



Ministry of Housing  
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Smart City  
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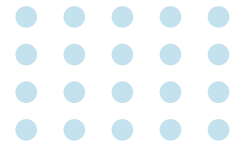
iscf  
Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs

# ISCF DIGEST

Volume 1 // April- June 2020  
India Smart Cities Fellowship Programme

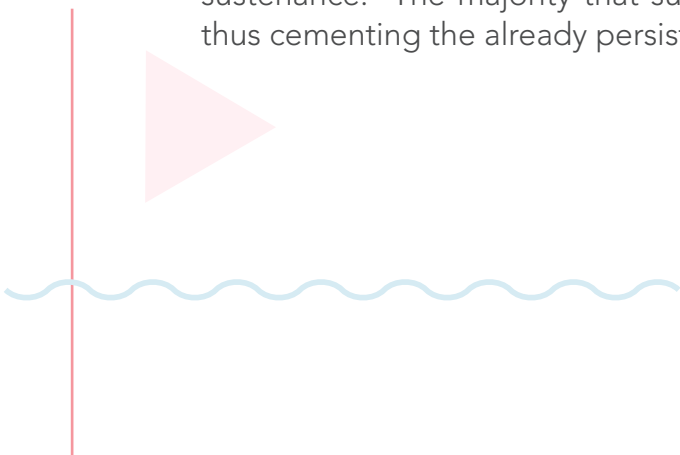


# Introduction



2020 is facing one of the biggest public health crises of the present-day 21st century i.e. the CoronaVirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). It continues to affect millions of lives by pushing many to their untimely deaths. Additionally, the pandemic and the lock-down that was put in place to fight the virus have fastened the economic crisis grappling cities globally, affecting all sectors severely. At large, the pandemic has triggered a chain of events within the healthcare and governance sectors of every nation at the helm of defence. Some events set in motion by the pandemic could be contested on a global scale with global solutions, yet many are peculiar and require contextual solutions.

As historically evident, India too, just like any other nation hit by the pandemic has tackled the virus with an initial nationwide lockdown; a practice prevalent during pandemics. The lockdown in turn forced the professionals from all the sectors to change the lens of viewing their practice. As necessity is the mother of all inventions, some succeeded to survive in their professions through adaptations via digital mediums or a change in the work process, but many on the other hand lost their livelihoods and had to switch to alternative methods of finding monetary sustenance. The majority that survived are considered to be privileged, thus cementing the already persisting inequalities in the country.

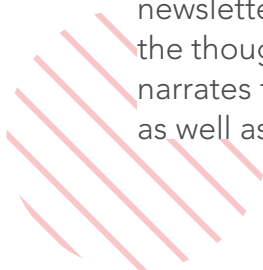




Humans are social animals, who seek innumerable mediums to express and convey their feelings to others. The pandemic has partially severed our physical communication, enclosing us within four walls and a roof, if we're lucky. This precarious situation has significantly altered not only our everyday schedules, but also the way we behave; both inside and outside the space we call our home. The newsletter reflects on the perspectives of people from varied backgrounds, the changes induced in their professional and personal lifestyles by the current situation. It questions what distinguishes them from each other, and if there is any distinction left. The issue also focuses on analysing the pandemics in history, the common links between them and ways of investigations that were undertaken to combat the same. These analyses question how comparisons made between the past and the current patterns can be instrumental in dealing with the uncertainty a pandemic presents. Finally, we highlight how time and again, possessing vital information has proven to be a necessity and an asset while addressing large-scale uncertainty.

From questions pertaining to the functioning of public spaces to discussing the future of design and urban development, we realise, the first step towards establishing a new normal is to learn from the past. COVID-19 pandemic has forced the policymakers, urbanists, planners, architects and the realty sector to critically question and rethink the future of the urban quotidian. In the wake of this, we write about the fundamentals involved in the process of design and development of our urban areas, the value these spaces have attained with time and their relationship with the urban population. Essentially, we unpack the discourses that have led to the current state of our cities and throw light on the very first step required to rethink development in terms of envisioning a future that is socially, economically, spatially and technologically inclusive of every cadre of the society.

The **ISCF Digest April-June 2020** is the first volume of the official newsletter of the **India Smart Cities Fellowship Programme**. It brings forth the thoughts, observations, realities and stories of the cohort of 2020-21. It narrates the perspectives of; and from people, who are both professionals as well as common citizens caught amidst this unusual situation.



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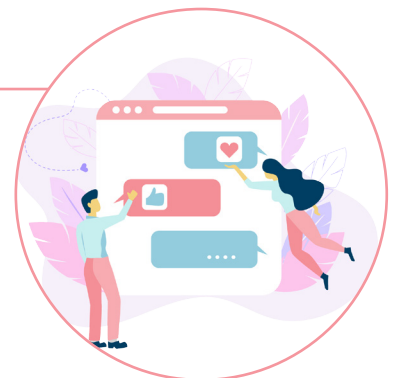
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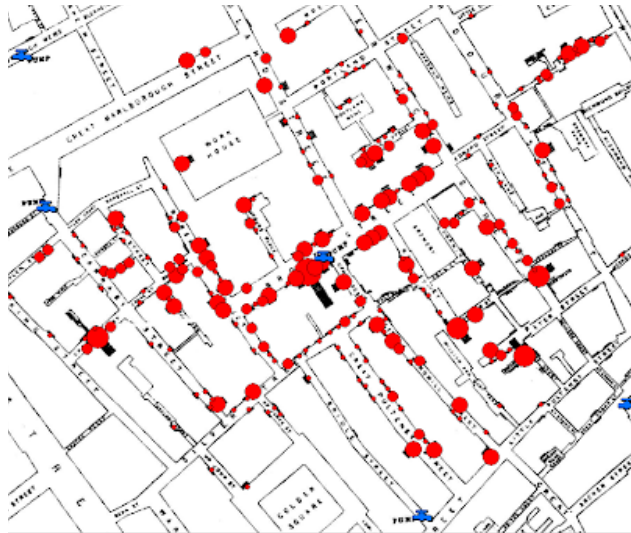
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# 1 Pandemics and Data: Why Does it Count!



*John Snow's Cholera Data in More Formats, Robin's Blog, 13th March 2013, Retrieved from : <http://blog.rtwilson.com/john-snows-cholera-data-in-more-formats/>*

In the mid-nineteenth century, Soho, a London suburb was struck by Cholera. Back then, sewerage systems were primitive, and sewage waste from homes and commercial activities was dumped into the River Thames. Town wells and common pumps were used to access drinking water. The outbreak prompted Dr. John Snow to track the patients of cholera and investigate their source of drinking water. He used a geographical grid to determine the extent of spread of cholera through the water systems in the town. Even though the mapping technique helped Dr. Snow in stemming the epidemic greatly, it was considered as sheer nonsense by the officials, who refused to clean the cesspools and water systems. They called it a 'belief that they do not want to buy into'. However, today, Dr John Snow is considered as a pioneer in the field of public health research and epidemiology.

