

We have conducted 19 interviews with community leaders and civil society organisations of various scales who have worked tirelessly during the last 4 months of the lockdown to provide relief to those worst affected by the pandemic in Dharavi. Being a hotspot with high density and poor sanitary conditions, WHO recently lauded this collective action and community engagement that was crucial to flatten the curve.

## LACK OF FUNDS REMAINS THE CONCERN FOR ORGANISATIONS WORKING IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD



Distribution of food packets by Girirajbhai, Aapatkaleen Seva Samiti

## Civil Society Movement

The lockdown has seen active involvement from local heroes such as community leaders and residents, Dharavi-based organisations, Mumbai-based, national as well as international organisations, working in tandem and each forming a crucial link to the chain of humanitarian aid. While many of these organisations have been previously involved in various sectors of social work before the COVID pandemic, Dharavi has also witnessed a rise in proactive residents, many of which have no prior background in social work but felt their contribution to this fight was imperative. To name a few, Giriraj Bhai, who ran a construction business and Asgar Bhai, who ran a gym, foresaw the hardships of their community in the coming few months and began many self-initiated relief activities. Much of the work at the community level required an on-ground presence, which the COVID fighters executed while following all norms of social distancing and personal protection.

## STORIES

### Emerging heroes

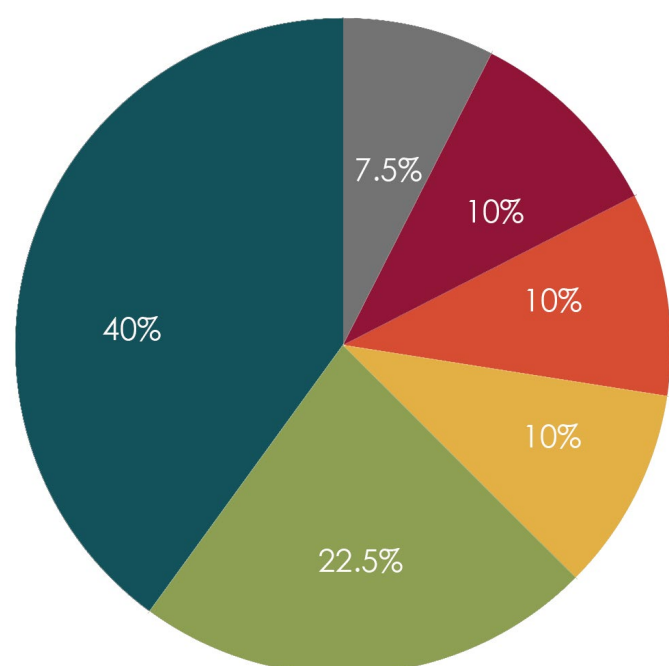
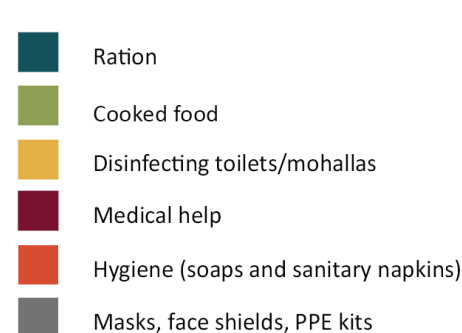
Giriraj Bhai, who began with distributing face masks in a personal capacity, shifted to providing food packets supplied by the collectorate. To receive government assistance, he and his friends had to set up Aapatkaleen Seva Samiti. Once the collectorate support stopped, he organised several medical camps in Dharavi as the cases began to surge. He recognised people's fear of seeing medical officials clad in PPE kits and the 14-day quarantine period and provided a humane touch and guidance to testing and check-ups that he felt essential.

### Sustainability of aid

While most of our respondents have been focusing on providing immediate relief assistance, community leader Bhau Korde and Drona Foundation foresee the need to shift focus to more sustainable forms of assistance such as employment support. People need to begin earning money to tackle mounting debts and other necessities, and the relief strategy must transition to an approach that empowers the affected communities. A representative of Drona Foundation noted a prevalent stigma that everyone belonging to Dharavi is COVID infected, due to which jobs of many domestic workers have been affected.

