



THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: IMPACT, CHALLENGES AND MEASURES TAKEN TO HELP RURAL COMMUNITIES AND VULNERABLE GIRLS

With operations across some of the most remote and marginalized 14,000+ villages in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, states that rank amongst the top 10 in terms of population density, Educate Girls has had to switch gears and take up the daunting task of addressing the immediate needs of the crisis whilst mitigating some of the longer term impacts the crisis will have on education and gender equity. Educate Girls is empowering its rural communities, including the most vulnerable out-of-school girls, to gear up in this fight against the global pandemic of Coronavirus.

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As the world comes to terms with the outbreak of Novel Coronavirus, in a densely-populated country like India, its fast spread has become a major cause of concern.

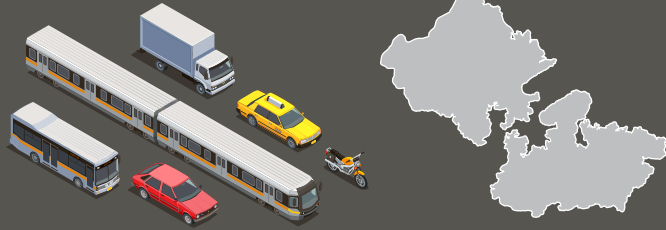
India had its first Coronavirus case on 30 January 2020 and since then the virus has infected more than 5,000 people. Although we are still in the

early stages, the virus has made its way into all states and union territories.

On the threshold of this global humanitarian crisis, on 24 March 2020, Honorable Prime Minister Narendra Modi took the step to announce a three-week nation-wide lockdown. The world's largest democracy of 1.3 billion people came to a standstill.

Chronology

March 3 onwards



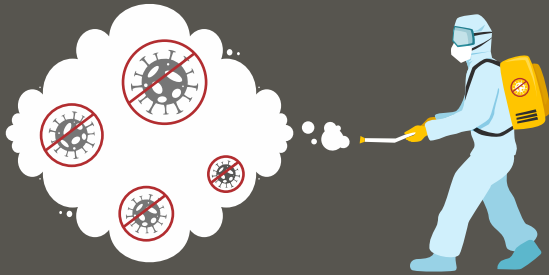
Taking a pre-emptive and proactive stance, the Government of India suspended new visas, initiated travel restrictions and the closure of national borders.

March 5



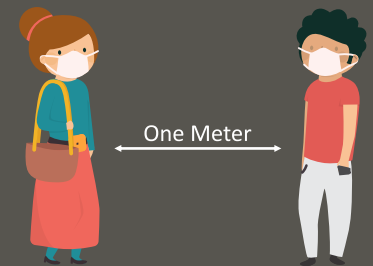
State governments across the nation closed schools, colleges and postponed exams.

March 14



The Government of India declared the pandemic a 'notified disaster'.

March 17



The Government of India issued an advisory urging all Indian states to implement social distancing measures.

March 22



Honorable PM Narendra Modi asked all citizens to observe 14-hour Janata Curfew (people's curfew).

March 24



Honorable PM Narendra Modi announced a 21-day nation-wide lock down.

What's happening in rural India?

A significant proportion of rural household income comes from agriculture and daily-wage earning, related to the sector. With extreme weather patterns of higher temperatures and reducing rainfall directly impacting farming productivity, many of India's villages are facing extreme poverty and low levels of nutrition, even before the virus hit.

With the virus spreading to rural areas, it is disproportionately hurting already marginalized communities with loss of village-level and urban livelihoods, lack of food, poor access to health

facilities, sub optimal education and other basic needs.

Another challenge is migration. The Economic Survey of India 2017 estimates that the magnitude of inter-state migration in India was close to 9 million people annually between 2011 and 2016. Remote and marginalized villages of Uttar Pradesh (UP), closely followed by Madhya Pradesh (MP) and Rajasthan are the biggest source for this migration, and the major destination where these migrants travel are Delhi, the National Capital Region and Mumbai.



As Coronavirus started to spread through the economic hubs in these states, taking a preventive stance, the state and centre started closure of schools, offices, manufacturing and most people started working from home, social distancing and home quarantines. As the numbers surged, the Central Government implemented a 21-day lockdown. With no daily job opportunities due to the rising pandemic and the implementation of preventive/control measures, millions of migrants started trudging

back to their hometowns, furthering the spread of the infection.

