring of procurement has played a vital role in the success of the seed distribution initiative. Realtime web-based dashboards, organization of virtual review meetings on daily basis using Google Meet platform, structured payment mechanisms helped the project to achieve and surpass the set target. In Nagaland, the FOCUS group used WhatsApp groups to stay connected with the lead farmers and disseminate information. This was done through small group meetings with FIG leaders while following all safe distancing norms. The matter from the meetings was shared with the farmers using WhatsApp, telephone calls, emails, and one-on-one interactions. Presently, all the districts under

FOCUS have their own Whatsapp group of staff and lead farmers through which they can communicate. The primary unit has a common WhatsApp group, and the members of this group are also part of the district Whatsapp groups. The method has been quite effective except in a few far-flung villages with poor or no internet connectivity. One example of the ingenuity of the workers in Nagaland is the creation of short videos on planting techniques to promote safe agriculture. This was done in collaboration with the Department of Horticulture, Govt. of Nagaland, for certain crops (Khasi mandarin, parkia, areca nut). Digital brochures on growing plum were also given to Lead Farmers and FIGs of the project villages as physical training was not possible due to the COVID – 19 lockdown.

Screenshot from a monitoring & review programme on 2nd April 2020, attended by IFAD & the project team from Odisha

Photo Credits: OPELIP





3 Innovations in Markets

The pandemic induced lockdown severely impacted the purchase of essential food by consumers worldwide. Although brick & mortar grocery stores remained open, panic buying of essential goods and initial supply chain disruptions in farm-to-market models resulted in a severe shortage of essentials. Social distancing norms and limited entry in the stores also made a purchase from markets a time-consuming hassle. The traditional methods of distribution through channel partners were disrupted both in rural and urban markets because of a shortage of goods and limited availability of transport vehicles. The impact was even more for smaller towns and people living in remote rural areas, resulting in a shortage of daily essentials. All this shortage was existing while the farmers

were ready with harvested produce and looking to move it through vendors. There was an urgent need for direct market linkage, with the support of FPOs, SHGs, and other grass-root organizations. Realizing this need, the Government of India, through a landmark reform, had also recently liberalized the sector allowing farmers the choice to sell directly to retailers and processors. This key change in terms of increased direct sourcing has the potential to utilize the economies of scale currently missing in Indian agriculture. The learnings from this pandemic period can be leveraged to identify structural transformation through collaborative actions and alternate market integrations, which are needed for linking clusters to organized supply chains.





Meghalaya

A woman showing off freshly harvested potatoes from her farm.

Photo credits: LAMP

Grow Local, Buy Local

With food shortages and transport restrictions, growing and buying food locally was the most sustainable alternative. The **livelihood collectives in Uttarakhand** joined hands with the Almora district administration to facilitate the **distribution of locally produced goods**. They also provided seeds and other agricultural inputs to farmers at their doorsteps to facilitate local production. In **Andhra Pradesh**, the government set up

22,000 YSR Janata Bazaars that provided all the essential goods to be delivered to various households. The bazaars sold vegetable kits with 10 types of vegetables for only a hundred rupees. The material was procured locally to create livelihood opportunities for local farmers. Overall, the poor benefited from economically priced vegetables while the farmers earned money for their produce without incurring any costs.



Andhra Pradesh

Vegetables being sold in YSR Janatha Bazaar

Photo credits: APDMP

Wealth from waste

In **Uttarakhand**, the sale of flowers like gerbera, roses, and carnations is a profitable business. However, farmers didn't know what to do with these flowers during the lockdown, and they had **tonnes of waste flowers**. Nearly 800 floriculture farmers in the project area had suffered heavy losses. To rebuild their confidence and enable them to recover at least part of their losses, ILSP initiated **online capacity building for preservation of the flowers** by engaging services of an expert

private sector organization and a start-up working in rural entrepreneurship and value addition. These training sessions intended to teach farmers how to process **dry flowers to produce commercially viable products like incense sticks**, colours for the Holi festival, craft paper, **natural dyes**, etc. The idea was to preserve the flowers that were likely to go waste and later use them for various products.



