

## EDGE 2020

EVENING ①

Thursday, 03<sup>rd</sup> December 2020  
6:00 pm onwardsIN SEARCH  
OF NEW LIVESRecognizing dignity  
for Livelihood

A nationwide lockdown hastily announced in March 2020 left countless without food, shelter, livelihoods and dignity. A decision initially rolled out to curtail the steadily increasing coronavirus cases across India quickly escalated into a humanitarian crisis. Daily wage migrant labourers and workers, along with their families, found their entire world crumbling down in an instant. Thus, began a crisis. A crisis of such immense magnitude, that it sent tremors along the length and breadth of the nation. Migrant workers, along with their families, embarked on an uncertain journey back home. Their plight exposed the loopholes of the highly unequal society we live in.

The following set of conversations are an attempt to understand the situation and the challenges that lie before us and collectively bring different stakeholders to create a pathway to building resilient and dignified livelihoods.

## SEGMENT 1 – GROUND ZERO



Exploring the ground realities of ensuring dignity for livelihoods, **Amit Garg, Migration and Livelihoods Expert, delves into an in-depth conversation with Gayatri Divecha, CSR Head, Godrej Industries Limited and Associated Companies and Sarman Prajapati, a Construction worker from Damoh associated with Jan Sahas.**

Sarman, who was working in Noida at the time of the lockdown, recalls the tragic situation that unfolded for him. Mobility was severely restricted even to fetch basic amenities and that too carried strict measures imposed by the authorities. In a span of 40 days, their group of 20-30 people gradually ran out of their savings. Help was scarce, and thus, the decision to head home was taken. Having braved a lot of trials and tribulations, Sarman reached his village, Damoh in Madhya Pradesh. Back home, he was initially greeted with suspicion and ostracised by the members of his community. This contempt stemmed mainly from the fear of contracting the virus that was arriving from the city. The village administration was absent and there were no checks to monitor the influx and quarantine procedures. Sarman returned to his workplace three months ago to restart a life of dignity through work.

Within this grave context, the role of industry is also significant. Gayatri and Amit explored a few critical points to this effect:

- The focus of all industries should be in **building resilience for communities** in their ecosystem through their value chain as well in surrounding areas of their manufacturing presence.
- Industries should provide **access to entitlements for the workers** and to ensure social safety nets.
- **Livelihoods and healthcare particularly vector-borne diseases** should be managed for all workers, including the overall emphasis on social protection
- It is important to build a **better normal** rather than a new one!

Godrej industries is taking a pause to look at their practices, value chain and ecosystems to promote responsible businesses and ensure resilience towards such calamities. Towards this effort, Godrej Properties have successfully registered over 13,000 construction workers with the Board of Construction Welfare, enabling them to access entitlements in various schemes, in the last 24 months.

The pandemic has also highlighted how civil society has come together to help sail through a time like this and secure the lives of workers like Sarman:

- Big corporates have been running programs in partnerships with civil society and this could help with the first phase of assistance before the administration support arrives.
- A time like this has also led to forging new partnerships with stakeholders like the government. New initiatives like the *Dasra Social Impact* and [Migrant Resilience Collaborative \(MRC\)](#) by [Jan Sahas](#) have been able to bring people together in terms of funding impactful programmes but also to share learning and best practices.

Concluding the session, Amit reiterates that this isn't the first pandemic, and it won't be the last one. Employers should think beyond daily wages and ensure social safety nets for their workers for times when there is no work. If someone asks for help, we should find a way to help them.



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## SEGMENT 2 – FRONTLINE FORWARD



**Naghma Mulla, President and COO, EdelGive Foundation in conversation with EdelGive’s grassroots partners, Mina Das, Secretary, Nishtha, Pallavi Sobti Rajpal, Deputy CEO, Utthan and Dr Prakash Tyagi, GRAVIS** explored their respective contexts, challenges faced at the onset of the pandemic and mitigation measures adopted to respond to the immediate needs of the community. Starting the conversation, Naghma highlighted the thought of being at the receiving end of benefiting from the services of the migrant workers. She highlights the danger of viewing their situation from a linear angle. In this case, a shift in the lens from their source locations can be a starting point to comprehend the complexities.

