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Newsletter

Dignified Home
Dignified Work
Dignified Life

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2020 has been the most difficult and traumatic period for the whole world. COVID-19 has changed the thought process, life-style, communication, needs and work, work environment, methodology of work and many aspects of life have become 'Virtual'. It has had a serious socio-economic and psychological impact on communities.

MHT planned several events to celebrate its silver jubilee. However, due to COVID-19 pandemic, MHT could organize only one event in November 2019 before the lockdown. Majority of the events had to be cancelled. However, the publication of the book, "The City Makers" authored by Ms. Renana Jhabvala, Executive Trustee, MHT and Ms. Bijal Brahmhatt, Director, MHT was another professionally successful event.

The book takes you down memory lane, and reveals the initial activities providing water, sanitation and electricity to the urban poor communities, and the process that led to the inclusion of connected and allied activities of upgrading the physical habitat of the poor communities. It took up constructing low-income houses, micro finance, and property and land rights for the poor, building resilience for climate change for the urban poor, participation and their voice in the governance and city planning processes. It gives a glimpse of how MHT advocated for the rights of the poor communities as citizens to have access to basic facilities. Lastly, up scaling the skills of

women construction workers was imperative to enhance their livelihood.

In addition, we are happy to receive Certificate of Appreciation by the Housing and Urban Development Corporation Ltd. (HUDCO) Awards for Best Practices for the project 'Revitalization of Dhal ni Pol'.

The MHT team relentlessly worked to reach out to the most vulnerable urban poor communities during the pandemic. It covered nine cities of six states in India. Our efforts were recognized by The Roddenberry Foundation, who conferred the Plus One Global Fund award to MHT.

MHT's project 'Women's Action towards Climate Resilience for the Urban Poor'; India was one of the five country finalists, chosen by World Resource Institute (WRI) from 260 projects across the world.

MHT has enhanced and improved its administration, accounting and governance in the changed environment. It is formulating the strategies to continue to work efficiently. The Vikasinis (women leaders), Community Action Groups (CAGs) and the Community Based Organizations (CBOs) are being strengthened to take action directly in urban governance and planning. They have not only been introduced, but also trained and to understand the 74th amendment of constitution of India to enable them participate in the processes of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).

We continue to provide support to our communities, while ensuring the safety and well-being of the members. We value the support we have received from our members, our partners and our communities in the work that we do.

We are happy that 2020 is ending and hopefully so is the pandemic. We look forward to 2021 with new hope and scope to work in an enabling environment to continue our activities with much enthusiasm as before.

Wishing all our partners, readers, well-wishers and our members a very very Happy 2021!

- Lalita Krishnaswami

COVID-19 WARRIORS

An immediate action to reach out to the vulnerable individuals and communities, MHT designed and initiated a rigorous outreach program during lockdown. It supported communities, individuals, and facilitated government to reach the affected in nine cities of six states i.e. Gujarat, Delhi, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. It primarily focussed on a) spreading awareness about COVID-19 and government initiatives to curb spread of disease; b) providing food support (meals) to families and individuals; c) distributing safety kits; d) mobilizing government subsidies and facilitating individuals with Direct Bank Transfer or Cash Support. These efforts have brought about behavioural change in the communities.

During the pandemic, all women leaders of Mahila Housing SEWA Trust (MHT) and staff strived hard to identify vulnerable people and made efforts to address their issues in terms of spreading awareness about COVID-19 and distributing food and kits.

At a glance

Parameter	Outreach
Individuals reached for COVID-19 awareness	570877
Individuals reached for government schemes awareness	308536
Government subsidies mobilized (INR)	13267249
Meals provided	13859309
Safety kits provided	36212

'My husband, a hawker who sells clothes, struggled to make ends meet due to restricted movement during the pandemic. I sold off some of the jewellery to pay for my cancer treatment. The food support, provided by MHT team was well timed to enable us to feed ourselves.' Said Karsanben, Indiranagar, Sarkhej, Ahmedabad.



Karsanben receives food kit

Baijiben, Hanumanni chali, Behrampura, Ahmedabad was always afraid of Municipal Corporation personnel, fearing that she would be quarantined by them every time she saw them. She was made aware of the importance of understanding the impact of COVID-19. Today, she herself does not forget to wear mask, but sees to it that nobody goes out without masks. She is ever ready to give information and participate in any surveys conducted.

COVID-19 impacted turns entrepreneur

Cash compensation during the pandemic; led a jobless slum woman become a profit-making entrepreneur.

In finding a slump during the lockdown, layoffs, pay cuts across most segments of business, lack of opportunity in employment and livelihood led Ms. Fagan Kachhap, a construction worker struggle to make ends meet for her six-member family. In addition, her husband was unemployed.

She received cash compensation of Rs. 3300 from MHT. She saved Rs. 300 for emergencies and used Rs. 2000 to meet her household needs and groceries.

