TN FIRST

Social mobilisation for resilient livelihoods during and beyond disasters

May 2023

Human Rights Advocacy and Research Foundation

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List of abbreviations

€	Euro (Exchange rate used for calculation of monetised value is €1=₹80)
₹	Indian Rupee
Adi–Dravidar	Official term for scheduled castes in Tamil Nadu. Literally, the first Dravidian
Aadhar	Biometric identification card issued to all residents of India and is a prerequisite to avail of any state supported social security scheme that draws subsidy from the consolidated fund of India
BPL	Below Poverty Line. An administrative classification. Determines who gets free or subsidised state support including rations and other welfare provisions
CMUPT	Chief Minister's *Uzhavar Pathukappu thittam* Chief Minister's Comprehensive Health Scheme
Covid	Coronavirus 2019 (also COVID–19, coronavirus 2 SARS–CoV–2)
CSC	Citizens Service Centre
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EE	Employment Exchange
eShram	A portal created by the Ministry of Labour and Employment for the welfare of workers in the unorganised sector. Registered members will be eligible for a variety of benefits
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, (English: German Agency for International Cooperation GmbH); https://www.giz.de/
GST	Goods and Services Tax
grama sabha	Village assembly, the only direct democracy institution in India, in which all adults in the jurisdiction are members
Jal Jeevan	Scheme to provide safe and adequate drinking water through individual household connections to all rural households.
KVVT	'Kalaignar Veettu Vasathi Thittam' (KVVT) state government scheme for replacing all the huts in Tamil Nadu with permanent houses
LPG	Liquefied Petroleum Gas
MBC	Most Backward Classes, an administrative category eligible for some specific state support, including reservations, certain additional educational concessions (full tuition fee concessions, and liberalised scholarship benefits)
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. Provides 100 days' work on demand in rural areas
NABARD	National Bank for Rural Development
Narikoravar	A semi–nomadic tribe

OAP	Old Age Pension
PAN	Permanent Account Number, issued by the income tax department, Government of India
PMAY	Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awas Yojana, previously Indira Awas Yojana, a social welfare programme to provide housing for the rural poor
PMSBY	Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana, a government–backed accident insurance scheme
PMJJBY	Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, a government–backed life insurance scheme with a life cover of ₹200,000
PMSYMY	Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan, a scheme meant for old age protection and social security of unorganised workers
PWD	Person with Disability
RBSF	Recover Better Support Fund
RC	Ration cards (RC) are an official document issued by state governments in India to households that are eligible to purchase subsidised food grain from the Public Distribution System under the National Food Security Act
SC	Scheduled Castes, an administrative category eligible for some specific state support, including reservations, certain additional educational concessions (full tuition fee concessions, and liberalised scholarship benefits). They are subject to caste (work and descent) based slavery and untouchability
SEVC	Socially Excluded Vulnerable Communities. Includes the STs, SCs, MBCs, and others with heightened vulnerability such as people with special needs (physical or mental), single women, rough sleepers, etc.
ST	Scheduled Tribes (indigenous and tribal people), an administrative category eligible for some specific state support, including reservations, certain additional educational concessions (full tuition fee concessions, and liberalised scholarship benefits)
TNSCB	Tamil Nadu Urban Habitat Development Board, formerly known as Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board, is administered by the Government of Tamil Nadu to remove slums in the state

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Edwin
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Human Rights Advocacy and Research Foundation (HRF)
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2 Redefining resilience in pandemic times

The increasing frequency and intensity of disasters are exacerbated by the rather incompetent state response with catastrophic consequences on the poor – who already live on the edges of survival. Before they can recover from one, the next is already upon them pushing even the middle class into penury and reversing whatever little progress was made over decades in a matter of months. From 'the decade of action' for the sustainable development goals, the needle shifted to preserving developmental gains and ensuring no backsliding.

The covid–19 pandemic and the response of the Indian state led by no less than the prime minister, ranged from the comic – banging plates for 8 minutes at 8pm yelling 'go corona go' – to the bizarre – a total country–wide lockdown effective from midnight announced at 8pm (there goes that number again!) by the prime minister itself. Despite the sight of millions walking thousands of miles home due to the lockdown, the government had the gall to tell the Supreme Court of India that it was not happening – just because there was no data available (NDA), because they ensured that it was not collected.

Though governments sought help from the CSOs for providing relief to the communities, and the returning and the stranded migrant labour during the pandemic – and even demanded it – there were considerable hurdles put in their way. CSOs in Tamil Nadu were prohibited from providing relief until the ban was lifted by the Madras High Court which held that citizens had the right to help each other. CSOs receiving foreign funds were prohibited from collaborating with each other – a still existent ban – through an amendment to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 on 29 September 2020 at the height of the pandemic, when the government was still asking for periodic reports on the money spent on relief and amelioration by CSOs.

Just as the emergency brought out the worst in government, it brought out the best in people. HRF has promoted a human rights–based approach at all times, including during disaster relief and rehabilitation. We followed this approach even in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami. However, after 100 days of the most brutal pandemic induced lockdown on the planet, an epic failure of governance unrivalled since the time of Tuglaq, the communities were in despair. HRF contemplated direct delivery of relief to the affected families for the first time in our 27–year history.

Out of the blue Divya and Kailash Nadh from Zerodha reached out to support the communities. Though HRF did not have the requisite income tax registrations that would give Zerodha tax credit, they still extended support to almost 6,000 families

in the most remote areas. By then the situation of the families was so dire that the officials present when relief was distributed (with full corona protocols) were visibly moved by the utter poverty of these remote isolated communities. In one village the officials even issued pattas for three cents of land each to 30 families and promised them ration cards too. These were long pending demands of the community (but repeatedly denied since they could not come up with the 'service costs'). The previous allotments for another 20 families in the village was only for one cent of land per family. The Zerodha support for relief has translated into long lasting (and inter–generational) benefit.

As the pandemic became normalised and then abated, we realised the need to build the resilience of the community in the face of a permanent state of emergency and disasters – which was the 'new normal'. The intensity and frequency of concurrent disasters necessitated robust institutional support to survive let alone thrive, and romanticised arcadian notions of self–sufficient communities – even for remote forest dependent communities – was no longer feasible.

These resilience systems would need to be built *during* the pandemic – which came on top of the disastrous demonetisation of 8 November 2016 which wiped out self–employment and the incompetent introduction of the goods and services tax, GST, on 1 July 2017 which wiped out the micro, small and medium enterprises, and a series of natural disasters – and could not wait for 'periods of stability' nor 'after the disaster' due to the permanent state mentioned earlier.

On mapping the stakeholders and the resources available, we uncovered a curious conundrum. On the one hand there were initiatives from the government for the welfare and social security of the communities and on the other a large number eligible but excluded. There were reasons on both sides, but the result was that there was systemic exclusion of the eligible. Each reason for exclusion is as light and inconsequential as gossamer. Entwined, they become as strong as a net that can immobilise an elephant – an insurmountable barrier.

Most of it rested on eligibility documents which were the right of every citizen, and the rest depended on application for the eligible schemes with the requisite eligibility documents and follow–up. However, these eligibility documents are difficult to get. One eligibility document is easy to get. Three become difficult. Five impossible. This lack of documents – and the reluctance of the eligible to pursue entitlements in the face of repeated denials – is the result of multiple barriers: these communities do not have mobile phones to receive the verification passwords, the service centres are far away because the areas these communities inhabit are underserved by

telecommunications and other infrastructure, and every day away from work has a direct cost apart from the travel and associated costs.

This loss of daily wage, travel and associated costs is taken advantage of by the government officials who repeatedly ask them to 'come tomorrow', preying on the poor who cannot afford multiple trips for applications and therefore succumb to the extortion. The only way that the poor can minimise their costs is to pay the ransom money that the officials demand. A life in poverty is very expensive. The initiative consciously set out to remove these barriers by collective applications, verification and prior preparation of eligibility documents, and systematic follow up and escalation when there was abnormal delay or proof of discrimination (including filing criminal charges).

Instead of helping those eligible to access their entitlements, the 'public servants' at all levels take perverse delight in throwing up barriers and in misusing their intelligence to create new reasons to deny entitlements. With amazing lack of self–awareness, government employees 'public servants' with annual inflation indexed salaries upwards of ₹600,000, lifetime pension and free medical care for life for self and dependents, routinely extort ₹50 from the poor whose annual income is less than ₹30,000 – about 5% of theirs.

Irate 'public servants' berated the district animators for giving them 'extra work' (I will have time to do only your work) and some were even 'blacklisted' from submitting any applications. One even asked the applicants – whose entitlements he had delayed for months on end – who 'gave you permission to go tell all this to the district collector'.

