

Vaan Muhil Trust

Annual report for April 2020 – March 2021

Introduction

2020 – 2021 was the year of untold suffering for most of the working poor, as the whole world witnessed the wrath of Covid 19. The poor rural women, unorganized workers, migrant workers and children were the worst hit in the pandemic. The national lockdowns forced most of the people to remain at home and due to restrictions of mobility imposed by the Governments in 2020 - 2021, almost all physical meetings in the working areas were temporarily suspended. A few programs were carried out from November 2020 to February 2021, when the Government relaxed conditions of the lockdowns. The following is the Annual report of Vaan Muhil Trust for the financial year 2020-2021.

1. Covid – 19 Relief Work

Vaan Muhil was involved in providing relief materials to the most deserving families in the working villages during the pandemic, with the financial assistance from the Donor Agencies, the Freedom Fund, APPI and the NHRF. The project staff reached out to around 5000 vulnerable families



in 60 villages in 8 blocks in Tirunelveli, Tenkasi and Virudhu Nagar districts in 2020. Dry rations with essential items worth of Rs.1000 each per family were distributed to the affected families, identified by the project staff based on certain criteria and the distribution was transparent. Quality materials were provided to the families and efforts were taken to follow covid protocols and preventive measures given by the government. The organization also helped the poor women SHG members with monetary support in the working villages in



Srivilliputhur and Vembakkottai blocks in Virudhu Nagar district.

Vaan Muhil is grateful to the Donor Agencies for their timely support in the time of extreme crisis and their financial assistance helped a lot of needy families. The

community members expressed gratitude to the donor agencies for their support during the

unprecedented pandemic that hit very badly the working poor. The project staff involved themselves fully in the relief work and the management is grateful to all staff for their selfless service during the pandemic.

2. Role of Community Support Group members in Covid – 19 relief work

Vaan Muhil actively involved community members in identifying the deserving families for providing relief materials and they were able to finalize the needy families in their respective villages, along with the facilitators and this avoided unnecessary confusion in the villages, while distributing the relief materials to the families. Their involvement and responsibility in the preparation of the list, and supporting the project staff in the smooth distribution of relief materials in the working villages have been commendable. The members also took efforts to bring some of the elected local body representatives for distribution of materials and assisted the project team.



3. Participation of elected panchayat leaders in distribution of relief materials

The participating elected panchayat leaders in the working villages were happy to associate with Vaan Muhil during the distribution of relief materials and also supportive of efforts



taken by the organization during the pandemic situation. Some of the elected Panchayat Presidents willingly provided dry rations to deserving families in their own panchayats (in our working areas) with their resources and this support was complementary to the relief work that the organization initiated during the pandemic.

4. Community Resource Centres during the pandemic situation

Most of the activities of Community Resource Centres in the working villages in Srivilliputhur and Vembakottai blocks in Virdhu Nagar district were suspended due to national lockdowns in the pandemic situation. Since the schools were closed during this period, the children had to remain at home and the facilitators could not organize regular programs for these children and the Centres remained closed. CRCs were opened by the end of November 2020 and the facilitators took extra efforts to bring back the children to the centres and spent time on extra curricular activities, besides concentrated on numeracy and

literacy to improve their writing and reading skills in order to bridge the learning gaps among the children.

5. Orientation and personality development programs for Adolescent Girls

Special motivational inputs and orientation on personality development for Adolescent Girls were organized in some of the working villages in Srivilliputhur and Vembakkottai blocks from November 2020 to March 2021. The Adolescent Girls were given inputs on stress management, time management, developing their potentials and inter relationship. Most of the Adolescent Girls shared that they had been stressed due to restriction of mobility during the lockdown period and they needed some outlet to share their feelings and their problems. They were also given practical tips as to spend meaningfully their leisure time in the lockdown period and develop their potentials and thereby reducing their stress level.