Sharing the context from Gujarat, Pallavi highlights critical findings:

- **Loss of savings and self-respect** for interstate migrants working particularly in agriculture and construction.
- Even today, **66% of households face lack of money for food**, one of the basic amenities of life (*Rapid assessment conducted by Utthan*)
- Migrants have started to **head back to cities** either in search of new work or to their previous employers. They are now plagued with issues of **lower wage rates, longer hours and strict monitoring** by contactors
- Fear and anxiety of income and sustenance engulf the migrant workers today.

### Utthan’s Key Initiatives:

- District Federations, Mahila Sangathan and Village Development Committees supported by Utthan have brought together a group of people to build capacity as an institution. With women at the forefront, these groups actively identified people in distress – the ones in need of food and others willing to sell their Rabi produce.
- Utthan also instituted a pooling system wherein they sourced food grains from women farmers and youth and made them available to the most vulnerable 3,600 families in need.
- Utthan also leveraged its People-to-People Social Solidarity Enterprise Model to: Strengthen local supply chains, Initiate bringing back dignity and livelihoods and ensuring the communities’ access to basic entitlements and amenities.

For more information on Utthan click [here](#)

### GRAVIS’ Key Initiatives:

GRAVIS adopted the following strategy to help 1,50,000 people:

- Extremely disconnected population was targeted in the months of March-June and family kits comprising of dry food and hygiene supplies were made available.
- Smallest and neediest farmers would have water supplies for farming
- Healthcare facilities rolled out not only COVID but other existing health conditions for people.

For more information on [GRAVIS](#) click here

*“For centuries we have dealt with droughts in solidarity and a sense of community. We stand together, sit and talk together and share our sorrows and resources. This disease has taken away the biggest defense from us--shared the sense of being the community. We want to follow the distancing norms and we want to be protected. But we also want to find new ways of being together.” - SHG women leader from Jaisalmer*

Familiarising us with the harsh realities of the Thar Desert, Dr Prakash Tyagi states how COVID-19 exacerbated the existing challenges of drought and food insecurity. Thar desert is one of the most densely populated ecosystem not only in India but worldwide. He shared some consequences of COVID-19 on the Livelihoods of 1.4 million inbound and outbound migrant workers

- Workers stranded for long periods of time in shelters faced challenges with **security, physical distancing, hygiene and healthcare access**.
- **Stigma from their own families and communities**
- Dwindling options for **local livelihoods generation**

Mina Das from Nishtha narrated how the areas of South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal was reeling with the effects of the lockdown since the end of March.

- At least 1 out of 6 people in rural West Bengal have lost their jobs. In addition, the super cyclone Amphan ravaged not only their agricultural lands and its production; but also, homes.
- Almost 10 million people in the eastern Indian States suffered due to Amphan, whereas 2.5 Million people of the South 24 Parganas district in West Bengal are the worst sufferers.
- More than 85% of women are engaged in agriculture and allied activities but are always seen and treated as an invisible workforce.
- During the lockdown, the violence against women and girl children has increased many folds but it further surged after the cyclone took its toll.

### Nishtha’s Key Initiatives:

- The revive livelihood engagements such as agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, fisheries, Nishtha is working with women to take a lead in chalking out plausible solutions.
- Women’s groups have planned to create irrigation facilities for agriculture. Their concerted efforts will enable more than 2500 women will be able to cultivate 3 to 4 times a year in their farmland. Their collective voice has also created running water facilities to mitigate the scarcity of drinking water in two villages.
- Nishtha managed to get many women engaged under MGNREGA for maintaining nurseries and planting mangrove to resist inundation of fields and other activities.

For more information on Nishtha click [here](#)



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## SEGMENT 3 – COLLECTIVE ACTION



**Faye D' Souza, Journalist and Entrepreneur brought together Kireet Khurana, Director-Storyteller and Anshu Gupta, Founder and Director, Goonj** to embark on the path of finding collaborative solutions to the migrants' crisis that India saw.

