

United by Pandemic, Divided by Challenges

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When one stays somewhere for a very long time, life switches to the 'time-lapse' mode – the feature that we have in our smartphones these days. The development happens at such a fast pace that you appear to be at a stand-still – just observing the rapid transformation happening around you. In one of the sectors of Noida, in the last 24 years, villages have become pucca houses, empty plots transformed into societies and plush bungalows and slums have expanded beyond their authorized limit. The most striking feature of this development is the interaction it leads to between the inhabitants of these residential societies, pucca houses in village, bungalows and the slums. People living in slums and the village offer their services as house-help and society staff to people living in these societies and bungalows – creating a perfect plot for co-existence. But on March 24 – with the announcement of nationwide lockdown, the dynamics changed with everything coming to a pause.

In lockdown phase 1, people living in the societies – the privileged ones, were not much affected by the lockdown. Mostly everything was available – if not at that particular moment but the most one had to wait for a special food item was for a week – which was quite laudable considering the logistics were closed too. House helps were not permitted, but the support staff of the society was allowed as they were under the purview of essential services. They helped the senior citizens residing alone in the society by getting them the groceries and medicines. Soon, some socially conscious residents of this particular society realized that their co-existing partners have been hit harder by the lockdown and they need to do something for them.



Residents of the society have to follow strict measures imposed by RWA

They contacted their individual house-help and transferred their salaries online. Some gave it to them through the support staff. There were families who were reluctant to pay salaries but had agreed only due to the peer pressure. Sadly, very few asked them if they needed anything else other than money. And soon, the slum and village area were cordoned off by authorities leading to restriction on the movement of its residents. This made their lives even more difficult.

In the second phase of lockdown, exactly in the last week of April, a positive case was reported in this society and within an hour, a lot changed. Just like the slum and the village, a set of people were locked inside their gate with no certainty about future.

The patient - a frontline warrior, happened to be a nurse working in a private hospital in Delhi. At the first sign of symptom, she called the authorities and within 15 minutes, a special team and ambulance arrived. While the family members were being taken to a quarantine center, a loud cheer and applause from her neighbors followed who were appreciative of her selfless and responsible act. Immediately, each building in the society was sanitized and since then, the Fire Department sanitizes the society every alternate day. The prompt response and the continued follow-up by the government is commendable.

The government's efforts are being supported by the Residents Welfare Association and the management committee of the society that allows for smooth provision of essentials without compromising the rules of physical distancing. No one in the society is allowed to move out of their flats until they need to buy essential goods that are being delivered at the society gate, every day.

This strict lockdown, however, made everyone in the society realize the pain and dilemma of those living in slums and village. Under the management committee, this society has raised funds for all the guards and support staff who were diligently performing their duties while the residents enjoyed the privilege of staying safe inside their houses. The privileged have taken the responsibility of providing ration to the society staff, house helps and the laundry man. This truly reflects the essence of co-existence!