6. Health Camp for Adolescent Girls

Two health camps for adolescent girls were organized in R.Reddyapatti and Korukkampatty in Quarter 1, 2021. A total of 232 benefited in the health camp and out of them, 155 were adolescent girls from eight villages in Vembakottai block in Virudhunagar district. A team of



10 medical practitioners came with necessary equipments for check up and medical support. Three adolescent girls were referred to the Meenatchi Mission Hospital, Madurai for further treatment as a follow up of the medical camp in the village. A few medical camps could not be organized in the working villages, as planned due to the pandemic situation.

7. Mental health services for children and adolescents

Mental health services were provided to the needy children and adolescents in the working villages in Srivilliputhur and Vembakkottai blocks in Virudhunagar district, as long closure

of schools throughout the state during the pandemic situation resulting in mental stress. Totally 121 adolescents and young girls benefitted through mental Health care services by the staff team and the facilitators, who helped the adolescents to overcome the issues through regular counseling and sharing. Most of the adolescent girls have faced family problems, infatuation, love affair, suspicion and punishment by the parents, abuses, no interest in studies, addiction to mobile and social media, alcoholism among male members of the families and mental stress during the pandemic.

8. Education support to continue their college studies

A total of 42 deserving adolescents were supported with educational assistance to continue their college studies during the second half yearly in 2020. Vaan Muhil identified with the support of the facilitators and field coordinators deserving adolescents for education support from the working villages in Srivilliputhur and Vembakkottai blocks. Out of the 42 supported, five adolescents are doing engineering, 10 arts, 10 science, 1 B.B.A, 1 B.C.A, 6 B.Com, 1 B. P.Ed, 1 B. Tech, 6 diploma courses and nursing in various colleges. The field coordinators regularly monitor the progress of the students who have received assistance from the project.

9. Vocational and skill development courses

The project team identified interested adolescent girls and deserving survivors in the working villages in Srivilliputhur and Vembakkottai blocks to be supported with skill trainings during the last Quarter in 2020. Totally 24 adolescent girls benefitted out of the skill development courses and out of these 24 candidates, 14 were supported for six month tailoring courses, while five joined computer courses and other five for beautician courses. The field coordinators follow them up at regular intervals and they will be issued certificates from the institutes, after the completion of their courses.



10. Prevention of Five Child Marriages in working villages

The Field Coordinators, along with the respective village facilitators stopped five child marriages during the pandemic period. These five girls from the working villages in

Srivilliputhur and Vembakkottai blocks were about to be married with the support of their family members. But the village facilitators, with the help of the Field Coordinators, informed Child Line and took efforts to stop the child marriages. The timely interventions by the project staff could prevent these child marriages.



The project staff and the volunteers were actively involved in a series of campaigns against child marriages in all working villages in Srivilliputhur and Vembakkottai blocks, as there was an increase of child marriages and child labour during the pandemic period in 2020. Stickers containing slogans against child marriages were pasted in most of the houses in all the working villages and the facilitators reached out to the people and explained to them the need for stopping of child marriages and its legal implications.

11. Linkages with government schemes and services

A total of 960 individuals from the working villages in all the blocks in Tirunelveli and Virudhunagar districts, applied for different government schemes, with the support and guidance of the project staff in 2020. These individuals have applied for farmers cards, ration cards, Aadhar cards, smart cards, unorganized workers welfare cards, MNREGA cards, voter cards old age pensions, community certificates and income certificates. Many of them also applied for Loans for goat rearing and buffalo, Poultry, for individual toilets and soaks pit, PMJJBY schemes, and PMSBY schemes. Many women also applied for sewing machines and free electricity.

12. Support for Micro Enterprises

Totally 28 deserving individuals were supported with assistance to start micro enterprises and of the 28 individuals, 11 were supported for tailoring, 4 for petty shops, another four for flour vending and two for cloth vending. The remaining individuals were supported with assistance for Idly shops, snacks sales, Tiffin shop, masala powder and fruits vending. Out of the 28 individuals, 9 survivors received support to start micro enterprises from the working villages in Srivilliputhur and Vembakkottai blocks.

