



Wada Na Todo ABHIYAN

Holding the Government Accountable to its Promise to End Poverty & Social Exclusion

WNTA Statement on the Coronavirus emergency in India

Copy to: PMO India, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Ministry of Tribal Affairs

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India is facing an emergency, and 519 have been tested positive of COVID-19. Therefore, the lockdown across 75 districts of India announced earlier on 22 March 2020 and extended to the whole country today evening to restrict movements is a timely step by both the Centre and State governments to contain the spread of coronavirus.

Wada Na Todo Abhiyan-WNTA is a national civil society platform with over 4000 members across the country. We stand in solidarity with the people suffering from the coronavirus pandemic, and with all the people and communities working to stop the outbreak.

Health is a Fundamental Human Right and has to be put in place in a real way. Our health care budgets have always been low; all reports show that we are not prepared to handle this massive threat. This crisis highlights how universal public health systems are fundamental to the life of all.

93% of labour in India work in the informal sector – casual, migrant and self-employed without labour protection or social security. They are daily wage workers and the lockdown affects their daily wages, livelihood, access to food and health care. Migrants and urban poor live in congested slums and ghettos with negligible access to water, hygiene and sanitation. The lockdown has resulted in migrant workers leaving their urban locations and travelling back to their homelands, posing spread of the disease among themselves and to the faraway places they are moving to.

In a diverse country like India, large population groups are also vulnerable to social exclusion, discrimination and unequal access to state resources and protection - Adivasis, Dalits, the Muslim minority, LGBTQIA+, PWDs, internally displaced and refugees, bonded labour and victims of trafficking, homeless and street dwellers, street children and orphans, the aged, single women, sex workers to name some of them.

Recognising and upholding the humanitarian principles of Humanity, Neutrality, Impartiality and Independence, and invoking the Constitutional principles and international human rights commitments, the SDGs, the Core Humanitarian Standards and Sphere Standards:

We the WNTA and concerned citizens appeal to the Central and State Governments to:

1. Come up with necessary financial packages to meet the medical emergency and also ensure money into people's account to meet their basic needs. We are well prepared to do this at a stroke with the JAM infrastructure we have created.
2. To put in place strong public health measures now for massive FREE testing for the virus and provide FREE treatment to the affected and avoid the danger of the "disease jumping back up" once the lockdown and restrictions on mobility are lifted.
3. Increase the facilities for treatment by considering requisition and nationalization of private health facilities in order to speed up delivery assistance.
4. Ensure inclusive preventive measures and actions: It is evident lack of testing, ventilators, hospitals will affect many people in the days to come.

WNTA National Secretariat: C-1/E, Second Floor, Green Park Extension, New Delhi 110 016
Tel: 91-11-46082371 ■
Email: info.wadanatodo@gmail.com ■ Website: www.wadanatodo.net



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- a) Engage companies, biomedical engineers, researchers to produce mechanical ventilators and testing kits, enhance the number of testing centres and its capacity to ensure they reach everyone and accommodate marginalised communities.
 - b) We call on the government to take urgent measures to provide adequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) to the health, sanitation and other frontline personnel to protect them and help the system function.
 - c) Open up public spaces -hotels, guest houses, hostels, school building and others and convert them to hospitals and makeshift quarantine centres.
 - d) Engage local administration civil society and religious leaders help spread awareness among masses on hygiene, physical distancing and social solidarity, and responsible buying.
 - e) Civil Society engagement in relief distribution and essentials - quality masks, soaps, eatables, medicine etc. helping in the fair distribution of materials etc.
 - f) District level quality quarantine facilities- isolation beds and quarantine beds with adequate medical treatment equipments should be focussed by state governments and making concerned Deputy Commissioner's responsible for district-level management.
5. Ensure provision of basic amenities like water supply and hygiene kits, soaps, sanitisers, masks and other essential commodities to all vulnerable population groups, inmates in various homeless shelters, night shelters/relief camps and slum-dwelling population across India.
6. Institute inclusive relief measures and livelihood support through relief and packages (food stocks etc), and social security measures (pensions), unemployment allowances, livelihood compensations – till the pandemic passes for marginalised/informal sector/ self-employed/ casual workers. Additionally, integrate the losses of informal/migrant sector workers as recognised and described by the corresponding laws, into the State /National Disaster Response Fund Norms.
7. Ensure that the designated public fair price/distribution shops are functioning with adequate stocks of provisions and distribute necessary food items to their cardholders in a safe manner until the uncertainty over Covid19 passes.
8. Strengthen Mohalla clinics, Sub-centres, PHCs to reach out with correct information and awareness drive. Institute similar local community-based systems to support and complement regular public healthcare systems to prevent, test and treat the Covid-19 issues among marginalised communities.
9. Put in place accessible and people-friendly complaints and grievance registration and redress mechanisms under the designated local authorities to provide and ensure justice along with humanitarian relief.

We are encouraged by the response and solidarity shown by people to the Janata curfew on 22nd March in protecting themselves and also safeguarding the communities. We are encouraged by the medical fraternity and frontline workers risking their own safety. We are encouraged by the initiatives of civil society organisations and many individual and private efforts of people in their neighbourhood and communities.

However, the COVID-19 challenge needs a nationwide approach to address the threat before us. We call upon the union and state governments to mobilise all of society to stand together and lead and coordinate the efforts.

Annie Namala, A K Singh, Roshni Nuggehalli
WNTA Conveners

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