Living in the 21st century, we now have a number of methods to obtain and utilize data to battle a health crisis. Two methods that we continue to use today since the previous century are: health surveillance on a large population and data-driven decision making.

## Health surveillance on large scale populations

COVID-19 showed us the importance of contact tracing to stop the spread of infection. This is done by creating

a time-series contact graph using GPS, Bluetooth or telecom data and identifying all secondary contacts of an infected person.

Health surveillance of large populations was previously used during the Nipah virus (NiV) outbreak. When the first critical patient of NiV was admitted to the hospital, their blood samples were immediately sent to the Manipal Center for Virus Research in Karnataka. After testing positive for NiV, more than 2500 contacts of the NiV-positive patients were monitored by the state. Surveillance was scaled to the neighbouring districts as well. A 24-hour helpline was established to answer queries from citizens and all channels of social media were used to stop the spread of misinformation. As a result of continuous efforts from the state and central governments, human-to-human transmission of NiV was contained.

## Data-driven decision making

Florence Nightingale, famously known as the 'Lady with the Lamp', is little known for her contribution to use of data to create graphics, especially the 'polar area diagram' to map variations in deaths caused due to epidemics. In 1855, when diseases like cholera and typhus were on the rise, she established a data-driven correlation between the use of improved sanitation

and reduction in the number of deaths.

Today, there is enormous healthcare data available in our cities that could be utilized to monitor both healthcare infrastructure and the movement of the people in order to aid public authorities in making informed, real-time decisions. During the COVID outbreak, Indian cities adopted real-time decision-making tools to aggregate information about the city, to onboard volunteers and start a hunger helpline by connecting to available data sources.

Ebola, a massive life-threatening epidemic in Africa prompted UNICEF to use two data platforms for disease control on the ground: U-Report and Edutrac. Developed with the help of a group of adolescent girls in the West Point neighbourhood of Monrovia, U-Report is a real-time two-way information system which uses SMS to both transmit information regarding the disease, and collect user information and requirements. Edutrac, on the other hand, was used in Sierra Leone to gather real-time information about various hygiene oriented needs of schools.

Additionally, modern use of data includes mapping of affected zones, genome sequencing and preparing knowledge graphs of symptoms among others.

Trend prediction of disease growth through time-space constraints aids administrators in mapping quarantine and containment zones to restrict movement and provide essential services to people. Correlated features like the rate of increase in cases and cluster maps have helped in estimating the burden on hospitals and essential healthcare supply requirements like oxygen, ICU beds, PPE kits and ventilators during COVID times.

Genome Sequencing is a process of determining the complete DNA sequence of an organism's genome.

It can help in the development of different kinds of tests, medicines and vaccines. It also helps identify the mutations and map the spread of the epidemic by identifying various strains in different parts of the world. The next step involves data-driven drug discovery. Once the genome of a virus is identified, certain compute data-intensive protein folding methods would be employed to build the right protein to be attached to the virus to render it inactive.

Data-driven diagnostic tools are based on various kinds of data like sound and images. Diagnostic tools used in the past were driven by chemical sciences. They take time to develop. Today, however, researchers are using computer vision and audio processing techniques in medicine to identify COVID symptoms by using a chest X-Ray or even the sound of a person's cough.

Epidemic knowledge-graph construction of symptoms and response to certain medication for patients in different age groups, demographics and comorbidity is vital for a medical practitioner. A real-time knowledge graph can assist in decision-making by identifying the right set of treatments through a recommendation system driven by big data and Machine Learning.

Data has proven to be useful since the last couple of centuries to understand the transmission of diseases, discover strains of viruses and contain diseases. Aforementioned epidemiologist Dr. Snow was not taken seriously by the authorities when he first mapped the spread of cholera in Soho. Today, collection and analysis of data during epidemics is far more important and life-saving. While issues of data privacy have risen, the role of governments in policymaking to protect data becomes crucial. However, creating machinery to assimilate local data and put it to good use and keeping the data transparent to avoid the spread of misinformation, while taking care of individual privacy should be encouraged.

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## 2 A Shift Towards the Digital - An Essential Survival Trick for Sectors



*Manil Kandwal, Digital Art, 22nd May 2020, Retrieved from the Author*

Globally, India ranks second in terms of having the largest independent workforce after the United States of America. More than 15 million people work independently in professions dealing with content writing, designing, animation, videography, ideography and academic writing. The independent 'Work from Home' culture was prominent for these professions since they are digitally-based.

Even before Covid-19 hit us, this workforce has been basing their livelihoods and building their identity independent of any outdoor office space. "Even though in terms of pricing and budgeting, Covid-19 has influenced the economic ecosystem of a freelancer drastically, communication-wise there isn't much change within the creative industry," says Amalendu Kaushik, an animation artist. With the onset of Covid-19, freelancers have had no choice but to lower their industry-standard prices, even after countless negotiations with the clients. When questioned further about the ease of work, the young freelancer candidly admitted, "I always believed that Work from Home is a very effective way of working as a creative freelancer. We have a virtual workspace on WhatsApp and Slack, where we collaborate with a lot of freelancers virtually. However, as a freelancer, it is extremely challenging to be at the forefront since many talented young professionals with a similar

profile are doing an amazing job." says Rajat Gautam, a professional photographer. He elaborates, "If there's anything common with freelancers across the world, it is the fact that they are always ready and prepared to face any sort of uncertainty. Of course, this pandemic is something nobody expected and its impact has been enormous on us."

This pandemic has not only affected the freelancers but another sector of the workforce too- the event management professionals. The hospitality sector has taken a turbulent hit and its chances of survival are grim considering the present scenario. As wedding seasons in India depend on auspicious dates occurring in April, May, October and November, the revenue generated on these remains cancelled or postponed. Anukriti Batra, an Event Manager describes her situation and the dependency of her workers on the company, "A wedding involves many people for it to be planned and organized, of which most of them are hired on daily wages, with it being their only source of income." She further adds that people who are engaged in works that require arranging tents, flowers, lights and the catering businesses for the wedding processions are on the verge of losing their livelihoods.

One of the key parts of weddings, or any event for that matter, the Food Catering sector has taken a big



blow, especially in the state of Uttarakhand. The state produces several cooks & chefs who are not employees in India but abroad too. For example, in Japan, China and parts of Western Europe, this profession has been the key source of livelihoods for Indian immigrants. Viraj Sikand, Founder, Palm Plates - a farm kitchen which is a unit of 9 Palm Resort, runs a family business in Dehradun. He says, "Catering companies want to retain their well-trained staff. So regardless of the economic conditions, they have been given a regular salary to retain the talented lot." Allowance of the home delivery option granted by the government brought a ray of hope for the restaurants and catering businesses to sustain themselves. The idea of Cloud Kitchens is in the loop now, many catering businesses are looking to refine their services through this system. This could be a good way of generating income to sustain and flourish.