She invested Rs. 1000 for purchasing vegetables at nominal rates from farmers who were unable to travel to the market due to lockdown.

"As sale of vegetable and other essentials were allowed during the lockdown, I took the opportunity of buying the vegetables from farmers at nominal rates and selling them at the prevailing market rates. The money was flowing in, and it enabled me to have cash in hand." Fagan said. "I woke up at 3:00 AM and rented a neighbour's motorcycle at Rs. 100 per day and ride pillion with my son. I made 250-300 Rs. daily excluding my transport and fuel costs.

When I had sufficient sum, I started purchasing fruits, which gave me higher profit. I started selling vegetables from a sheet spread on footpath, and today I own a hand-cart."

Cash compensation from MHT not only opened an avenue to earn a livelihood, but also provided her a strong sense of self-confidence to overcome financial vulnerabilities. It was her entrepreneurial spirit that ensured a healthier survival of her family.



કોરોનાની આફતે બેકાર મહિલાને આંતરિચ્છોર બનાવી

કોરોનાની આફતે બેકાર મહિલાને આંતરિચ્છોર બનાવી. કોરોનાની આફતે બેકાર મહિલાને આંતરિચ્છોર બનાવી. કોરોનાની આફતે બેકાર મહિલાને આંતરિચ્છોર બનાવી.

Faganben selling vegetables

This enabled her to pay the electricity bills, buy food and essentials and pay for education of her children.

Fagan's story prompted us to re-strategize our support mechanism. Instead of supporting families with meals and dry ration kits as we did earlier, we were now considering the cash channel as an integral part of our immediate relief plan.

We believe in empowering women and women like Fagan re-assure us of our purpose and efforts.

WATER AND SANITATION

A toilet of my own!

Bhartiben Godhakiya (20 years old), resident of Garudiya Tekra, is 7 months pregnant. She stays with her husband and in-laws in a semi-pakka house, which has brick walls and metal tin sheets as roof. Her husband with his brothers work in nearby factories in Ramol - an industrial area. The monthly family income ranges from Rs 18,000 – Rs 20,000. Bhartiben used to walk 20 minutes to relieve herself and had to carry bottles of water. The mobile toilet is at a distance of 35-40 minutes and is shared between 60-70 families. The mobile toilet was inadequate for the population dependent on it. This led to a long queue and higher waiting time. There were days and months when Bharti ben ate less food, even skipped meals to avoid walking in scorching heat or rains to relieve herself.

MHT introduced her to the scheme of providing individual household toilets, wherein it will provide subsidy of Rs. 12000. Rs. 2000 has to be contributed individually by the member of the community. Bhartiben was eager to have the toilet but her husband was hesitant in contributing Rs. 2000. Eventually, she was able to persuade her husband to have the toilet before her delivery and promised to support the family financially. No more waking up early in the morning, spending time to walk to an open defecation spot, keeping herself half hungry, struggle to carry water, fear of insects and snakebites.



Bhartiben Godhaliya

She participated in the trainings organized by MHT for introduction of material used in construction of toilets. She was extremely delighted when she saw the construction materials getting delivered at her home. She checked the quality of materials based on what she

learnt from the training. Her husband is now supportive and has purchased cleaning materials like phenyl, cleaning brush, etc. to keep the toilet clean.

PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE

Women leaders become techno-savvy

Based on the Amdavad Municipal Corporation's notification suggestions/comments on the Draft Town Planning (TP) schemes published, MHT organized a visit for Vikasinis/women leaders to the City Planning Department. They viewed the Draft Town Planning schemes and attempted to understand and interpret its provisions and allocations. They interacted with an officer in the City Planning Department and discussed their issues and comments.



Women leaders reviewing plan at AMC

Krishnaben Yadav took the lead to submit the feedback and suggestions on a TP scheme after she had held the meetings with the communities of 4-5 slums in her ward. She also included the slums she was not familiar with and showed them the plan and its provisions. The communities felt and realized that there was no provision of a Community Hall in their area. They faced challenges in organizing any public and social events as the available halls are unaffordable. Krishnaben wrote an application and got it signed by the communities and submitted to relevant government authorities.

Collective Action

Purnima Kachchhap, CBO member of Gitil Kocha, Ranchi had installed an electricity meter in at her home one year ago. She had two issues: one that she did not receive any electricity bill and two: because of not having the electricity bill, she did not have the residence proof. In spite of her visiting to the electricity department several times, the issue remains unsolved. The CAG took up the matter and presented the issue to

the Municipal Councillor and Electricity Department. As a result, the team of Electricity Department visited the house, read the meter and issued the bill.

The ration dealer in Harijan basti, Ranchi was not providing ration to the community as per the norms. The CAG of the basti took up the issue, met the Municipal Councillor, and resolved the issue.

Mr. Dharmapal Lakra, MLA, Mundka, Delhi issues letter of appreciation to Sawda Disha Mahila Mandal, CAG of Sawda Gerva for their activities and permitted them to give their services to other poor communities.



