

## Government assistance during lockdown in rural society.

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## **Abstract:**

COVID-19 has shaken the world to its core. It's one of the deadliest and the most life threatening diseases. This disease started in Wuhan city of China in 2019 and spread to different countries like wildfire. COVID-19 is very different from other life threatening diseases. It is highly contagious and immediately spreads to someone who comes into its contact. The corona virus spreads through coughing, sneezing and human contact. It spreads via droplet infection. To curb its spread the government of India has taken several steps like lockdown, curfew, stopping social, religious and other gatherings as well as social distancing.

It was an entirely new disease for the world and it became extremely hard for medical science and modern medicine to find the cure for the virus and save people's lives. Even in the past, several such calamities have struck human kind and thousands of people have lost their lives. Diseases like measles, smallpox, cholera, malaria, typhoid, plague, tuberculosis, etc. have taken the lives of thousands. Technology and modern science hadn't developed much during those times but now they have advanced drastically. Even today after more than a year of the COVID-19 pandemic, thousands of people have lost their lives. Even youngsters have lost their lives due to this virus.

The wealthy and developed nations like America, Italy, Spain, France and Britain were filled with corpses as the government could not curb the spread of the virus. They even lost some of the best doctors. Even the population of these countries was less than India's and yet the situation was worse than the Indian subcontinent. If such a situation were to strike India, it is quite disastrous to think about the consequences. The state of healthcare, especially rural health care in India is at a very primitive stage. There is a lack of hospitals and paramedical staff in India. In this situation, the coronavirus infection started spreading through out the country and the government took aid of 'lockdown' to curb its effects. A nationwide lockdown was announced by the Indian government on 25 March, 2020. A bustling and booming nation came to a sudden halt.

People faced various challenges due to the lockdown. The rural population who relied on their meager income that stopped due to the lockdown, faced some new challenges altogether. To look after some of the weaker sections of the society like the poor and the deprived, widows and farmers, the government of India announced some helpful schemes and measures. This research aims to check whether these schemes could be availed by the rural population or not.

## **Research Methodology**

A total of 499 participants (village representatives of Gujarat State) were approached to partake in a cross-sectional online survey and share their experiences regarding the government helps during the pandemic. The descriptive statistics and ordinary least squares (OLS) regression were used to analyse the data. To get information, a Google Document with multiple choice questions as well as open ended questions was prepared. The link to the document was circulated to the researcher's WhatsApp contacts. The respondents were instructed to open the link and answer the questions. They were given a definite time to send their responses. Additionally, the respondents were asked to send the questionnaire link to their contacts on WhatsApp to record their responses as well. The main objective of the research was to see what impact lockdown had on the rural population and get information regarding government assistance schemes received by rural society during lockdown. After discarding the responses from urban citizens as well as the section that was well-off, the total number of responses by the rural population were 499. These responses have been scientifically analyzed. The responses were collected during the lockdown in May, 2020.

In the conducted research, 499 responses from 22 districts of Gujarat were collected. 69% of the total respondents are post graduates and 18.6% are graduates, i.e. in this research most of the informants are highly educated, whose responses have been analyzed and presented

in this paper. The research is only limited to how the rural population of Gujarat was affected during the lockdown.

### **Research Objectives:**

1. To educate the masses about what schemes and measures have been enacted by the government to help the rural population as well as the farmers.
2. To find out whether the beneficiaries could avail the benefits of the schemes enacted by the government or not.
3. To find out whether the beneficiaries could avail the fixed amount decided by the government and if the government has put aside the promised aid amount.
4. Finding out to what extent were various government assistance and schemes helpful in controlling the effects of COVID-19 in the rural community.

### **Introduction:**

### **Information Analysis and Conclusion:**

The rural people have to face the most hardships during a pandemic as employment opportunities to the rural community are limited, and hence the poor and underprivileged suffer the most. The rural community is dependent on agriculture and its related industries. During lockdown, the central and the state governments enacted various schemes to ensure that the rural community does not have to starve and face further hardship. During the pandemic to support the poor in the wake of the 'lockdown', the central government has launched the 'Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana'. A relief package of Rs. 1.70 lakh crore was announced to help the poor, so they could benefit from it. Be it 'Jan Dhan Yojana' or 'Kisan Samman Nidhi', 'Widow Aid' or aid to the poor through 'Anna Yojana', announcements were being made by the Government of Gujarat about the beneficiaries getting aid and assistance to all those in need. Eventually, did the various means of assistance reach the villagers and the targeted community or not? This research is an attempt to analyze the same.