A couple of district collectors told the applicants not to 'come with the NGOs since they will take money from you' but 'come directly to us we will do it for free' – before being schooled by the community leaders that they had tried but were denied by the government officials, and that the NGOs instead of taking money from them, as he alleged, had arranged their transport and helped with the documents. In desperation, some officials came to the district animator's house and asked them not to 'take the food from their mouths' and to 'give at least some token money' for releasing the sanctioned entitlement.

Apart from the perseverance, the success is because we followed one of the fundamental tenets of disaster relief: In disasters the one who needs help most is not the person who can reach the relief centre. It is the person who cannot even reach out – the person with disability, the children, and the stigmatised (widows and other strong women, the outcasts) – who needs relief most. The humanitarian worker

needs to search them out, reach out to them, and deliver relief, services, and entitlements at their doorstep. Support should be provided till the support systems are sufficiently strong (and resilient) to ensure that they do not fall back into the clutches of the disaster, and then monitored so that there is no backsliding.

By taking the service to the doorstep, in line with humanitarian principles, by systematically untangling the web one strand at a time, applying for eligible entitlements with the right documentation, escalating it as required in a whole of society approach, we were able to make the breakthrough to deliver entitlements to the community without any cost to the government (they were already provided for in the state budget). In contrast, the government officials want the affected to come to them, with all the requisite documentation in flawless condition.

At one level, this is the story of how every ₹1 received translated into ₹77 for the community – to celebrate those who made it possible, and to inspire others on the same journey to adapt the model, draw lessons from our successes and yes, our mistakes too. We have been told that the narrative can be framed as fulfilling the SDGs to the success of a human rights–based approach, to the importance of evidence–based engagement. At a more consequential level, for us, it was to ensure sustainability of the communities during and beyond disasters in an extremely volatile and unpredictable world where the fragile coping mechanisms of the poor are unable to cope and need to be redesigned bottom up.

As India moves forward with a K shaped recovery with over 800 million dependent on free rations for mere survival, innovative models for resilience become even more necessary. This is a simple, eminently replicable model and we hope this documentation will enable others to replicate and improve on this model. If this experience ensures that the spectacle of millions walking thousands of miles – with infants in arms and children on their shoulders – just to reach home is never repeated, or that vulnerable citizens do not need to believe demagogues who proclaim that banging plates for 8 minutes at 8pm yelling ‘go corona go’ in the face of a major disaster will bring succour, then its purpose is served.

3 A snapshot

3.1 The problem that the project tried to address

Vulnerability is always multidimensional, each vulnerability reinforcing the other and degrading resilience. The economically poor are also document poor, resource poor, and agency poor. The cause and effect are circular. Because they do not have community certificates, they are not eligible for land titles (especially tribals in forests and nomads and scheduled castes in their traditional lands). Without land titles, they cannot get houses. Without houses they cannot get toilets or sometimes – because there is no proof of residence – ration cards, and no cash support from income generation schemes specifically meant for them.

Ration cards are virtually passports for the poor. Some managed to get the Aadhar card – the biometric national identity card – using a combination of papers, but for others, they cannot open a bank account and so miss out on regular support such as scholarships, pensions for senior citizens, widows, and persons with disability, and the pandemic relief.

Without the 'below poverty line' (BPL) ration cards, they miss out on government schemes and grants including free rations (regular and special supplement during the pandemic), monthly grant for mothers, the annual festive grant, and free/subsidised up–skilling vocational education programmes which waive application, tuition, and exam fees, provide free course material, and financial support on completion.

There is extreme vulnerability due to lack of savings/buffers, caused by low paid work, due to low skills, due to not attending school due to poverty (child labour/ early marriage) and no productive assets (inadequate capital or resource base), low awareness of schemes, and dependence on intermediaries.

Many social security schemes do not reach socially excluded communities. The government does not have robust last mile delivery mechanisms, especially for the socially excluded communities (e.g., nomads and migrants don't have ration cards without which they cannot access relief). Elected representatives in local self–government (village presidents and ward members), who have close links to the community, are out of the loop in the disaster management protocols. The long–term problems are inadequate investment in health, education, and livelihood infrastructure. The pandemic has exacerbated these gaps.

3.2 Approach to address the problem

The approach was human rights and partnership based to strengthen state mechanisms and remove barriers in community access. In our assessment, this approach would result in the most sustainable, long–term solution. We concentrated

on procuring the eligibility documents (the first mile) and then, once received, the eligible entitlements that go with the documents (last mile connectivity) for the following critical documents – a) community certificate b) birth certificate c) marriage certificate d) death certificate e) income / BPL certificate/ BPL ration card) f) land and house title g) Job card (to get 100 days' work on demand) and h)registration with the respective welfare board (construction workers, manual labourers, transgender, denotified communities, Narikoravar, etc).

The partnership and mentoring approach enhanced the capacity of elected representatives and CSOs in 30 districts to strengthen the resilience of socially excluded communities. Through systematic engagement with the state mechanisms, state welfare and social security measures could be delivered to the hitherto excluded communities and households.

3.3 Project achievements

In 15 months (454 days) the project delivered entitlements worth ₹365 million (47%) in assets to about 25,000 priority households (55,707 individuals). There is an additional ₹412 million (53%) in cash flow (pensions, etc) that they will get over the next ten years. A conservative estimate of the measurable benefits due to the project totals ₹777 million (€9.71 million at an exchange rate of €1=₹80) to record a return on investment of 1:77 (7700%). This translates to a scorching ₹1.7 million per day, from a standing start. (Annexes 1 to 7 has details and calculation methodology).

Social security (insurance, medical, and others), if availed, would add an additional ₹650 million (~€8 million). This is in addition to foundational documents (such as community certificates) or basic services (piped water) applied for and received during the implementation period. Applications were filed for over 15,000 documents and 7,045 (47%) were received (and possibly more will be granted post–project). These documents are permanent assets and will be useful for access to many other social welfare and income generating support schemes.

Almost 25,000 applications were filed for assets and cash flow (in addition to 18,000 applications for eligibility documents and entitlements), of which 7,800 were received. The monetised value is ₹3.30 billion applied for and ₹777 million received – about 24%. It keeps open the prospect of more entitlements being delivered post project from the 76% still to be approved (all are eligible, though actual access depends on follow through).

3.4 Continuing challenges

The areas to strengthen are the community level youth groups and engagement with the elected representatives and state mechanisms. In the absence of formal structures

for the local, subdivisional, and district level administrations to engage at periodic intervals with the elected representatives and the CSOs, this is an uphill task

Though they are constitutional functionaries, there are no formal engagement structures between the elected representatives in local self–government on the one hand and the administration on the other – let alone with citizens groups and civil society organisations. The skills, capacity, and authority levels of the elected representatives are quite low.

There are no village level or subdivisional level disaster management structures yet. The disaster management authority stops at the district level.

These are a result of multiple structural deficits. Addressing them is beyond the design or capacity of the project.

3.5 Lessons learned

Lesson 1: To reach the unreached, doorstep delivery is the key. The key to any disaster relief is that 'the person who really needs your help cannot reach you, you need to reach them'.

Lesson 2: Poverty is not one chain, but multiple shackles. Untangle the shackles that create poverty (and force people to be 'left behind') one at a time. Bunching applications, entitlement 'camps', collective visits to the appropriate authorities, incrementally help and multiply the chances of success.

Lesson 3: Multi–level engagement at scale is essential. Only by working with the community, elected representatives, civil society, and the civil service at the village, sub–divisional, district, and state levels, can the barriers be overcome. When the barriers cannot be overcome at one level, we need to address them by moving to another level. This requires state–wide and state level presence and cannot be done by isolated initiatives without a critical mass.

3.6 Replication

The scaling–up methodology and approaches applied

The methodology and approaches worked and are replicable. A dissemination workshop (part of the project design) was conducted. We are now doing a more detailed documentation of the process, with best practices and lessons learned so that it can be an induction document for others who would like to replicate it.

The links HRF had earlier due to our programmes in local government for CSOs and elected representatives, the support systems that were in place to monitor the implementation of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, the data–based approach to fulfilment of SDGs for excluded

communities (supported by GIZ), all stood us in good stead and were adapted and repurposed for this integrated project. The links were deepened and strengthened due to the 360–degree engagement and scaling up.

3.7 Contribution to recover better, reduction of poverty

Contribution to support the community to recover better from the impact of the Covid–19 pandemic, particularly with reference to application of the 'leave no one behind' (LNOB) principle and/or the reduction of poverty and / or inequality

Those households covered by the project are now fully eligible for all government support, including emergency support should the need arise. Their documentation is up to date, and their resilience has improved tremendously. In some categories (for instance housing and social security) it has permanently improved.