Stories of being 'Vocal About Local' are surfacing now, two examples of which are the enterprises Pahaadi Gaadi and I-Woot. "At Pahaadi Gaadi, our passion and goal are to serve the best of local and fresh to our customers. We have always supported the idea of promoting local and now the entire country is on the path to be vocal for local. We will be making extra efforts towards ensuring our services are delivered taking all necessary precautions and arrangements. Things will be more clear in the next few weeks for sure," says Abhishek Rajput, owner of Pahaadi Gaadi.

Coming to creative MSMEs, sustainability generally

lies in the list of robust clients they acquire. As small start-up firms, it's quite difficult to cope with situations like Covid-19. There are so many uncertainties in the market generally, but the worst possible situation looms over these enterprises now as the majority of these businesses have been shut since a long period. Omanshu Saini, co-Founder of I-Woot says, "Since we majorly work with clients from hospitality and private firms, we are facing huge financial loss and might soon run out of business; all due to an unforeseen pandemic. With no business, no running capital along with the earlier payments stuck due to lockdown, we don't really see a ray of hope right now."

There is no doubt that we are living in uncertain times. The pandemic has now left us with the only option of being optimistic and think of solutions to fight the challenges laid out before us. The above-mentioned sectors are strategizing for their survival now through grounded online mediums. They are improving their delivery to the masses by networking with creative agencies and individuals for good content. Also, the pandemic is giving rise to multidisciplinary collaborations, forcing humans to change their lens. It is a situation that has triggered many patrons to commission new works and to get involved in social causes.

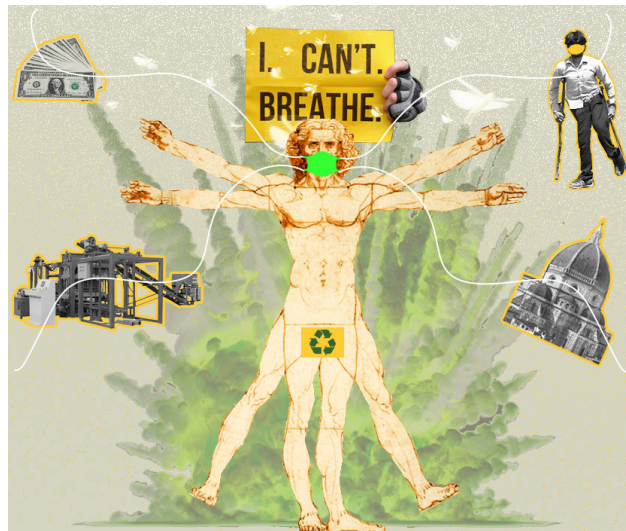
Healthy competition amongst businesses is a culture prevalent since ages and has also proven to be important, but collaborating together now to sustain is the need of the hour.



Abhisikha Das



## 3 On Design Changing the Pandemic World



Syed Mohammad Hamza Abdullah, *The Vitruvian Man: Vanity, Voicelessness and Vicissitudes*, 31st May 2020

**D**esign – It’s a broad term having different meanings and values for different people. In our time, the word will presumably resonate with, amongst many things, graphic design, visual communication, a piece of clothing or furniture, architecture or engineering at large. However, there are so many other connotations that the word encompasses. And essentially, its implications continue to shape the world we have been living in since time immemorial.

The role of design in shaping our past, present and now the post-pandemic future, goes back to the invention of the wheel, the design of which allowed us humans to harness rotational motion. This, in turn, enabled our evolution from inarticulate nomadic tribes to intelligent beings excelling in art, science and technology. Inherently, design has always shaped the way we strive to be more productive and efficient, face new challenges and come up with innovative solutions.

Many remnants of our past speak for the argument that design, at any given time, was not just architecture wearing cosmetic faces, but an important tool for understanding and resolving the unique challenges of that particular time. It is for instance, evident in the 14th century Renaissance movement, which is credited with bridging the gap between the Middle Ages and modern-day civilization through closely linking design with art and

technology. In the later centuries, design had continued to respond to the major shifts in socio-economic orders, aftermaths of wars, and technological innovations. With the advent of industrialisation, design was now not merely a medium of self-expression, grandeur and opulence. It had now begun to lend itself to the cause of creative problem-solving. The bid to keep up with the population boom and an increasingly consumerist society prompted mass-production of goods. Thus, resulting in modernist design pioneers like Walter Gropius, Louis Sullivan and Le-Corbusier, arguing for a world where necessity and function would take precedence over magnificence, pride and emotional overtones.

It is evident in the manner our world has evolved that design has played a prominent role in shaping it on the forefront. However, when we talk about design changing the world today, it tends to sound a little grand and a far-fetched idea, and sometimes even ridiculous.

Primarily because the current design paradigms have failed to provide answers to some of the most complex pre-existing social, economic and environmental challenges, which in the wake of the CoronaVirus crisis, have amplified and nakedly portrayed the vast fault lines prevailing in the current world order. Upon a pre-pandemic retrospection, we now realise that our cities have been built replacing our biodiversity with concrete

jungles to cater to more needs within limited resources, and in the process, pushing billions of people below the socio-economic margins. Additionally, our industries are exploiting our water reserves and polluting the air. The buildings we design consume 60 per cent of our generated electricity, most of which are produced through fossil fuels; and for procuring which again, we engage in horrid war-mongering and kill what lives in this world.

Today, we stand at a juncture of time where the surmounting challenges of this pandemic, on top of the existing global poverty, climate change, inequality and war have shaken the very foundations of who we are as a species. The mass demand for survival, sustenance, growth and comfort has ousted the idea of 'natural balance' in our habitats. Consequently, after years of unchecked consumption and mindless expansion, the present healthcare crisis has unmasked the conveniently hidden flaws in our societies and therefore, allowed a sudden hard-hitting fear of extinction to creep into our collective psyche. We are now compelled to revisit the role of design, among other processes, to help sustain the world.

**Surely, design can change the world again, as it always has. But not at once. And definitely not alone.**

Upon enlarging the definition of design to accommodate more interdisciplinary action, it no longer seems to be limited to iconic buildings or products. For it to be an actor of change in a post-pandemic world, it has to be a blend of everything – an interdisciplinary process with different stakeholders involved in creating a set of solutions. For this to be achieved, the design has to be accessible to all people, so that they identify the common goal of coming together as a species to ensure a sustainable future. And this cannot be realised until a virtue of 'design thinking' is fostered within each individual around.