With the aim of increasing the income of small and marginal farmers and providing income support by the Central Government; 'Prime Minister Kisan Samman Nidhi'; a scheme under PM Kisan Yojana was launched. Its aim was to provide assistance to the farmers to meet their financial requirement for agricultural materials, so that they could conserve their crops and earn a fixed income through production.

Under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Yojana, farmers having up to 2 hectares of cultivable land can earn up to Rs. 6000 of quarterly income. During a year, every four months, farmers can directly get paid Rs. 2000 as a financial aid. Under Prime Minister Garib Kalyan Yojana's 'Prime Minister Kisan Samman Nidhi' scheme, assistance is given to farmers across the country. In an agrarian nation, prime minister never forgets to think about the interests of the country's farmers. During the lockdown due to coronavirus, the government decided to help the farmers so that they do not face economic hurdles. Under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi, installments of assistance of Rs. 2000 was given to the farmers across the country, and so that it doesn't get delayed for any reason, it was paid directly into their respective accounts. The Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Yojana has emerged as a lifeline for farmers amid the crisis. The central government has claimed that after the time of 'lockdown' so far thousands of crores of rupees have been distributed in the accounts of farmers. According to the government, since March 24, 9.55 crore farmer families of the country have benefited from this scheme. The amount has been directly transferred to the farmer's bank accounts. The

help of 'digital technology' was taken for speedy and efficient transfer of the aid to beneficiaries. 'Direct Benefit Transfer' was implemented to directly credit the amount into the account of the beneficiary. It was to ensure that any deficiencies in between can be eliminated. It was also ensured that the amount was transferred directly to the beneficiary's bank account and they could access it without personally visiting a bank branch.

Was this amount deposited in the farmer's account or not? This question was asked to a total of 210 respondents out of which 58.50% of the respondents said that this amount was deposited in their accounts successfully. 29.50% rural respondents were those who did not know anything about this as they were not involved in agriculture and the remaining 14% people are those who have still not received any payment. These figures show that the claims being made by the government are true. Those who are farmers and have completed their registration process and are eligible to avail the benefits from this scheme have received the amount in their bank accounts. These farmers have not faced any difficulties in the process.

Apart from this, the 'Ujjwala Yojana' has been started by the central government for the rural poor in which the poor and 'B.P.L.' families have been provided with one free gas stove and one LPG cylinder so that the rural poor use gas instead of wood and relieve women from respiratory diseases caused by smoke. In the time of 'lockdown', the rural poor should not face the problem of cooking fuel. Therefore, it was decided by the central government to provide one LPG cylinder free of charge under the Ujjwala Yojana. Under it, the rural poor who have gotten free gas cylinders at their homes are 65.40%. 20.70% people aren't aware about the scheme and 13.90% people have responded saying that they did not get any such gas cylinders for free. An important reason behind people not getting a gas cylinder is that the beneficiary has to pay to get it refilled. People have a misconception that bottle refills are not free and many times people do not avail this benefit suspecting that they will have to spend money in trying to refill it. Due to this, they are being deprived of benefiting from this scheme.

The government has also taken care that no person should go hungry. For this, under the "National Food Security Act", the "Anna Brahma Yojana" has also been launched. During the lockdown, all the ration card holders of the state are given free foodgrains. Here, each person can get 3.5 kg of wheat, 1.5 kg of rice, 1 kg sugar, 1 kg of salt and 1 kg of dal to provide a source of protein. People who do not have an Aadhaar card, ration card or any proof of identity could also avail the foodgrains as advertised by the government. The government took full care that any person should not starve due to lack of employment in the situation of 'lockdown'.

So far "Anna Brahma Yojana" is concerned. The data indicate that the benefit of this scheme is reaching maximum people of the village. 76.6% of the respondents have indicated that this quantity is given to them as per the prescription of the government. This information clearly indicates that the scheme reaches the people in the outskirts of the villages too. There is no doubt that it has been successful. Apart from this, no person had to face hunger due to lack of employment. Adequate vigilance was kept by the government and it is clear that the government has been completely successful in doing so.