## Fields of intervention

Each stakeholder adapted to restricted working conditions in their own innovative ways and rose to address the need of the hour, which changed frequently throughout the lockdown. Relief included provision of ration kits, cooked meals, grocery kits, sanitary pads, medicines, protective equipment such as masks, sanitizers, handwash, PPE kits for police officials, organising medical camps, disinfecting residential and public spaces, awareness campaigns, and COVID helplines and quarantine guidance. All our respondents have worn more than one hat, and have adapted their relief strategies according to changing needs.



*Distribution of relief in Dharavi provided by our respondents.*

## How has the system been working so far

Large NGOs and corporates who have provided relief in the form of material supplies and funding in Dharavi, have typically reached out to community leaders and local NGOs for on-ground support. The former tend to have greater outreach and bigger capacities for funding and management. The latter has a better understanding of the on-ground reality and relief required, are better placed to conduct surveys and needs assessment, ensure even and wide-spread distribution, mobilise community support and coordinate with local government officials and police. In some cases, local leaders identified the problem/ focus area of aid and reached out to larger organisations for help. CSOs that have directly worked on-ground are either based in Dharavi itself or have been working here for many years and have established networks. Some proactive residents have also formed their own organisations, either to receive external funding or government assistance. There have been many collaborations amongst these stakeholders, primarily in the form of monetary, material, volunteer, and distribution support. Organisations located outside Dharavi faced transportation issues. Some managed to get help from the retail distributors or Nagar Sevaks, but many faced barriers in making sure that the food reached on time.

Many community leaders have corroborated active youth participation in relief activities. Pre-established volunteer networks have grown, and many new ones have emerged as a result of an active community-driven approach.



*Distribution of ration kits by Gulzar Waqar Khan*

## List of relief providers in Dharavi

We are providing a list of all the CSOs and local actors contacted by us who have been working in Dharavi, along with their area of focus. We hope that this newsletter can bring out their exemplary work, and connect them to potential donors and well-wishers like yourselves. If you wish to contact any individual or organisation and extend your support, you may contact them through the details provided below. Funds and any other form of support are welcome by all listed below.

### Community leaders

**Asgarbhai** distributes rations and cooked meals, and as a part of Dharavi Foundation, is involved with disinfection drives in community toilets and Mohalla Committee. The foundation is planning to set up spaces for medical professionals in Dharavi. They are currently looking for funds.

aewk157@gmail.com

**Bhau Korde** has been coordinating with local actors and organisations to procure material supplies and financial support. His focus is on helping domestic workers living in dharavi, widows, and the differently-abled.

+91-98925 75255

**Giriraj** founded Aapatkaleen Seva Samiti, which distributes masks, cooked food, and ration kits and organises medical camps. They plan to distribute notebooks and stationery as schools reopen. They are willing to receive any form of help. +91-97684 28550

**Gulzar Waqar Khan** is a part of Hum Sab Hai Ek foundation. They provide cooked food, ration, sanitizers, and soaps to the people of Dharavi.

gulzarkhan22@gmail.com;  
9930405257

**Harshada** cooks and distributes food in Dharavi. And helps the women receive sanitary napkins. She's willing to receive monetary and material help.

+91-79775 13841

**Suryakant** and his brother have been distributing dry ration kits in Dharavi.

+91-93231 93212

**Vidya Mane** launched the Bhoomi Swachta Foundation which provides food support for the differently-abled, clean public toilets and organise medical camps. They now want funds to provide children with notebooks. vmane4273@gmail.com;

**Zubairbhai and Siddharth Madge** are distributing grocery kits in Dharavi, and proactively spread awareness about COVID.