CAPACITY BUILDING:

MHT with support of Hindustan Computers Limited (HCL) Foundation and WIN Foundation undertook capacity building of Trainers in collaboration with Centre for Technology Alternatives for Rural Areas (CTARA), Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay. 60 master trainers imparted training in the importance and technique of breast feeding to 600 pregnant women and lactating mothers from Ahmedabad and Surat. They also emphasized the nutrition value of food for mother and child.

"My relatives restricted me to feed my child when I had fever. But the training made me aware that breast feeding can be done normally and it is safe." Said Pinkyben Verma, Vrundavan Park, Vastral, Ahmedabad.

WEBINAR:

A Multi Stakeholder Consultative Webinar

A Multi Stakeholder Consultative Webinar was organized with the support of Commonwealth Foundation.

The focus of the webinar was to invite suggestions and inputs on Comprehensive Gender Focused Training Program for Women Leaders in Surat. The modules were shared with the stakeholders and a wider audience including academia, practitioners and other development organisations to enable them to give suggestions and inputs on the modules. Stakeholders including Academicians, researchers, individual consultants, officials from Municipal Corporations, Urban Development Authority, elected representatives participated the webinar.

Women leaders as City Makers

Sharing his experience Mr. J. T. Mehta, Director, Traffic said, "The two Vikasinis (Anuradhben and Jagrutiben) from MHT has regularly requested for a bus stop in their area for last two years." He appreciated the detailed presentation with GPS coordinates and consents of local people of Odhav ward. Based on their application, he instructed AMTS to visit the anticipated bus-route and make a survey. The vikasinis were present with the AMTS survey team and pointed out the accurate location for the bus-stop. He expressed his appreciation and felt that the Vikasinis should work beyond Odhav ward and participate for the development of the entire city.

"Rethinking Cities: City Planning and Urban Informal Livelihoods, India in comparative Perspective", organized by Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing – WIEGO and Inhaf: Habitat Forum. The conclave is an attempt towards collecting voices from all walks of life on gender equity – the very foundation for a resilient society and strong economies worldwide. Bijal Brahmhatt, Director, MHT was one of the panellist.

MHT Webinaar series on: The City Makers: Responsible Urbanization through Women's Participation

Mahila Housing Trust has organized

5 Webinar series as a part of its silver jubilee celebration. This includes the publication of a book 'The City Makers'.

The webinar series will bring together activists, grass-roots women, policy makers, researchers, international organisations and many others to discuss and debate about making cities more people friendly and especially gender friendly.

The series aims to arrive at a larger strategic understanding of interaction between city development priorities and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The goals would be gender equality and empowerment, clean water and sanitation, climate action, clean energy and eliminating poverty across policy and governance levels.

It will provide a diverse and inclusive platform for leaders to assemble and share the best practices, insights and experiences.

AWARDS

MHT has been conferred with the Certificate of Appreciation by the Housing and Urban Development Corporation Ltd. (HUDCO) National Awards for Best Practices for its project 'Revitalization of Dhal ni Pol' with support of AMC-Amdavad Municipal Corporation. This award was under the Urban Design and Regional Planning, Inner City Revitalization and Conservation category.

This ongoing pilot project is supported by H.T. Parekh Foundation, Indian oil and SELCO Foundation. It recognises its potential as a part of larger initiative of MHT that aims to improve the living environment for residents of pols and precincts of the old cities while conserving and leveraging its rich heritage.

The Roddenberry Foundation has selected MHT as a Plus One Global Fund awardee for its initiatives on health, economic and social impact during COVID-19 in vulnerable communities.

MHT's project 'Women's Action towards Climate Resilience for the Urban Poor';

Ahmedabad, India is one of the five finalists, chosen by World Resource Institute (WRI) for demonstrated impact on climate risk, resilience and socioeconomic inequality. The objective of the project is to empower women to conduct climate risk assessments through a partnership model that helps them access and implement both technical and non-technical solutions in their communities. It envisages increased household and community resilience through a range of physical upgrades, and women's involvement in both familial and city-level decision-making processes. It will establish formal input channels into multiple climate action plans and inspire the creation of similar models in seven other cities across South Asia.



SHRADHHANJALI

We express our condolences on the loss of Mr.P.K.Vasudevan Nair, Dy. General Manager, Heritage Department, Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation to his family.



An Archaeological Engineer, backed by years of experience, Nairji played a pivotal role in Ahmedabad's status of India's first World Heritage City by UNESCO. He supported MHT's initiative: Revitalization of precincts and his valuable inputs enhanced the project implementation. PK Vasudevan Nair, (1947-2020) would stay with us in our purpose to enhance the quality of life of residents of heritage precincts by improving both the public and private realms leveraging its heritage value.●

MAHILA HOUSING SEWA TRUST

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