In case of the coronavirus, when it was difficult for the citizens to attain livelihood, the Chief Minister of the state, Mr. Vijaybhai Rupani, decided to help the citizens of the state, the elderly, widows and the differently-abled by providing assistance of Rs 1000 to them. In the regard, it was found that 22.10% people got the benefit of this scheme and 36.10% people stated that they have not benefited from this scheme. 15.40% people did not know about this scheme and 26.40% of the respondents are those who are not eligible to avail the benefit of the scheme.

The government implemented 'Direct Benefit Transfer' to the eligible beneficiaries of the scheme i.e. the amount was directly credited to the beneficiary's account.

Under the National Food Security Act, 5 kg food grains, 1 kg dal, 1 kg of salt, 1 kg of sugar was being given to each person below the poverty line. In addition to this, the A.P.L. card holders could avail 10 kg wheat, 3 kg rice, 1 kg sugar and 1 kg dal for free per card. Apart from this, the homeless, destitute and those without ration cards could also avail 5 kg of food grains, 1 kg for dal, 1 kg of salt and 1 kg of sugar. These benefits are distributed in quantities fixed by the government.

So far as is concerned, it was observed that one thing can be clearly seen that the rural community is getting the appropriate amount of grains and pulses decided by the government (86.5%). There was a time when the aid of Re 1 was sent by the government, the rupee would be reduced to 15 paise by the time it reached the beneficiary. That means that there was corruption of 85 paise. The responses shown in the graph above clearly show that eradicating corruption by the current government has been successful. The government has taken several effective measures for this, such as direct deposit of subsidy or assistance money in bank accounts, digital transactions, cheap food grains shops, biometric systems etc. All these steps have resulted in effective and positive results as shown in the above graph.

Under the 'Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana' assistance of Rs 500 was announced by the central government to the families of women whose bank accounts have been opened. In this, 31.90% people have received assistance, 32.90% did not receive assistance and 35.30% reported that they are not eligible to be the beneficiary of the scheme. As the account was not opened under the woman's name, they are not eligible to avail the benefit under the 'Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana'. Here too, Direct Benefit Transfer has been implemented i.e. the amount is directly credited to the beneficiary's account. The government uses this method as there is no scope for human intervention.

All the respondents covered in this study were asked whether they are satisfied with the various assistance provided by the government during the lockdown and corona period? In response, 76% respondents say they are satisfied? 24% respondents themselves are not satisfied with this support. Among the respondents who are not satisfied, most of the respondents believe that they were not eligible for the benefits of these schemes, so they could not get the benefits, so they should have got the benefits as well, which is an important factor behind their dissatisfaction.

At the end of this entire study it can be clearly stated that the government has paid attention to the farmers, deprived communities, rural poor, widows, B.P.L. and A.P.L. card holders, disabled people, homeless, destitute and people without ration cards, etc. and even tried to take care of them. They have shown vigilance and awareness in identifying the issues in the rural society and handled them with concern and care.

### **Key Findings of the Study:**

The main findings of this study are as follows.

.1 Nationwide Lockdown was announced by the Central Government on March 25, 2020 to reduce the impact of 'Corona' in India and prevent the spread of infection.

.2 A total of 210 rural respondents from 22 districts of Gujarat gave their responses in this study.

%69.3 of the total respondents are post graduate and %18.6 are graduate.



.4Out of total 210 respondents %58.50 respondents say that 'Kisan Samman Nidhi' money has been deposited in their account. %29.50 of the rural respondents are those who do not know anything about this as these people are not involved in agriculture and %14 of the people are those whose accounts have not yet been credited as the process is still ongoing.

%65.40 .5 people said that rural poor are getting free gas cylinder in their village under 'Ujjwala Yojana'.

%76.6 .6 said they are getting free ration under 'Anna Brahma Yojana'.

.7In order to help the citizens and public of the state, it was announced to give assistance of Rs. %22.10 people have benefited from this scheme.

%86.5 .8 of the rural community is getting the same quantity of food grains, pulses as fixed by the government under the 'National Food Security Act'.

.9The central government announced an assistance of Rs 500 to the families of women who have opened bank accounts under the 'Pradhan Mantri Jandhan Yojana'. Out of which %31.90 people have received this assistance.

%76 .10of the respondents say that they are satisfied with the various assistance provided by the government during the lockdown and corona period.

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