In terms of the Sustainable Development Goals 2030, SDG, this project has significantly covered 11 of 17 SDGs: goals 1–6 (no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well–being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation); 8–10 (decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation, and infrastructure, reduced inequalities); 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions); and 17 (partnerships for the goals).

Working primarily – almost exclusively – with the socially excluded communities, this project frontally addresses social exclusion, and implemented the application of the LNOB principle at its core.

4 Resilience during and beyond disasters

4.1 Introduction

The daily life of the poor is the epitome of VUCA – volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous – used by the military to describe war. 'Extraordinary' disasters — whether the pandemic, extreme cyclones, or heavy rainfall — have become the norm, and we must prepare to face them. The pandemic has exposed, as never before, the need for the poor to have formal resilience mechanisms. For the poor, only proactive mitigation and sustenance measures that enhance their resilience, will help them survive these multiple recurrent disasters. The key link in this is their linkage, access, and benefit from the state social security mechanisms and welfare net before the disaster.

Every state promises the uplift of the oppressed, and some sincerely try to do so. But there is a huge gap in delivery. While many social security schemes of the government are introduced with the best of intensions, their design makes access impossible for the deserving. Schemes designed for the poor remain complex and inaccessible, pushing them further and further into poverty while making more well–paid jobs for the administrators of the 'welfare state' who are from the privileged strata. The poor find access difficult since they do not even have the necessary certificates and mandatory documents – so they cannot cross the first milestone in the journey to get the entitlements.

An example of good intensions and policy announcements falling by the wayside is the Government of Tamil Nadu's order No.69856/2022 dated 25.11.2022 to enumerate the families who are unable to construct houses in rural areas by obtaining free house site pattas to benefit under the scheme of Housing for All – though under TN Vision 2023 (notified in 2012) all were to have houses with 24x7 water supply by now. Ten years down the line, the government is unable to get its act together.

After a global disaster like COVID–19, the marginalised have been further marginalised. Hundreds of schemes introduced by the union and state governments during the lockdown have not fully reached their intended persons (especially the scheduled communities, those with special needs, LGBTQIA+, fishers, religious and linguistic minorities, bypassing almost totally the women, children, and persons with disabilities among them).

To that end HRF, with the assistance of GIZ–RBSF, implemented the 'Tamil Nadu First' programme in 30 of 38 districts of Tamil Nadu. The name was consciously chosen to make Tamil Nadu first in not only humanitarian response, but in all human development indicators and to attain the SDGs well before 2030.

The first step was getting the basic documents required to get the basic rights guaranteed by the Constitution of India and various schemes of the government to make the social security net a reality for the vulnerable. This would ensure that they receive emergency aid, social security benefits, and all entitlements, in addition to assistance in adapting to evolving environmental conditions, enabling them to progress and attain sustainable livelihoods through government–supported programs and amenities.

4.2 Project description

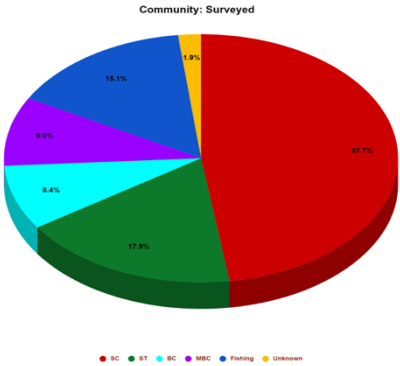
Sl	Activity	Output	Outcome (baseline/ target)
Objective: Ensure 15000 families get all entitlements			
Sub–objective 1: Ensure 15000 families get all required documentation			
1.1	Map beneficiaries (100%).	List of potential eligible beneficiaries with and without documents.	Selection of households with less than 25% benefits accessed, and without documentation.
1.2	Apply for required certification (100%) and follow up.	Applications filed for all the 15,000 selected households (100%).	At least 75% of the families get the critical documents to avail of the welfare schemes and pandemic relief: Certificates of birth, death, marriage, community, disability, school, income/ poverty, title deeds.
1.3	Verify and validate the selection.	Final list of beneficiaries prepared transparently.	Community buy–in for the process.
Sub–objective 2: Ensure 15000 families get all relief and entitlements			
2.1	Apply for all eligible relief and follow up.	Applications filed for all the 15,000 selected households.	Eligible families will get 100% of the assured relief. Baseline: 0%. Target: 50% will get all, at least 75% will get most. 100% will get some.
2.2	Apply for eligible social security and follow up.	Applications filed for all the 15,000 selected households.	Families will get all eligible social security. Baseline: 0%. Target: 50% will get all, at least 75% will get some. 100% will get at least one.
2.3	Register in the respective welfare board and follow up.	All eligible are registered in the respective welfare boards.	Access to specific social welfare for self and family. Baseline 0%. Target 50% (majority women/ women headed families).
Note: We deliberately targeted 100% coverage because the need was high. It was a challenge. These communities are unreached and underserved – the 'left behind' – despite all the outreach of the government, civil society, and corporate initiatives. The households selected are even more deprived, and they cannot wait any longer.			

4.3 Project priority locations

The project priority areas were selected at the stage of project proposal preparation. Selection was made from 161 village panchayats (an average of five panchayats per district) in the 30 (of the total 38) districts in Tamil Nadu where local body elections had been held. Priority was given to remote villages, where the presidents were women, scheduled castes, or scheduled tribes.

4.4 Project priority communities

The project priority communities were the socially excluded communities and vulnerable groups in remote areas. This translates into the tribals (including nomadic tribes), the Adi–Dravidar, and the most backward classes (MBC) in remote rural and forest areas, who score the lowest in human development indices.



The 18,000 project priority households (though the project was for 15,000 families) were selected from socially excluded communities based on a survey particularly mindful of senior citizens, single women, the disabled, trans persons, and families living below the poverty line.

Of the total households surveyed, 8,625 belonged to the scheduled castes, 3,238 to the scheduled tribes, 1,526 to backward classes, 1,627 to most backward classes, and 2,732 were fishers. 338 chose not to respond.

4.5 Approach

4.5.1 360° HRBA

To enhance resilience the project followed a human rights–based approach. The key components of the approach have been strengthening existing local institutions – the elected representatives and the CSOs – on the one hand and enrolling the most vulnerable into the formal state support mechanisms for access to state welfare and social security measures on the other.

4.5.2 The first mile

In the first phase the project concentrated on procuring the following critical eligibility documents – a) community b) birth c) marriage d) death and e) income / below poverty line (BPL) certificates f) BPL ration card and g) Aadhar card.

4.5.3 The last mile

Once the critical documents were got, applications were filed and followed up to acquire the eligible entitlements that go with the documents a) land and house title (in the joint names of the wife and husband) b) Job card (to enable them get 100 days jobs on demand under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, MGNREGA) c) registration with the respective welfare board (construction workers, manual labourers, transgender, Denotified Communities, Narikuravar welfare board, etc).

4.5.4 Partnerships

In all the working districts, other CSOs were included in the project as mentors to the district animators, and accompanied the engagement with stakeholders at the village, sub–divisional, and district levels. They participated in the trainings and monthly online reviews. Similarly, the elected representatives were also involved in the project in the trainings and in engagement at the village, sub–divisional, and district levels.

5 The process

5.1 Milestones

The process was initially planned for 12 months. However, within six months it became obvious that the take–off had been slower than expected and therefore had to be revised upwards by four months (25%) with no cost escalation. The extension was critical to the success of the project.

Month 01–03

a) Mapping schemes, eligibility documents, and inter–dependencies.
b) Preparation of survey tools and mobile app.
c) Onboarding district animators and mentors.

Month 03–04

a) Survey
b) Consolidation and analysis.

Month 05–06

a) Applications filed with the competent authorities for eligible schemes.
b) Applications filed for those who don't have eligibility certificates.
c) Applications filed for registration in welfare boards.
d) Verification of certificates received.

Month 07–16

a) Follow–on applications based on documentation received.
b) Engagement with the competent authorities at village, subdivisional, and district levels.

Month 14–16

a) Prepare plans for step up (post pandemic) schemes, including the required documentation.
b) Engaged with the government on post pandemic recovery plans.
c) Prepare village disaster vulnerability, mitigation, and management plans.
d) Lessons learnt and best practices dissemination multi–stakeholder workshop.

5.2 Selection of district animators and mentors

The district animators were the anchors for the project in each district, interacting with the communities, the elected representatives, and the administration at the village, subdivisional, and district levels. Those with some experience in securing the rights of the socially excluded communities were selected, with a preference for women from the local communities.

5.3 Initiation

All HRF programmes start with an initiation meeting with the key actors – usually the CEOs of the participating CSOs and the trainees (in this case the district mentors and animators) – reiterating the aims, objectives, methodology, and desired outcomes of the initiative, the specific roles of each in the effort.

