

Draft

Best Practice

**Feeding the Needy:
A Social Initiative by the Gurugram Administration**

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Introduction

Just after the announcement of lockdown by the Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi to contain the spread of Covid-19, the whole country joined the call by lockingdown all the activities at every level. In an effort to break the chain of transmission of the virus the lockdown brought life to a halt in all its aspects and forms. There was a cascading effect of the suspension of transportation, manufacturing and commercial activities. Closure of markets and limited movement outside one's home or locality was bound to create shortage of consumption and household items including food grains and grocery.

The lockdown was demanding at the social, economic, institutional and political level and the biggest challenge was to ensure sufficient supply of essential grocery and medicines during the lockdown period. Another challenge for administration was to control the hoarding of essential commodities and hike in prices for which the government took all the measures to ensure no food shortage in the second-most populous country.

Crisis of Vulnerability

The worst affected communities in the country are:

1. Threat of starvation loomed over the daily wage-earners and labourers including migrant labourers and wage workers. Many of the migrants were willing to go back to their village for their inability to pay rent and make a living during lockdown /curfew. The exodus of migrants and overcrowding of public transport threatened community spread, adding another layer to India's battle against Corona.
2. Farmers: Due to shortage of labour for harvesting (Rabi) caused by lockdown, agriculture and allied activities, including the operation of Mandis and procurement were halted.
3. Senior Citizens and Adults: People in older age groups are already at risk and the lockdown further amplified their loneliness and isolation, resulting in anxiety and depression. An important need of older people included food and medicines besides their mental health.
4. Children: India has the largest child population in the world and research say that lockdown has impacted around 40 million children from poor families. These include those working in farms sector in rural areas or city rag pickers.
5. Service Class and Business: Resulted in corporate layoffs and bankruptcy rise.

Reaching out to Society

The main reason of anxiety and depression is the impending and sudden loss of routines, jobs, food and money. It required some concrete and innovative steps by the government to assuage the apprehensions and reassure the people that their basic needs will be taken care of through the concerted efforts of all the agencies of

government. The biggest challenge was to feed the most vulnerable and poor daily wage earners, casual labour and migrants with no place of their own. Secondly, the people locked down in their houses, particularly those in containment zones were to be provided daily essentials and items like cereals and vegetables.

In such testing times of crisis an inventive approach was adopted by the Gurugram administration to ensure availability of essential commodities like grocery, fruits & vegetables, dairy and milk products, meat, animal feed and fodder and medicines.

Implementation

A multi-pronged strategy was adopted in this initiative which involved:

- Category-wise identification of areas/clusters that need supplies
- To mobilize food preparation for free distribution
- Distribution of cooked food to poor, casual and migrant labour
- Distribution of free dry ration kits in slums
- Supply of essential and grocery items to households
- Maintaining supply chain
- Coordination among government agencies, volunteers, NGOs and traders

Identification and Classification

To feed the last man in the district, various initiatives were taken by the district administration. It started with mapping areas in the city where aid is required and kept updating its list. It identified clusters in order to streamline the flow of food and other essential supplies to these areas. A Civil Defence Team at the Integrated Command Centre in Gurugram carried out a survey to identify the affected population in every zone and their needs. These areas were further identified as those requiring cooked food or dry ration kits and were geo-tagged on the map.

Free distribution category

Forty-three slums in the city were identified by the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG) with over 250 informal housing clusters (including smaller unauthorised colonies and EWS hamlets) where an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 families, mostly daily wage migrant labourers, reside. With the help of several volunteers and NGO groups, MCG is attempting to supply two time cooked meals a day to these families. Initially, MCG were focused on providing residents with dry ration, but later they were switched to cooked food since many families lacked cooking facility. As per a statement issued by the district administration on an average every day, a total of 1,72,000 individuals across the district are being provided with cooked food and other essential supplies. Approximately 168,000 food packets, along with 2,500 dry ration packets, are being provided to people each day. Several community kitchens are at work in Gurugram, from where MCG officials and volunteers collect and distribute food packets.

On March 26, the government announced a relief package which included major food components. PDS provided 5 kg of either rice or wheat and 1 kg of preferred pulse per month free in two instalments. The relief package allotment could meet families' cereal requirement but the pulses allocation is likely to be inadequate, given per month consumption is 4-5 kg. A dry ration kit which consists of five kg wheat flour,

five kg rice, three kg pulses, three litres mustard oil, soap and sanitary napkins is given to every family which has the capacity to cook, and it is estimated that the supply will last them for 8-10 days. The areas where these kits are distributed are marked off on a geo map and its requirement shows up on the system on the tenth day.