Highlighting the importance of the conversation, Faye reminds us how we tend to forget the recent past where workers suffered together. The outbreak of COVID-19 was a universal phenomenon, yet India was the only country where it spiraled into a humanitarian crisis. Not even our neighbouring countries in Asia or Africa faced a trajectory close to the one we did. As fellow citizens we must ask-did we fail the job that we had to do for those who work with us?

Kireet explained how he uses his craft as a medium to ask pertinent questions. A sense of helplessness dawned on him during the lockdown as he possibly could not go out and help the distressed.

Since films serve the purpose of putting forth messages that can leave an impact on society. In order to etch these indelible images of the lockdown in the minds of the citizens, Kireet strung it together in one compelling narrative.

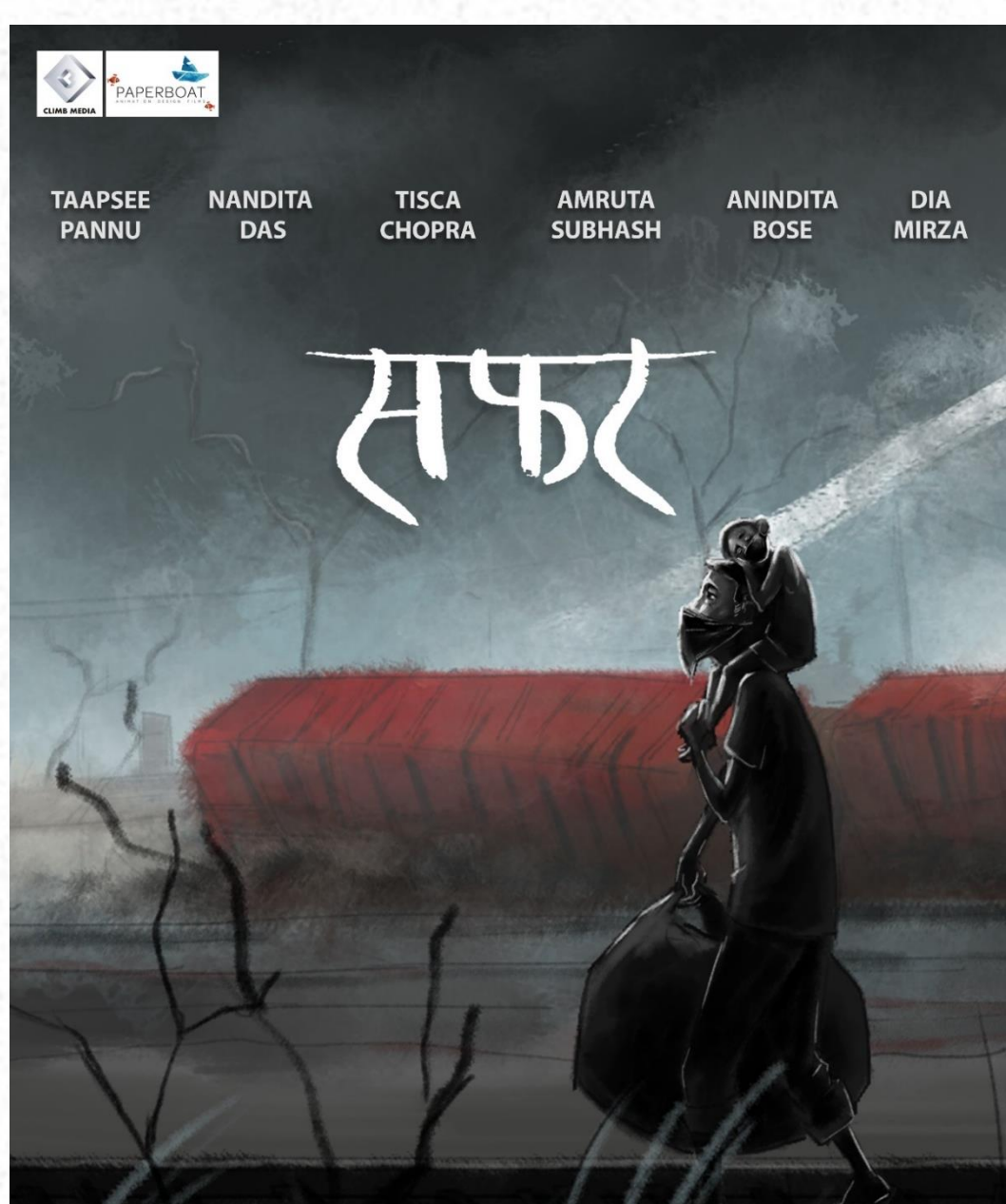
Another underlying aim behind the creation of the films is not to outweigh any particular side. A common thread between the well-received films, *Pravaasi*, *Samvaad* and *Safar* is that the nation as a whole is missing is logic and empathy and how humanity can be evoked.

