Mitigating the impact of COVID-19

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The Action for Support to Deprived Children (ASED) is a Swiss cooperation and development organization founded in Geneva in 1988. Its goal is to enable underprivileged children and youth help themselves by facilitating access to basic education and good quality professional training, tailored to their environment. ASED has been operating in India since 1991.

Of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, four are of particular importance to ASED work:

- No Poverty: end poverty in all forms everywhere
- Zero Hunger: end hunger, achieve food security, improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
- Quality education: ensure inclusive and quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- Gender Equality: achieve gender equality and empower all women & girls

ASED programme in India contributes to the country’s efforts in two distinct fields: education and disability-through partnership with nonprofits organizations, in different parts of the country.

Since March 2020, the world has been in the grip of the Covid-19 virus. In India, the pandemic and the subsequent lockdown struck at the start of the new academic year 2020-2021. For students from poor communities, this has created disturbances and loss of income for parent, hunger, deprivation etc.

Lotus Petal Foundation’s initiatives to combat Covid-19’s impact on education:

Since 2011, one of ASED partners in India, the Lotus Petal Foundation has been working in the Northern city of Gurugram- with the objective of helping children from the urban slums get access to quality education and healthcare. In light of the lockdown, LPF strengthened its willingness to serve and support its students by working out innovative ways to teach remotely. In addition, the school kitchen turned into a community kitchen, feeding the most vulnerable students and their families.

The Preparation:

Class wise Whatsapp groups were created and videos on how to avail digital learning were shared with the students and their parents. They were also briefed on the do’s and don’ts of online tools. Teachers were provided with laptops and data packs and were also trained for handling cyberbullying and cyber security issues.

Children in the pre primary and primary classes (3+-10 years of age) learned through audio and video clips on Whatsapp as well as LPF Youtube channel. For the older students, (upto 15/16 years), online classes were held through Zoom. Classes were also recorded and uploaded on Youtube. This was followed by daily homework using Google spreadsheets and online assessments were conducted using Google Forms.

The Progress:

In addition, to the online academic program, LPF went beyond to organize extra curricular activities, counselling sessions, virtual science labs, theatre classes and workshops on skills-using technology.
The Challenges Resolved: Nearly 70% of LPF students (come from migrant families-many working in the informal job market or as daily wage earners. They did not own Smartphones/laptops. To overcome this, all students were provided with a laptop, headphone, camera with internet connectivity and reimbursement of data pack. Strict monitoring was ensured to maintain effective learning. Recharge of data pack is linked to attendance.

Vinita Kumari, a senior class student, says “I had to borrow the smartphone from my neighbour to attend the online classes, and the data pack was also limited”.

Throughout the lockdown period of over two months, the students have received 1504 hours of online classes. Parent Teacher meetings have also been conducted online (recorded 82% participation).

Volunteers who have always contributed towards developing the confidence, personality and a world overview-transitioned during the pandemic towards E-Volunteering and continued to enrich the life of the students in most creative ways.

In addition to education, LPF has been also intervening to provide:

- **Nutrition & Medical services**: A mix of cooked meals and dry ration have been provided to the families during this period-in all 1,00,062 meals have been distributed till early June. The weekly medical service also moved towards telemedicine.

- **Livelihood Opportunities**: LPF has also has launched an online job portal,-Blue Khoj- with the skills and work experience of the parents. This database is accessed by LPF’s large base of supporters and helps the parents get better livelihood opportunities in case they have lost their present job.

The Covid-19 crisis has exposed the fragility of the lives of the migrants-LPF has taken the responsibility to provide the necessary support to ensure they are kept on the path towards a better life through education.