



# THE BRIDGE INDIA

Facilitating Social Partners

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Preparedness  
for the

## Third Wave

of  
**Covid**

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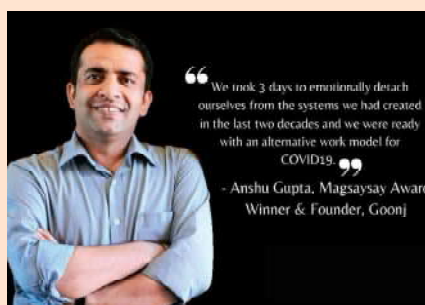
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# Gearing up to Combat Third Wave of Covid-19



**Seema Jairath**  
Editor-in-Chief

Dear Friends,

The second wave of Covid-19 infections exposed glaring loopholes in India's public health system. The country's response to the rapidly rising cases was crippled by an acute shortage of medical staff doctors, nurses, paramedics, technicians as well as shortage of beds, medical oxygen, ICU beds and ventilators. Here the corporates can play a big role in keeping their supply chains robust so that essential material and services could be marshalled without wasting time.

Senior scientists of Government of India have already cautioned that a third wave of Covid-19 infection is inevitable, given the higher levels of circulating virus. However, it is not yet clear on what time scale the third phase will occur. Hence, it would be much

safer that everyone stays prepared for any upcoming wave.

The problem is that the second wave was nothing like the first wave, so the country wasn't able to deal with it the same way. The only thing one knows is that the nation must get prepared for another wave whether it comes or not. It's no more a question of where we all went wrong. It is now about being prepared even if the challenges could turn out to be different! A few months ago, we didn't know what we were facing. Now the country has the experience of the first wave and second wave with it. If it is anything like the previous ones, it should be able to sail through without facing similar tragic situations. For doing this effectively a big task would be training of medical students and allied health professionals. To achieve this, government and private sector agencies could work hand in hand in order to quickly prepare thousands of trained hands ready.

One needs to keep India's age pyramid in mind while making preparations. Forty percent of the Indian population is in 0–18 years for whom vaccines are not available yet. If we can get vaccines for this age group, that will be a big addition to the immunisation strategy. Data also shows that in people with past COVID-19 infection, one dose can produce similar antibody levels as in an infection-free person with two doses. If a large fraction of India is infected, then one dose of vaccine post

infection will likely give good protection. One-shot vaccines could go a long way for India since vaccine adherence is an issue along with a large population. Youth of rural areas could be mobilised by frontline workers, college teachers and government officials managing youth affairs towards making voluntary efforts to make people ready for vaccinating themselves.

For urban poor and rural areas, mobile vaccination, door-to-door campaigns, seeking buy-in from religious and community leaders, and vaccine clinics in front of places of religious gatherings are required. Private sector employers or companies encouraging and providing vaccination to employees, even supporting and ensuring vaccination of all household help in urban metros would go a long way.

During the second wave, the virus has penetrated deeper into rural areas. The rural—urban vaccine inequity is starkly visible. Hence, the governments have to take vaccines to rural areas. The public health system has a strong immunisation framework using community health workers in rural areas. So, key stakeholders like ASHA, Anganwadi workers and NGO functionaries have to work in synergy to get through this challenge successfully.

Happy Reading



# Prayas Responds to COVID-19

Since the onset of COVID-19 in 2020 Prayas continues to serve during the second wave also. It has been reaching out to the affected tirelessly. The distressed including children in need of care & protection (CNC), homeless, migrant & domestic workers and their families, commercial sex workers, and trans genders, severely affected by COVID-19 has been supported through its various initiatives, namely, cooked meal, family rations, essential medicines, sanitary pads, PPE kit, face masks, sanitizers, soaps etc. Looking at the dire need Prayas also started 5 COVID Care Centres in Delhi with medical and paramedical staff at Geeta Colony, Tughlaqabad, Jahangirpuri, Kashmere Gate and Kirti Nagar. All COVID Care Centers have been notified by the Delhi Government.