Mizoram

Distribution of chicks under the Poultry development programme

Photo credits: FOCUS

Direct selling

Farmers lose a lot of money by selling their produce via middlemen. Besides, in the lockdown, it was impossible for the farmers to market or sell their produce. The **Jharkhand Tribal Empowerment and Livelihoods Project (JTELP)** supported the farmers in selling their produce through an online platform in the local market. "**Aajeevika Farm Fresh,**" an online portal launched by rural development department, was used to connect all the farmers to the local populace and sell their produce directly. In **Meghalaya, Farmers Consumers Direct Marketing Outlet (FCDMO)** were established to enable continuous supply chain from farmers to residents of towns/cities across the state. This is a three tier supply chain network of producers (farmers, SHGs, small traders/

Pop-up Grocery Stores

In the far-flung villages of Meghalaya, locals walk several kilometres each day to procure necessities. With the lockdown in place, locals were hard put to meet their daily needs. The **Meghalaya Livelihood and Access to Markets (LAMP) Project** opened **six grocery stores** in five districts to meet the essential requirements of the people. These stores were also told to keep cash with them to meet the small cash requirements of the people through short-term loans.

In the OPELIP areas, grocery shops were opened by locals with assistance from project. The beneficiaries were identified from differently-abled persons, women-headed households, etc. These grocery shops provided a source of income to the beneficiaries and helped the community by providing all grocery items at reasonable prices.

aggregators), government agencies and consumers. Traditional institutions facilitate demand aggregation from consumers. Government's role includes mapping production and demand across the state through MBMA (LAMP), providing logistics support through 1917 iTEAMS, enabling resource convergence, and bridging science and technology gaps. In **Nagaland**, FIGs were mobilized for collecting both wild and cultivated vegetables that were sold in the district headquarters. This was tried in the Longleng district and helped **18,000 households** to sell their produce directly to the state and earn money. Overall, the project covered 28 villages in Longleng district, collecting and selling over **48 tonnes of perishables.**

Innovations in Markets

22



Impact

- 15,769 HHs benefited in Uttarakhand through sale of grocery items
- 18,000 HHs benefited in Nagaland selling 48 tonnes of perishables
- 36,123 vegetable kits sold across 544 villages through 22,000 YSR Janata Bazaars in AP
- 22,000 farmers benefited in Jharkhand through sale of produce through online portal "Ajeevika Farm Fresh"

Innovations



- Home delivery of essentials in remote areas
- Direct selling through mobile grocery and vegetable shops
- Value addition of waste flowers & successful market linkage
- Pop-up grocery stores through IGA Fund



Challenges

- Shutdown of local markets & mandis
- Growing demand for essential groceries & vegetables
- Shortage of essentials in remote areas
- Wastage of perishables with farmers
- Wastage of flowers among floriculturists
- Shortage of logistic vehicles

4 Reintegration of returnee migrants

"Without labor, nothing prospers"

Migrant workers in India were perhaps the most vulnerable group to the restrictions imposed by the crisis. Facing a loss of livelihood, many of them were being forced to return home. But with the absence of any public transportation, thousands of them had to resort to traveling on foot to reach their hometowns, some of them traveling as far as 1000 km. This issue of migrant workers was one of the most difficult episodes in the lockdown period. The central government had even started arranging special Shramik Trains

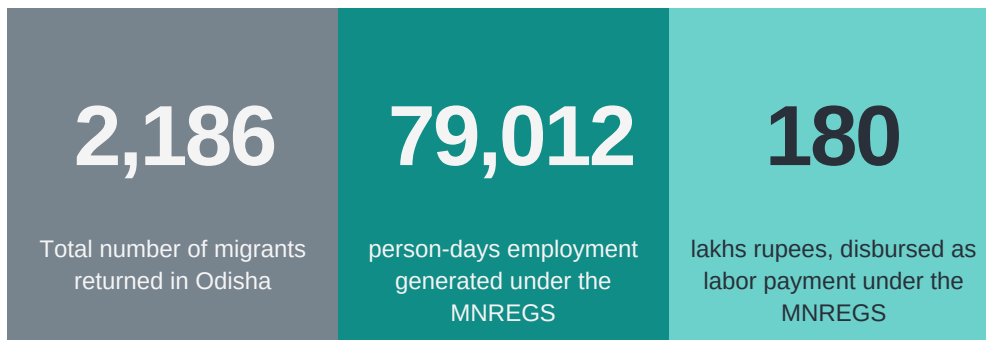
to transport the stranded migrants to their native places. As the migrants reached their homes, quarantine, and prevention measures were needed as some of them were carrying the virus from the urban setting and slowly began spreading in the rural areas. Containing the spread of the virus and immediate reintegration of the returnee migrants by providing them immediate access to livelihoods remained a priority for the local governments and the communities.



