



# COVID19 RELIEF REPORT

## Moitrisanjog Society Cooch Behar

Address:

PO & Village: Ghughumari,  
Pin code – 736170,  
District: Cooch Behar, west Bengal

Contact:

Email: [moitrisanjog2011@gmail.com](mailto:moitrisanjog2011@gmail.com)  
Website: [www.moitrisanjog.weebly.com](http://www.moitrisanjog.weebly.com)  
Phone No: +91 7063418696

**July 2020**

## About us

---

Persons who do not fit into the socially constructed gender binary and the heteronormative sexual behaviour, those who identify themselves as transgender, Kothi, Hijras have been facing tremendous violence and discrimination in our society which is plagued by the patriarchal mindset. It has been quite challenging to grow up as an individual with all dignity, rights and equal opportunity for a gender-unidentified person and a person having a different sexual orientation. This group of people are unwelcome, and unaccepted in the family and in all other sections of a larger society as a result of which they have become the victim of rampant violence and discrimination. Most often they left with no other choice but to commit suicide or begging / sex work for living. The situation in the rural areas are even worse.

Given that back in 2009, a few transgender / gender variant persons based at Cooch Behar, North Bengal used to regularly meet and share their own stories of struggle and painful lives in order to vent out their pain and find solidarity in each other. Gradually more people were added to the informal group. Their ideas and thoughts started taking shape, they got enough strength from each other to collectively fight against the discrimination and violence inflicted on them. This solidarity group eventually turned out to be a community-based organisation (CBO) back in 2011.

The CBO was named Moitrisanjog, meaning “a network to connect friends”. Thus, the Moitrisanjog Society got officially registered under Society Act as a CBO in the year 2011. The society is committed to protest the violence against the queer community. The main objective of our society is to provide a supportive network to ensure that everyone from the queer community gets equal opportunity, rights and entitlements to grow as a human being with dignity and respect. Our society strives to provide financial security to the community through establishing alternative livelihoods such as the craftsmanship program. We also provide the community members with health, counselling and legal-aid services. We advocate for equal access to education, employment etc. Besides, we organise awareness programs in the larger society to fight against discrimination and violence.

## The Covid-Lockdown and our community

---

Today, during this worldwide fight against the Corona pandemic we are witnessing an unprecedented reality where physical distancing is a norm and staying at home, working from home has become a new way of life. But what about those who cannot afford to stay at home, those who are bound to come out for a living. The daily wage earners, whose livelihood is depending on social gathering, public transport - are in a crisis. Most of them have already been laid off. The trans-koti-hijra community is a socioeconomically marginalised community anyway. This sudden and prolonged lockdown has disproportionately affected our community.

The trans-koti-hijra community has been socially and economically marginalised in many ways. Their marginalization includes family rejection, discrimination in education, employment etc. and they are particularly susceptible to various forms of violence and health risk. A big chunk of this community is involved in sex work, begging at trains and traffic signals, dancing in wedding and other ceremonies for their living. Their livelihood is now at stake due to the sudden lockdown.

Those who are involved in sex work not getting any clients. They cannot continue begging since the trains and other transportations are shut down. Some of the wedding dancers are stranded in UP and Behar. The daily-wage working class people and all the people whose livelihood depend on direct human interaction are bearing the brunt of unplanned lockdown.

## Relief Work

---

Moitrisanjog has started reaching out to the worst effected people within the community ever since the lockdown happened. We tried to understand the crisis from the ground and started reaching out to the different agencies and individuals in order to raise funds to support our community. We made this relief support in two different ways –

- 1) We have made some direct support in terms of providing them with ration, organising community kitchen etc.
- 2) We have connected our community people to the individuals and agencies so that they can directly access support from them.

### Ration support

We have been able to help around 160 individuals from the community in the Mathabhanga and Dinhata subdivisions of Cooch Behar district. It has been possible to give them ration four times. We have given rice, pulses, soya bean, cooking oil and masks. In Alipurduar, we gave ration twice to 70 individuals from the transgender community.