Using the voice of the worker in the videos was a conscious decision to familiarise the audience with the pain and anguish suffered by the migrants.



*Pravasi : An ode to the migrants that the state has forgotten*

**Watch Pravasi [here](#)**



*"Why did you let this happen?"*

*A haunting question is thrown before us in the film Safar written by Anshu and directed by Kireet.*

**Watch Safar [here](#).**

Over the past few months, Anshu describes his journey through the disasters, distress and destruction. March and April placed us next to reality and saw large-scale partnerships and immediate action.

The same people who put a roof over our heads were left without one. The hasty decision of the lockdown made the migrants leave everything they had built over many years in an instant.

This brings up yet another pertinent question about the fabric of the society that we reside in. The inhuman treatment meted out to the workers by first, labelling them and without a speck of cooperation from the administration divides the society between those who thrive and barely survive and no bridge between the two.

What unfolded in March and April seems to be a long-lost memory and the country now seems to be proceeding towards recovery. The society we live in, essentially ignores the existence of a large number of financially rural poor. However, urban poor is considered as a support person or cheap labour. Societal conditioning and perceptions have a segregated society. In normal life this exists, in disasters how do we value and respect each other.

The urgent need is to shun the vocabulary of 'donors' and 'beneficiaries' as we have been the constant beneficiaries of the services of the migrant labourers.

**Replacing injustice and inaction with inculcating dignity, value and love can pay back a fraction of all that they have done for us.**



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## SEGMENT 4 – REBUILDING TOGETHER



The development sector is a concoction of intertwined issues that needs the collective deliberation and action of varied stakeholders like civil society actors and funders to find long-term sustainable solutions to. **Vidya Shah, Chairperson and CEO, EdelGive Foundation welcomes industry stalwarts Manish Sabharwal, Chairman, TeamLease Services Ltd and M.R Rangaswami, Founder and Chairman of the Board, Indiaspora**, to discuss how dignified livelihoods opportunities can be ensured to people from vulnerable communities. They also explore the complicated yet interesting interplay of Labour markets, Education and skilling, Migration, Digital Technology and the role of capital and access to financing.

Describing himself as an accidental philanthropist, MR's journey started when he wanted to create a bridge between the for-profit and nonprofit world for a symbiotic exchange of capital, capacities and skills. Supporting young and vibrant nonprofits brimming with a bold vision, passion and conviction deserve a chance and an upward thrust to make a difference.

*"The Indian American community stood up not only to the immediate needs but also for what's coming beyond the crisis. Inequality cannot go on forever. India needs a new model for creating sustainable livelihoods opportunities."* – **MR Rangaswami, Founder and Chairman of the Board, Indiaspora**

*"When a patient comes into the emergency room, you don't ask them to lose weight or exercise! India's been in an emergency room for 40 years. India doesn't have a shortage of land, labour or capital. Poverty is about productivity. We can fix this by raising our game and focusing on 4 or 5 different areas. There is a role for all of the three on the table: the government, private sector & NGOs. Nonprofits cannot substitute for the state. It has to begin with less regulatory cholesterol. More encouragement for entrepreneurs and so on. "* – **Manish Sabharwal, Chairman, TeamLease Services Limited**