Accordingly, on 15 November 2021, an online meeting with mentors and animators was held. The meeting also covered administration and finance procedures from the project calendar to mandatory meetings, remuneration, cost heads and allocations.

Those who were unwilling or not confident of staying the course during the project had the option of dropping out. Since most of this was already shared beforehand during the planning process, all participants from the 30 districts signed on.

5.4 Mapping the social security network

government schemes, eligibility documents, and dependencies

A list of existing union and state government schemes for the priority households was mapped in seven domains. Once that was done, we worked backwards to identify the eligibility documents required for each of them, and then the dependencies. There were a few critical eligibility documents for most of the entitlements and dependency on them was the highest – for instance the community certificates and Aadhar numbers.

Some depended on fulfilling other criteria first – piped water and toilets depended on having houses with clear titles. Once these criteria were mapped, they had to be sequenced – which one to apply first. These were matched with the household priorities. Only then were we ready for the two–step process of applying for the documentation followed by applying for the entitlements.

1	Citizenship	Birth certificate (for the under 18s), Aadhar (biometric identification) card, ration card, community certificate, voter ID (for those over 18)
2	Infrastructure	Land titles, housing, LPG, electricity, piped water, toilets
3	Health	Pre– and postnatal care, institutional check–up and delivery, child vaccination, maternity benefit, government medical insurance, covid vaccination for adults
4	Education	Schooling up to 18, no dropouts, scholarships, school/degree certificate (10–year backlog), degree enrolment
5	Employment	Registration for MGNREGA, relevant welfare boards, entrepreneur schemes, employment exchange, and opening bank account
6	Social security	Marriage registration / certificate (especially inter–caste marriage) Pensions for: old age, widows, disabled, transgender
7	Access to justice	Relief and rehabilitation: Bonded / child labour, child marriage, caste atrocities, migrants Custodial justice: Bail for prisoners / undertrials, juveniles

5.5 Survey

A proper survey was essential to select the right beneficiaries. Therefore, it was systematically undertaken over several rounds in consultation with both domain experts and the field practitioners.

5.5.1 Questionnaire

The survey design was such that the answers (excluding the name of the Panchayat, family members, and contact number) were yes/no or multiple choice. This was to reduce error, in addition to standardisation. The design was mindful of the circumstances of the households to be surveyed and the external environment in which the survey would be done.

5.5.2 Programming Kobo

The questions were programmed, verified, and tested on Kobo, a mobile phone–based application. Kobo was chosen because it is easy to programme. An additional and crucial consideration was that it would work off–line, and then synchronise on reaching an area with mobile coverage.

5.5.3 Survey training

A one–day training for the district animators was conducted in Chennai on 25 November 2021 covering the main issues and challenges facing marginalised communities and the ways and means to address these issues. The district animators were trained on conducting the survey using Kobo. The mentors also participated in the training.

5.5.4 Test survey and clarification

The tool was field tested by the district animators covering at least 10 families each. This was followed by an online review, which revealed the areas that needed to be strengthened in the app.

5.5.5 Modification of Kobo App

The app was updated to incorporate the requested changes to the questionnaires to address the issues identified during the trial. It involved modifying both the questions and answers.

5.5.6 Two–day training for district animators

The animators were trained on applying for government schemes online and acquire the necessary eligibility certificates. Domain experts were guest trainers. A total of 28 animators (17 women, 11 men) from 28 districts attended the programme which was conducted from 27 to 29 December 2021.

5.5.7 Briefing the elected community representatives

To ensure smooth functioning the respective elected representatives (panchayat presidents and ward members) were briefed on the project goals before conducting the survey and their cooperation was requested. Some elected representatives were enthusiastic and even helped identify the marginalised people in their village. But most elected representatives insisted that all the people in the village be surveyed, or else they would be in trouble with other people.

5.5.8 Survey

The survey was launched in December 2021 among 18,000 marginalised households (an average of 100 families per Panchayat) in 161 village panchayats (of which 149 were selected) in 30 districts of Tamil Nadu.

The survey was planned to be conducted in two months. Due to the lack of cooperation of elected representatives, post–lockdown mobility that prevented the survey being conducted on the working (week) days, seasonal migration up to six months in some villages, and lack of understanding, the survey took longer than planned and was completed two months behind schedule.

5.5.9 Data validation and beneficiary list

The uploaded data were verified and cleaned. Based on this data, district and village–wise beneficiary lists were prepared. These lists were distributed to the respective mentor and animator in each district. The full list was available at the project office.

5.6 Balavana

Simultaneous with the survey were initiatives for community involvement, and for the long–term sustainability and resilience of the community.

To ensure the participation of the entire community in the project – and as an incentive for long–term engagement – the Balavana (literally children's forest) concept was introduced. The idea was for each child to plant a tree in the village commons and take care of it.

This would have multiple benefits. Identifying the land would mean that the entire decision–making structure of the village would come together and interact with the children. To find a place to plant trees, encroached common land, unused thorny bush covered land, and crematoriums without trees were found.

To facilitate their maintenance, some districts encouraged children to plant saplings in their school premises and homes. The saplings required for this effort were collected by the district animators. Local government officials, presidents, and the villagers helped in selecting the place to plant the trees. The process was designed

to bring in children into the development process of the village and be active next generation village assembly (grama sabha) members.

5.7 Grama sabha monitoring

The grama sabha is the only institution of direct democracy in India. All adults in the voter's list are automatically members. It meets four times a year (six times from 2023) on 26 January (Republic Day), 1 May (May Day), 15 August (Independence Day) and 2 October (Gandhi Jayanthi). It is supposed to take stock of the functioning of the elected representatives, the finances, approve of the development works and select beneficiaries for social security.

Since there is 50% quota for women and proportionate reservation of the scheduled communities at all levels, the president and ward members are from the underserved communities as well. Even so, the dominant communities ensure that the social security and development schemes are disproportionately cornered by the already privileged. Monitoring these meetings was as much to ensure the correct selection of beneficiaries as to ensure that the presidents from the socially excluded communities were allowed to function.

Four regular meetings (1 May 2022, 15 August 2022, 2 October 2022, and 26 January 2023) and one special gram sabha meeting (on 24 April 2022) were held during this project period. The special grama sabha meeting was conducted on National Panchayati Raj Day (the anniversary of the parliament passing the Indian Constitution 73rd Amendment which made the three-tier local self-government mandatory across the country).

The agenda for the special grama sabha was to develop a village specific plan to fulfil the SDGs using the lens of LNOB. We prepared a goal wise action plan and circulated it across the state (including all 149 project areas). The animators monitored the meetings and resolutions in 30 village panchayats on 24 April 2022.

Throughout the project period, beneficiary lists were placed before, and passed by, 137 village assemblies. Among them, 68 were monitored by the district animators. Since the meetings are held simultaneously, each animator could attend only one meeting in the district.

5.8 Village equity and vulnerability maps

As a part of sustainability and resilience, village disaster vulnerability maps were made followed by mitigation and management plans. The district animators and mentors were trained and supported to make these maps. The maps identify the areas most vulnerable to disasters – which are also the areas where the socially excluded

communities reside. These areas are the most underserved in terms of infrastructure and services. Roads, bus stops, water tanks, government offices, schools, police stations, electricity, mobile coverage – all are located where the dominant communities reside. This makes for secondary consequences when, for instance, it becomes difficult for ambulances to serve those not in the privileged areas – a classic example of a manmade disaster.

The maps located the vulnerable areas, the vulnerable people (especially people with disabilities), and the assembly points in times of disaster. The contact numbers of the appropriate services (district disaster management authority, fire, ambulance, police) and the distance to the nearest facilities for relief (primary health centres, community halls, schools) were also mapped from the perspective of the socially excluded communities.

In addition, these were also social equity maps. They contained the location of the critical infrastructure, the controls such as the electricity substation, main water control valves, access roads and bus stops, and gaps in coverage (especially electrification of houses and public spaces). Vulnerable areas were colour coded. Caste prohibited areas, such as roads and water sources, were marked in red.

Though each village is supposed to have a GIS map with this information, the animators were not able to access them despite several attempts. Going forward, the communities can use these equity and vulnerability maps in the village perspective plans (once in five years) and the annual plans to fill the gaps and secure equitable coverage.

5.9 Weekly coordination and study circles

Weekly online coordination–cum–training meeting were held every Saturday from 4 pm to 5 pm (last Friday of the month from August 2022) to review the weekly progress with the mentors and provide the necessary assistance to the district animators. A detailed training on the application process of one government scheme, its documentation requirements, and application filing procedures was also imparted in these meeting. The topic of the weekly training was determined based on the queries and needs of the animators. Based on experience, the animators training was shifted to Mondays since the agenda and purpose were distinct.