Here are insights on how the situation is unfolding in the rural last-mile of three states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, where Educate Girls is working closely with the state governments to mitigate these challenges and continuing on its mission to bring 40% of India's out of school girls back to school.



Educate Girls – playing its part

Educate Girls is well-placed to support the government and its communities with a robust response to the pandemic crisis.

- We have strong community relationships and village communities trust us – they will listen, so we can influence their behaviour and ability to respond better to the crisis.
- We have a network of 14,000 volunteers, across 2 lakh villages and over 1,760 full-time staff who are working in remote rural villages which have poor telecom connectivity and limited transportation.

- We have a strong ability to gather, analyse and act upon data using technology and a fully dedicated team.
- We have existing, recently collected data on a vast number of households that we can tap into.
- We have solid relationships with the local government, village leaders and school administration.



Most vulnerable: Girls will be disproportionately impacted

While rural communities struggle to survive through these challenging times, girls will continue to be the worst affected. Aggravating the vulnerability of the girl child toward increasing responsibilities in the household, care giving, child labour at farms, abuse through domestic violence, migration and related health issues, this pandemic is likely to have long term implications on girls' education and learning outcomes.

Anticipating these challenges, Educate Girls is working in close collaboration with the government and rural communities to mitigate the short and long-term implications of this global pandemic.

Educate Girls is taking immediate measures through its long-term relationship with rural communities and a strong workforce of 14,000 Team Balika.

Challenges on-ground

Educate Girls has spent the last fortnight observing social distancing norms and conducting a wide reaching analysis of the current status and response to the crisis across all our districts. The feedback we have received has identified the following common challenges:

- On the educational front, the closure of schools to control COVID-19 transmission is

having a differential effect on girls who are now providing informal care within families – to elders and siblings, taking the responsibility of household chores, agriculture related activities and regressing to disparate gender roles.

- Nutritional requirements of children, especially girls are unmet as mid-day meals are no longer accessible to them.

- With economic crisis and increasing pressure on below poverty line families, incidences of domestic violence are on the rise. This will affect the emotional health of our children.
- With the closure of schools, it is highly likely that even after the schools open the drop-out rate will go up and bringing girls back to school will become a difficult task.
- Inadequate knowledge on how to tackle the health crisis coupled with a limited supply of clean water and limited public health facilities are adding to people's ability to respond to the crisis.
- There is a lack of clear information about the virus, a lot of rumour, superstition and false information being spread.
- There is a lack of knowledge about symptoms, how to diagnose and what to do if a family member demonstrates symptoms.
- There is a lot of anxiety not just about the health impact of the crisis but the impact it will have on household incomes as most people in our villages have lost their income as daily wage earners.
- Social distancing itself is either not being fully understood or not possible due to small homes.
- Families who were prepping for family functions like weddings are also worried.
- Local financiers are refusing to lend money. There is now a heightened concern of the financial consequences if a medical emergency occurs in the family.
- With basic provisions now scarce and bus and carriages services now closed, no one can travel to other places to buy groceries.





Educate Girls' Response

Normal field work ceased on March 21, 2020 and work from home commenced for all meetings, administration and training.

Team Balika Volunteers and Field Coordinators conducted a rapid household survey to understand our community's situation and the challenges being faced. Team Balika volunteers are now following social distancing guidelines but still reaching out to community members on calls and WhatsApp, creating awareness within the community on the preventative measures of the Coronavirus. The volunteers so far, in partnership and close coordination with the local government functionaries, have taken up below initiatives:

- Supporting relief efforts by distribution of ration, food packets, masks and sanitizers.
- Helping to create greater awareness on measures to prevent the transmission via phone calls, WhatsApp messages and posters.