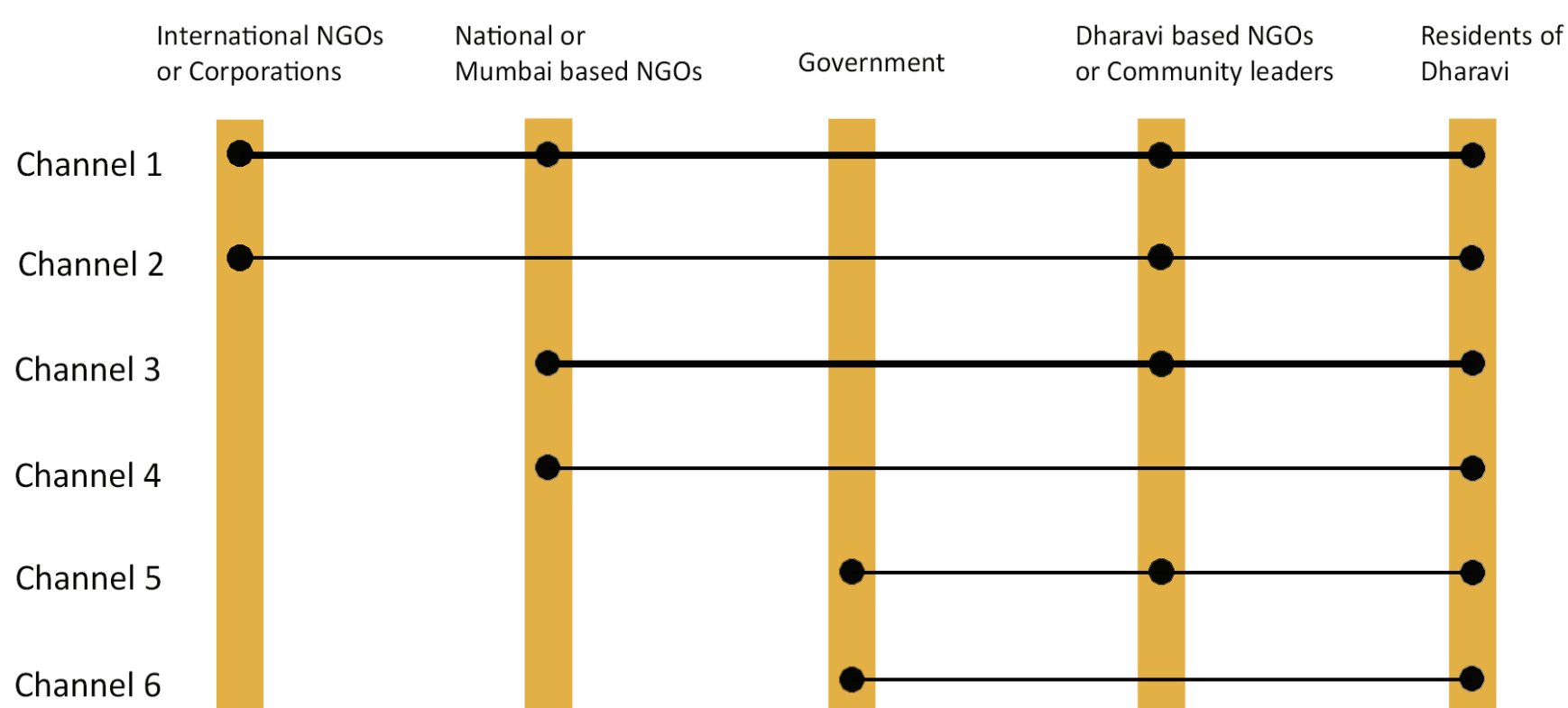


Delivery of ration kits

## Government assistance

There has been mixed feedback from our respondents regarding the government assistance they received during the lockdown. In general, the government and law enforcement have been supporting the NGOs with the required permissions for movement and distribution activities. While some community leaders and local NGOs were given food packets and ration kits to distribute by the collectorate, some claimed to have been repeatedly turned away, with officials citing reasons such as lack of funds and supplies. Praja, a Mumbai-based NGO working on urban governance, successfully used the manpower of local governance for distribution activities. They were given the NSCI venue for 10 days to coordinate ration support across Mumbai. Roti Bank used the local police station in Dharavi to coordinate local distribution.

Nagar Sevaks are the last rung of urban governance and responsible for the last mile government assistance. They received funding to distribute essential supplies and often collaborated with the locals for distribution support. However, some respondents claimed that the political leanings and religion of residents had an impact on the support they received from the government. Ration kits were largely considered insufficient for a family of 5 for 1 month, and some has leakages as well.