Mobile Grocery Outlets

The Gurugram administration launched A 'Mobile Grocery Bus' for the delivery of food items and essentials like atta, ghee, refined oils, pulses, Maggi, soaps, etc. at home on payment basis. This is a government approved mobile bus loaded with grocery and it visits each locality in Gurugram town to supply all essentials at cheaper prices than the MRP. These mobile grocery bus / Mobile shop covered all the sector, colonies, old Gurugram and other areas falling in Badshahpur, Bhondsi, Sohna.

Strategy for Containment Zones

The district administration of Gurugram has identified nine areas and declared them as 'containment zones' after identifying multiple cases of coronavirus, namely: Nirvana County in Sector 54, Palam Vihar, Emaar Palm Gardens in Sector 83, Fazilpur Jharsa, Ward No 11 in Pataudi and Raipur village in Sohna.

For the containment areas having local shops the administration supplies grocery items to these shops. RWA volunteers collected the essential items from these neighbourhood shops and distributed door to door.

For the areas with no shop within 1-1.5 km, the administration authorised nearby grocery shop owners to deliver items door to door. DFSC ensured that the designated shops have sufficient stock of grocery items.

Further, in case of no neighbourhood grocery shop (within 2 km) RWA appointed members or volunteers, convey consolidated requirements of residents to administration and then collect the items after necessary payments and subsequently deliver it to various residents as per individual requirement.

Logistics

For the purposes of distribution of cooked meals and dry rations, the city has been divided into four zones (Z1, Z2, Z3 & Z4) to ensure proper coverage. All the supply vehicles are marked out and identified in the motor transport pool as R1, R2, R3, etc. To avoid duplication in distribution and tracking of supply, a daily spreadsheet is prepared showing who will cater particular areas. The vehicles follow a strict timetable. Cooked meals have to be picked up from kitchens at a designated time, reach distribution points and handed out to ensure that food is supplied during meal hours. Any delay risks the food getting spoilt and clusters going hungry.

It was noticed that several slum clusters in newer parts of the city are being adequately serviced, because of their proximity to condominiums. However, some large informal housing settlements in older parts of the city were identified little late or not identified. Later, to ensure equitable distribution, the MCG created a centralised, digital map for each of the city's four zones, marking the exact locations of these clusters, along with the number of families residing there.

Collaborators

The Gurugram administration set up an Integrated Command Centre which coordinated the collection and distribution of thousands of cooked meals and dry ration kits every day. The key players in feeding the needy included MCG, DFSC, Volunteers, Red Cross, GMCBL and Haryana Roadways, NGOs like IAM Gurgaon, Gurugram Nagrik Ekta Manch, Agrasar, Janata Rasoi (a community kitchen being run in DLF-III), Rasoi on the Wheels, several small initiatives at a neighbourhood level by citizens; city's civil defence personnel, who have taken the reins on distribution efforts and local panchayats in rural areas. Food Delivery is operated by Zomato, Flipkart, Amazon, Big Bazaar, Swiggy, Grofers, Big Basket and Milk basket.

Rahul Roy's Gurgaon Nagrik Ekta Manch (GNEM), a civil rights NGO based in Gurgaon, has been preparing close to 16,000 meals every day. The NGO has a tie-up with Prashant Kishore's I-PAC, which provides an additional 5,000 meals, and Swiggy contributes roughly the same number. A cloud kitchen in Gurugram is serving food to over 1,000 poor people. The initiative was started by couple Arjun Pandey and Ambika Kapoor under their kitchen "*Shanghai Surprise*".

Hero Moto Corp's kitchen which used to cater to 8,000 factory workers is currently preparing 4,500 meals a day free of cost and using the Integrated Command Centre to distribute them. There is another kitchen running out at Shri Ram School at Moulisary – DLF Phase 3. The Oberoi, Gurgaon is organising packed meals daily, which is given to the local district health office to distribute to the underprivileged.

Community centres at sector 21 and 22 were developed by MCG as food distribution centres where meals are provided to daily wage earners, migrant workers, and those living in slums and villages. At least 2,000 people from Salapur, Mulahera and other areas in the vicinity come to the two centres to collect their food. Many corporates in Gurugram have joined hands through 'Kartavya' which is an initiative to provide food and nutritional support to daily wage earners. The initiative was started by Reach & Realistic Group and realty developer M3M Group along with support from the government officials as well as NGOs including Red Cross and Aide at Action.

Challenges

While feeding the public of Gurugram, the administration faced challenges of various nature. Some of these, as recorded from the field experience, are as follows:

There were many instances of dispute over billing, timing of delivery and allowed quantity. Suppliers insisted on cash payments while many customers preferred digital payment. Packing and quantity was also an issue where supplies arrived in large packings and customer wanted smaller convenient quantity. People also sometimes insisted on particular brand and fancy packing.

Volunteers had to be found for senior citizens or those who could not go to grocery vans but wanted doorstep delivery. Some people brought in their entrepreneurial instinct into play and purchased essentials in quantity to sell these later at higher price. There were instances of some influential people wanting preferential treatment.