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## Covid-19 Initiative by SPECTRA



The lockdown, in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic, has affected the lives of some of the most vulnerable communities across the country, such as slums, beggars, street children, migrant laborers, waste pickers, single mothers, artisans and sex workers. In order to cushion the impact of the crisis on these sections, Spectra has taken initiative at the ground level. While facilitating the poor and marginalized with masks, gloves, sanitizer, oximeters and thermometers and distributing ration kit in slums and for rural poor it has also disseminated health and safety guidelines while distributing the material and motivated them for Covid-19 vaccinations. The initiative of working for the rural villages has been with the help of Govt. PRI bodies and other local administrative bodies.

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## SPID takes on relief activities during the second wave of COVID-19

The onslaught of second wave of Covid-19 lead to multiple relief activities and initiatives that were taken up by SPID society viz community kitchen & cooked food distribution to construction workers & street vendors, ration distribution to transgender community, supplementary nutritional food and milk distribution to children of 1-5 years and to pregnant & lactating women, sanitary Items distribution to adolescent girls from several underprivileged communities of delhi, ration distribution & supplementary food distribution in the community to the economically marginalised families.

SPID has also helped people for getting registration for free ration card coupon (to link it with Govt. Free Ration Card Coupon) and has created awareness about effects of COVID, safety & preventive & safety measures.





# NGOs rise to push the envelope for the Third Wave

By The Bridge India  
Correspondent

As the second wave took the nation by surprise, if anyone rose to the occasion, besides of course the individuals, it was the social sector.

From devising new strategies to working around the tough challenges, they have truly shown what it takes to confront and combat a crisis as massive as the ongoing pandemic.

At The Bridge India, we bring out stories of hope and courage where the challenge on hand has been dealt with proactively. We spoke to two NGOs who did exceptional work in the second wave and are readying for the dreaded third one.

## CASA

Church's Auxiliary for social action (CASA) was established in 1947 and has since then been working tirelessly for the poorest of poor.

One of the worst affected during Covid has been this segment of population for sure.

CASA in turn worked at various levels to provide help here. The second wave saw them cover 16 states of India,

helping a population of approximately 3,00,000 through various initiatives.

A very important step in stopping the spread of Covid is awareness. Posters, pamphlets, wall writings, banners focusing on Covid appropriate behavior were used extensively.

Another big challenge has been lack of cash. COVID infected families were identified by local volunteers, local NGO network, outgoing NGO partners and PO leaders from the remotest areas and communities. After this, direct cash was transferred to COVID infected family's bank account to support them.

Besides this, dry ration was also







provided to COVID affected families. Other essentials like double layered masks, soap, sanitizer, detergent powder and sanitary pads were also provided to marginalised community at door step or through small gathering maintaining physical distance and COVID protocol..

Rural COVID care centre at Panchayat level were identified with the help of local volunteers, CBO leaders, and local NGO leaders. Collaborative

efforts were made along with block level medical officer; para medical staff, nurses and doctors to provide healthcare support including drugs and health services. Emergency aid like cooked meals for 3 times a day, oximeter, thermometer, mask, and sanitizer for each COVID patient were provided. Doctors, nurses and health workers were ensured by block level CFC for 24x7 health services and monitoring of health condition of the infected.



Five to seven key influential persons from the community were identified, and a Covid response committee was formed to monitor the ongoing COVID 19 response in the villages, linkages with PHC for health service and PRI regarding food support to most marginalized and poor people in the village. Besides this, vaccination drives were launched.

In preparation for third wave, the health volunteers are discussing with the



ASHA, ANM, and LHV about the possibility of third wave and creating awareness among the villagers about the precautions on child safety as the input they receive from health workers.

CASA have started capacity assessment of health institution at village level like PHC and CHC with doctors, ASHA, ANM about the health infrastructures, service availability and gaps. Efforts will be made to strengthen the capacity of PHC, CHC, isolation centre and COVID care centre in collaboration with govt, PRIs and community.

Health Volunteers are spreading awareness on the necessary precautions as unlocking has begun, which in turn, can lead to spreading of infection if COVID appropriate behavior is not followed.



### National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People

For an organisation that has been working for the rights of disabled people for the past 25 years, National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) hasn't let down its efforts in Covid times.

