



### Press Release

The largest survey to assess the impact of COVID 19 and the lockdowns on the rural poor was undertaken by India's leading NGOs in the country. The collaborating NGOs have footprints in most poverty-stricken belts in the country. The survey covered 5100 households in 47 districts in 12 States of the Union and carried out from April 27 to May 2, 2020, 35 days after the lockdown. The survey was jointly anchored by Transform Rural India Foundation, Delhi and Vikasanvesh Foundation, a development research centre based in Pune, Maharashtra and methodologically supported by Sambodhi, a well know research firm in Lucknow.

At a virtual conference today, the representatives of collaborating NGOs said that the rapid response representative in-person survey was carried out by the community workers to understand the impact of the pandemic on food security and livelihoods, coping mechanisms, preparedness for next agricultural season and drudgery of women. Participating NGOs were: Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN), BAIF Development Research Foundation (BAIF), Action for Social Advancement (ASA), SATHI-UP, Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP), Grameen Sahara and Transforming Rural India Foundation (TRIF).

The survey results are revealing and should ring alarm bells. What the survey reveals is

- a. A majority of households have with them very limited stocks of food grown by them in the last Kharif or Rabi. They will be solely dependent on the food supply through the PDS.
- b. While the months of peak food insecurity in most rain-fed regions are July and August, people are already experiencing food insecurity. They have begun consuming fewer items and eating fewer meals every day than similar periods in normal times.
- c. Indebtedness among rural poor is rising and nearly 30% of the respondents have already had to borrow from their kin or professional money lenders to meet subsistence costs.
- d. Early signs of acute distress are visible: all discretionary expenses on marriages or similar ceremonies are being cut down drastically. Their children are likely to be withdrawn from schools in 30% of the households.
- e. Households have begun depleting productive assets with households selling even bullocks or milch animals.
- f. With only a sixth of the households reporting return of their migrant members, the workload on women has significantly increased for fetching water and fuelwood and the drudgery shows no sign of abetting.
- g. Usually migrant family members return just prior to Kharif sowing but come with cash savings made by them in the cities. This time, they will return exhausted and with empty pockets. This situation can only become far worse with their arrival in the villages.
- h. As many as 40% of households reported having no seeds nor any access to farm credit for initiating kharif operations.

The survey covers most districts currently mapped as left-wing extremism affected districts. Unless the rural distress is alleviated, the situation could become volatile as the distress could be used to further alienate people. We believe that Governments need to step in and ensure uninterrupted and universal coverage of the PDS to avoid acute food insecurity. The Governments also need to intervene by ensuring seeds supply as well as provision of farm credit to the rural poor.

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