Drawing from his early experiences of life, education and TeamLease, Manish highlights the different dimensions of the labour market. The intersection of three players that are tackling challenges. The government is facing an execution deficit, the private sector is facing a trust deficit and the non-profits are facing a scale deficit. India essentially is dealing with a wages problem and not a job problem. Official unemployment rates in India have stayed at a constant between 6 to 9 percent. Employment poverty is rampant and plaguing the country. Shock absorbers-Agriculture and Self-employment are no longer viable to young populations whose aspirations have evolved over time. Agriculture's share in the labour force is about 45% of the population but it generates only 14% of the GDP.

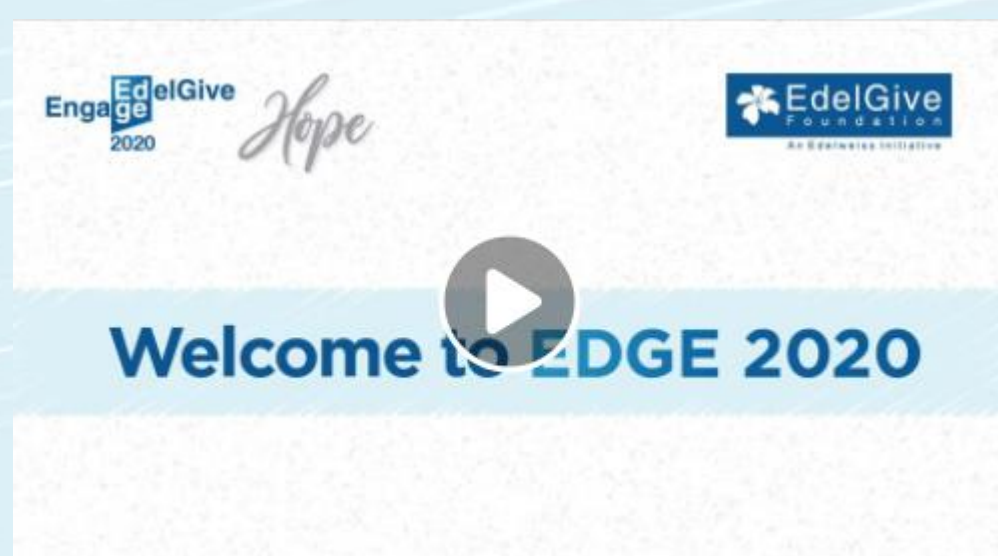
From the conversation the following key points were highlighted as the need of the hour:

- Raising the **human capability of the state**
- **Performance management and trainings**
- **Earmarked budget** directed to human capital performance management
- **Decentralisation of power**— where funds, functions and functionaries are given equal chance to compete

Formalisation, urbanisation, industrialisation, financialisation and raising human capital are some of the key changes that will catalyze a rise in productivity and ultimately in wages. A rise in productivity can fuel the gradual dismantling of the shackles of poverty. *Now, the question is, should an Indian dream be cultivated?* A more standardised set of rules and regulations and minimum friction is what sets the US apart. The aspirational tone of the American dream channels the drive to pursue the impossible.

Concluding their address with a word of advice for philanthropists, MR suggests supporting young NGOs with the capacity to scale and create ripples of impact. Manish advises on exploring the uncharted territories and gear up to take more risks.

**Vidya concluded the evening on a hopeful note that in the long run, everything is possible with hope.**



Thank you for joining the conversations at EDGE!

We hope to see you on **Thursday, 10<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> of December at 6:00 pm IST** live at [www.edelgiveedge2020.com](http://www.edelgiveedge2020.com)

If you haven't registered for EDGE 2020, **you can register [here](#)**.

**Please write to us at [edge@edelweissfin.com](mailto:edge@edelweissfin.com) for any concerns.**

**If you missed Evening 1 you can watch it on the link above!**