People with disabilities have been among the marginalised groups hardest hit by the Covid-19. The challenges have been on various fronts. The first and the second waves of Covid-19, resulting in nationwide lockdowns, made many people

with disabilities unemployed. When companies started laying off people, people with disabilities, sadly, were at the top of such lists.

Unfortunately, "there is no data available as to how many people with disabilities have lost their lives to Covid-19 or how many of them have been vaccinated", says NCPEDP.

Vaccination is not prioritised for people with disabilities, despite the fact that people with disabilities are more susceptible to the virus than able-bodied people. This is just the tip of the iceberg; the vaccination drive has

been inaccessible on all fronts. The Cowin registration does not follow the latest guidelines on accessibility. Similarly, there was no arrangement for separate vaccination booths or slots as per the SOP for people with disabilities. Another important issue that has been neglected by many is gate keeping. Most people with disabilities may not have their disability certificates or other identity certificates for many reasons, which makes it difficult for them to get access to vaccines.

As an advocacy organisation, NCPEDP, have been advocating prioritising vaccination for persons with disabilities across the country. Unfortunately there is no explicit data available as to what is the percentage of persons with disabilities that have been vaccinated. But like they say, "Our aim is to prioritise disabled people and get all of them vaccinated and we are also trying to reduce gate keeping by not asking for identity for the purpose of vaccine."

Challenges for the third wave remain much the same as the second and first wave.

"The need of the hour is to recover whatever has been lost by coming up with plans/schemes for those who have lost their jobs and are facing a financial crisis and to strong-armed people, improved and accessible vaccination policies whilst also improving the healthcare system", says NCPEDP.

NCPEDP is working hard to meet the challenges by advocating to prioritise vaccination of people who are differently abled. Most important of them being the inaccessibility of information and the issue of awareness among people with disabilities, healthcare workers or the system itself.





# “This is war time and wars are won by strategy”

What started as a small journey is now a movement. The idea is simple but path breaking. Use urban discard (clothes, utensils, books, toys, stationery and more) to help alleviate poverty and give dignity to the poor. In turn, the poor work on neglected issues (say a broken road, a dry pond) to get the material as reward. It has been this very ideology that has been the forefront of change at Goonj since its inception in 1999.

At the helm of the organisation is the Founder and Magsaysay award winner, Anshu Gupta. He has won several national and international honors like Ashoka and Schwab Fellowship. He also found space in Forbes Magazine which listed him as one of India's most powerful rural entrepreneurs.

**Anshu Gupta** spoke to **Prachi Raturi Misra** on how Goonj adapted to Covid challenge, the power of civil society and the road ahead. Excerpts of the interview:

**Q: Please share some of your big learnings after Covid's first wave?**

**A:** I guess it came as a shock and lesson for each one of us, to the entire world. We plan ahead for the next ten years and suddenly out of nowhere a virus throws everything off gear. It showed everyone the shallowness of so much. Think of the largest, fanciest airports in the world, big shopping malls, huge buildings-- everything was closed.

We saw how the most robust health systems across the world failed. It

showed all of us that the priorities we created were all wrong. It was like a slap on the face of humanity to show us the kind of societies we have created.

The good thing it brought to fore was how one of the most undervalued thing in our country is the role of civil society.

What is needed is a drastic change where the leaders need to lead from the front. We need to review systems. This is a war time and wars, I always say are won with strategy.

**Q: How did Rahat Covid start and what were the initial challenges?**

**A:** We had to change our strategy overnight. In flat three days our Covid strategy was ready and rolled out as Rahat Covid. The need of the country had changed and we had to change as well. We couldn't work with the old strategy because the need of the hour was different.

What worked for us is the simple fact that we have reach in the deepest pockets of the country, we understand logistics, we understand material management and most importantly we have the trust of people.

We began buying vegetables directly from farmers and used them in relief kits. Food and material came in, people pitched in every possible way. I am so touched to see how everyone has been doing their bit. Like I said, civil society is highly under rated.