Prabasi Migrants of Odisha

According to the information obtained from the Micro Project Agencies under OPELIP, 2186 persons had migrated, and 452 returned to their native villages during the lockdown. A plan was thereby formulated to help their reintegration by offering livelihood support based on the requirement of the community. Training sessions to migrant workers under the livelihood schemes were provided through the IFAD Fund. OPELIP has ensured livelihood opportunities to the Prabasi Odia migrants, as well as the local communities under MGNREGS - an Indian social security measure

for unskilled labor. Around 921 migrant workers were employed under this scheme. As per the need of the communities, various activities were taken up, and a total of 500 projects were executed, creating around 79012 person-days amounting to INR 1.80 crore. Most of the projects were centered on crop cultivation on a scientific basis to increase the yield. Farmers were also introduced to safe farming practices during COVID-19 and were disseminated seedlings for crops that gave maximum yield in the area during the said season.

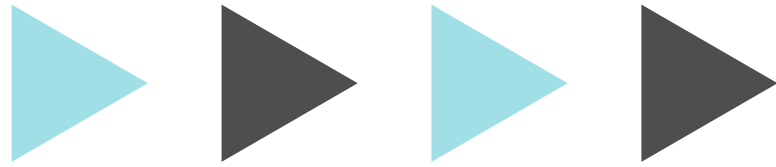


Rural Business Incubator in Uttarakhand

Due to the initial large influx of migrants into the state, Government of Uttarakhand started registering the returnee migrants on an online portal (HOPE) of the skill department. This data was used by the ILSP to assess the employment needs of the migrants and mapped them with the available opportunities. With many of the migrants expressing their desire to stay back which included some of

them with an entrepreneurial mindset, a Rural Business Incubator is being setup under the project. The incubator will serve as an institutional platform to support new and existing rural enterprises and collectives, by promoting technology & knowledge-based businesses, enabling a culture of techno-preneurship and creation of value-added new jobs.

The Road Ahead



When the going gets tough, the tough gets going. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted modern life, both in the short term, and in ways that we are yet to understand. In response, a new normal is emerging that's rooted in constant innovation to meet the demands of an uncertain future. The spirit of innovation is the bedrock on which the new normal is founded. Whether it is product innovation or streamlining supply chains in the face of ongoing geographical and labor supply shortages - individuals from all walks of life have risen to the challenge and introduced new ideas and efforts to meet these ends.

Farmer producer organisations are running fast to close the demand gap, and there's ample opportunity for rural entrepreneurs to make new inroads. India is mainly an agriculture-based economy, and most of the rural population depends on agriculture for its livelihood. From procuring the basics to grow food and handling the new harvest for sale during the lockdown - the farmers have faced enormous challenges that were overcome through innovative partnerships between state and non-state based visionaries. Whether it was setting up grocery shops for selling locally sourced

produce or converting agricultural waste into commercially viable products, the key stakeholders were connected using mobile technology for seamless exchange of information. Some interesting business models also emerged in various states, like what was done in the Longleng district or the income-generating activities initiated in OPELIP areas. In that way, the pandemic has fuelled the digitization of some of the agricultural practices and also introduced innovative collaboration and direct to consumer models that are beneficial for both the end stakeholders in the process. Digital media was also harnessed by both government and non-government agencies for information dissemination, which is a cost-effective, hygienic, and safe way to bring people together and keep them on the same page. The use of technology and human initiative for the upliftment of the most marginalized sections are some remarkable achievements of the current times. In these times, IFAD continues to work relentlessly to improve the lives of the most marginalized people in the rural areas of the world.