Wholesalers and retailers who ran out of stock were helped by officials in procuring items. Office bearers of wholesale market association had to be roped in to resolve the issue. Price of only few essential groceries was decided by administration. For many other commodities (that are not listed) it remained a bone of contention. In many cases price control team deployed in various areas looked into the issue to check overpricing. Vendors were warned of strict action including fine for charging more than MRP. People short of cash and living in apartments wanted medicines on short term credit. Wholesalers and retailers needed to be persuaded to open their godowns and arrange the essentials and also provide at fair price.

The lockdown has created a shortage of labour which hampered procurement and movement of supplies. Personal differences and work distribution often created wedges between groups of volunteers. The fuel bill of many vehicles like trucks and buses used by different departments ran into hefty figures. The problem needed coordination with RTA and was resolved by segregating vehicles as per department, driver and vehicle number, allocation of petrol pump and issuing of log books to each departments.

Output and Outcomes

Food shortage across various sections and strata of society were effectively addressed. The district administration worked round the clock holding meetings with wholesalers and retailers as and when required even late in night, making arrangement of grocery in large and small amounts to all including medical in-charge and their team. For medicines and grocery, officers have also made payments from their pocket but did not let the supply stop for genuine cases. With the joint efforts of administration, police, civil society and NGOs, Gurugram has come up with remarkable results.

Lessons Learnt

What Worked Really Well

1. Food Collection and Distribution Model: Food collection and distribution model that had been prepared by the civil defence team. "Between March 28 and 29, as lakhs of migrant workers poured out on the streets to walk back to homes, Gurugram was the only city where every police station was ready with 300-350 food packets. Administration had anticipated the problem and tackled it with food distribution instead of roadblocks.
2. Administration showed, zero tolerance for hate and rumour mongering. There were a couple of incidents where FIRs were immediately registered and no communal colour of any kind was allowed to be given from the beginning.
3. No Hoarding and No Shortage of Essential items: Food inspectors and Price Control Team is deployed in various areas to protect citizens against malpractices like hoarding and overcharging.

What did not work

1. There is a scope of better coordination between the administration and civil society, and a lot of times they end up working on cross-purposes. Administration has created a system where citizens feel that someone is

listening to them and the government can be reached, on a WhatsApp group or through a DCP.

2. Managing the logistics of the entire operation left much to be desired because the men, material and resources came from different agencies.
3. The storage facilities and godowns were scattered at various locations. Food inspectors had a difficult time to collect, weigh, prepare bill and distribute to different localities. Sometimes, non-purchased items come back to respective Godown. It is time consuming. Administration has to continuously motivate field inspectors and request wholesalers to cooperate. The need of warehouse management (including inventory control and operational management) was badly felt.
4. Unavailability of labour: For loading, unloading and distribution of dry items, essentials and food, the labour is difficult to make available. Most of the time truck driver and his helper distribute/sell grocery and administration needs to take entire data from them only.

Conclusion

The entire world including India has suffered with the pandemic of Corona virus, for the first time which had never mutated in human beings earlier. Since, we do not have many resources like testing kits, ventilators, vaccine, etc. to handle such situation, the best solution is *Prevention*. We can prevent the spread of disease with self-discipline, proper hygiene, healthy eating habits and maintaining physical distance. In the fight to break the chain, the joint initiatives of administration, Municipal Corporation, DFSC along with various NGOs has ensured that the supply of essentials such as food and medicines didn't come to a halt for the entire public after enforcement of lockdown.

Administration prepared Standard Operating Procedure and set up helpline numbers and helpdesks. Administration took all measures to supply essential goods with minimum human contact and at fair price. Gurugram settled the migrants with proper facilities and does not face any case of mass movement of migrant labour. Labourers from the unorganised sector such as construction workers, rickshaw-pullers, rag pickers and beggars were struggling to get cooked food or dry ration. Supply of other essential items, like water and medicines was also ensured. There is no shortage of all essential grocery. Besides, district has kept the control over spread of COVID-19.

The whole effort could successfully curb movement during lockdown and restrained transmission of virus while maintaining supply of essential food items. Essential supplies were available to people living housing sectors, apartments, slums, as well as homeless. This also could check crowding and exodus of migrants in search of food.

Recommendations

1. Better coordination between administration, various departments, civil societies and NGOs should be worked out even in normal times to address such exigencies promptly.
2. One common online platform to bring transparency and respond the complaints at the earliest. All the information should be accessible to the authorities to plan future course of action.

3. Awareness about roles and guidelines should be made to avoid confusion.

Reference:

The whole document is prepared with the inputs from officer trainees deputed at district level and administrative/performance reports of Gurugram district. Right now, not much information is available for references.