I have always been proud of Goonj's work but in this unforeseen time, all

the more. I am extremely proud to be a part of the social sector.

**Q: Rahat Covid has eight different work areas through which you reach marginalised communities. How did these evolve?**

**A:** I guess we learnt along the way. In the first wave, we involved women in making masks and cloth pads, supporting frontline workers.

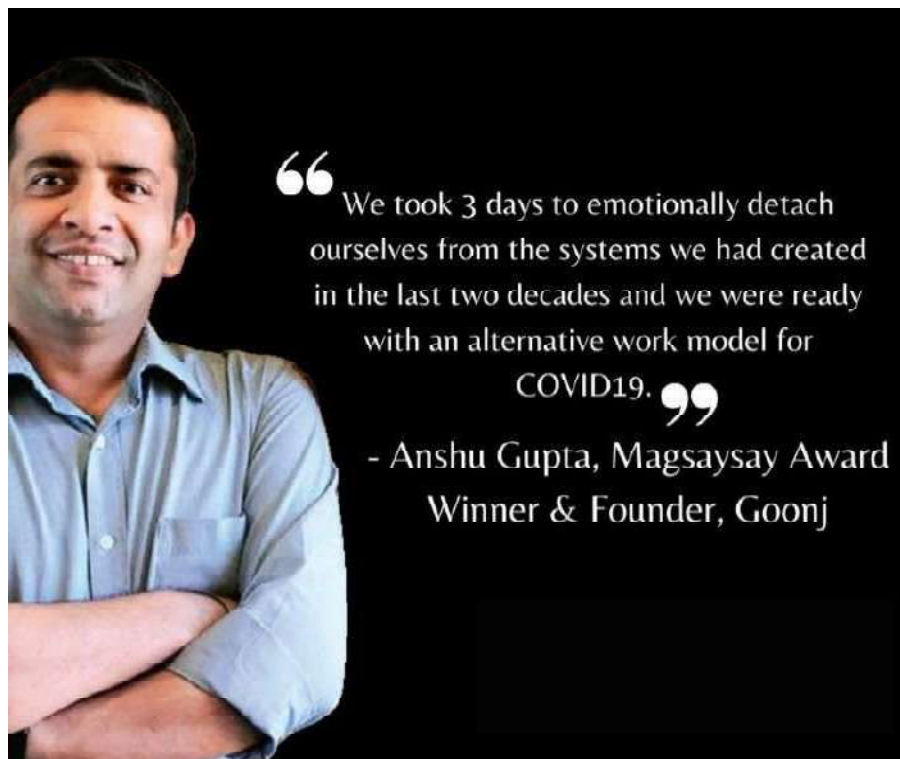
We also saw how dhaba owners were suffering because dhabas were closed and there were no people out. Second wave saw us start khichri dhabas. Here we support dhaba owners to make khichri which we then supply to people who might be in need of food. We bought vegetables directly from farmers and used them in food kits. Another thing we began in the second wave were 'Not alone centers'. For entire families living in a single room, social distancing is impossible. These centers filled that need. These are ready for the predicted third wave as well.

**Q: The worst hit in COVID have been the poorest of poor. Did your work in rural areas and communities come in handy to help reach them?**

**A:** Absolutely, yes. Over the years, we have built a grid of relationship, of knowhow of how logistics work. Everyone pitched in and it has been an extremely rewarding experience.

Since dignity for work is always at the core of our work culture, it is brilliant that we managed about 1000 activities with people, despite COVID. Roads were built, bridges repaired, the work





went on because people who got help, came back to do their bit when they could.

**Q: Any anecdotes from your Covid experience of Goonj?**

**A:** In the past 15 months our lenses changed completely. This is the first time we looked at communities like the

differently abled, HIV+, sex workers, devadasis. We also worked with artisans, musicians, transgenders, and lepers. The missed out communities face challenges even in normal circumstances, Covid only made the situation much more challenging. So we did our bit to reach out to them.

