

## Depicting the Vital Role Played by Volunteers in Addressing Community Needs in COVID-19: Gauging Media Coverage on the Issue

**Bhavna Wal<sup>1</sup>**

*Freelance writer.*

### Abstract

SARS-CoV-2 infection (COVID-19) is a deadly virus that has been claimed to have originated from Wuhan city in China, and spread to all parts of the world. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted economic workings and increased high burden on healthcare centers across the globe. It increased the need for external groups such as Non Government Organizations (NGOs), non-profits to serve the needy in the pandemic conditions so that there will be a reduction on pressure faced by healthcare centers and governing agencies. Volunteers (youth and millennials) are known to be helping different marginalized groups in society in combating several social challenges that existed in Indian society in the form of education, poverty, women empowerment, social justice, child protection, human rights, and others. In particular, youth and millennials came forward to give a lending hand in society during the ongoing crisis. The role of media is also highlighted in the study that acts as a bridge in outlining the invaluable contribution made by volunteers and NGOs for addressing community needs during the pandemic.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Non Government Organizations (NGOs), volunteer, healthcare, pandemic.

### Introduction

SARS-CoV-2 infection (COVID-19) is a deadly virus that has been claimed to have originated from Wuhan city in China and spread across the globe. The first case of COVID-19 was recorded on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2020 and since then there has been an alarming increase in the spread of COVID-19 cases along with death and recovery toll (Tomar & Gupta, 2020). The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted economic workings and increased the high burden on the healthcare centers. Apart from this, due to lockdown conditions in the COVID-19 pandemic condition, there were disruptions in all commercial sectors such as manufacturing, food industry, local handicraft, banking, construction, and others which adversely impacted the economic growth of India. The human race from all age groups, creed, and location was impacted by COVID-19 (Lancet, 2020). The individuals suffering from pre-existing modalities such as

diabetics, hypertension, kidney problems, immunity issues, older age, and younger children were more vulnerable to get infected by Coronavirus. It increased the need for external groups such as Non-profit Organizations and NGOs to serve the needy in the pandemic conditions so that there would be reduction in the pressure faced by the healthcare centers and governing agencies. Additionally, volunteers (youth and millennials) are known to be helping different marginalized groups in the society in combating several social challenges that existed in Indian society in the form of education, poverty, women empowerment, social justice, child protection, human rights, and others. The contribution of NGOs and volunteers could also be recorded in the current COVID-19 pandemic conditions in the form of providing support and services to the homeless, migrants, and daily wage workers. The present research will provide brief information about Coronavirus and how the pandemic disrupted life and worked detrimentally. It will also analyze the role of millennials and young professionals in volunteer work and its impact on communities and societies.

## **Aim of the Study**

### **Objectives of the study**

- To comprehend the role and importance of volunteer work during the novel corona crisis.
- To assess the role of millennials and young professionals for volunteer work and its impact on communities and societies.
- To analyze the conducive and invaluable contribution made by the NGOs.
- To highlight the role of media in covering the issues and work by volunteering during the corona crisis.

### **Research Questions**

- What is the role and importance of volunteer work during the novel corona crisis?
- What is the role played by millennials and young professionals in volunteer work?
- What is the impact of volunteer work on communities and societies?
- How have the NGOs been conducive and invaluablely contributed to the community?
- What is the role of media in covering the issues and work by volunteering during the corona crisis?

## **Literature Review**

### **Outlining the role and importance of volunteer work during COVID-19**

According to Shammi, Bodrud-Doza, Islam & Rahman, (2021) several volunteers came forward during the COVID-19 pandemic condition to provide relief to the needy at ground zero level. For example, Dr. Anita Suryanarayan Vice President of Operations carried out volunteering work in afternoons in the form of providing virtual sessions to people against Coronavirus. Dr. Anita allied with NGOs and educated people about the avoidance, treatment, symptoms, and doubts

about COVID-19. On the other hand, Sonali Shah who is an entrepreneur actively volunteered during the COVID-19 pandemic condition and provided Conversational English sessions in various schools through online mediums.