While providing ration to our community members, we noticed that the poor people of Ghughumari village whose only vocation is making 'Shitalpati' and selling it to the local market are suffering a lot as due this lockdown which has stopped their selling of products.

We have reached out to 60 individuals and provided them with ration twice.

The ration that we have distributed has been arranged through online crowd funding and help from our donor agencies.



*Support to another district (Alipurduar)*



*Support to Hijra community*



*Support to migrant labour*



*Support to trans-koti community*

### Direct cash support

We have also linked the community people with the NISD scheme and as a result 240 transgender individuals from Coochbehar and Alipurduar have received Rs. 1500.

We could also connect our people with India Fellow and 60 individuals from our community received a onetime support of Rs. 1000.

Besides, we have also reached out to individuals and friends to raise funds and make some direct financial support to the community members who lost their source of income and are in distress. We could support around 10 community members from our friend's group.

In all three cases the supported amount has been directly transferred to the individual account of the community member. We helped in filling up the required format, making posters, providing required information about the community.



### Advocacy with the government

As a result of Moitrisanjog's advocacy with the State Government we have received 105 packets of dry ration. The Honourable SP & SDO of Coochbehar came in person to hand over the ration. We have distributed the packets to Hijra community people as well as the transgender individuals.



*Cooch Behar, District SP providing us with ration support*



*The Minister (Uttar Bango Unnayon) is providing us with ration support*

### Community kitchen

We have set up a community kitchen that has been functional since the 5<sup>th</sup> of May, 2020. The kitchen runs for five days a week and provides for approximately 50 trans-kothi-hijra individuals. In trying times that hang around the globe due to the COVID 19 crisis, hunger and poverty run rampant amongst trans-kothi-hijra networks. Needless to say, the kitchen

despite its obvious purpose also facilitates community-building and cements resistance against state oppression.

Moitrisanjog's initiative comes against the backdrop of a nationwide lockdown in India that has been continuing for two months and counting. While social distancing measures have been staunchly imposed by the state, social provisioning has not been looked into as much. This threatens the existence of kothi-hijra community members who are already burdened with unsustainable sources of livelihoods. Avenues of informal labour such as begging in trains, dancing at weddings/festivals and sex work has come to a standstill making the community hit the lowest of lows.

Many of the community members are homeless and estranged from their natal families. They often do not have identification and social security documents such as ration card, Aadhar card, voter ID card etc. with which they can seek benefits from the government. This is also the reason why they may fall out of the free ration initiatives of the government in response to the crisis. Housing is compromised because of pervasive stigma and discrimination coupled with inability to pay rent.

The community kitchen definitely becomes a saviour in such trying times ensuring the basic survival needs of trans-feminine lives. The kitchen also extends its services to local poor people who are not 'atmyanirbhar' enough.

Moitrisanjog operates on a non-metropolitan base far from the privileges of urban spaces and their kitchen is sustaining on crowd-funding appeals and donations from well-wishers. The organization plans to keep the kitchen functioning even after the lockdown is lifted until circumstances return to normalcy.

This is a brilliant example of crisis management and the kitchen has been running successfully for a month now. Let us hope that the flames of resistance and thriving keep the pot burning.



## Awareness

While we were providing ration to artisans of Shitalpati in the Ghughumari village we had notice that there was no awareness about the Covid-19 whatsoever.

We decided to interact with the villagers about the infective nature of this virus and distributed mask and sanitizer as preventive measures.

