

# Avoidable Deaths Network and Orissa State Volunteers and Social Workers Association

## Need Your Help for COVID-19 Response in Odisha, India

**The ongoing second surge of the COVID-19 in India is a catastrophe.**

As of 2 May 2021, according to Worldometer, the total number of deaths due to COVID-19 is estimated at 215,542. This is an underestimate because the number of deaths taking place at home, undiagnosed, are not counted.



### What are the causes of these deaths?

Based on newspapers and media reports, the causes of deaths are attributed to the lack of hospital beds, lack of oxygen supply, lack of vaccines, and ineffective governance – among other things.

There is another cause of death, which can be attributed to nutritional crisis and starvation. These deaths and morbidities are due to the direct impact of the COVID-19 and economic lockdown, and they have been disproportionately borne by the most vulnerable segments of society. For example, daily wage earners in rural villages, tribal communities, farmers and street beggars. This is evident in the state of Odisha where the Avoidable Deaths Network (ADN) - India Hub is located (hosted by the Orissa State Volunteers Social Workers Association (OSVSWA)).

The first COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, has altered the landscape of the labour market. More than 10.6 million people have lost their jobs in the informal sector. The number of poor in India (with an income of \$2 per day or less in purchasing power parity) has more than doubled from 60 million to 134 million in just a year due to the COVID-19 induced recession (Mahapatra, 2021).

Restriction on mobility due to lockdown has affected the farming and harvest capacity of the farmers, and migrant workers. Restrictions on foraging from the forests have directly impacted the health and wellbeing of the tribal communities, including pregnant and lactating women and children. The street beggars, who are either homeless or unknown are also severely affected due to limited shops and people to beg from. Furthermore, the mandatory linking of an Aadhaar number<sup>1</sup> with a ration card has excluded about 1.9 million people from accessing the government's public distribution system (Dash, 2020). Due to this many poor households have gone without

food in the first lockdown (Dash, 2020) and continue to do so. According to a national survey conducted by GaonConnection, three-fourth poor households did not receive any government ration in lockdown (cited in Dash, 2020). Deaths of these most vulnerable segments of society are paid little attention in everyday life, and more so in the current COVID-19 dominating the media coverage.

### What is our intervention to reduce avoidable deaths?

Deaths from nutritional crisis and starvation are avoidable. To reduce these avoidable deaths, OSVSWA is providing food and nutrition security through cooked meals. This intervention is named 'meals on wheels'.

The ADN-India Hub, supported by the ADN-UK and Japan team, has come together to support this novel intervention of OSVSWA.

Meals are cooked by the local members of Self-Help Groups and Village Youth Clubs while following the COVID-19 guidelines and safety measures. A local operational team has been formed to supervise the operation of the 'meals on wheels'. Once cooked, meals are transported by OSVSWA's cart to prominent locations in 15 villages of Kandamahal District, targeting 400-500 tribal men, women and children. In the city of Bhubaneswar, meals are distributed to 100-150 beggars on the streets.



### How can you help to reduce avoidable deaths from the impact of COVID-19 and economic lockdown?

You can help by donating funds to keep the intervention 'meals on wheels' ongoing during the upcoming lockdown (5-19 May), and a few weeks afterwards until some normality is restored in Odisha. For every £10 donated, 10 people can be fed for a day.

### How can I donate?

Please click here to donate:

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/covid19-response-in-odisha-india>



## References

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## Footnote

The Aadhaar number is a 12-digit random number issued by the Government of India's Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) to the residents of India after satisfying the verification process. The Aadhaar number is a proof of identity (UIDAI, 2019). The Aadhaar number has become important for financial transactions and access to social welfare including the PDS, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and social security pensions (Biswas, 2018; Mathew, 2018). A survey conducted by Dalberg (cited in Roychoudhury, 2019) found that 30% of homeless people in India do not have Aadhaar number. Furthermore, Aadhaar-based biometric authentication failure led to the exclusion of 1.15 million households from Jharkhand's PDS, and 487,500 households from Delhi's PDS (Mathew, 2018).

## Contact Details

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