Relief activities in Dharavi taking multiple channels of aid distribution and involving stakeholders or various capacities.

This visual emphasizes the vital link that Dharavi-based NGOs and community leaders form in the process. Scenario 1 and 3 have been the most common with our respondents

## Funding- Stretched capacities

Funding has been a recurring concern for all our respondents. While the well-established foundations have long-standing individual donors and additional corpus, smaller organisations and activists have been using personal funds, contributions from friends, and approaching individuals/ organisations/corporations for additional funding. The latter faced problems procuring funds, as people tend to question the unknown or new organisations and their intentions, taking up crucial time and effort. While the first few months saw an exponential rise in donations, the extended lockdown has reduced everybody's financial capacity over time due to a decline in income, supplemented by a 'Donor's fatigue'. A few local actors have been unable to continue their relief work due to dwindling donations and personal savings. A representative from YUVA claimed that nowadays people are under the impression that migrants have travelled back and everyone is doing better, and thus don't feel the need to donate anymore.

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## Organisations

**ACORN** Foundation distributes food and dry ration to the communities where their members belong.  
022-26428618

**Brightfuture** set up community-led 'Mission Rahat' under which they are distributing ration kits and hygiene kits. They want to provide laptops and internet connections to their students, for online education and counselling. Bright Future India – Bright Future India  
022-25274628

**Drona** Foundation distributes dry rations and conducts disinfection drives in Dharavi mohallas. They've organised health camps and provide mobile health facilities. They need help in providing employment support for their students/trainees.

<https://www.facebook.com/dronafoundation>  
+91-9702082012

**Goonj** has been providing ration kits and sanitary pads in Dharavi.  
022-28453034

**Mumbai Roti Bank** is providing cooked food in Dharavi.  
+91-8655580001

**Need Vikas Sanstha** has provided face shields, masks, and water bottles to the police and bus conductors. They also distribute grocery kits to women-led families and families without ration cards. They have also distributed snacks to migrants traveling back and food support for the affected or quarantined families.

<https://www.facebook.com/NeedVikasSanstha/>  
+91-70453 18989

**Praja** has been distributing ration kits in Dharavi and other areas. They also provided masks, gloves, PPE kits, sanitisers, and acrylic screen separators to the police.  
022-65252729



ration provision setup by local organisations

## A consortium of NGOs and a planned response

The need for a network of stakeholders working in Dharavi was voiced by many respondents. The primary reason cited was to prevent overlaps in aid receivers and avoid communities being left out. Very few CSOs conducted a systematic survey and needs assessment of the community to identify the genuinely needy and their requirement. Good practices such as this, experiences, and other learnings could be shared on this network to prevent the repetition of past mistakes, along with a chance for the new actors to receive guidance from the experienced players. A strategy for distributing aid, along with parity in the kind of aid given would also address the issue of accumulation of supplies by the people. It would also enable smaller organisations and local actors to tap into collaborations and shared resources. A body of CSOs would streamline coordination and collaboration with government officials of multiple levels as well. A combined vision for Dharavi for the next few months of hardships to come could strengthen the collective community action, discuss potential issues and device solutions.



Cooked food provided by the community leaders

contd.

## Organisations

**SNEHA** has provided ration kits, vegetables, and fruits, along with door-to-door checkups and quarantine guidance. Society for Nutrition, Education & Health Action (SNEHA)  
022-24042627

**SPARC** provides dry ration and is currently trying to arrange livelihood support. They need donations to continue their work.  
SPARC - Society For the Promotion of Area Resource Centers  
022-6555 5061

**Triratna Prerana Mandal** provides cooked food, dry ration kits, and conducts cleanliness drives of public toilets.  
Triratna Prerana Mandal  
> Enhancing Excellence in Environment, Education & Enterprise  
+91 9322844054

**YUVA** provides residents and police on duty with dry ration kits and cooked food.  
Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA)  
+91-9152051717

The list of relief providers is not exhaustive, and there are many more heroes in Dharavi doing their bit to help the community get through these hard times. We intend to release more information on the CSO movement in Dharavi, so if you are a part of an organisation that has been missed from the list, please contact us at [urbz](mailto:urbz@urbz.net) : user-