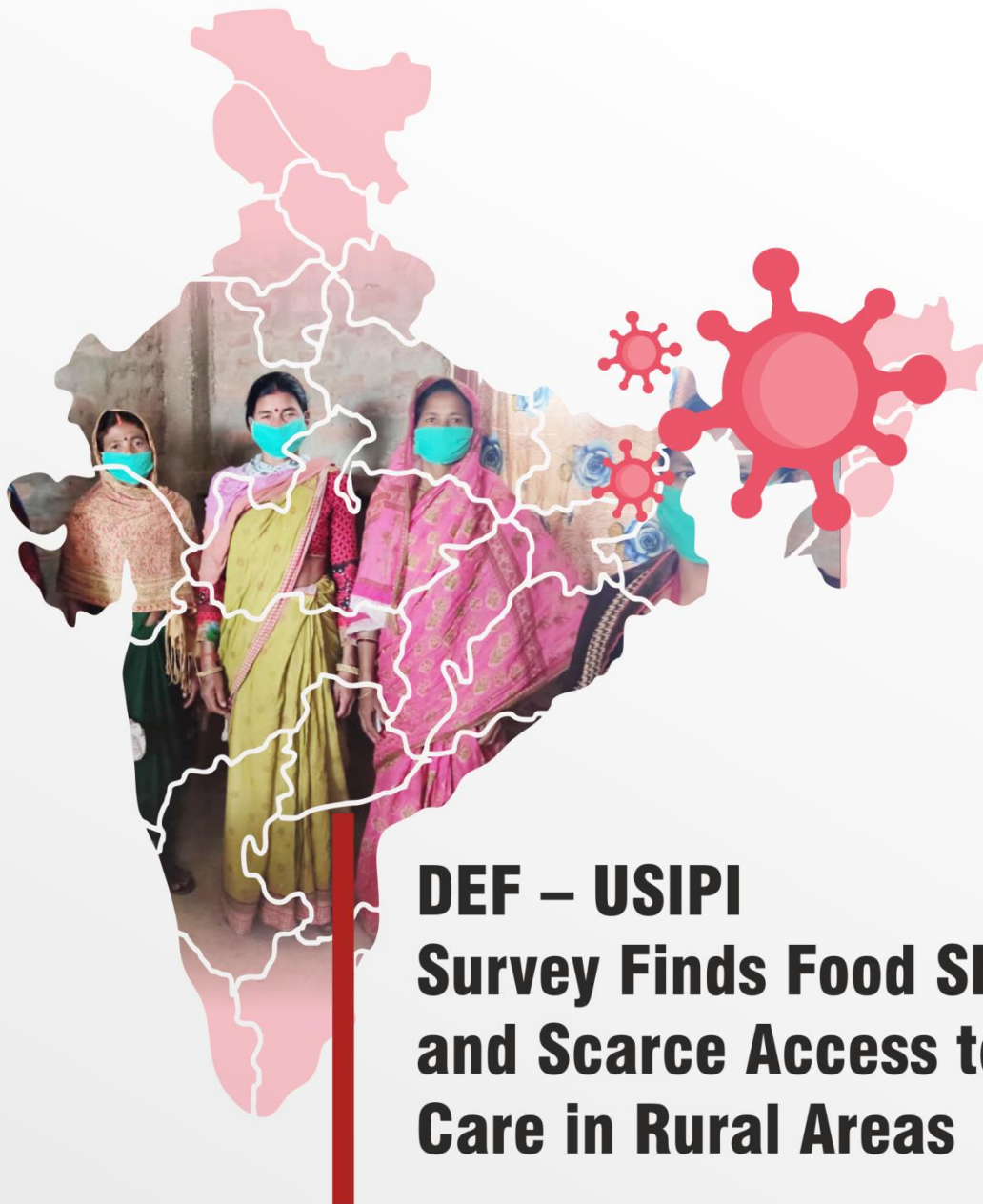




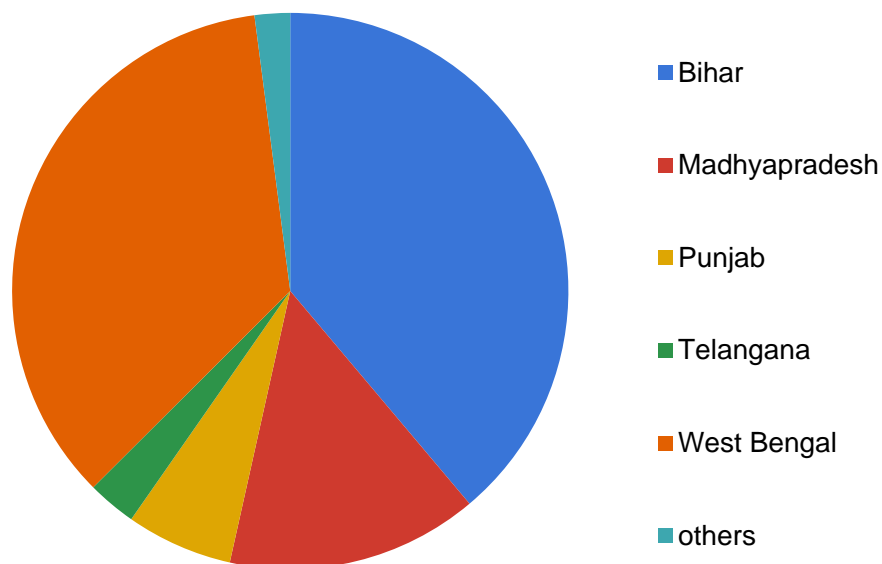
US-INDIA POLICY INSTITUTE
DEVELOPMENT • DEMOCRACY • DIVERSITY



**DEF – USIPI
Survey Finds Food Shortage
and Scarce Access to Medical
Care in Rural Areas**

US India Policy Institute (USIPI) a Washington, DC, based policy think tank and its partner Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF), New Delhi have jointly instituted a social survey of opinions on how Indians are coping during the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic and the lockdown. DEF administered the online survey through its network 600-plus Digital Centers spread across India but mainly concentrated in rural towns and villages. The