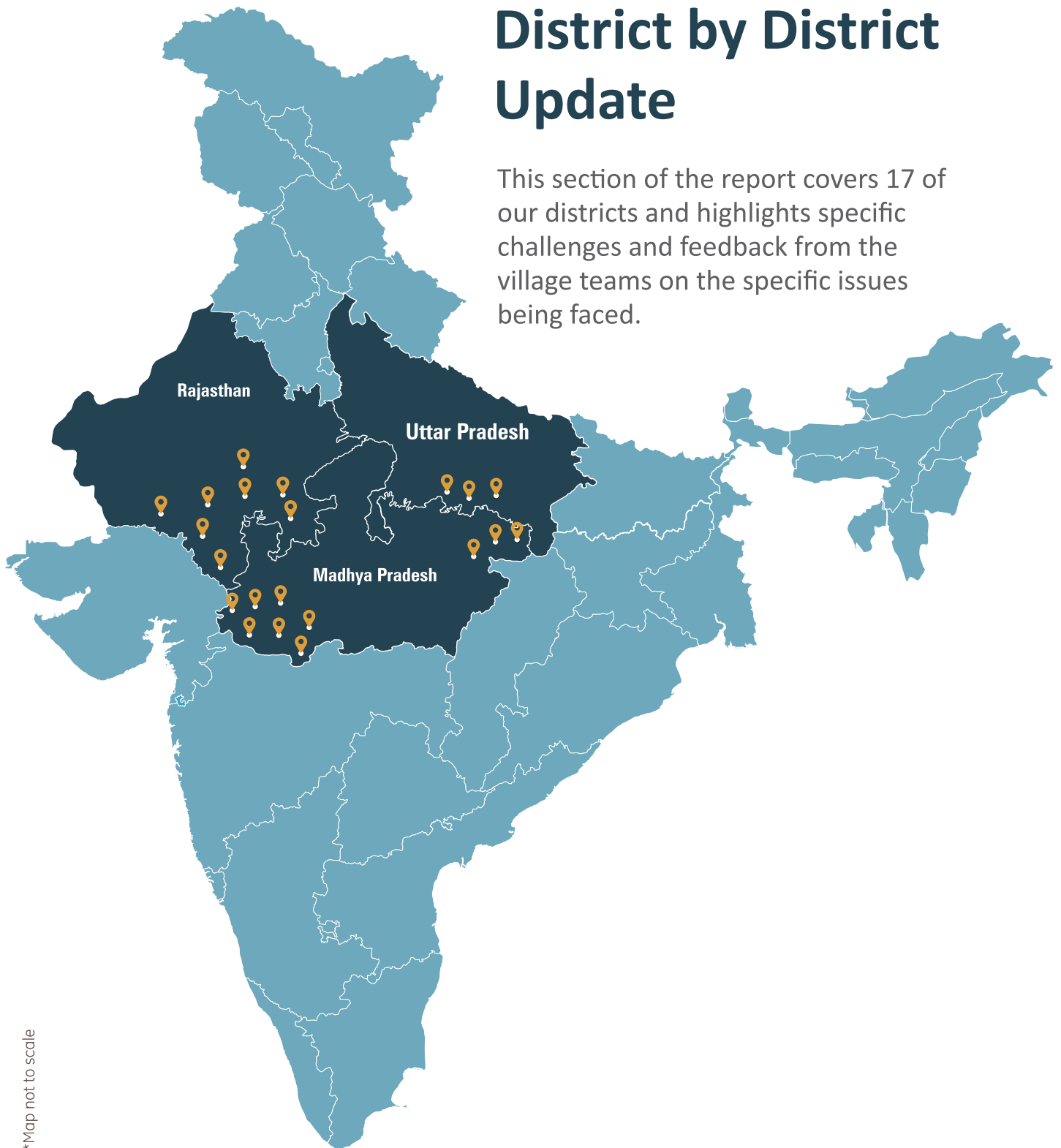
- Speaking to community leaders and families on how to keep children engaged through various learning activities.
- Highlighting the needs of the girl child for proper sanitation and nutrition.
- Keeping families updated on the various COVID relief measures announced by the government and the processes to avail them.
- Connecting with the teachers, village influencers and Panchayati Raj Institutes (PRI) members on phone and regularly tracking emerging challenges.

Educate Girls has also instituted an internal COVID relief and welfare taskforce that is gathering information on the struggles faced by the rural communities in the three states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh to further build and operationalize strategies to support them.



District by District Update

This section of the report covers 17 of our districts and highlights specific challenges and feedback from the village teams on the specific issues being faced.



*Map not to scale

Rajasthan Total Cases – 489 (As on April 10th, 2020)

AJMER: Year 6, villages 771, Team Balika 775

A major problem faced by the people of Ajmer is non-accessibility of food grains. Many villagers, being migrants, do not have a labour card, that is used to avail subsidised rates from Government-authorized shops for ration. Other shops are selling vegetables at inflated prices. Villagers are continuing to harvest crops while covering their faces as the food

shortage is so severe. When village members working in the fields were asked if they are not scared of the virus, some responded that hunger would kill them before the virus. Due to the closure of schools, many girls enrolled by Educate Girls are now helping their parents on farms or doing other household chores.

