

Case studies

Hemaben, Saundarya Mandali (Cleaning cooperative)

I am a member of Saundarya Cleaning Cooperative and I work as a cleaning staff in an office. To reach my place of work I take a bus everyday. I found out about the lockdown when the Prime Minister announced it in March. After that, all the inter-city transportation was shut down and I realized I won't be able to go to work. Earlier when the cases weren't many, precautions were being taken at our workplace. We were given masks and asked to sanitize our hands. So I had assumed that my work wouldn't stop. But following the announcement, we were asked to not come to work. Since then [March 24] we have been at home.

At first, we didn't really know what a lockdown was. We were aware about a curfew but didn't know what was supposed to be done in the lockdown. Will we be allowed to work? If we can't go to work, will we get our salary? Can our children go to school? Will grocery shops be open? The ailment is such that it spreads through touching and that is why the lockdown was important. All we had to do was stay indoors so that we could protect ourselves and our families.

We generally purchase monthly ration. The announcement of lockdown was made towards the end of the month when we were running out of our monthly stock of ration at home. Normally when this happens, we buy items in small quantities on credit and pay back when we receive the salary. We couldn't do the same this year as the shop that we usually buy from wasn't open at all. Also, other stores did not have enough stock as people were panic buying. We somehow managed to buy a few things in the beginning. Moreover, many shops nearby are closed. Some shops, which are open, were very far away. After standing in long queues, we're able to buy some supplies in small quantities. The ration kit that we received from our cooperative and SEWA Cooperative Federation helped us for more than a week. Due to that we were able to save the money we could have otherwise spent on purchasing ration.

Now it is my hope that people understand that they need to take precautions so that we are able to overcome this difficult time. It is only then that we who are informal workers will be able to go back to work, earn and feed our families.



Khaniben, Aabodana Mandali (Handicrafts' cooperative)



I am a patch work artisan and a member of the Aabodana Cooperative. For a long time, I haven't been able to find work. With the lockdown, my situation worsened. I currently live with my grandchildren and their parents--my children--live away for work.

I didn't know what to do when I heard about the national lockdown. I was worrying how I would survive without work and money. I had to feed the young children who were living with me. I did not have enough supplies and have been managing with whatever I had.

For some time, my daughter would send me food. But with the restriction on transportation, my daughter was unable to send food to me. My son who works as a labourer also lives a little far away but tried to send it whenever possible. Since the lockdown, even he has been out of work. Many family members also supported me. But when that stopped, I was completely on my own. It was a very difficult time for me. I tried to cook whatever was available to me--boiled milk or boiled rice. There were no vegetables or fruit. It has been almost 3 months since I have been trying to manage all by myself. I was also unable to receive State support for grain, even though I have the necessary documents. It was difficult, especially with these young children. I am 75 years old and I don't have any savings unfortunately. Everyday is a struggle without any work. I am always looking for a work opportunity so that I can earn but it hasn't been possible so far.

At last I had to reach out to my supervisor in SEWA who proved to be really helpful. They managed to send me grains and health supplies. This is when SEWA Cooperative Federation's support came through to me. I received a grain kit and a health kit, which allowed me to feed the children and myself. I hope and pray that things get better soon.

Bhagwati Ben, Saundarya Mandali (Cleaning cooperative)

I am a rag picker, but I have been out of work since the lockdown began in March. My husband works as a driver and he too lost his employment. When the lockdown was suddenly announced, I was informed by my boss that I don't have to go to work since the office will be closed. At this time I was completely out of household supplies. We were not sure how we would manage.

With the continuous coverage of lockdown on news channels, we slowly began to understand how serious this was and that we were going to be out of work for longer than we expected. With very little food supplies at home, we tried to manage. For quite a few days, my neighbourhood received ration support from different organizations. All of us divided the ration amongst ourselves and managed. Even then, there were three days, when we were without proper food and only ate rice with a little oil in it. Because we are daily wage workers, how could we manage to arrange for ration? On a daily basis I earn approximately Rs 150 and use it to buy daily essentials. But without any work, my husband and I have been unable to earn anything. How do we even save with our meagre wages? Whatever we earn in a day, we use it to buy daily supplies.

We thought we would get support from the Government because we have a BPL (Below Poverty Line) card. When we tried, we were told that our card had been converted to an APL (Above Poverty Line) status, and we were ineligible for grain. I put in all my efforts to negotiate with them. I explained to them that we work on daily wages and don't have secure jobs, but they just wouldn't believe it. After arguing so much, I came back home without any ration.

I am not sure what the future holds for us. Slowly, the government has been increasing the lockdown period. If this continues to happen, my family will be fully dependent on the ration that we have been receiving from different organizations. There is no way I will be able to manage without that. For now, I have enough supplies for 4-5 days and then I will need more support till I am able to get back to work.



Muniraben, Lok Swasthya Mandali (Health Cooperative)



We are 5 members in the household. Our kids are still in school and our main source of income is handicrafts work as my husband and I are both involved in stitching work. I am a shareholder in the health cooperative--Lok Swasthya Mandali.

Before the lockdown was announced, we were taking stitching orders regularly. Because of the lockdown, our main source of income was blocked. We weren't getting large stitching orders anymore like we used to. This was a huge blow, also because it was the festive season, which is a time for us to earn well. We also haven't been able to reach out to people who could give us mask production work.

With the sudden lockdown announcement we were even unable to purchase essential supplies. The upcoming month of Ramadan (month of fasting) made me worry more as we would fast everyday and we needed supplies for Iftar (meal eaten after sunset during Ramadan). With three young children and no income, this was worrying for me.

It was then that the *aagewan* (leader) from my cooperative reached out to me. She said SEWA Cooperative Federation was distributing ration and health kits. Receiving the kits not only allowed us to make sure the children were fed, it was also a source of great mental relief to me.

Varshaben, SEWA Health Worker, Daskroi

I have been using a simple phone (with basic configuration) since I own one. I was thinking that there would be no grassroots work because of COVID-19 and its resultant impact. BUT we never stopped. SEWA came up with this idea of building our capacity in digital literacy. I was worried that how would I manage to reach out to members as I have limited to no knowledge about phone functions. But with the help of my colleagues, I learnt to operate the phone, and underwent training based on modules. And, I give all the credit to SEWA, because of SEWA, I am able to impart life saving information through. All the experiences of COVID-19 has taught me so much, and once again this made me realize the importance of organizing and collective strength.