**But what is design thinking? And why is it relevant in a post-pandemic future?**

It is a creative but iterative process that revolves around a deep interest in developing an understanding of the people whom the design intends to serve. As we move forward with accommodating COVID-19 as the new normal in our lives, design thinking is relevant now more than ever, as it fosters the qualities of empathy, observation and curiosity that this world now desperately needs. In a post-pandemic future, design thinking must essentially be a process of asking the right questions about fixing our pre-pandemic socio-economic, communal and environmental inequities, which have made the virus a lot deadlier for low-income groups and minorities. Further, it must now include revisiting the assumptions of our celebrated notions of the 'world-class development' – which is nothing but a rush to consume and produce more – and forecasting the implications of the ways we want to forge the new world order.

With a potential to be nurtured into the young minds through education, design thinking can prove to be a game-changing tool towards unravelling the unanticipated consequences of the pandemic, in human-centric ways. It is a process that involves studying people to figure out what's lacking in their lives and what needs to be done. It is a method of arriving at an array of ideas and solutions that must undergo testing to know what works the best for everyone so that none gets left behind.

If we can instil the values of design thinking as the driving force behind our social orders, economies and our politics, perhaps we go a long way towards rectifying our mistakes, reinstating the severed social contracts due to the pandemic and solving the imminent and unaccustomed challenges we face as human beings today.

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Syed Mohammad Hamza Abdullah



## 4 The COVID-19 Struggle for Vulnerable Age Groups



*Manil Kandwal, An Old Green Day, 22nd May 2020, Retrieved from the Author*

COVID-19, despite many efforts, has rendered the world helpless regarding life and death across all lands. Like any normal year, it was a time ripe for young individuals to plan for higher education in foreign lands, young professionals ready for vacations, grandparents eagerly waiting for their grandchildren's summer visit, women entrepreneurs finally starting their ventures and many more hopeful situations were taking fruit. Suddenly, Covid-19 rendered humans dysfunctional, ripped out their dreams and left them facing raw situations. When patience and tolerance are challenged, solidarity arises and wins over any crisis. And this is a crisis!

As per the 2011 Census of India, there are approximately 7.6 million senior citizens in India and now more than ever, there is a need to provide the utmost care, attention and abundant love as many of them might feel lonely, especially with their growing age. Multiple reasons resonate towards this loneliness, one being the rising number of nuclear families. Out of the many factors that can be listed for causing this rise, some are; children moving out for education and career prospects, fewer activities to engage in, restrictions in freedom of mobility and so forth. With the nation under the fifth stage of the lockdown, the rate of these activities has reduced drastically, allowing families to spend more time at home.

Since social distancing is compulsory, mohalla news exchange with the domestic help has stopped. This is a worry for Labanya, 65, Dehradun as the domestic help was her only companion and portal through which she could access her locality and its residents, and their chattering information. Though this pandemic has stopped her from seeing her domestic help, she says, "I do appreciate the fact that through this lockdown I can see more of my family, and this makes me happy." Experts recommend developing new skills and playing indoor games for the senior citizens to fight a monotonous life, but the task is not an easy one for Pushpadevi, who is in her late 70's now and already finished knitting a sweater along with a muffler in the Dehradun summer. As a person who already has reached the age of wisdom, is witty and has the power of innocence, she is fighting Covid-19 by washing gas cylinders, sanitizing cash alongside binge-watching Ramayana and Mahabharata on television. She sighs, "Sitting here on this chair in the verandah with gates as high as the Guava tree, I miss my friend who would often come in for tea, and we would sit together absorbing the soft evening sun."

Speaking of senior citizens' financial dependency, many services are available for senior citizens to make them somewhat independent, one of them being their timely pensions, presently the only source of income available

to fight this situation. Despite these services provided, fears arise through the spread of misinformation and myths. Additionally, discriminatory behaviour towards specific communities proves to be extremely harmful to the older age groups. Certain stigmas that we have heard during this trying time, such as allegations that only Muslims carry the virus or that North-East Indians, due to their facial features, are Chinese allies, can be a cause of particularly great mental agony to senior citizens. It is the moral responsibility of the family to address this kind of polarization, to let them know about the falsity, facts and logic along with making them aware of the kind of thought process it leads to.

Moving onto another vulnerable group - children. Their cognitive minds should be potentially filled with the correct information to digest the changes in their surroundings and explore the situation accordingly. After all, their socio-psychological growth is vital even during such times. Parents play an important role in enabling the environment needed for this socio-psychological growth. They have the inevitable responsibility of making their children resistant to fake information, plan their daily discipline and take the opportunity to learn and practice life skills. "My room has become a classroom with daily online classes and the ease of early summer break is keeping me indoors" says Vairabhah, student of Aryan School, Dehradun. The initiative of keeping their spirit alive is a struggle.

Physical activities are a must for body growth and the virtual gaming world is not helping," complained his mother. "Being compassionate to people suffering, donating dry ration kits to Doon Happy Meal has made us understand and appreciate our privileges. These are life lessons for us," exclaimed the 12-year-old boy.

As for the young tutor Ichchhit Kimothi, he yearningly says, "My life for the past few years has revolved outside my home. I spend a mere few hours at my house, the majority time is spent outside either working or chilling with friends. I like teaching English language and go for tuitions from one corner of the city to the other. This pandemic has created a change in that particular ecosystem". With social distancing, educational professionals' earnings have been affected and have sent them spiralling backwards in their careers, but they are still faring better than other sectors through online lectures.

Covid-19 is a crucial time, it has affected us both mentally and physically and taking care of one's health on both these segments is necessary. Even though the numbers of infected people are increasing exponentially and leading us to more crises, the world is nothing if not hope and preparedness. The ongoing pandemic will be remembered as a dark memoir of our casual behaviour.



Abhishikha Das



## 5 The Topsy Turvey Life of a Mexican in Locked-down India



*Manuel Diego, The Last Flight before Pandemic, 11th March 2020*

Arriving in India, the period between a few hours before the first day of the Fellowship and less than a week before the national lockdown has been a very intense life experience for me. Since the moment I was selected as a Fellow I was aware that my life will take a 360 degree-turn, thus I knew I had to be prepared for a completely different and new life. But not even the most imaginative mind would ever envision the life we have been living for the last few months.

My name is Manuel, I am a Mexican and I am lucky to be the only international Fellow in the 2020-2021 ISCF cohort. Since the moment I was selected, my life entered a fast-forward mode. Moving to another country is always a complicated and exhausting process. In the time of two months that I had, I was busy with calls, paperwork, visa, arrangements of my previous work, farewells and much more. Along with this, I had to mentally prepare myself for the upcoming change and deal with the situation of my dear ones vanishing suddenly. In a blink of an eye, I was boarding a plane to take an exhausting trip to get to the other side of the world.

The difficulties associated with the pandemic commenced since I arrived at Mexico International Airport. Precaution measures were already in place at the airport, with special security and sanitary checks to those flying to the USA. The connecting flight at New

York was even worse, precautions were listed with a note of paranoia in the air. And after countless hours of the journey, I was finally landing in beautiful India! I felt that my problems have taken a step back.