BANSWARA

Year 4, villages 1,560, Team Balika 1,502

With zero mobility, most are worried villagers in Banswara are about the adverse effect on their monsoon crop. Volunteers reported villagers are feeling anxious about the unavailability of food. Most families are on the verge of running out of groceries, while some are running out of cash. Some families are bothered about the closure of schools and a concern that it is leaving their children disinterested in education.

BHILWARA

Year 5, villages 161, Team Balika 169

The number of Coronavirus positive cases are the highest in Bhilwara. Prohibition orders under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) were imposed in District Bhilwara on March 20, 2020. All businesses have completely shut down affecting daily-wage labourers the most. According to our Team Balika, as Bhilwara is the most adversely affected, the communities are panicking and fearing long term impact. Being a tribal and educationally backward district, it will be particularly difficult for people to cope with the Coronavirus.

BUNDI

Year 7, villages 670, Team Balika 670

In Bundi, people are still engaging in agriculture work out of the necessity to support their families. They are now taking precautions like maintaining distance and wearing masks. Stuck within their homes, the village sentiment has changed; people are stressed and can't travel to their shops, outside the village.

JALORE

Year 10, villages 793, Team Balika 876

After the construction of the Narmada canal, that runs through Gujarat and into Rajasthan, the standard of living in Jalore had improved. But now, villagers are fighting two challenges of loss of income opportunities and the pandemic. The villagers are already suffering because their cumin crops were destroyed by

untimely rains. The villagers are also worried about the further spread of the virus as migrant workers head back to Jalore. While most people are working from home, they are tense about the future ramifications of the pandemic and about the impact on children, since the closure of the schools.

JHALAWAR

Year 5, villages 823, Team Balika 813

Untimely rains have caused a havoc in the lives of the villagers in Jhalawar. Most of them depend on agriculture for their daily income and are now worried about the forthcoming months. Our Team Balika are also suffering. People are aware about the virus but still don't seem to understand the seriousness of it. In areas like these, people refrain from going to the doctor even if they have a few symptoms. Many people have lost their regular income. Girls are at home and taking care of their siblings while their parents toil in the farm.

RAJSAMAND

Year 7, villages 843, Team Balika 791

Rajsamand is located close to Udaipur and is famous for the historical Battle of Hathgadi. As with Udaipur, all tourist spots and other prominent places in the district are closed and the locals advised to stay home. This is having an impact on income. Some village members from better off families are volunteering to help others with groceries and other basic necessities. Currently, the local school administration is keeping a track of all Coronavirus related updates. Due to the closure of schools, girls are only engaged in household chores and completely distanced from educational activities.

UDAIPUR

Year 6, villages 2,013, Team Balika 2,021

Villages in Udaipur are scattered across the Aravalli Mountain Range which creates communication challenges. As Udaipur is a major tourist destination, for many, their daily source of income depends on the inflow of tourists. Post the lockdown,

these people are struggling to make ends meet. Our Team Balika reported that the situation is worsening in some villages where families are barely managing their daily needs. If the situation worsens, they would not be able to cope up.

SIROHI

Year 7, villages 419, Team Balika 436

Most of the villagers in Sirohi work in a local factory, and since its closure, their daily wage earnings have been affected. With loss of jobs, people are facing difficulty in feeding their families. People are panicking and are worried that returning migrants might be carriers of the virus. Along with the outbreak of Coronavirus, untimely rains have disrupted agricultural output.

Madhya Pradesh

Total Cases – 259 (As on April 10th, 2020)

ALIRAJPUR

Year 4, villages 548, Team Balika 560

Most people from this area are migrants. The current lockdown has had a profound impact on their lives. Mid-day meals have stopped, jobs have been lost, people are facing trouble in getting access to not just food but medical services as well. In such a situation, our Team Balika and field coordinators are sending relief materials to the villagers with their resources so that the situation doesn't get chaotic and help is available to everyone.

BARWANI

Year 3, villages 712, Team Balika 664

Barwani is the easternmost district of Madhya Pradesh, bordering Maharashtra. A large part of this district falls in the Narmada submergence area, where last year at least 178 villages were submerged or partially submerged. The transport facility is the biggest problem here, people have built their houses on the hills to avoid the river water.