Khadse, Rosset, Morales, & Ferguson, (2018) analyzed that to combat the spread of COVID-19, the Department of Information and Public Relations (Karnataka) has established association with the two organizations such as Karnataka State Labor Institute to launch a program in which young volunteers will be appointed to execute tasks as Corona Warriors. The major task of the volunteers will be to thwart false information and rumors that are surrounding different social platforms. The volunteers would keep a tap on the false information that is spread in different social media groups such as Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, and others. It will help in reducing the excessive panic that is created in social sites from false information.

Bennett, (2013) examined that 1750 teachers of educational organizations such as eVidyaloka volunteered to provide education to more than 20,000 children in 233 villages located in ten states of India by using different languages such as Telugu, Malayalam, Hindi, Tamil, Kannada, and English. Other voluntary organizations such as Bhumi (youth volunteer-driven NGO), Sarvahitey (Delhi-NCR-based organization), World Youth Council (non-profit working organization), and Indian Foundation for Educational Transformation (volunteering unit) came forward and provided their services to the needy at ground level during the COVID-19 pandemic condition.

### **Understanding the contribution of NGOs in COVID-19**

There are different NGOs such as Ketto (Mission Oxygen- Helping Hospitals Save Lives), Hemkunt Foundation, Khalsa Aid, GiveIndia, Milaap, and others have come forward to provide support and assist in caregiving activities to marginalized sections in India. For example, Ketto is helping in accessing oxygen concentrators to needy patients, while Hemkunt is working at ground level to provide critical medical services to Covid patients in Mumbai and Gurugram. Khalsa is providing free oxygen cylinders to home isolated patients in Delhi and GiveIndia is providing relief material to Covid affected individuals.

Rubin, Abbasi & Voelker, (2020) examined that the NGOs distributed several products such as PPE kits, face masks, food materials, and others to the needy people in different locations. Apart from this, the Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy (CSIP) also revealed that NGOs and volunteers actively participated in the last mile delivery of essential products such as dry ration and sanitation kits, medical supplies, rehabilitation, and others to the distressed communities. The Voluntary Action Network India (VANI) also stated that the youth and millennials made a difference by participating in volunteering works such as support and services to the marginalized and untouched area during these difficult times. The different industries such as Reliance Industries Limited provided free meals to 50 lakhs individuals, distributed one lakh masks, 1000 PPE kits to the healthcare workers, 100-bed Covid-hospital, and 500 crore donation to the Prime Minister CARES Fund.

Choudhury, Koo, Li, Kishore, Balsari & Khanna, (2020) examined that NGOs played a significant role in providing care to the individuals by distributing free meals to 3 million individuals in the first three weeks of the lockdown. As per the Indian Government mandatory rule, all the corporate houses are required to contribute 2% towards Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities. The collection of the CSR amount was recorded to be INR 13000 crores in the year 2017-2018. The NGOs in India have collaborated with CSR fundraisers to get financial aid from them and carry out relief activities during the pandemic.

Shammi, Bodrud-Doza, Islam, & Rahman, (2021) examined that NGOs such as Uday Foundation, Goonj, Habitat for Humanity, Hasiru Dala, and others are working actively to provide support to the marginalized groups in India in different locations. For example, Uday Foundation has distributed 2 lakh sanitizers and feed more than 50000 individuals, while Goonj provided dry ration and personal care material to more than 1 million people in Delhi. Habitat for Humanity distributed masks, personal hygiene materials, hand sanitizers, and instructional materials to needy people in Mumbai, while Hasiru Dala helped garbage and waste pickers in six cities such as Bengaluru, Tumkur, Hubli, Mysore, Davanagere, and Dharwad by providing them food material and soaps.

### **Accentuating the role of Media Coverage in highlighting the contribution of Volunteer work**

Onuch, (2015) examined that media played a significant role in accentuating the contribution of NGOs and volunteer work in a different print, electronic, social media platforms. The different media channels covered and showcased the work and contribution that has been made by voluntary organizations, NOS, and volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the media channel such as India Today effectively covered the volunteering acts conducted by young volunteers such as Kaushik Raj, Aanya, Muskan Shandla that helped the people at the ground level during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Muskan helped a Covid patient in acquiring medical services by proving a lead, while Kaushik set up a team to provide the right leads to Covid patients so that they get the right medical services at right time.