5.10 Orientation for village presidents

Village councils headed by scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, or women were selected as our project priority areas. For the most part, neither these presidents nor the members had any training or sufficient knowledge of their legal authority or manner of functioning in the local body. It was a big challenge for them to meet the

needs of the marginalised due to the prevailing caste and patriarchal structures, practices, and expectations. Let alone enabling their communities to access entitlements, these presidents could not even exercise their own constitutional rights nor perform their constitutional duties. Their administrative and financial authority and power were virtually non–existent.

To overcome these multiple debilities, a closer coordination with better understanding of roles, rights, powers, and duties had to be forged. Therefore, zonal–level trainings were conducted to empower the presidents of the project villages. The purpose was to demystify government and governance for them.

5.11 Engagement and escalation

Applications were filed and followed up continuously, regularly, rigorously, and systematically. Once the application was filed, the district animators, along with the elected representatives where possible, followed it up with the village and subdivisional officials. This was required because there was considerable degradation in administrative systems during and post–pandemic, in addition to the pre–existing, pre–pandemic lethargic delivery of services.

Sometimes the delay was because the usual extortion (when the individuals applied) was not possible due to the systematic group applications facilitated by the elected representative and the animator under the guidance of the mentor. Some staff went on 'long leave' when further delay became untenable.

Anticipating this, escalation to the district and state levels was part of the project design. While escalation to the state level was to be need based, engagement with the district collector was to be quarterly. This was to be with evidence of abnormal delay, and would involve the affected persons, elected representatives, and the district animator. Once the quarterly meetings got off ground, the people started approaching the district administration whenever needed.

At the state level, the survey was shared with the administration. In a couple of cases of extreme caste discrimination, cases were filed under the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 and state level intervention was made due to foot–dragging by the district administration.

6 Course correction

6.1 Changed circumstances

With people starting to move out of the village for work – prioritising todays needs over long–term resilience – the data and applications could be collected only on their off–workdays. Given that mobile connectivity was erratic and power outages the norm in some villages, these considerably added to the time required. Consequently, the schedule was thrown off kilt.

6.2 Data integrity

During the survey, people had given wrong information at the application stage, resulting in a huge wastage of time. This came to light when there was application for entitlements, during the online verification stage. The wrong information (especially multiple applications for entitlements already received in the hope of somehow cheating the system) created avoidable bottlenecks since the applications were online. Only after the all the details were input, the system would validate and reject the duplicates. That took a lot of precious online time.

6.3 Applying through TN First Camp

Since all the priority families were daily wage labourers, especially tribal family heads who migrated continuously for work, it was very difficult to reach them on working days. Therefore, camps were conducted on weekends in challenging areas with the cooperation of the panchayat administration. Prior to the camps, information about the venue, programmes, and required certificates was printed as pamphlets and distributed in areas where priority families were located.

However, the priority households still found it difficult to avail of these doorstep services due to erratic daily wage employment. Others from the community, eligible but who had earlier declined to be part of the survey or programme, made full use of these camps sometimes even exceeding the identified project priority households.

6.4 The streamlined final stretch

The major reason for better success in the later part of the project was that the process was streamlined based on the bottlenecks identified and lessons learnt in the earlier months. The foundational documents were cleaned up first, so applications could not be denied due to incompleteness.

‘Cleaning up’ was an unforeseen task. It includes getting the right name (especially spellings) and other details (such as birthdays) harmonised across documents – for which sometimes other documentation and attestation were required. Sometimes, it entailed deleting the names from old documents and databases such as the parents’ ration cards so that new ones could be issued for new households.

Since the preparatory work was done at the doorstep, the time at the point of service (at the citizens service centres, CSCs, or competent authority) could be minimised. With prior identification and preparation, those eligible were mobilised to go to the point of service collectively, increasing motivational levels and taking comfort in peer support.

'Camps' – when the CSC operators or computers with internet access was brought to the village on off workdays – further reduced the time off from work and decreased the entry and adoption barriers. This had a great impact on adoption since it directly affected the days away from their work – and therefore their income – with tangible benefits even in the short term.

7 Community involvement

7.1 Ensuring universal involvement

The involvement of the entire community is essential for the success of this model in the long run. Therefore, the project was designed to involve all sections.

The children (and through them the teachers and parents) were involved through the balavana component.

The youth were involved in the applications and eligibility documents. They assisted in mobilising the community and in collecting the necessary evidence.

In some places, educated youth along with the district animators were also involved in the online application process.

However overall, we were not as successful as we wanted to be in securing community–wide involvement.

7.2 The contours of involvement

In the initial phase, there were four clear groups of people. The first was the *enthusiasts* – those who were eligible and embraced the opportunity. The second was the *free loaders* – those who wanted to milk the project to the extent that they wanted the project to pay even the application fees (in addition to arranging doorstep services or transportation). Obviously, they were left out.

The third was the *opportunists* – those whose survey responses was that they did not have their entitlements, when they already did, in the hope that they would get it one more time (from a ration card to community certificates, to houses). Most were exposed in the application stage itself since the online system verified basic details before accepting the applications. Few reached the physical verification stage. For this group, the initial hope of gaming the system did not fructify. They were not unduly affected by these reverses for they well knew that they were just trying (pushing) their luck.

The fourth was the *fatalists*. They were those so obviously and visibly eligible for the entitlements – and for whom the project was made for – yet were so reluctant to join in the effort. It was a mixture of apathy, resignation, fatalism, helplessness, and hopelessness – since many had tried before or they could not afford the extortion and had run the entire gauntlet that wore out their stamina, drained out their meagre income and life savings, or had watched the fruitless attempts of others to meet the multiple documentation requirements of red tape.

Despite the best efforts of the district animators, these group people could not be persuaded to apply. Fatalism (also 'acceptance', resignation) is a coping mechanism in the face of certain failure (denial of entitlements and rights). Unbridled optimism in the face of certain failure is a sure recipe for trauma.

7.3 The hope dividend

An interesting phenomenon of how 'success breeds success' is revealed during the progress of the project. It is such a definitive trend that it can even be considered an external, independent validation of our success. We call it the hope dividend.

Once the first documents and entitlements started to trickle in, there was a marked attitudinal change. Those who stayed away initially (fatalists, sceptics, cynics) started to clamour to be included. With the increasing visible success, the fatalists were willing to give it a try, and the freeloaders were willing to pay the application fees to the government citizens service centres (CSC). Even those who were not part of the initial surveyed cohort came on their own to the entitlement camps to get their documents and apply for their eligible entitlements.

There were fewer rejections in the second phase since the opportunists kept away because they knew that the system had their information and that it was a waste of time to try outsmarting it.

8 Programme support systems

The monitoring and evaluation methods to assess project progress and the impact of the activities on beneficiaries.

8.1 Approach to systems

As an organisation rooted in advocacy, research, and training (ART) our approach to monitoring and evaluation is 'mentoring'. There is training, followed by almost daily support and mentoring. Right at the outset we realised that this was a new way of functioning for the district animators – who were development workers and human rights defenders – in that the systematic, system–wide engagement from the first mile to the last mile. In the best of times, it would be a novelty. In the pandemic context, it was a new game with new rules – and therefore needed a whole new method of mentoring.

8.2 Selection of districts, mentors, and animators

The first step was to choose the district animators from among the trainees. This would depend on their capacity, willingness to learn, and the support they district mentor was willing to provide. The districts were chosen based on whether the local government elections were conducted, since working with the village presidents was a major part of the project design. Within them, CEOs of organisations that had previously been part of our programmes and training on effective local government were asked to nominate trainees, who would be placed in their organisation as interns as their mentees.

8.3 Baseline survey

The second step was to ensure that the selection of beneficiaries and fulfilment of their priorities was systematic, regular, and verifiable. So, a baseline survey was conducted, in which the needs and eligibility were identified, and tabulated in a custom–made app on the KOBO platform. These surveyed households were tracked right through the project period using their coding number, and the entitlements they prioritised. There were some who were a part of the survey but did not want to join the project. They dropped out.

However, once the project began to get results, they too clamoured to join. They were included since they came from the same demographic and were eligible for the entitlements, but as individuals (not as households) for specific entitlements, without a household survey reference number. (These two categories are tracked and tabulated separately in the data tables).

The data of the surveyed households was given back to the district animators and mentors in print for reference and performance tracking.