When visiting India, as the majority of the lucky-enough foreigners would tell you, the extreme emotions begin from the moment you descend the aircraft. I was prepared for it, after all, this was not my first time here. But this time everything was different and extremely intense; I was surprised that it was possible after already visiting the country before. Indira Gandhi International Airport looked uncannily devoid of life, the staff and the flight passengers were the only people I encountered at the airport, the time spent at the huge airport felt like a long journey. It felt similar to a scene in a video game; if you were lucky enough to make it through the checkpoint then you were able to continue to the next level, and as we all know unfortunately some of us don't cross all levels.

Similar to the majority of video games, the levels here were infinite. Just to mention some, it included us sorting uncountable revisions, medical checks, paperwork, etc. In the end, after an exhausting journey, some of us were free to go and content about it. Not getting into the details, but getting from the airport to my hotel in the middle of the night was a nightmare for me. The

reason for the nightmare were the following factors - the rising worldwide pandemic, the political situation that exploded during the visit of my dear friend Donald Trump and the Holi celebrations created an explosive situation, especially in Delhi. Though leaving behind these problems, I finally, safely reached my hotel room and had some hours to rest, at least I tried to. The next I knew, I was getting ready for the first day of work at ISCF.

Unsurprisingly, I got lost on my way to work and arrived late on the very first day. I had the luck to know some of the Fellows and finally shared a delicious heartwarming Indian lunch. Later in the evening, I came to know that all the borders were closed and all international flights were banned from that day. Effectively, I was one of the very last people to enter India.

In less than a week, the new 'normal' that defined my life was splitting my day's time between work hours while simultaneously trying to find a place to live. In a span of a few days, without any prior notice, we were sent to Work From Home. Starting a new life in a foreign country is always very complicated, doing it in less than a week with basically everything banned, you can imagine my plight! As a result, since that very day, I have been living with nothing but a bed and everything that you can pack in a small luggage bag, which I assure you is very little. My last real interaction with a human was

the last day at the office.

To be completely honest, I have been facing innumerable problems, be it the simple and the easiest day-to-day tasks one can think of or staying positive and happy for my emotional sanity. I am frustrated to be trapped inside a flat, as travelling around half the world has made me realize that a flat, after all, is four walls and a ceiling. I am amidst a total lockdown which took away the opportunity of merging myself with the Indian culture. After all, that was one of my main mottos to live here and something that I was eagerly looking forward to.

As a part of this experience, I have been learning that we don't need much to be happy, what you can pack in a piece of luggage is more than enough. Also, this situation taught me, and to a lot of us, the art of being alone. During tiring times, we tend to underestimate ourselves and take things for granted, but rarely allow ourselves to learn and practice it. Being humans and complex living beings, I am convinced that is one of those things you could not master even in a lifetime, but the lockdown helped me to know myself a lot more and even love myself. Hopefully, all these learnings will help me to be a better version of myself and for those surrounding me. The whole point of this anecdote is to rescue the learnings and positive outcomes gained from this situation, which are more.



Manuel Diego



# 6 Corona: Not a Child's Play!

## hide and seek: before Covid19



## hide and seek: during Covid19



Subarna Sadhu



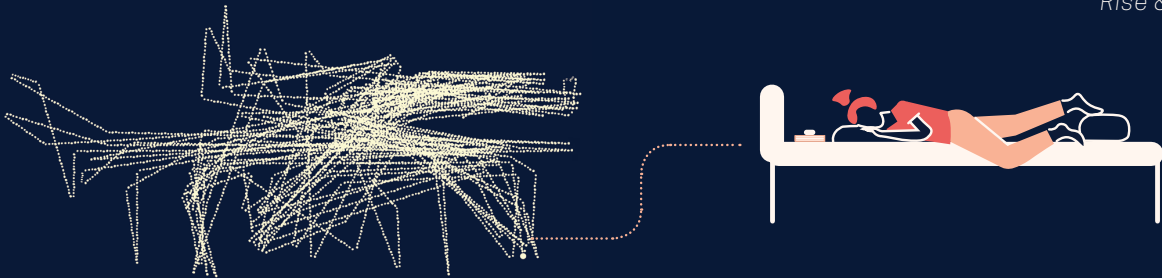


## 7 The Art Of Staying At Home

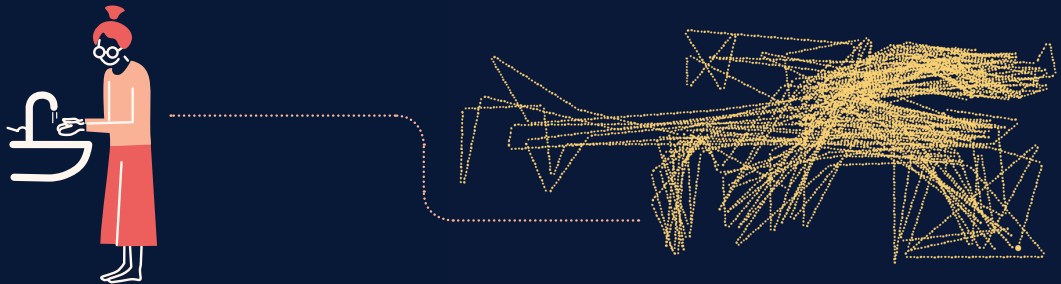
The Art Of Staying At Home is a mapping exploration of my footsteps within the boundaries of my home during the lockdown period. With the lines between professional & personal spaces & events blurring, I ventured into this week-long exercise as a quick hiatus from my routine by combining forces of simple manual methods and digital tools. Undulating, meandering curves and lines of my movements illustrate the visual output of the experiment. Unsurprisingly, the distinction of a weekday from a weekend is adrift. However, amongst

each similar day, there is a lot that is different. From watering a succulent on one day to chasing a lizard off the kitchen on the other, these minuscule movements which may otherwise go unnoticed, add to the overall eccentricity of the outcome. With actions triggered by the setting of amenities, the relationship of planning and movements being interwoven facets of design could not have been more apparent. Although the exercise concluded almost a week back, I find myself tracing footsteps in my head and visualising a web of lines wondering what guise may emerge out of it.

