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## COVID-19 pandemic triggers humanitarian crisis: Indian Diaspora shines as a force for good

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The campaign's goal of raising \$1 million was achieved in just 9 days which confirms that the community was eager and looking for ways to give back. (Reuters photo)

**By Ashish Shah and Rajesh Mehta**

There is nothing we can say that has not been said before about the enormous impact that this pandemic has had and continues to have on public health, global economy, and the overall functioning of society. We are all tired of hearing words like surreal, unprecedented, uncertain that have been used over and over again to describe the world we live in. Over the course of this pandemic and lockdown, it has become increasingly clear that COVID-19 is a much larger humanitarian crisis than merely one of health, particularly in India. The need and urgency for support presents a tremendous challenge, and a huge opportunity for all of us who have the means to give back and to do so generously. To that end, we have come to witness a remarkable outpouring of support by the global Indian diaspora. One can argue that perhaps never before has there been such a coming together of this community.

### RELATED NEWS

Indiaspora, a U.S. non-profit organization focused on amplifying the voice of the global Indian diaspora, recently released a report highlighting the diaspora's response to COVID-19 that identified 58 non-profit organizations who have re-purposed or increased their efforts in response to the pandemic. ChaloGive, Indiaspora's annual online giving campaign,

antibodies

COVID-19 in Delhi:  
Highest single-day spike  
for any city; hospitals  
struggle to meet  
demand for beds

India's COVID-19 tally  
races past 83 lakh,  
recoveries surge to  
76,56,478

the U.S. and India earlier this year, The campaign focused on addressing food insecurity and supporting the most vulnerable communities in the U.S. and India. The campaign's goal of raising \$1 million was achieved in just 9 days which confirms

that the community was eager and looking for ways to give back.

HungerMitao is a shining example of how the Indian community in the U.S. stepped up to give back to their local communities. In the spirit of "give where you live", HungerMitao, a movement founded by Raj and Aradhana (Anna) Asava, focuses on raising awareness about hunger in the U.S., improving community engagement, and channeling resources and contributions of the Indian American community in the fight against hunger. "Contributing towards unfulfilled needs in the community we live in, is critical for us to properly integrate. That is exactly what HungerMitao set out to achieve three years ago." said Anna Asava. COVID-19 has pushed an alarming number of families in the US into financial and food insecurity and placed a tremendous strain on the food banks across the country. In response, just since March 2020, HungerMitao has enabled over 15 million meals for Feeding America and its network of Food Banks. "With over 53 million food challenged people across the U.S., we are unifying the resources and efforts of the 4 million strong Indian American community to fight hunger, thereby affecting transformational change in our adopted land", added Raj Asava.

Another example of community organization is the "Indian Task Force" established by a group of community organizations and leaders to mobilize Indian American resources and deploy grassroots assistance in times of major humanitarian crisis like COVID-19. They have played a key role in providing critical medical supplies including PPEs, providing assistance with accessing government loans/grants, helping students stranded in the U.S., and caring for the at-risk elderly citizens. "As we united over 125 Indian American community organizations to mobilize resources and deploy grassroots assistance, we realized the potential of coming together as a community. To maintain this unity, we, along with several organizations, are establishing a community center", said Harish Kolasani, President, National Council of Asian Indian Associations (NCAIA).

There are several examples of the diaspora giving back in other countries as well. The British-Sikh community is an inspiring example of selfless service in the fight against the pandemic. The Sikh community with their network of gurudwaras are helping with the delivery of free food and supporting the elderly and most vulnerable in their communities. In India, crowdfunding campaigns have seen huge support from the general public around the world who is opening up their wallets to give generously. Foundations, high net worth donors, and corporates have also stepped up. GiveIndia's India Covid Response Fund (ICRF) has collected over 230+ crores so far from Corporate CSRs, Foundations, Philanthropists & Individuals. "Through this giving collective, we have been able to support 40+ lakh Indians across 100+ cities, with food/dry rations, cash relief and medical care (ambulances, mobile screening vans, PPEs, home isolation support etc), through 200+ of our nonprofit partners. As numbers in India continue to grow, we are carefully prioritising & channelising the funds in the most efficient way possible", said E R Ashok Kumar, President of GiveIndia

With no clear end in sight yet, we know that the impact of this pandemic is going to be felt for several months in personal and professional lives and civil society in general. Progress made in the development sector in India in the past several years has suffered a huge setback and has prompted leaders of the philanthropic ecosystem in India to come together and adopt a common charter that calls for extraordinary and urgent measures to address the ongoing crisis. The desperate need of the development community presents an incredible opportunity for bold and innovative philanthropy. "The innovation and agility of non-profit organizations across India in their response to the COVID-19 crisis, has us in awe. While they have stepped up in serving the last in line, as funders we have an opportunity and responsibility to pause, reassess, and restructure ourselves in a way that allows us to be flexible in our support to non-profit organizations", said Nagma Mulla, President and COO at EdelGive Foundation.

While we acknowledge that we have a long way to go and can't let this momentum slow down, we must also acknowledge and celebrate the Indian diaspora banding together with such energy and intent to support COVID relief efforts in India and their local communities. This is going to be a long slog but it is very heartening to see that we are all in this together.

***(Ashish Shah is the Director of Community Relations at Indiaspora focused on diaspora engagement and philanthropy. He can be reached at ashish@indiaspora.org. Rajesh Mehta is a Leading International Consultant, Columnist and Policy Professional. His email address is rajesh@entry-india.com and Twitter address is @entryindia. Views expressed are personal.)***