8.4 Applications and daily support

The animators report what they did at specific times during the week (6 per day for a total of all 30 animators in a week) by sending screenshots of applications filed, or photographs of the certificates/allotment letters or other similar evidence via Signal (a relatively secure mobile app). They were to file applications systematically either household–wise or scheme–wise or document–wise. As and when they did the filing, they would send the photograph to HRF for updating the priority needs database. This would be verified with the beneficiary database for consistency (did they ask for this when surveyed or was it a low hanging fruit?) and duplication.

Some of the documentation was 1 to 3–minute videos of 'before' and 'after'. On being verified, the databased (tracking sheet) would be updated. In either case, feedback would be given to each individual district animator every week. In this way, the progress of fulfilment of each household and the performance of each district animator was monitored every day and every week right till the very end of the project.

8.5 Weekly animators' performance review

The performance of each animator was reviewed every Monday (1600 to 1700 IST). This included the applications sent, entitlements received, and the evidence provided. It was done collectively to motivate the district animators to better their efforts in comparison to the previous week and with the performance of their peers. The animators also point out if there are data gaps in the project tracking system which are noted and verified post meeting with the concerned animator.

8.6 Monthly mentor's meeting

The mentor's forum was the steering committee for this project. Their monthly online review was at a fixed date and time throughout the project: the first of the month, or Monday if the 1st falls on a Saturday or Sunday. The performance review of their mentees was presented to them, as well as the progress towards goals. Any corrections or streamlining were discussed at these meetings.

8.7 Quarterly all–team review

Every quarter there were onsite reviews with all district animators and the project core–team with mentors joining on the last day to review of progress and impact and discuss strategic corrections if required. These were multi–purpose meetings, which included capacity building for the needs of the next quarter. The district animators brought the hardcopies of the evidence for verification, which are individually discussed with the coordinators at the meeting itself.

Any local circumstance that was hindering them was discussed together with the mentor. In one quarterly review, even the village presidents were included, so that they could own and participate in the process better.

8.8 End of project review

The online end of project review was a special mentors and animators meeting. The data was verified for one last time and the experiences shared – the highs and the lows, the challenges and the joys. The lessons learnt and best practices were freely exchanged. It was tinged with nostalgia as well.

8.9 Dissemination workshop

The best practice and lessons learnt were documented and shared at a state level dissemination workshop. It was to share the journey and celebration of the success. The mentors and animators were felicitated. There were 57 participants (33 women, 24 men), with special invitees from other CSOs and academia. The international participants attended online.

The workshop, though an integral part of the project design, was conducted on 8 March 2023 just after the project completion on 28 February 2023.

9 Challenges and work arounds

The main risks during implementation and how they have been addressed.

9.1 Disaster as a permanent 'given'

The project was designed at the height of the pandemic related restrictions, to be implemented during, and in the aftermath of, the pandemic. A disaster–like situation – VUCA – was taken as a given, and the planning considered that as the norm. There were several risks that were foreseen at the time of project design, and they were provided for – the pandemic being the foremost.

Limited mobility due to travel restrictions and breakdown of essential infrastructure (personal transport in disrepair, public transport off road) was foreseen and the project was planned to take advantage of them (the communities and the officials would be in place not migrating for work or travel on official duty – a perennial excuse of recalcitrant officials who do not want the underprivileged to access entitlements and refuse to issue the relevant documents).

We were also aware that those who could get their entitlements would have already got them – there were no 'low hanging fruit' left – each would be uniquely difficult and would need specific solutions.

9.2 Caste and patriarchal resistance

Caste and patriarchal resistance were risk factors considered since they hold considerable sway outside cosmopolitan islands and are the socio–economic and cultural determinants in all but a few isolated pockets. Even so, the depth of caste hatred and misogyny shocked us. In most cases, when the dominant community blocked our access demanding 'if you are doing, do for all' – which was another way of saying 'do it for us first and only then for them' – we tried reasoning with them that they were not eligible (perhaps because they already had a house or ration card or community certificate and could not get another one). Some still wanted to apply and were convinced only when their online applications were rejected in the de–duplication stage (they trusted the computers more than they did us!).

We addressed this by selecting villages with a majority population of socially excluded communities (which also meant that the village elected representative – president or ward member – would be from the community), women district animators from the same project area and preferably from the same community, and a mentor from a civil society organisation with sufficient social capital to engage with the district administration.

The animators chosen were from the socially excluded communities, preferably women. The women coordinators, especially those belonging to oppressed

communities, faced stiff opposition from the local government officials and elected representatives in local self–government from the dominant communities, especially the men. In hindsight, this multiple exclusion also meant that there was little social capital that they could deploy. The officials' response reflects this perceived lack. The hostility of caste privileged men in positions of authority to women from excluded communities submitting applications for entitlements to 'allowing' the socially excluded communities to access entitlements is an unfortunate reality.

Though we have more than a couple of decades worth of experience in work in empowering women in local self–government, this was very challenging, and some district animators and even mentors could not travel the distance with us.

9.3 Institutional casteism

In one case in Karur district the resistance was so high (including in officialdom) that our senior team had to conduct a fact finding (citizen's investigation) and meet with district level officials for action. The village president was literally made to sit next to garbage in the outhouse, while the dominant caste village clerk occupied the president's chair, kept all the files in her custody, and controlled the chequebook.

Though the village clerk was transferred pending inquiry, two weeks later she was transferred right back, and the village president was kidnapped along with her husband at midnight and forced to sign blank papers in the police station. We had to intervene at the highest levels of the state to ensure that the president was reinstated, and a case was filed against the village clerk (who was finally transferred) under the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

A similar case was resolved at the district level in Tirupattur with social mobilisation and the threat of use of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

Despite the 'victories' in the district, the process was so exhausting that the entitlement's access process was severely affected and never regained the initial momentum in the particular districts.

9.4 Recalcitrant officials

There was the risk of recalcitrant officials, who often belonged to the dominant communities, denying, and delaying the entitlements. We countered that by working with the village presidents (elected constitutional functionaries), and then escalating all delays to the subdivisional level every month, quarterly to the district level, and as required to the state level. Having 30–50 applicants land up at the district collectorate was attention grabbing, as well as an effective means of getting redress.

Generally, all the animators faced resistance from village administrative officers, local e–service centre operators, and intermediaries. One of the main reasons for this is that when accompanied by the district animators, the applications were filed at the government rates – either free of charge or as per the government determined rate (a maximum of ₹60) – instead of falling prey to overcharging by the service centres and outright extortion by the government officials.

9.5 Pandemic disruption

The project was designed during the pandemic, approved after its peak, and executed post–pandemic in the recovery phase. The major challenge was to redesign implementation for the post–pandemic situation (the objectives and the goals remained valid, since the initiative was to improve resilience beyond disasters).

Paradoxically, lifting the restrictions increased the challenges for the project by changing one of the fundamental assumptions that it was designed on: mobility. The mobility of the community in general who worked outside the village and particularly those from two of the surveyed villages who migrated for work for up to six months at a time. In many others, the adults of working age were available to complete the formalities only on Sundays – when officials are on leave – considerably restricting the window of opportunity.

Here the project methodology changed from taking the applicants to the service centres to bringing the service provider and equipment to the villages. Even so, all the applications could not be filed, nor the supporting documents be found, just in the weekends. We requested, and GIZ–RBSF approved, a four–month (25%) no–cost extension to the project. This extension increased the outputs manifold and enabled us to cruise past the targets.

There was also another impact that we did not plan for – though it was staring in our face. There were several instances when animators had to stop work for considerable periods of time since they contracted the virus or were primary caregivers of those who did. Since there were mentors in each district, they could find others to backstop within the same peer group. In others we had to find alternatives (some of which also did not pan out).

9.6 Circular dependencies: Infrastructure and poverty

The entitlements are dependent on identification documentation, and some are interdependent (for instance, housing is dependent on the community certificate and poverty certificate, which depends on the bio–metric identification, which is a pre–requisite for bank accounts etc…). The poor are also documentation poor, so getting the documentation right took a lot of time – it was not one off.

Their areas were underserved infrastructure wise. The SMS based OTP system does not work in remote villages where there is no coverage, and indifferent power supply. On top of this are the ‘informal quotas’. Informal quotas of the government mean that only a few applications were accepted at a time. (10 applications a day in the CSCs, two applications per village per month for old age and widow pensions). So, for each step of each document and application, multiple OTPs was a drag. Since their Aadhaar numbers were done much earlier, they did not have, nor know, the old mobile numbers. Some had not kept their numbers active simply because they could not afford the money for the monthly rental, which was a significant part of their monthly income. In the meantime, several operators had gone bankrupt so they could not revive the old numbers either.

If they managed to overcome the infrastructure hurdles (which the project did by organising the camps) other factors come into play. Most of the initial application is online, which is a hurdle that we could overcome for some. After that, everything depends on the officials, and bias and privilege comes to play in the form of extortion, though it is sanitised by euphemistically labelling it ‘rent seeking’, ‘leakage’, and ‘bribes’.