Rise & Shine



Wash up

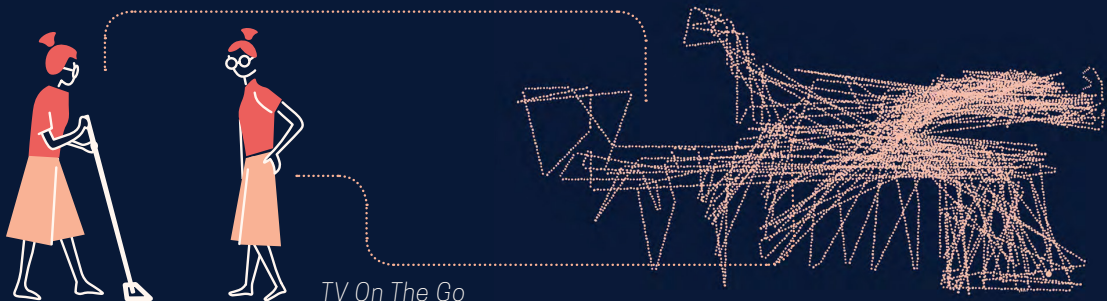


Feeding Homies

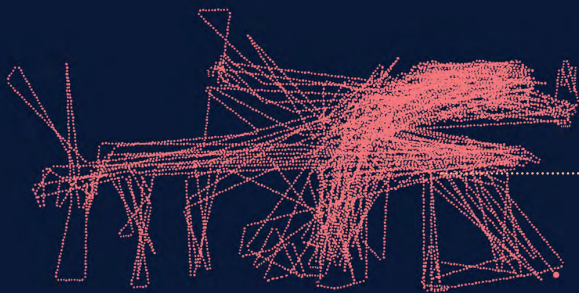


Filter Coffee Station

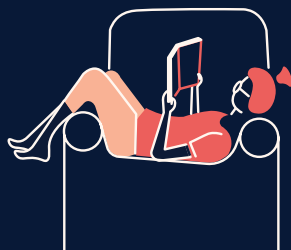
Swish & Flick  
The Broom



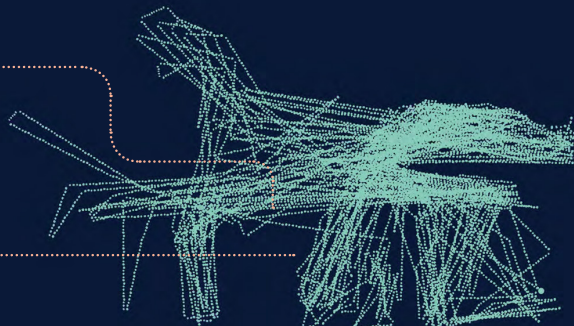
TV On The Go



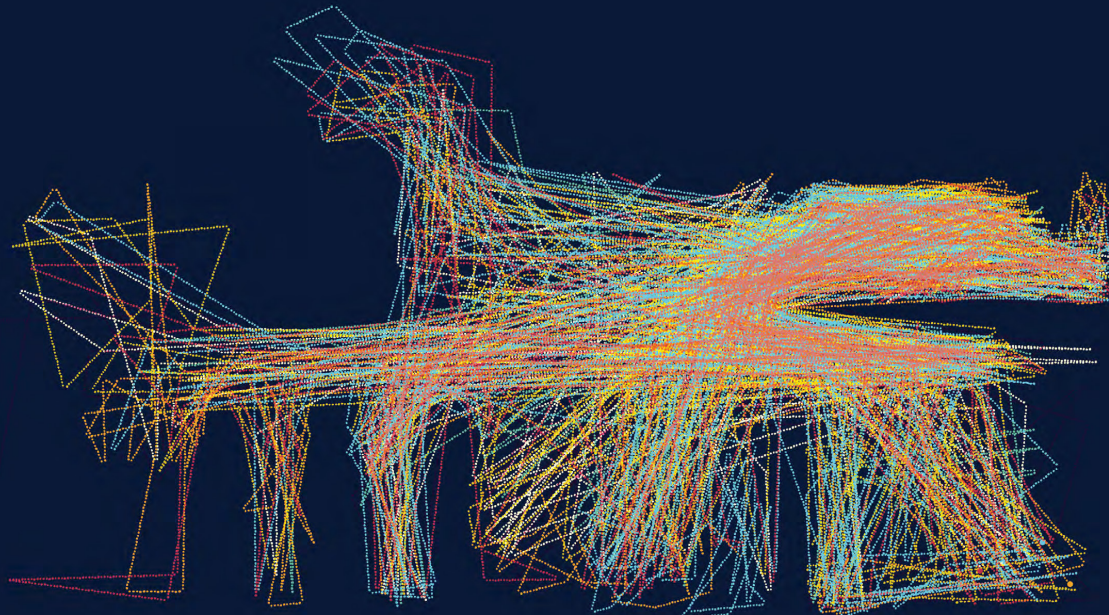
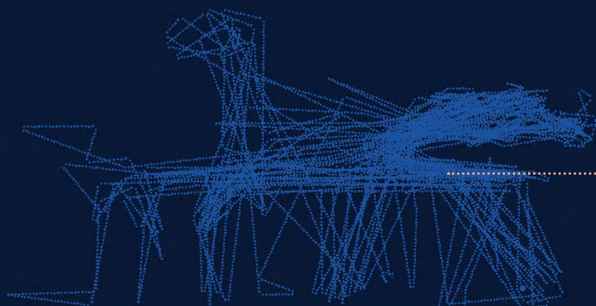
Reading Nook



Dynamic Dinette



Work From Home Room



Srinidhi Ravishankar



# 8 A Fight Against “Misinformation Pandemic” through Data Stories

India has been fighting the war against Covid-19 for more than four months now, but it is not just fought in our hospitals. Millions of people are on their phone browsing through social media and messenger apps every minute to consume what they call ‘news’. Access to right and valuable information has become a privilege in today’s world, and false or fake news is swamping the internet and media channels.

A viral infection disease like Covid-19 is deadly not just by being a pandemic, it also infuses fear that reduces our tendency to validate any information that we consume. False news and rumours very much behave like a digital virus; they are “wire-borne” and hence digitally transmitted, can only be identified when “forwarded” by a human and they mutate and evolve when jumping from one person to another.

Fig. 1, 2, 3 and 4, Coronavirus Action Initiative, 25th June 2020  
Retrieved from : <https://cov.social/#/>. Screenshot by Author

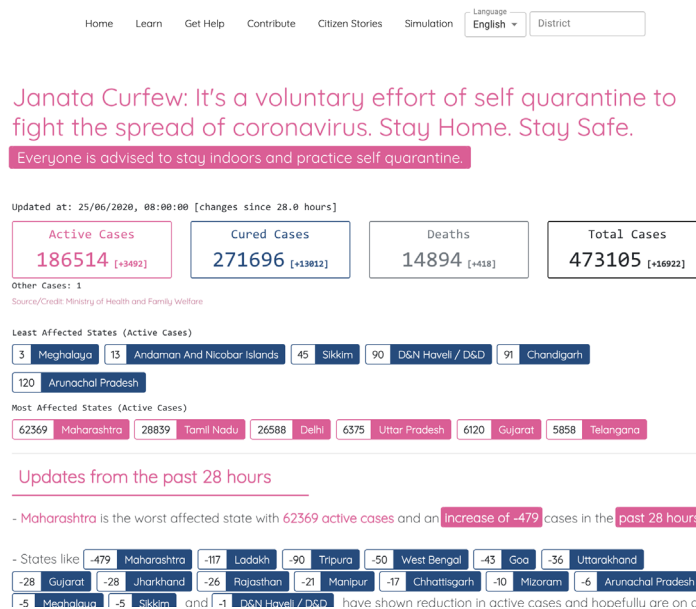


Fig. 1. Active Cases in India

How to prevent getting infected?