**Q: There is a talk of a third wave. How well prepared are we as a country for another wave?**

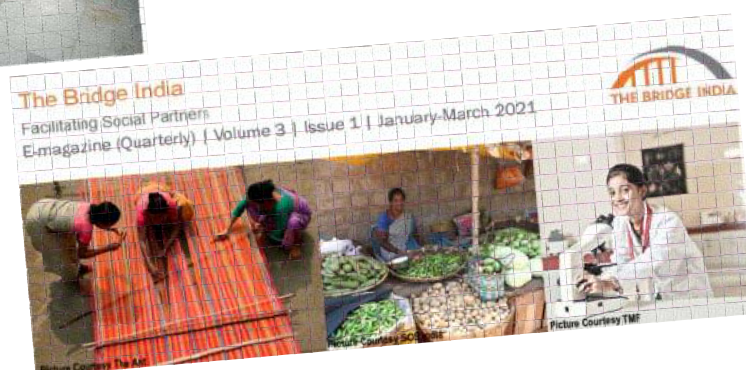
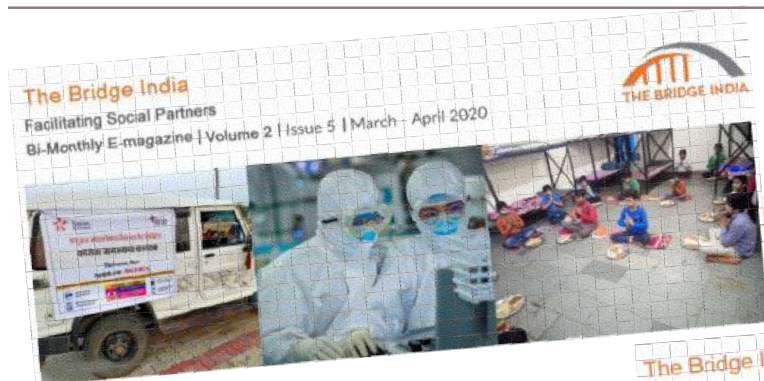
**A:** As a country, I am not sure how prepared we are. We all saw the horrors that unfolded. As an institution, I would say we are prepared to keep doing our best. Each one of us in fact after the second wave needs to ask a few questions. Do you have a job, do you have food on your plate and did you survive the second wave? If you say yes, it is time to give back in whichever way possible. Look at your strength and give back. If you are a singer, sing, if you are great at conversations, talk to the lonely people at home, if you can cook, give a meal to someone who needs it.

**Q: Over two decades of Goonj how has the journey been?**

**A:** It has been an extremely beautiful journey. Because it is an organisation we built there was scope to try so many things and learn so much. For me it has also been a journey of self discovery. I have been extremely lucky to get so many blessings and so much love.

**Q: What are some of the dreams you have for Goonj?**

**A:** We want to continue working hard. We want Goonj to keep growing as an idea and pass on our ideology.



# India Inc. calibrates efforts to counter Covid-19 challenges

Giant employers lend a helping hand to not only ensure well being of their employees but also prepare the nation combat the forthcoming challenges posed by the pandemic.

By Karan Bhardwaj

Last year, joblessness plunged the market on one side and left many employees in limbo on the other. However, few months later, Indian corporate has turned the tables. They have introduced a slew of measures for their employees, giving them a sense of security and support. Nationwide, they have pledged thousands of crores, set up medical facilities, boosted vaccination programmes, donated and manufactured equipment that helped and healed the nation.

## Monetary Backup

The humanitarian side of the blue chip business houses was lauded when they decided to share financial burden of the affected employees. In a move that inspired many giants of the market, Tata Steel announced they would continue to give last-drawn salaries of the employees who succumbed to coronavirus to their families, till the retirement age of 60 years. The families of the deceased employees would also be offered required medical and residential facilities. Additionally, the company has promised to bear educational expenses of children of its frontline employees who have died due to the infection. "The company has always been a shield of steel, supporting its stakeholders at all times. Tata Steel family stands stoically with all its people, committed to their security and well-being," the company stated in a statement. Tata Steel, with a force of over 75,000 employees, is one of the largest employers in India



Pic Courtesy: tata.com

to introduce such benefits.