Van Tassel, Murphy & Schmitz, (2020) examined that media channels such as CBS News also played an effective role in highlighting the contribution of volunteers that were actively supporting needy people during the COVID-19 condition. The news highlighted the volunteering act done by Lakshmi Mittal in providing medical services to Covid patients in Delhi. Lakshmi also started a blog to keep people informed about the medicines that are available in stock in different medical counters across Delhi. The contribution made by a volunteer who did not want to reveal his/her name was also highlighted by the CBS News channel. The unknown volunteer helped Covid patients to get SOS services by posting their difficulties on social media sites. Therefore, it can be said that media acts as a bridge in outlining the invaluable contribution made by the volunteers and NGOs for addressing community needs during the pandemic.

## Results and Discussion

Based on the above-discussed facts, it can be said that NGOs and volunteers are an integral part of Indian society contributing to well-being of the marginalized and poverty-stricken. Contributions made by NGOs and volunteers during COVID-19 pandemic are not new. They have been contributing to the Indian community for years and helped in uplifting the poor segments of the society. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted life and work detrimentally and increased the need for external help such as Non- Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and state agencies to overcome the sudden shocks faced due to the pandemic. As per NITI Aayog, more than 90,000 NGOs and Civil Society Organizations (CSO) came forward and provided support to the healthcare and governing agencies in delivering services to the poor, needy, and unprivileged sections of the community. The contribution of youth and millennials that voluntarily contributed to aid the people during the difficult time. The role of media is also highlighted in the research that has been covering each aspect of the pandemic from close eyes. The media covered the contributions of the NGOs and voluntary groups/individuals in a different print, digital, and social media channels. It encouraged other individuals and self-help groups to come forwards and extend help to needy people in the critical COVID-19 conditions.

## Conclusion and Future Research Directions

COVID-19 has created severe disruptions in the economy by spreading disease on a large scale and creating lockdown conditions. Under such conditions, it becomes a huge burden for the healthcare agencies and governing body to provide adequate care and support to large populations in different locations. The NGOs and volunteers give hope to these organizations by assisting them in carrying out caregiving activities. The role of media is also discussed in highlighting the contribution of volunteer work. However, information related to the role of NGOs, Volunteers, and media and their contribution has been limited in context to India which increases the need for study in this direction.

## References

1. Bennett, S. V. (2013). Effective facets of a field experience that contributed to eight preservice teachers' developing understandings about culturally responsive teaching. *Urban Education*, 48(3), 380-419.
2. Choudhury, P., Koo, W., Li, X., Kishore, N., Balsari, S., & Khanna, T. (2020). Food Security and Human Mobility During the COVID-19 Lockdown. *Harvard Business School Technology & Operations Mgt. Unit Working Paper*, (20-113), 20-113.
3. Khadse, A., Rosset, P. M., Morales, H., & Ferguson, B. G. (2018). Taking agroecology to scale: The zero budget natural farming peasant movement in Karnataka, India. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 45(1), 192-219.
4. Lancet, T. (2020). India under COVID-19 lockdown. *Lancet (London, England)*, 395(10233), 1315.

5. Onuch, O. (2015). EuroMaidan protests in Ukraine: Social media versus social networks. *Problems of post-communism*, 62(4), 217-235.
6. Rubin, R., Abbasi, J., & Voelker, R. (2020). Latin America and its global partners toil to procure medical supplies as COVID-19 pushes the region to its limit. *Jama*, 324(3), 217-219.
7. Shammi, M., Bodrud-Doza, M., Islam, A. R. M. T., & Rahman, M. M. (2021). Strategic assessment of COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh: comparative lockdown scenario analysis, public perception, and management for sustainability. *Environment, Development and Sustainability*, 23(4), 6148-6191.
8. Shammi, M., Bodrud-Doza, M., Islam, A. R. M. T., & Rahman, M. M. (2021). Strategic assessment of COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh: comparative lockdown scenario analysis, public perception, and management for sustainability. *Environment, Development and Sustainability*, 23(4), 6148-6191.
9. Tomar, A., & Gupta, N. (2020). Prediction for the spread of COVID-19 in India and effectiveness of preventive measures. *Science of The Total Environment*, 728, 138762. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7169890/>.
10. Van Tassel, J., Murphy, M., & Schmitz, J. (2020). *The New News: The Journalist's Guide to Producing Digital Content for Online & Mobile News*. Routledge.