

COVID REPORT

LEARN FOR LIFE EMPOWERMENT PROJECT

In India, novel COVID-19 and the consequent lockdown came with serious socio-economic and sanitary implications. In a country where most people are involved in the informal work sector – millions of day labourers have to work every day to provide food for their families - the lockdown represented a potential death sentence from starvation for millions of families. Millions of migrant workers, left with no other mean of survival in the big cities, started walking hundreds of kilometres in the attempt to reach their native villages during the first phase of lockdown which contributed for the virus to spread to even the remotest areas. Official statistics show us a very bad situation in fact: already in April 2020, an estimate of 120 million people in India lost their job, leading to a spike in the unemployment rate of 27% and this percentage is on the rise. Another big challenge for India is represented by the situation of a hardly existent Public Healthcare System which has been compromised by a strong privatization of the sector over the last 3 decades. This is showing the total collapse of Indian Healthcare system in the attempt to encounter the pandemic. This also means that other pathologies which are very common in India like Diabetes and Malaria among others, are not been treated right now as they should.

In the light of all of this **Learn for Life Empowerment Project (LFL)** has had to face new and big challenges in order to guarantee safety and livelihood of employees and beneficiaries of its work.

Aware of what was happening in other countries, already at the beginning of March, 3 weeks before lockdown was announced in India, LFL started taking precaution measures and thinking ahead.

One step was to start an intense fundraising campaign in Europe by reaching out to partners and donors in order to generate additional funds for the Covid-19 Relief Program.

Anticipating supply problems, we started purchasing and storing well in advance big quantities of ingredients in order to ensure uninterrupted bakery production during the lockdown and part went for distribution of food for relief work.

In Varanasi, the school building has been reconverted into Bakery, lodging for staff and trainees, storage and the tailoring workshop has been also shifted here. The Varanasi bakery started production of energy cookies and protein balls commissioned by Rama Krishna Mission who distributed food to migrant workers and big quantity of masks, rice, pulses and essentials have been donated by LFL to RKM and to other NGOs involved in relief work for migrants, as well.



Empowerment Project

Also, in Delhi the bakery started the production in support to NGOs involved in relief work and food distribution and around the same time, LFL Italy has given financial contribution to NGOs involved in food distribution to people in need in Milan and Bologna, as well.

In Varanasi, Badhi Asha School's class schedule was interrupted one week before official lockdown announced on March 24th 2020. Although classes were stopped, LFL promptly implemented online Teacher Training and soon after online classes for the students of class 6 by distributing tablets to Teachers and students. In Varanasi, LFL has been distributing food, masks and soaps for free to the families of Badhi Asha School students, Alumni students and the afternoon coaching participants (110 families total) at the school itself every day since the very beginning of lockdown. Some of these families live in slum areas and, especially at the beginning, it has been difficult for them to reach out in the lockdown.

Moreover, a Sanitary Precaution Training was implemented in all locations through different means even before the beginning of lockdown. Staff members were specially trained to ensure social distancing while working and a regular and direct exchange platform between Rama Krishna Mission's doctors and our employees was created to provide free consultancy and healthcare support.

Starting from July 1st 2020, as part of the program to sustain 500 village families since begin of April, LFL is also supporting RKM healthcare program for 550 malnourished women and their children, in which telemedicine is used to keep track of health conditions of people in villages which are too often isolated and difficult to access.

LFL Austria donated funds to build a health centre where telemedicine computer can be kept and from where food is stocked for supplying the beneficiaries (500 families plus 550 malnourished women) in the villages surrounding the health centre. Therefore, the health centre truly represents the bridge between the city (resources) and the villages.

For the last few years, in Delhi LFL has built a successful partnership with Salaam Balaak Trust (an NGOs providing shelter, education and care to Delhi street children) by offering a Vocational Training Program for them. This represents a truly empowering opportunity for these boys and girls to acquire professional skills indispensable to gain their livelihood after leaving the shelter-home at the age of 18. During the training, trainees are offered salary, food and lodging for their work. In most of cases, at the end of the training, they have joined our Bakery staff and have been offered full-time jobs. We recently tied up with another such NGO in Delhi, Rainbow/Centre for Equity, and soon two



Empowerment Project

boys from their shelter-homes are going to join our Training Program. To be able to create job opportunities even in the currently difficult employment scenario, represents an achievement, although small. Every day, we work towards been able to scale up this goal.

In Varanasi, what we see ahead is to create a Sustainable Relief Work which will allow LFL to survive during these hard times and to help people in need, at the same time. The idea is to create a platform through which local small farmers can reach us and sell us their products. In the future, we would like to open a small shop near the school where we will sell our bakery products as well as local products (outsourced from small producers and farmers) at affordable prices for the local community.

For the near future, we know that Indian schools won't be allowed to open until November 2020 at the earliest; therefore, we are planning to keep up with online classes for 6th grade students, and also expanding the online classes to class 5 and class 7. The situation for Class 7 is unique, in that we have just this year received the license to offer this level of education, and that to begin this as online, during the Covid-19 pandemic, shall be an extra challenge, in terms of both equipment and faculty. For the kindergarten and the younger students, we plan to reopen the park where we can organise outdoor classes in small groups. So far, this has not been possible due to the lockdown and heavy monsoon.

In regards to the Tailoring Project, we are focusing more and more on the online shop, which has been restructured and improved in the last few months. We are starting to have bulk orders for our garments from shops in Europe with whom we had a long relation and, in the future, we shall succeed in expanding our European and International costumers pool through extensive promotion of our online shop, which is based now in Italy.