DHAR

Year 4, villages 1,279, Team Balika 1,241

Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh is the closest in proximity to Indore, which is the epicentre of the pandemic in the state. Here, due to a migratory and illiterate population, many are not able to understand and avail the arrangements government and local authorities have made for them. In all the blocks of the district, Team Balika along with Educate Girls' block officers and field coordinators are distributing food items among the need.

JHABUA

Year 5, villages 788, Team Balika 766

Jhabua is a tribal-dominated district of Madhya Pradesh, and it has a large number of families that migrate in order to seek employment. Ration has become the biggest problem for the villagers as many villages are more than 15-20 km far from the market and due to lockdown, travelling that distance is not possible. Some villages have shops that sell essential commodities, but these are either closed or selling daily need items at a very high price. Many people migrate to Gujarat for employment. However, they are unable to return to their homes due to lockdown.

KHANDWA

Year 2, villages 1,000, Team Balika 1,002

Many of the villagers in Khandwa are come from tribal communities and live below the poverty line. Educate Girls volunteers are trying to help people to get at least two meals a day. As well as the COVID-19 response creating awareness in the villages, our Team Balika here are trying to distribute food packages to those in need. Most shops and markets are closed, due to which daily labourers are not even able to provide two meals a day to their family. Farmers who sell vegetables and fruits are in the hope that when this lockdown will end, their life will return to normal again.

KHALWA

Year 4, villages 147, Team Balika 147

Most villages in this district are surrounded by the dense Satpura forests and face an acute shortage of water. Due to the outbreak of Coronavirus, many migrants are coming back to Khalwa and our Team Balika are helping them with food and accessibility to drinking water.

Adolescent Girls Program

AJMER

Year 3, villages 81, Kishori Coaches 15

Educate Girls' Adolescent Girls Program is an intervention into secondary education by piloting community and in-school interventions for secondary school students for 3 academic years (2017-20) in Ajmer. Adolescent girls who were enrolled by Educate Girls are now on the verge of losing touch with their studies. This is the harvest season and girls are helping their families. After toiling hard in the farms, they hardly have the stamina to study. In villages, Kishori coaches are providing masks and helping arrange food for villagers. They are also taking classes and clearing curriculum related doubts through phone calls, so that adolescent girls do not lose touch with studies.

Expansion geography: Uttar Pradesh

Total Cases – 410 (As on April 10th, 2020)

Educate Girls is in the start-up phase of operations in the state of Uttar Pradesh (UP). Here, the number of Coronavirus cases suddenly increased due to people returning from the Tabligi Jamaat event at Nizamuddin, a hotspot.

Our area of operations in UP includes: Banda, Chitrakoot and Kaushambi. Being at an early stage of operations, our newly recruited team has surveyed over 420 villages, where we found more than 1,500 families without Aadhar Card,

a must-have document to avail government facilities. Such families are being informed about COVID-19 related government schemes, through phone calls.

BANDA

Banda has been struggling for a long-time because of lack of water, resulting in poor farming and subsequent poverty. The education level in the district was already low. Now, Coronavirus will have increased the problems many folds. The people here are slipping into financial crises. There are chances that post lockdown, families will migrate for livelihoods, which will increase the drop-out number among school-going girls. Amid all the problems, the closure of markets is compelling girls to use cloth instead of sanitary napkins, which will be dangerous to their health.

CHITRAKOOT

Chitrakoot is a famous pilgrimage centre that shares borders with Madhya Pradesh. The impact of Coronavirus is evident in the district. With a large number of children out of schools, the likelihood of girls dropping out again after the crisis has increased manifold. As the duration of the lockdown passes, these girls are more likely to get demotivated in returning to the school routine. Being away from school will also affect their level of learning and have deep impact on their emotional and psychological needs.

KAUSHAMBI

Educate Girls has just started their operations here and out of school girls have been identified through a survey. The team are currently connected to the people through phone to try and support in whatever ways they can. The biggest problem is of accessing rations as most villagers work as daily wage labourers, and in the current scenario, they are not able to earn enough income to feed their families. Many villagers are working in other cities, and the lockdown has prevented their return. Long-term lockdown will result in deep financial crisis, with families struggling to survive.