13. Strengthening of Women Self Help Groups

Village level facilitators and field coordinators in Srivilliputhur and Vembakkottai blocks take efforts to strengthen the women self help groups that were formed earlier. Out of the 55 women SHGs in Srivilliputhur and Vembakkottai blocks in Virdhu Nagar district, 28 groups have received bank loans to the tune of Rs. 88,57,150 in 2020-2021. The women SHGs are meeting regularly in their respective villages and discuss concrete issues concerning them. Through their operations and performance in thrift and savings, the SHG members are able to improve access to alternate source of household income. These interventions are helpful to many families to access Government benefits and to come out from their loan debt to some extent, thereby reducing their socio-economic vulnerabilities. Due to subsequent national lockdowns, Vaan Muhil staff could not organize several programs for the SHGs, as planned earlier.



14. Legal Support to survivors

Due to subsequent lockdown in 2020, many programs such as legal support to the workers, formation of workers support groups and awareness creation among the workers, formation of migrant workers groups and IC formation in the mills were temporarily suspended during the period. However the project team helped 16 workers to get their PF dues settlements and 3 workers received compensation to the tune of 2 lakhs and 35 thousands the staff helped the survivors in drafting the petitions, seeking for compensation and PF settlement and assisted them in going to the labour department in filling the complaints.



15. Fact Findings on rights violations

There were two fact findings on the labour rights violations in the workplaces undertaken by the project team in 2020. The first one was about the impact of continuous fire accidents in Sivakasi, Vembakkottai and Sattur areas on the unorganized workers, as there were shocking incidents happening in fireworks near Sivakasi, wherein many poor people have died. They

have no safety gears and the protection of the workers has always been at stake. The other incident was about a girl from Sattur area, who was trafficked and made as a child beggar in one of the railway stations in Andhra. Based on a news report, the project staff collected the details and approached the DCPU to make immediate interventions in this issue. The girl child was rescued and brought back to her native village.

16. Data collection of unorganized workers in Nanguneri and Valliyur blocks in Tirunelveli district, with the support of NHRF project



Vaan Muhil staff conducted baseline survey in 20 villages in two blocks (Nanguneri and Valliyur) in Tirunelveli district and identified the unorganized workers (1298) under 3 sectors (construction workers, textile workers and manual labourers, (out of these, 601 are construction, 442 textile workers and 255 manual labourers and 454 male and 809 female workers). Details of these 1298 unorganized workers have been collected and compilation of all details of these workers has been completed and a data base of these workers has been created.

17. Awareness Camps on Social Protection Benefits

Village level awareness programs for the unorganized workers were organized in 15 villages in Nanguneri and Valliyur blocks in Tirunelveli district and a total of 967 workers actively participated in these awareness camps and out of these workers, 328 were men and 639 women. They were given inputs on labour rights, social protection benefits and the need for organizing as workers collectives, details about the unorganized welfare boards and the registration process. Six page materials (handouts) on the Unorganized Welfare Boards and the various social protection benefits for the workers under the Welfare Boards were distributed, besides the registration process and the eligibility criteria to access social protection benefits.



18. Formation of Workers' Collectives, with the support of NHRF

The Project staff of NHRF project identified workers' leaders in 15 villages in Nanguneri and Valliyur blocks and a total of 182 workers' leaders - on an average of 12 leaders in each

village in these two blocks are in the collectives. These leaders were given inputs on labour rights, unorganized workers' issues and the registration process. Rapport building with labour Department officials and District Legal Services Authority has taken place in Quarter 1, 2021. The regular meetings of the workers' collectives in the villages in Nanguneri and Valliyur blocks in Tirunelveli district could not be held, due to the restrictions of movement announced by the government during the lockdown period.

19. Constitutional Rights Education Program for children

Vaan Muhil has initiated Constitutional Rights Education Program for children schools, hostels and in communities in 17 districts in Tamil Nadu and Pudhucherry in 2021, with the support of MISEREOR. As schools were closed due to lockdowns in Tamil Nadu, the project team started Constitutional Rights Education Programs in communities, in collaboration with 10 CSOs in different parts of the state and efforts were been taken to start CRE clubs in the communities.