majority of the 4,857 respondents are from the states of Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, and Telangana.

State wise distribution of respondents

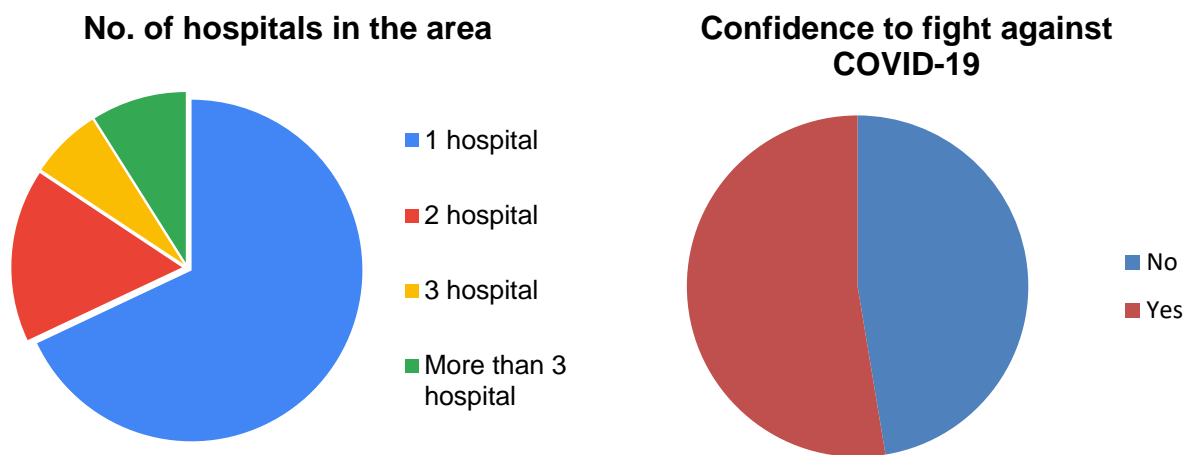


COVID-19 related distress in rural India

Shahid Siddiqui, DEF, who has been tracking the survey since the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown on 27 March 2020 found interesting insights that can help shape critical COVID-19 relief and interventions on the ground. About 24% of the respondents have reported a shortage of food grains in the local markets, 25% reported a shortage of masks, 21% reported a shortage of Sanitizers and 9% reported a shortage of doctors in their area.

