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World Service**
ACTION AGAINST POVERTY
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Autumn Story

Mothers Velankanni (pictured left) and Sangeetha are worried for their children and Tribal community in Kodaikanal, South India. They cannot work and are running out of food. Credit: WDRC

WE ARE THERE FOR YOU

BY GILLIAN SOUTHEY | CWS COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR.

The big story is about a virus that has changed everything. In a few months it has claimed many lives and livelihoods. Covid-19 has tested governments and is reshaping the political agenda. It has ruptured economies, pushing many more people to the brink of starvation and companies to failure. We have discovered what a pandemic looks like and how closely our lives are connected at a global level. Working together, we can share kindness and protect some of the poorest families from harm.

By March, Covid-19 had reached many of the places where our partners work. They were worried about what might happen. Plans were changed quickly and as more places went into lockdown, they took the message to these communities. What they found was even more worrying: little or no information about protecting their families from Covid-19, a shortage of soap, water and hygiene items, and a real fear of hunger. In every case, our partners have told them they will do everything they can to help. Funds for training events or new livelihood opportunities have been diverted into buying emergency supplies. They are pushing for more assistance from authorities and suggesting ways to help.

Get help to those who need it most

When staff from the Women Development Resource Centre heard news of the lockdown, they knew it would mean trouble. Covid-19 has spread quickly in the state of Tamil Nadu, India where they work. Now with the lockdown these communities are facing hardship unless WDRC can get more aid.



Sangeetha (holding her son) is the leader of the Women's *Sangam* on the edge of the forest, the traditional home of the Tribal people. Credit: Rob Wayne

With the help of CWS supporters they have built an impressive network of local women's *sangam* or associations with nearly 27,000 members on a shoestring budget. Their successes are many and significant. Dalit, Tribal or indigenous, and gypsy women have been able to realise rights for food, housing and schooling guaranteed in India's constitution. They have a greater say in decisions that affect them and some have been elected to local councils.

Tribal families are afraid of Hunger

Before Covid-19, Mrs Velankanni and her husband could support their three children by working as agricultural day labourers up to five days a week. They supplemented this income by harvesting produce from the forest in the summer. Together they had enough income to feed their three children and meet the costs of education (including transport to school 9 kilometres away) and medicine.

Now there is no school or work. Their village is guarded by two policemen who will not let anyone leave. By May, they will have run out of the food rations supplied by government to 38 of the 57 eligible families. The Women's *Sangam* divided the rations equally so everyone could have two meals a day and distributed all the money in their shared saving scheme. **It will not get them through. They are not the only ones.**

Unable to visit, WDRC is doing all it can by phone from Madurai. They have supplied Personal Protective Equipment to medical centres and instructed *sangam* leaders like Sangeetha on protection measures.

So far their efforts to lobby local authorities for more food assistance have met with no success. Like all of our partners they will not give up.

\$40 will contribute to cattle feed for Bedouin farmers unable to take cattle to pasture.

\$100 will pay for a hygiene kit for a refugee family in the Middle East.

\$130 will provide food for an Indian family for another month.

Sound Medical Advice to rural Fijians

Four weeks into the lockdown the Social Empowerment and Education Programme (SEEP) reported that there had been no Covid-19 cases in the 38 communities where they work. They are in constant communication with them, advising them on protection from Covid-19.



Credit: Women's Centre

Food for Sri Lanka's unpaid Factory Workers

Women's Centre staff are taking dry rations to factory workers who have not been paid for two months. Clothes orders have been cancelled and factory owners have not been paid. Women workers at the Koggala Free Trade Zone were pleased to get this support.



Credit: DSPR Jordan

Refugees Help Each Other

On news of the lockdown refugees in Jordan decided to help the poorest families. Last year the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees Jordan built two greenhouses near

the Husn Refugee camp, where a quarter of residents had no job before Covid-19. In six months of operation, women learnt to grow vegetables like zucchini, tomatoes and greens. Many were delivered to the kitchens where women learnt to cook them for home use and to sell.

When Jordan went into lockdown the training programme stopped and the women talked about what they could do. They packaged up staples from the kitchen and produce from the greenhouses to distribute 150 food parcels for the poorest families in the camp.

Save Lives with Clean Water

Festo and his family were lucky to complete their new rainwater tank before Uganda went into lockdown. The Centre for Community Solidarity completed 40 of the planned 67 rainwater tanks. Fortunately rain came and this family affected by HIV and AIDS has water. Now they and their neighbours can wash their hands. Their village hopes to escape Covid-19.



Credit: Centre for Community Solidarity

Like us, CWS partners are grappling with lockdown and the threat of Covid-19. They have had to cancel programmes designed to uphold rights and protect livelihoods. Instead they are doing whatever it takes to protect their communities and us all from Covid-19. Their knowledge and networks mean they can get food and medical advice to people who could be on the brink of acute hunger or risk infection. We are there for each other.

Our partners need more resources to protect families from Covid-19 and hunger.

Please support our Autumn Appeal today.

Donate now at www.cws.org.nz.

Phone 0800 74 73 72 or post to CWS, PO Box 22652, Christchurch 8140.

