



## **Coronavirus and its Impact on TWOAT's Projects in India**

India – the land of contrasts and 1.3 billion people. Great modern cities, top class education, world-renowned scientists and technicians, considerable wealth ... contrasting with slums and poor villages, minimal education, widespread illiteracy, poor health and extreme poverty.

The Indian Government, both national and in the separate States, has done a great deal over the years to try to help their poor masses. There are vaccinations, vitamins for pregnant women, schools, health workers in villages, subsidised grain stores for those issued with ration cards, and many more. But in such a large country these benefits do not always reach those for whom they are intended. Doctors may not wish to practise in a remote area – where is a decent school for their children? Semi-literate people may not know of some of these provisions, and certainly are unaware of their rights or where to go to access them. Grain stores depend on the harvest and the amount of grain the government can procure, are open to corruption, and ration cards may not include the most recent children in a family.

Into this complex country came the Covid-19 virus. It arrived a little later than in China or in Europe. Reported active cases (at 25 April) are 18953, with the worst areas being the Mumbai (Bombay) area, the State of Gujerat, and Delhi. No doubt, however, it will grow exponentially as in other countries. Though a report today, measured by funeral businesses, suggests a fall in deaths in parts of the country. (One suggestion for this is that the lockdown has cut the number of road traffic accidents and deaths on the railways – a sad commentary on the dangers of normal life!)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi acted quickly as the virus spread, by ordering a country-wide lockdown on 24 March. When this caused migrant city workers to rush to return to their villages, he specified a complete ban on transport, from air travel to trains to humble cycle-rickshaws. Industrial and commercial enterprises, schools, hospitality services, cinemas, shopping malls, places of worship are all closed. The punishment for violation of the rules is a fine or imprisonment.

Vital services are permitted, such as agriculture, health services, public utilities, industries in rural areas (these are far from the hot spots in the big cities). All in all the government ordinances can reach far into the lives of all citizens, though it may not be possible to enforce them equally everywhere.

TWOAT supports projects in three areas in India, each of which is having to deal with the effects of the virus on their people.



## Calcutta Cathedral Relief Service (CRS)

We have supported CRS for over 10 years. This Indian NGO works among some of the poorest who are living in slums (bustees) in and around Kolkata. Their work is administered from an office in the grounds of the cathedral, and over 40 field staff work in slums as teachers, doctors, health workers, etc. They have many years of experience and know the people in their areas very well. They report:

“Most people live from hand to mouth, earning meagre incomes by doing menial jobs or running small businesses such as tea stands. With these sources of income removed whole families who are already living below the poverty line will be left without any livelihood ...”

So CRS is distributing basic medical and food aid to those most in need, using their own vehicles. This distribution has already started and they hope to bring relief to 1,600 families.



Food being distributed by CRS at Mahamaya

For further examples of CRS work in virus hit areas visit

<http://www.cathedralreliefservice.net/news/stories/>



## **Christian Medical College and Hospital, Ludhiana, Punjab (CMC)**

This is a prestigious hospital in the large industrial city of Ludhiana in the Punjab, NW India. TWOAT has sent support for about 20 years, most recently to a fund to help poor patients with their hospital bills. When the virus arrived, the hospital set aside a section of its buildings equipped for Covid-19 patients. Patients and relatives are screened at the main entrance and sent to the appropriate area. An arrangement has been made with the local Civil (government) Hospital to take in their Covid-19 patients too. So far the Punjab is one of the less-affected States.

The British Friends of Ludhiana have sent funds for the purchase of Personal Protection Equipment and also to sponsor an ITU bed for the Covid-19 ward.



For further reports from Ludhiana hospital visit here:

<https://www.friendsofludhiana.org.uk/coronavirus-update/>



## **St Luke's Hospital, Hiranpur, Jharkhand, India**

This hospital is in a remote area in one of the poorest states in India. The population is mostly tribal, also Muslim, with low skill levels and a low literacy rate. The land is not very fertile so many seek work in other states or go to large cities.

In recent years it became impossible to recruit staff and the hospital finally closed. In 2015 a new pair of medical staff arrived to try to revive the healthcare work. They are struggling with the same problems of getting permanent staff, so at present they only do outpatient work. However, they have made valuable contacts with another small community hospital with an Eye Hospital, and, together with other health workers in the area, they have managed to get the hospital registered with the government and are taking clinics out into the community.

TWOAT has enabled them to buy a much-needed motor scooter and to refurbish some rooms for visits from the eye team. Internet contact is intermittent – at one time the best reception was under a nearby tamarind tree! We know little about the current position with regard to Covid-19, though we did hear that patients entering the building were having to buy masks at a cost of 15p, and that the little local tea house at the hospital had been closed down by the police. TWOAT stands ready to help when we have more information.



A baby being treated at St Luke's

For further information and photos from St Luke's visit here: <https://slhiranpur.wordpress.com/>



### **What next?**

TWOAT will endeavour to continue sending its usual support to its projects.

If you would like additionally to support these projects during their Covid-19 problems, please send a cheque to our Treasurer Antony Hawker at The Holt, Alcocks Lane, KT20 6BB or use Virgin Money Giving from the TWOAT web site [WWW.TWOAT.org](http://WWW.TWOAT.org) or by bank transfer to Tadworth & Walton Overseas Aid Trust, National Westminster Bank plc, Epsom Branch; Account No. 42988667, Sort Code 60-08-01

This could be your thanksgiving that we live in beautiful surroundings and are so well looked after by our own NHS.

Mary Heath      25.04.2020