Fig. 2. Sanitary Precautions are listed

People have been working on fantastic initiatives and platforms to convey the right information to the citizens, but most of them focus on building dashboards around data related to COVID19. Still, we need something more as the reach of knowledge to understand and interpret graphs is limited. We need 'data stories' that can help us interpret these numbers and extract meaning out of it.

Right Information Platform' or 'RIP COVID' (<https://cov.social>) is one such initiative by India Smart Cities Fellows to present facts through data stories. The platform aggregates real-time Covid-19 data from various national, state and district platforms and gives

updated and easy to understand data stories to its users. Apart from that, the platform also explains through simulation, the need for social distancing and how less movement in cities can help us flatten the curve of infected people. To increase its reach and accessibility, almost all the content is available in 7 different Indian languages. As data has shown to play a significant role in curbing the storm of misinformation on the internet, we are prepared to fight "false information" with the "right information" that is backed by data and facts.

If this is something that inspires and motivates you, we are always open for collaboration. See you on the other side.

Janata Curfew: It's a voluntary effort of self quarantine to fight the spread of coronavirus. Stay Home. Stay Safe.

Everyone is advised to stay indoors and practice self quarantine.

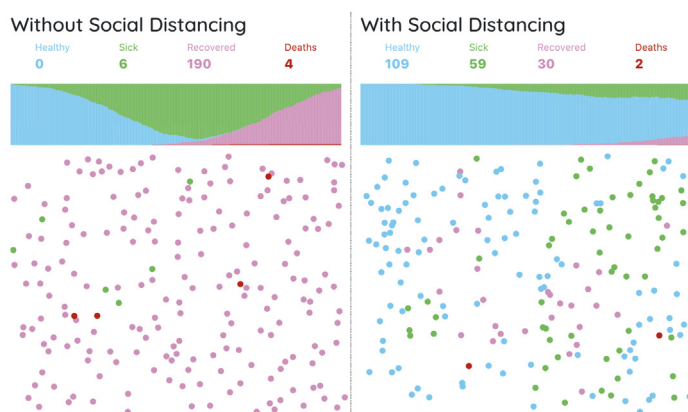


Fig. 3. Analysis depicting rate of virus infections with and without Social Distancing

Janata Curfew: It's a voluntary effort of self quarantine to fight the spread of coronavirus. Stay Home. Stay Safe.

Everyone is advised to stay indoors and practice self quarantine.

#### What is Social Distancing?

Social distancing is deliberately increasing the physical space between people to avoid spreading illness. Staying at least six feet away from other people lessens your chances of catching COVID-19.

Examples of social distancing that allow you to avoid larger crowds or crowded spaces are:

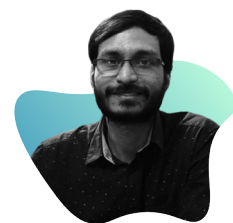
- Working from home instead of at the office
- Closing schools or switching to online classes
- Visiting loved ones by electronic devices instead of in person
- Cancelling or postponing conferences and large meetings

Source/Credit: Johns Hopkins Medicine

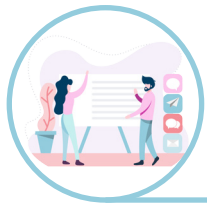


How does Ministry of Health, India defines it?

Fig. 4. Basic guidelines of Social Distancing



Abhishek Upperal



## 9 Op-ed: Citizens for Citizens



*Yogada Joshi, We Want to Go Home, 7th May 2020*

Indian Express article started it all. I got to know about GD Mara in Bannerghatta, Bengaluru, a slum that houses innumerable people living without any food ration. Getting in touch with a reporter from the Indian Express, I asked to connect with someone from the small yet highly populated neighbourhood in order to help. Additionally, I also contacted some people in Hasirudala in Bengaluru, who I knew were making ration kits and acquired access to resource personnel of NGO in order to help them with distributing the kits to those who were not provided with any ration since inter-district ration cards were not valid then. This churned up many everyday events where I kept liaising between people who needed ration and those who were providing it. I discussed with a co-Fellow about the possibility of a Swiggy or Zomato-like platform for food and ration for those who were in dire need of help, but the idea did not materialize into reality.

A construction site of Bagmane Builders located at Byrasandra in CV Ramman Nagar was another site that housed migrants, who like the many others were also left to fend for themselves since the advent of lockdown. As a citizen trying to help the migrant population, I discovered that the construction company was not intervening in any manner to help them out. Instead, the corporates had left the task of providing rations to their own site workers on the middle-class civilians and

NGOs. To make things worse, the Ward Councillor only donated to the locals whose voter IDs were registered locally and not to migrants, hence removing them from availing any kind of help. Comprehending the precarious situation of the migrants, my family decided to approach the Residents Welfare Association(RWA) and Bengaluru Ward WhatsApp groups to avail financial assistance to help them with ration and safety kits. We received an enormous response which led to the formation of a local donor group of 10-15 people. Through the respective contacts of the people in the group, we managed to pool in Rs. 2,83,635, through which we donated 700 face masks and ration kits. This served 1,385 people for 15 days in April.

Meanwhile, I signed up with Janaagraha's COVID-19 Responders and also applied for the Labour Department's Corona Warriors to help at both the ward-level and at the police jurisdiction-level respectively.

These two organizations had their own respective WhatsApp and Telegram groups, directing volunteers toward volunteering efforts which included packaging ration kits, distributing them at the required locations and reporting to the authorities about the same. This involved a good amount of back-end work like placing various calls, confirming locations, contacting donors and preparing lists of beneficiaries.

The initial step would be to survey, then give numbered tokens in order to control and limit the unknown beneficiaries emerging and acquiring the ration instead of people who actually got registered for it. Many times, we needed the police or civil defence authorities in their neon jackets to accompany us for our safety. The on-ground situation was quite unsafe since social distancing norms were never really followed by the beneficiaries. Their focus, understandably, was to get their name on the list, receive the token and avail the ration kits.

I was mostly involved in the back-end work but on one of those rare occasions where I had to assist on ground, the survey questions often shocked me at how the lives of innumerable people were actually hanging by a thread. On one such occasion, I went to conduct a survey at GD Mara, where the survey header had questions pertaining to total monetary and ration left, and for how many days both of them would suffice. The maximum amount of cash left was around 1000 rupees, but the rest averaged around 300 rupees with rice that would suffice for another 3 days or so. Some of the responders had no ID proof and they were all women with no families, no work, no money but they just existed. That made us question who is a citizen really?