Status of healthcare facilities and essential items

68% of the respondents said that they have access to 1 hospital in their area, 15% said they have access to 2 hospitals, 8% said they have access to 3 hospitals while only 6% said they have more than 3 hospitals in their area. The low coverage of health care facilities in rural areas coupled with the reported scarcity of items such as masks, sanitizers and medicine needs immediate intervention from local administration and NGO's. Respondents have also reported the need for generating awareness regarding COVID-19



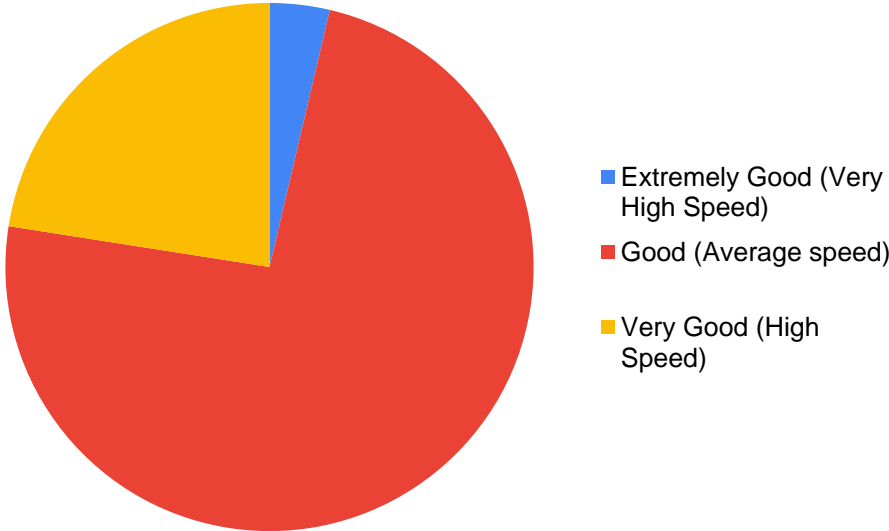
Interventions and relief on the ground

DEF and USIPI are working together to find intervention strategies for immediate help and relief to the families in distress. A number of government-run entitlement schemes have been identified for families in need. DEF is utilizing its network of Digital Entrepreneurs to apply for the Government's COVID-19 relief for families in need. DEF is also providing SOS Food and Livelihood packages with provisions to sustain a family for a month. Some of the DEF entrepreneurs are collaborating with local administration and health centers to produce masks and sanitizers along with generating awareness in the community.

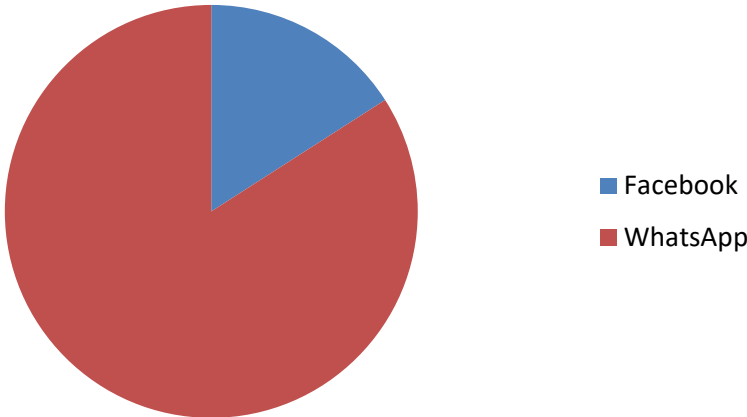
Digital connectivity and social media usage during COVID-19 lockdown

The survey also found interesting statistics on digital connectivity and social media platforms use within respondents. About 74% reported receiving average speed on the internet, 22% have good speed and 4% reported having high-speed internet. WhatsApp and Facebook emerged as the dominant platforms taking 82% and 15% share of social media. The overwhelming use of these platforms was to gain Education and Awareness (35%) followed by Chatting with friends and family (31%). About 16% of the respondents have reported using them for Forwarding messages (16%), Entertainment (7.2%) and for Video Chat (7.2%). Almost all of the respondents have said they spend 2 hours or more on social media every day.

Internet Speed



Social media platforms used



Potential for leveraging internet and social media

Given the existing uses and practices on social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp, these can be leveraged to provide access to essential health and social protection.

WhatsApp can be used to create and forward messages regarding the 'Do's and Don'ts' during the times of COVID-19 and at the same time sharing precautionary measures that one should take at this time. WhatsApp can also be a useful tool for effectively voicing the concern of the most vulnerable people by linking them with authorities providing rations or arranging shelter. Further, it can also be tool used to counter the spread of misinformation about the pandemic and raise awareness about the disease by circulating posters, credible sources of information, government information and advisory about social protection, and public health and safety practices.

It can also become a means for sharing Do-it-Yourself videos on how the associated livelihood crisis brought about by the pandemic can be ameliorated with social entrepreneurship initiatives. DEF has seen the communities it works showing inspiring response to the pandemic, whether it be in taking returning migrant workers for a health check-up or sanitizing community spaces – such best practices of community responses can be shared and highlighted using these platforms to ensure local care and support during a public health crises.

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