Acronyms & Abbreviations

APDMP	Andhra Pradesh Drought Mitigation Project
ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CMSS	Community Managed Seed System
CRP	Community Resource Persons
FCDMO	Farmers Consumers Direct Marketing Outlet
FOCUS	Fostering Climate Resilient Upland Farming Systems
FPO	Farmer Producer Organisation
GoAP	Government of Andhra Pradesh
HH	Households
HOPE	Helping Out People Everywhere
IFAD	International Fund for Agriculture Development
IGA	Income Generation Activity
ILSP	Integrated Livelihood Support Project
JSLPS	Jharkhan State Livelihood Promotion Society
JTELP	Jharkhand Tribal Empowerment and Livelihoods Project
LAMP	Livelihoods and Access to Markets Project
LC	Livelihood Collective
MAP	Medicinal & Aromatic Plants
MBMA	Meghalaya Basin Management Agency
MGNREGS	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
MINR	Meghalaya Institute of Natural Resources
NBFC	Non Banking Financial Corporation
NGO	Non government organisation
OPELIP	Odisha PVTG Employment & Livelihood Improvement Programme
PDS	Public Distribution System
PG	Producer Group
PLF	Panchayat Level Federation
PTSLP	Post Tsunami Sustainable Livelihoods Project
PVTG	Particularly vulnerable tribal groups
RBI	Rural Business Incubator
RBK	Rythu Bharosa Kendra (Farmer Trust Organisation)
SHG	Self Help Groups
SOP	Systems and Procedures
THR	Take Home Ration
VDC	Village Development Committee
VHND	Village Health and Nutrition Day
WHO	World Health Organisation

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About IFAD

INVESTING IN RURAL PEOPLE



IFAD invests in rural people, empowering them to reduce poverty, increase food security, improve nutrition and strengthen resilience. Since 1978, we have provided US\$23.2 billion in grants and low-interest loans to projects that have reached an estimated 518 million people. IFAD is an international financial institution and a United Nations specialized agency based in Rome – the United Nations food and agriculture hub.

India is a founding member of IFAD, and IFAD has worked in India for more than 40 years. The current country strategic opportunities programme is fully aligned with the government's policy framework and efforts to ensure that smallholder food and agricultural production systems are remunerative, sustainable and resilient to climate change and price shocks.

About ASCI

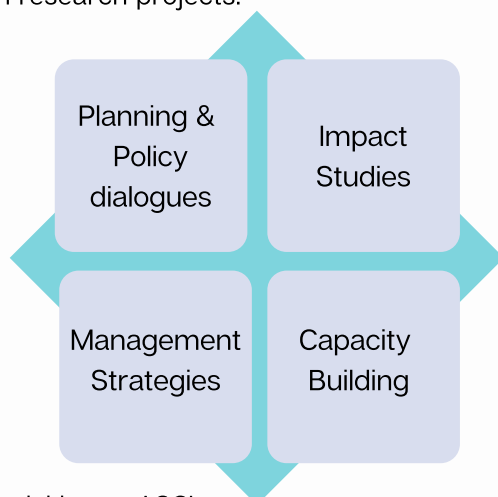
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Leadership through learning

ESTABLISHED IN 1956

An initiative of the government and the corporate sector, and under the leadership of our Hon. Chairman, Sri K Padmanabhaiah, IAS (Retd), who was the former Home Secretary, Government of India - the Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI), Hyderabad, has pioneered post-experience management education in India. ASCI equips corporate managers, administrators, entrepreneurs and academicians with the skills to synthesize managerial theory and practice; and respond to the ever-increasing complexity of managerial issues confronting government, industrial enterprises and non-government organizations. Also, ASCI is the chosen advisory and research destination for about 100 international and national organizations, year on year. Apart from several Ministries and Departments of the Gol and Departments of State Governments, several bilateral and multi-lateral institutions choose ASCI as their knowledge-partner for their applied research studies and action research projects.



Key activities at ASCI

Centre for Agriculture & Rural Development (CARD) at ASCI

CARD at ASCI is mandated to work on agriculture and rural development sectors with special focus on poverty alleviation. The Centre sets its goal in line with the global development agenda of eradicating poverty and zero hunger by 2030 through a variety of service offerings in knowledge management, advocacy and Monitoring & Evaluation. The centre believes in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of development programmes in order to bring in positive change in agriculture and rural development areas.

With its longstanding presence and repute in research and capacity building, ASCI brings on board its legacy of associating with Governance and policy making. Building on ASCI's strengths, the centre facilitates innovative policy dialogues, consultancies, action research and capacity development activities in agriculture and rural development. It undertakes in-depth assessment of development programmes aimed at improving livelihood, employment and entrepreneurship. Promoting convergence between various stakeholders including national and international agencies, departments, key functionaries, civil society organizations and beneficiaries remains the key principle of various activities of the centre.

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