Another corporate, Shriram Automall, said it would stand shoulder to shoulder with its staff in support during this disastrous time. "We have taken necessary measures and promise a secured future for the family of an employee who passed away due to Covid-19. We would provide 100% basic salary for one year, mediclaim coverage for two years, special loan facility and education of two kids till high school, in line with Junior Einstein Scholarship programme," Sameer Malhotra, CEO, Shriram Automall India, told The Bridge India. The company, which is a used vehicle auction platform, has established 'Covid Taskforce' to support employees and their families at over '100 Automalls' across India. Employees are given pro-

vision of availing a month's basic salary in advance and have also been paid back the salary cut/deductions from the last financial year, added Malhotra.

## Vaccination support

Vaccines are touted as the best weapon to fight future waves of Covid-19, if they arise. As soon as the government allowed business houses to inoculate their employees, the move was put in action instantaneously. Bajaj Auto is in the process of administering the jab free of cost to approximately 20,000 of its 'employees, off-roll employees, contract workers and their family members.' The company has already vaccinated employees and their family members above 45 years of age in the initial phase. Special vaccination camps have been set up at the





Pic Courtesy: samil.in

company's Akurdi, Chakan and Waluj facilities in Maharashtra and Pantnagar plant in Uttarakhand, said the Pune-based company. "With a vaccinated workforce, we will not only be able to significantly reduce the stress on the public health systems but also get back to regular economic activity much faster. We look forward to our employees leaving behind all pandemic-related stress after the completion of this vaccination drive," CP Tripathi, Advisor, Corporate Social Responsibility, Bajaj Auto Ltd, stated in a release. Shriram Automall has also decided to reimburse all expenses to employees incurred for Covid-19 testing and vaccinations, the CEO told us.

A major wing of Tata, TCS (Tata Consultancy Services) announced last month 118 'Covid Vaccination Centres' in 21 cities to vaccinate nearly five lakh of its employees and their families. This means the company would have to administer a minimum of 1 million doses. It has also tied up with 1,500 hospitals that are part of cashless network and 300 non-network hospitals for their coronavirus treatment of their employees.

#### Emergency services

When the nation was battling with the

deadly second wave of coronavirus, India Inc. was expected to use their mighty resources to navigate the grieving people out, which they dutifully did. In a bid to give back to the society, Shriram Automall supported PM CARES fund, became of a part of ISKCON 200 bed Covid treatment facility and joined hands with Hemkunt Foundation to distribute free oxygen to patients. Tata Trusts developed and handed over four treatment centres to the governments of Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. In Maharashtra, the Trusts-developed centres are at Sangli (50 beds) and Buldhana (104 beds), and Gautam Buddha Nagar (168 beds) and Gonda (124 beds) in Uttar Pradesh. Two more hospitals are being developed in Kekri and Jaipur regions of Rajasthan. Not just this, Tata Trusts and the Tata group tied up with two renowned medical institutions, Christian Medical College (CMC) in Vellore and Care Institute of Health Sciences (CIHS) in Hyderabad, to assist health care professionals augment skills in critical care in the management of Covid-19. The curated 22-hour on-line training programmes are meant for specific staff chosen by identified hospitals and are provided free of cost. This far, staff from over 2,340

hospitals in 28 states have been trained.

Bajaj Group's commitment against Covid was reflected by a donation of Rs 300 crore towards various government, local administration and NGO initiatives. It also procured 12 oxygen plants and several other respiratory support equipments since the onset of the pandemic last year.

"During the first wave, we started a 32-bed facility at Akurdi plant that operates from eight buildings and provides free treatment by trained medical personnel. This was in addition to other Covid centres in Waluj (200 beds), Chakan (16-bed) and Pantnagar (15-bed). While a certain proportion of beds are reserved for the company's employees and its staff, the remaining serves the requirements of the respective communities," said the company. As per statistics, multiple thousands of patients have recovered at these facilities.

Learning from the bitter experiences of the last one and a half years, the Indian companies continue to observe and evolve strategies to help India emerge global leader, yet again. In Malhotra's words, "we are now stronger than ever - physically, mentally, technologically and infrastructure wise to tackle third wave of Covid-19, if it occurs."





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