10 Sustainability

10.1 Long–term effectiveness of the project

Project continuation (upscaled, transferred, etc.) beyond the end of the grant agreement and sustainability.

The enhancement of the community resilience is permanent (in terms of documentation, assets, and cash flow) with them firmly within the institutional framework of state mechanisms. In future disasters they will be less vulnerable and will be able to access the social security net seamlessly.

The skills gained by the district animators will be embedded into the local organisations in which they were placed and their mentors. Several of the organisations have told us that they will be following this approach in their future interventions. Some have already got government and private grants to continue implementation in 15 districts. Another has integrated this approach into all their programmes and have already put in close to 55,000 applications and received positive responses to almost 50,000 of them.

10.2 Organisational growth

Programmatically, HRF scaled up from training and policy engagement to include work at all stages of programme implementation, monitoring, and engagement.

Geographically, the project scaled from the just state level training to implementation and engagement in 30 of 38 districts (i.e., all the districts in which local government elections were completed, since elected representatives were integral to project design).

Administratively, the engagement enlarged to encompass the village, sub–divisional, and district levels in addition to the pre–existing state level engagement. HRFs organisational and project management systems have scaled up to manage a state–wide project at multiple levels.

The team has upgraded their skills through this experience and through specialised training provided by GIZ–RBSF.

11 Lessons learned

lessons learned for future implementation or scaling up of this or similar projects.

11.1 To reach the unreached doorstep delivery is the key

The 'left behind' communities are perpetually in a state of 'disaster' and must be treated as such. The key to any disaster relief is that 'the person who really needs your help cannot reach you, you need to reach them'. All the entitlements were already present as government programmes – sometimes as 'flagship schemes', meaning that they are the priority of the government. But the government expectation is that the needy will reach them, which is an erroneous assumption if the disaster analogy is considered the norm.

11.2 Untangle the shackles one at a time

Poverty is not one chain, but multiple shackles. The poor are deprived – 'poor' – in many ways. The poor are also document poor. The government procedures require documentation of eligibility. The effort to obtain each document (requirement) might be trivial – only a gossamer strand, but together the gossamer strands become ironclad shackles that are a formidable barrier to access. Ensuring first mile (eligibility documents) and last mile connectivity (application and follow–up) is the key to success – and must be planned as peeling the onion one step at a time and is a laborious process that sometimes literally brings tears to the eye. Bunching applications, entitlement 'camps', collective visits to the appropriate authorities, incrementally help and multiply the chances of success.

11.3 Multi–level engagement at scale is essential

Allies become hostile and vice versa. From the households to the elected representatives, the community, civil service, and civil society, each have their own axes to grind and demons to conquer. The households often gave wrong data hoping to get additional (duplicate) benefits that they were not eligible for or had already availed of. The village community is caste ridden and uses false equivalence (get the entitlements for all not just 'them' – even though they have houses, and the scheme is for the homeless) to deny access to the excluded. Elected representatives see a loss of patronage and civil service a loss of extortion income.

By working with the community, elected representatives, civil society, and the civil service at the village, sub–divisional, district, and state levels, most of these barriers could be overcome by moving from one to the other level. (Even so, we have received only 40% of the entitlements applied for in the project duration). This requires state–wide and state level presence and cannot be done by isolated initiatives. The economies of scale, especially for effective engagement at the district and state levels, come into play only when there is a critical mass.

12 Recommendations for replication

Recommendations for refining the project's approach and implementation.

1. Plan the initiative at the appropriate scale. This worked because of the state–wide and state level action. It made the numbers compelling – 30 of 38 districts, 150 villages, and 18,000 families. The cost of the backend support systems could be amortised due to scale but would be prohibitively expensive with unutilised capacity for smaller numbers.
2. Allow for more time. We needed four more months to achieve our objectives – i.e., 25% more time. Add time and personnel for documentation and learning.
3. Factor in caste and male privilege in the government mechanisms and in the society in the power analysis and in the timelines. These considerably impede the access to entitlements.
4. Be focussed but flexible: Ensure focus on the goal but be flexible in the methodology. We had to have diversity in methodology even at the village level, not just the district level.
5. Work systematically. Map the entitlements, then work backwards to the eligibility documents. Start the application and follow up process for the entitlements only when the critical documentation is ready (otherwise the people lose heart and get discouraged). Once applications are filed, systematically follow up, escalating requests at regular intervals.
6. Conduct 'camps': Collectively apply for and follow up applications for entitlements (including the requisite documents). A collective approach considerably diminishes the opportunities for extortion by officials and increases the chances of extortion free sanction of entitlements.
7. Involve all power centres, opinion leaders, and decision makers separately and together. Separate training and orientation workshops need to be a part of the design for the district animators, mentors, and elected representatives. A joint workshop (inception conference) after the first round would be beneficial.
8. Quarterly residential training for the animators and mentors add to peer support and motivation. The lessons learnt and the process documentation could be more accurately recorded at these meetings.
9. Have regular planning and review meetings. The continuous mentoring, weekly animators' meetings, and the monthly mentors' meetings made the critical difference between success and failure. They add value through immediate feedback and corrective action, keeps documentation up to date, and is very motivating for the field workers. They also ensure continuous staff capacity building. Have a helpline (either inhouse or public).
10. Ensure strong backend support for monitoring (including verification). We missed it initially. In addition to three full time project staff, three programme staff from the HRF core team were tasked with the responsibility for verification, validation and follow up, working almost full time on this initiative.

13 Annex: Monetised Value

13.1 Entitlements received

In 15 months (454 days) the project enabled the priority households to access ₹777 million (€9.71 million) in assets and cash flow, an eye watering return on investment of 1:77 (7700%). Social security (insurance, medical, and others) if availed would add an additional ₹650 million (~€8 million). This does not include foundational documents or basic services (such as community certificates or piped water). Even so, this translates to a scorching ₹1.7 million per day, from a standing start.

13.2 Monetisation methodology

The monetized value of the entitlements received has been calculated using the methodology outlined in table 1. All calculations are based on present valuations.

Table 1: Monetisation methodology and rationale

#	Entitlement	Monetised value	Rationale
1	Eligibility documentation	NIL	Though these are a prerequisite for access to entitlements (and therefore are priceless), in themselves they do not have any intrinsic monetary value.
2	Cash received	Actual	No monetisation required.
3	House, schemes	Actual	No monetisation required.
4	Land	Equivalent	Land value in the neighbourhood or similar area.
5	House/ Land title deeds	Equivalent	Housing scheme equivalent. Land value in the neighbourhood or similar area.
6	Pensions, ration cards, work cards, recurring subsidies	10–year cash flow or savings	Though these are for life, calculations are made for 10 years at fixed present–day costs. For instance, though the fisher welfare board has increased the fishing ban allowance (and will do so again next year in keeping with the poll promise) the value as in 2022 is used for all 10 years. Similarly with the free 100 units of electricity.
7	Insurance	Potential	The potential ₹650 million insurance benefit is calculated and presented separately from the ₹777 million, since it is not actualised till there is a medical event.

13.3 Assets and cash flow

Table 2 has the monetised value of the entitlements received in Indian Rupees (INR, ₹). Monetisation is the value of the asset (land, house, infrastructure) and cashflow (conservatively calculated for ten years though some are lifelong). Monetisable entitlements worth ₹777 million, of which ₹365 million (47%) was in assets and ₹412 million (53%) in cash flow, were received by the project priority households.

Table 2: Monetised value of entitlements received						
Scheme	Per unit (₹)	Applied	T. Cost (₹)	Got	T. Cost (₹)	Calculation[1]
Social Security schemes						
OAP	1,000	1,960	235,200,000	530	63,600,000	₹1,000 per month* (above 60 years)
Single women	1,000	874	104,880,000	319	38,280,000	₹1,000 per month*
PWD	1,500	281	5,05,80,000	101	18,180,000	₹1,000 per month*
Education						
Education fund	7,545	11	83,000	11	83,000	Amount received
ID cards (Ration card)	100	1,637	19,644,000	834	10,008,000	Family of 4 (20kg rice per month @ ₹5 per kg)*
Employment						
Employment (Self business)	7,000	279	1,953,000	1	7,000	Sewing machine, average ₹7000/person (one time)
Employment (MNREGA)	281	3,747	105,290,700	2,571	72,245,100	100 days each, per year
Welfare board	1,000	4,405	528,600,000	1,467	176,040,000	₹1,000 per month*
SS Farmer certificate	3,000	67	24,120,000	44	15,840,000	₹1,000 per month*
Fishers' welfare board	5,000	846	84,600,000	33	3,300,000	₹5,000 for two months a year during fishing ban*
House and Land						
Housing scheme	2,80,000	2,645	740,600,000	348	97,440,000	Average ₹280,000 per house (one time)
House title deed	2,00,000	3,667	733,400,000	148	29,600,000	Average ₹200,000 for 2 cents (one time)
Land title deed	2,00,000	1,005	201,000,000	402	80,400,000	Average ₹200,000 for 2 cents (one time)
Agriculture land	10,00,000	439	439,000,000	100	150,000,000	Average ₹1 million for 1.5 acre (one time)
Infrastructure						
LPG	1,650	56	92,400	21	34,650	₹1,650 per connection
Electricity	450	328	8,856,000	262	14,148,000	100 units per month*
Toilet	12,000	2,323	27,876,000	615	7,380,000	₹12,000 per family (one time)
TOTAL		24,570	3,305,775,100	7,807	776,502,750	

[1] [*] Calculated for ten years at the present rate.