## An account of our relief support during lockdown (March – June, 2020)

| Relief support      | What                                                                           | Reached out (community) | Area                                    | Date                                                                      | How many times | Those who Supported us in the initiative                                                                     |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ration              | Rice, pulses, cooking oil, soya bean, flour, Salt                              | 143                     | Cooch Behar, Dinhata                    | 28 <sup>th</sup> March<br>2 <sup>nd</sup> April<br>16 <sup>th</sup> April | 3 times        | BDS Somobhabona , AID ,KWS, Parivaar, South Asian Trans Queer Group                                          |
| Ration              | Rice, pulses, cooking oil, soya bean, mask                                     | 70                      | Alipurduar                              | 30 <sup>th</sup> March<br>15 <sup>th</sup> April                          | 2 times        | Online crowd funding, COVID All India Relief                                                                 |
| Direct cash support | Rs. 1500                                                                       | 140                     | Cooch Behar<br>Alipurduar               |                                                                           | 1 time         | NISD scheme - Social Justices and Employment Department                                                      |
| Direct cash support | Rs. 1000                                                                       | 60                      | Cooch Behar<br>Alipurduar               |                                                                           | 1 time         | India Fellow Network based in Delhi                                                                          |
| Ration              | Rice, Dal, Potato, biscuits, soap, soya-bean, sanitizer                        | 120                     | Cooch Behar                             | 17 <sup>th</sup> April                                                    | 1 time         | Government of West Bengal, Social welfare Department                                                         |
| Ration              | Rice, Oil, Soya-bean, Potato, Dal, Soap, Turmeric & chilli powder              | 67                      | Mathabhanga, Boiragir Haat, Cooch Behar | 6 <sup>th</sup> May                                                       | 1 time         | Online crowd funding, COVID All India Relief, Individual Supporters, Parivaar, South Asian Trans Queer Group |
| Ration              | Rice, Oil, Soya-bean, Potato, Dal, salt, turmeric & Chilli powder, Soap, flour | 43                      | Ghughumari Gram panchayat               | 30 <sup>th</sup> April                                                    | 4 times        | Goonj, voice an effort, Based in Delhi                                                                       |
|                     |                                                                                | 92                      | Dinhata, Mathabhanga, Cocch Behar       | 10 <sup>th</sup> May                                                      |                |                                                                                                              |
|                     |                                                                                | 105                     | Ghughumari, Dinhata                     | 22 <sup>nd</sup> May                                                      |                |                                                                                                              |
|                     | Ration and sanitary napkins                                                    | 190 Migrant labourers   | Ghughumari                              | 13 <sup>th</sup> June                                                     |                |                                                                                                              |
| Financial support   | Rs. 2000                                                                       | 40 Hijra community      | Siliguri                                | 7 <sup>th</sup> May                                                       | 1 time         | Online crowd funding-Ketto                                                                                   |
| Community Kitchen   | Lunch                                                                          | Average 30 people daily | Ghughumari                              | 5 <sup>th</sup> May to 5 <sup>th</sup> June                               | 5 days / week  | AID India, Quarantined Student Youth Network, Bong East Alumni Association – Delhi                           |
|                     | Lunch – home delivery                                                          | 15 people daily         | Ghughumari village                      | 2 <sup>nd</sup> & 3 <sup>rd</sup> week of June                            | 5 days / week  |                                                                                                              |

## The Road Ahead

We have no idea about what lies ahead, what is our future, but one thing we know for sure is that we will have to continue our relief work as at this juncture. The most important thing for us is to support our community in this crisis. Our only concern is that not a single person should go hungry. The government of West Bengal has assured to provide us with the same ration support again in August. Meanwhile, we will also try and support the most vulnerable people in our community according to our capacity.

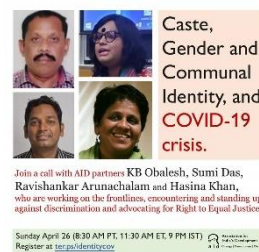
## Recognition of our relief work



Certificate from UDAHR



Certificate from Human Rights Forum of India



Participation in webinar organised by AID



Relief work covered by Media



কোচবিহারে করেন



উত্তরবঙ্গ সংবাদ | ১১ই মে, ২০২০ | পাতা - ৩

Community Kitchen covered by Media