Then came May, the ugliest month of 2020. The priorities for all volunteers changed to helping migrants register on the online portal to avail e-passes. Many didn't have phones. The system was to register online, print (?) and submit that to the nearest police station. The police would then collate the information and submit it to the Deputy Commissioner of Police who would then send this to the 'Seva Sindhu' office of the Revenue Department, which would then be forwarded to the Divisional Railway Authority and the Nodal Officer of travel, who would then forward this list to get appropriate permissions from the recipient state's authorities. Now, this was a hugely confusing and a complicated process because many states like West Bengal restricted entry (this is even before Amphan). The lack of coordination with recipient states and the railways and unnecessary interference from the real estate and employers' associations made it difficult for migrants to return to their home states, so much so that the Karnataka government cancelled Shramik trains. In retaliation, a silent migrants' protest with placards captured by volunteers and labour unions on social media helped resume the service.

The registered migrant would then receive an SMS on their phone confirming the location to report - usually, a police station or an open space to check their tickets received via SMS, after which, a medical screening was performed and a dedicated transport service would then take them to the railway station. But with blurred schedules, nobody ever knew the train itinerary for the next day until it was the eleventh hour. First, only those with an SMS confirmation were allowed. Then every police station was given a daily slot of 50 migrants for each train. But this ran into major issues since migrants were not evenly spread across the city and those who came from another jurisdiction were never entertained and were often sent back. So, all of us volunteers started collating lists of people wanting to go home. I got calls asking me to send people at the shortest notice saying, "Hey! We have a vacancy of 18 people in Ulsoor police station. Send them here at the earliest!" They were juggled like cargo from one station to the other. What went insanely wrong with the entire process was that one could never track when their turn would come. After registering, people were left in an abyss. Their friends who registered at a later point than them got the SMS and they didn't. Hence, they began mustering outside police stations on a daily basis, which at times took a violent turn.

By the third week of May, the Government of Karnataka (GoK) began to house the migrants at 'mustering centres' according to their state of origin. Migrants from UP, Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Assam and other North-Eastern states who couldn't be accommodated in trains, were sheltered in those centres until it was their turn. BBMP, the ULB in Bengaluru along with NGOs and citizen volunteers were providing parcels of food for their journey both at the mustering centres and the railway station. It was chaotic and a confusing process for both the volunteers and the workers in most parts of the city but there were exceptions as well. A few police stations with strong NGO and volunteer support and interference had perfected a road map through this chaos by pre-planning expected number of migrants, food orders, a number of volunteers needed for data entry and maintaining social distance/crowd control, even waste management!

On the other hand, at our ward level, the citizens have been involved in COVID-19 related social and organisational measures – pushing for the formation of a Ward Disaster Management Cell (WDMC),

informing health officials to quarantine people coming from outside the state, recording messages to be aired on public address systems in police vans, drawing rangoli powder-based boxes outside shops to physically distance the buyers, delivering medicines and essentials to people during the lockdown. Additional duties of the WDMC involved conducting relevant surveys of homeless people and those in financial distress in order to provide ration to them. Of 198 wards in Bengaluru, only 4 have formed a WDMC, all of which function without mandated goals, the scope of work and deliverables and zero contact with the BBMP War Room managing COVID-19 crisis in Bengaluru. In the third week of June with rising cases, BBMP has formed a 'Home Quarantine Squad' of 40,000 citizen volunteers which is yet to spring into action.

If only the city had functional WDMCs which were constantly in touch with the War Room, both the migrant and COVID-19 situation could have been handled better at a microscopic and decentralised level, instead of Bengaluru City Police performing the administrative functions of coordinating food supplies and travel arrangements at the macro level. Unfortunately, the police continue to be burdened with data entry, enforcing fines for not following rules

on masks, spitting, open defecation, home quarantine, travel arrangements for migrants, policing containment zones, check posts for inter-state travel and performing regular police functions which are catching and investigating non-COVID-19 offenders as well.

This experience has just reinforced my faith in the decentralization of governance and empowerment of the citizens. The government should not take credit for reaching out to the last citizen, nor should it take the blame for not doing so. It is not the failure of the government at the national, state or ULB level to be able to do everything, because they cannot. The dutiful citizen exists and wants to do the necessary but the government must learn to bend its knee because a government can be exclusive without the inclusion of a citizen but governance cannot. We have seen how the citizen is able to reach the ground and make implementation easy because quite simply the distance in terms of time and space is lesser while the incentive and concern are greater between the citizen and the beneficiary than it is for a government official overseeing the operation from her desk. Now more than ever is the time for decentralization to be acknowledged and power to be given to the regular citizens.

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### SPECIAL GRATITUDE TO:

*Capt. Mannivanan, former Labour Secretary, GoK for his recognition of citizens and their power to make a difference and giving us Bengalureans the opportunity to stand with our city again through DIPR Corona Warriors who saved Bengaluru from hunger*  
*Senthil from Ambedkar Computer Coaching Centre for taking me to GD Mara*  
*AICCTU team for re-starting migrant trains from Karnataka and continuing the effort to send them back with dignity*  
*Rajani ma'am for distributing PPE kits to ASHA workers*  
*BBMP for keeping COVID-19 at bay in Bengaluru for us to step out and reach out to migrant workers*

*- Yogada Joshi volunteer with  
COVID-19 Responders, Janaagraha  
Corona Warriors, Dept of Information and Press Release, Labour Dept, GoK  
Home Quarantine Squad, BBMP*



Yogada Joshi

### Aarsi Desai

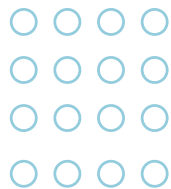
I view the Fellowship as an opportunity to explore, learn from other verticals, expand to newer perspectives and dream big. Just three months in, it has given me everything I hoped for, and more. The best part is that there is no pressure to deliver in a certain manner; we can be true to our inclinations.

The cohort of 2020-21 has been extremely enthusiastic, non-judgemental, eager to learn, ready for challenges and united throughout the journey. The COVID-19 crisis, to us, is an opportunity to define and contribute to the New Normal. We are adamant to make a difference, and we will do it!



### Shilpa Shashidharan

In these times of COVID and the 'Work from Home' scenario, what I love about the ISCF cohort is how socially responsible the team intends to be by doing whatever they can in their own capacity. We all are from different professional and educational backgrounds; but despite that, we thrive to learn and gain new experiences by interacting within the diverse mind bank and try to bring up solutions to tackle various problems happening due to COVID, or otherwise. This is what makes me proud to be part of such a team!



### Abhisikha Das

Due to the Work from Home situation induced in the lockdown, my bed has come to be my workspace now. With this reality hitting hard, the challenge I face includes co-ordinating my time between family and work, along with striking a balance with my physical and mental health. There are moments of peace, with some amount of fear creeping in which have to be balanced constantly for my own sanity and functioning. However, the ISCF team has been very supportive.., The pandemic arrived without warning, but I have found myself engaged in my work, developing content, acquiring new life skills, learning new languages and knitting.





# fin!



Reach out to us



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