Table 2 reveals that almost 25,000 applications were filed for assets and cash flow, of which 7,800 were received. The monetised value of entitlements applied for is ₹3.30 billions, of which ₹777 million worth (24%) have been received.

Table 5 explores the success rate based on applications – which is 40% overall, but just 8% for housing. Many of these will get sanctioned post project and will add to the household assets.

13.4 Social safety net

Most families are just one medical emergency away from catastrophe and destitution. The project made a deliberate effort to enrol the households into one or the other insurance scheme. This is an unrealised (potential) benefit of ₹650 million per annum for 3,602 families in case of a medical emergency.

Table 3: Medical Insurance						
Scheme	Per unit (₹)	Applied	T. Cost (₹)	Received	T. Cost (₹)	Calculation
Health						
Health insurance/ schemes	₹500,000	735	₹36,75,00,000	605	₹302,500,000	Potential per annum
Health (PMJJBY)	₹200,000	152	₹3,04,00,000	0	₹0	
Health (PMSBY)	₹200,000	90	₹1,80,00,000	0	₹0	
eShram	₹200,000	2,625	₹52,50,00,000	1,738	₹347,600,000	
TOTAL	₹1,100,000	3,602	₹940,900,000	2,343	₹650,100,000	

13.5 Eligibility documents – the first mile

To reach these milestones, several eligibility documents had to be procured. Applications were filed for over 15,002 documents and 7,045 (47%) were received. These documents are permanent assets and will be useful for access to many other social welfare and income generating support schemes. However, they are not monetised in our calculations.

Table 4: First mile documentation (Non monetised)		
Other categories	Applied	Received
Birth Certificate	522	241
Death Certificate	26	23
Marriage certificate	6	5
Community certificate	4,613	1,823
Aadhar	596	170
Voter ID	361	109
Income tax Permanent Account Number (PAN)	363	303
Corrections (RC, Voter ID, Aadhar, PAN)	1,159	205

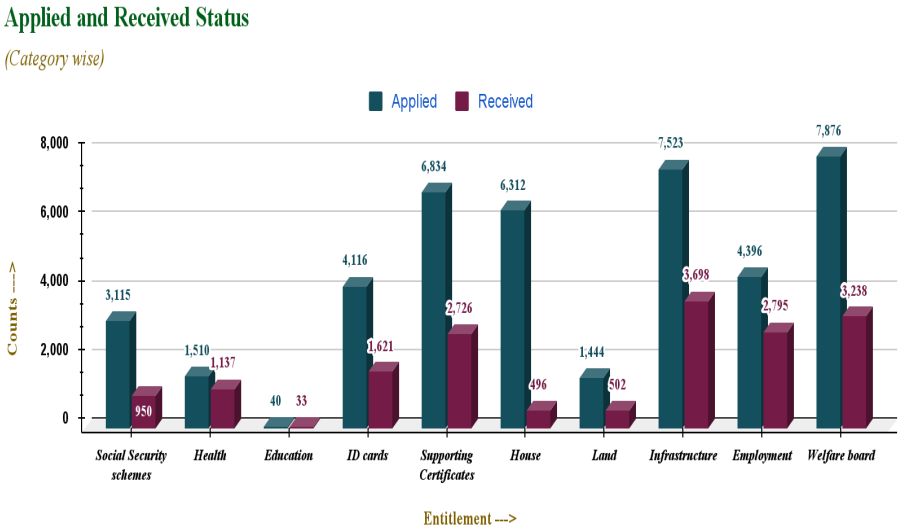
Table 4: First mile documentation (Non monetised)		
Other categories	Applied	Received
School Dropout (re–enrolment)	14	11
Transfer Certificate	6	6
First Graduate Certificate	8	4
Employment Exchange Registration	122	31
Employment Exchange Renewal	248	192
Job (PM)	10	0
Covid vaccination	529	529
Child Vaccination	3	3
Below Poverty Line number (certificate)	177	134
Bank A/C	23	10
Income certificate	899	314
Nativity certificate	191	107
Residential certificate	46	19
Legal Heir Certificate	264	6
Piped water	1,461	1,063
Jal Jeevan (drinking water)	3,331	1,737
Access road	24	0
TOTAL	15,002	7,045

13.6 Applications: Success rate

The success rate of applications filed varied (table 5) from 40% overall, but just 8% for housing. Some of the delay is due to varying durations taken to process applications and the funds available, while others are (unofficial) denials.

If it is the first case, then those entitlements could still be sanctioned after the project period, though if the delay is due to the second then it will die a bureaucratic death by filing.

Table 5: Applications: Success Rate				
Entitlement	Filed	% of total	Received	% of received
Social Security schemes	3,115	7.22%	950	30.50%
Health	1,510	3.50%	1,137	75.30%
Education	40	0.09%	33	82.50%
ID cards	4,116	9.54%	1,621	39.38%
Supporting Certificates	6,834	15.83%	2,726	39.89%
House	6,312	14.62%	496	7.86%
Land	1,444	3.35%	502	34.76%
Infrastructure	7,523	17.43%	3,698	49.16%
Employment	4,396	10.18%	2,795	63.58%
Welfare board	7,876	18.25%	3,238	41.11%
TOTAL	43,166	100%	17,196	39.84%



13.7 'Others' applications status

The project started off with a survey and then tracked the progress of access to entitlements of the eligible households. Some of the eligible households did not join due to scepticism and cynicism since there were others who did the surveys earlier and nothing had come from those surveys.

Once the results started coming in, however, many who did not want to join earlier clamoured to be included arguing correctly that they were eligible and should not be excluded just because they did not join at the outset. They spoke of the reasons for their disillusionment, and that the project working on a human rights approach should be understanding and empathetic.

Working at the community level it is impractical to exclude the eligible. But more importantly, they belong to the project priority demographic, were eligible for the entitlements and needed the social security which they would not get but for the project support. Therefore, they were also covered by the project.

These later entrants (12,484) were tracked separately from the households that were part of the initial survey. They were not part of the survey, and therefore their data does not have a survey number. Households from the survey (13,032) have a survey number, and disaggregated data could be generated.

Table 6: Status of 'others'						
Entitlement	Applied	Got		Entitlement	Applied	Got
Old age pension	1,168	358		Widow pension	96	6
PWD pension	153	61		Widow certificate	55	24
PWD/UDID card	5	1		Destitute widow pension	302	166
PWD certificate	2	2		Destitute woman pension	24	4
Birth certificate	16	1		Deserted woman certificate	1	1
Death certificate	1	1		Below poverty line number	177	134
Community certificate	1,012	64		Health insurance/cards	765	460
Ration card – New	31	2		Covid vaccination	2	1
Ration card – Name addition	69	10		First graduate certificate	2	2
Ration card – Name removal	3	1		EE registration	17	0
Voter ID	23	2		Sewing machine	111	0
Bala Aadhar	132	0		Job	8	1
Aadhar	62	1		Aavin milk shop	13	0
PAN	202	162		Simin/Cement shop	24	0
Corrections (Ration Card, Voter ID, Aadhar, PAN)	110	34		Small scale farmer certificate	65	43
Title deed for land	340	83		MGNREGA card	1,298	647
Title deed for house	610	0		Welfare board registration	893	113
Free house	537	0		eShram	1,248	563
Housing scheme/ PMAY	245	0		Fishing welfare	238	21
KVVT	826	0		Fisher women	150	0
TNSCB	34	0		Fisher committee	172	0
LPG	1	0		Legal heir certificate	244	1
Piped water	19	0		Income certificate	230	122
Jal Jeevan	234	0		Nativity certificate	41	25
Toilet	443	12		Residence certificate	30	12
TOTAL					**12,484**	**3,141**

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