20. Formation of Committees for Constitutional Rights Education

The formation of two committees (State Advisory Committee and Curriculum Development Committee) took place to take up Constitutional Rights Education Program for Children in schools and in communities throughout Tamil Nadu. The 15 member State Advisory Committee with vast experience and expertise in the fields of human rights education, social development and school education, is headed by Dr. V.Vasanthi Devi, a well-known educationist in Tamil Nadu, former Vice Chancellor of MS University, Tirunelveli and former Chair Person of State Commission for Women. The diverse experience of the members in school and higher education for many years has been useful for the project.

The 10 Member Curriculum Development Committee is headed by Prof.I.Devasagayam, who was the former Director of Institute of Human Rights Education for 15 years. There are also five experts to assist the committee by way of providing inputs and feedback on the lessons prepared. The Curriculum Development Committee had its meetings thrice (twice in Madurai and once in Trichy) to develop the first module for schools. Their rich experiences in the field were very useful in preparing the module for schools.

21. Preliminary discussions with Hostel Wardens:

An online meeting was organized for selected hostel wardens on 29.3.2021 to discuss strategies on introducing CRE program in hostels from this academic year. There were 19 hostel wardens representing different sections, boys and girls- run by catholic Sisters, Fathers, Adi Dravidar Welfare Hostels and Backward Community Hostels. Their experiential sharing was very useful to organize CRE program for hostel students and strategies to be worked out, keeping in mind the interests, likes and dislikes of the inmates and the hostel atmosphere. The identification of hostels by the staff team could not be done, due to the pandemic situation.

22. Experiential sharing by HRE teachers and contact with Teachers' Unions:

Seven experienced HRE teachers from different parts of Tamil Nadu were invited for a one-day meeting on 20th Feb. 2021 in Trichy. Particularly, their inputs on the syllabus for CRE program for schools and practical tips as to how to handle these sessions in classrooms were useful to the curriculum development committee to fine tune the CRE module. These teachers have promised to extend their support to carry out CRE program in schools in an effective manner. In addition to this batch of HRE teachers, the project team has identified a few retired teachers, who are exploring different models of taking up human rights education in informal setting.

23. Support extended from the Tamil Nadu State Human Rights Commission and other statutory bodies:

Vaan Muhil approached the Tamil Nadu State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) for its support to our CRE program in schools and communities and the initial discussions with the Commission was extremely positive and the Commission assured CRE of its possible support to our program in schools, hostels and communities. The project team invited the members from The State Human Rights Commission and State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCR), besides the Chairperson of the State Minorities Commission for the official launch of the CRE program for community engagement.

24. APPI support to strengthened workers' collectives in 45 locations in Tirunelveli district:

APPI supports Vaan Muhil for formation and strengthening of workers' collectives in 30 villages in Manur, Cheranmahadevi, Pappakudi blocks in Tirunelveli district and 15 locations in Tirunelveli City Corporations. Vaan Muhil focuses on unorganized workers in these locations, mainly Construction Workers, Garment Workers, Domestic Workers, Conservancy Workers, Manual Workers and Palm Tree Workers. The project staff started identifying unorganized workers, who have not registered themselves into the Welfare Boards and to train them into the registration process.

Vaan Muhil is grateful to the donors, The Freedom Fund, The NHRF, APPI and MISEREOR for their generous support to our various programs that we organized in 2020-2021. With their financial assistance for covid relief, we were able to support the most deserving families in the working villages at the time of extreme crisis. We also thank the community support group members and the elected Panchayat Leaders in the project areas, who extended their support in the relief work and assisted us in all possible ways. The management gratefully acknowledges the dedicated services of the program staff and facilitators who happily did the relief work during the pandemic situation, in spite of the fast spreading corona virus during the ferocious second wave. Vaan Muhil is committed to continue to work for the welfare and rights of the marginalized communities in our working villages.