



International
Association for
Volunteer
Effort

VOLUNTEERING **TOGETHER**

*Making a difference to
people and communities*

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VOLUNTEERING IN TIMES OF COVID-19

By Kinjal Jain, Deputy Manager of Community
Services, Tata Group, India



The Tata group is a large 'salt-to-software' conglomerate consisting of more than 100 companies and with a market valuation of \$160 billion. Volunteering is said to be part of a Tata employee's DNA and has been undertaken since the group's inception more than 150 years ago. The group's mission statement is 'To improve the quality of life of the communities we serve globally through long term stakeholder value creation based on Leadership with Trust'. Volunteering channelizes the group's most valuable asset, its 700,000+ employees spread across the globe, towards societal good and thereby contributes towards this mission.

Today, Tata is among the largest corporate volunteering programmes in the world – with 1.44 million volunteering hours in FY19. We are looking to increase this to 2.8 million hours by 2025, or about 4 hours per capita per year, and have developed a strategy that would enable this. This consists of: enabling individual companies to develop their own volunteering programmes, increasing the scope of volunteering programmes managed by the group centre, using technology to connect volunteers, and creating an adequate supply of relevant volunteering opportunities.



The COVID pandemic will require us to recalibrate the volunteering programme and the broad strategy. On the one hand, there are large numbers of people in immense distress (especially senior citizens, PWDs, migrants, refugees, the poor) and requiring a package of services that include voluntary support, as well as pressure on companies to help communities cope during and in the aftermath of the crisis and fill in gaps in the state's aid packages. On the other, there are constraints around movement and anxiety/paranoia regarding the risk of infection volunteers face while being in close proximity to the communities that need volunteering support.

The Novel Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is placing significant strains on health systems, essential public services and communities globally. There is a growing pressure on companies to do something to help communities cope during and in the aftermath of the crisis. We need to modify the ways of responding to the emerging social needs in this context, and to do so without posing health risks for our volunteers or the beneficiaries. These require the exploration of innovative ways to volunteer in order to create a meaningful impact.

A reality is that, despite the power of the on-site volunteering experience, this will be a challenge in the near future. We expect that remote volunteering will be a new-normal, and are designing virtual or online volunteering programs to meet the inherent need to make a difference through volunteering. This includes designing orientation modules, setting up platforms to deliver volunteering, tracking both quantitative and qualitative indicators and tying it back to impact on beneficiaries.

Our employees are straining to do something in spite of these constraints and risks,





and many individuals and companies are responding to emergent needs in their own respective areas of operation by rallying funds, time and effort.

Jaguar Land Rover has deployed over 2,500 vehicles in 20+ countries including United Kingdom, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Russia, South Africa and Spain. These are being used to support frontline services including those organized by the Red Cross and local charities. Volunteers are also delivering prescriptions, equipment and belongings to patients and their relatives. United Kingdom volunteers are working closely with the government to provide research and engineering expertise: digital engineering and design, printing of 3D models and prototypes, machine learning, artificial intelligence (AI) and data science.

Tata Consultancy Services has opened their virtual learning platform, TCS iON Glass Room, free-of-cost to all educational institutions globally to empower students to continue learning. Their volunteers are manning the phones to support struggling parents and educators through TCS Edu Virtual Assist. Their rapidly developed initiatives include a digital platform that allows Indians from rural locations to assess their flu-like symptoms at home, an e-pass system to seamlessly allow essential vehicles to move through checkpoints and restrictions, a mobile tracking application to aid healthcare workers in Maharashtra track quarantined patients, and AI-driven image analysis to help hospitals differentiate between COVID-19 and other common pathologies. They have also offered their proprietary technology, services, and skilled staff, in support of the 33 million Americans who are relying on their unemployment insurance as a safety net.

Over 900 Tata Steel volunteers are engaging 11,000 women, children and men in 15 states and 24 cities in India through online sessions on topics like Spoken English, Career Counselling, etc.

A Tata Communications team has curated a wide range of activities to engage employees, including raising funds for migrant workers, creating DIY masks and donating them to those in need, recording awareness videos on hygiene practices and more.

Tata Consumer Products coined the Iss Baar #BadonKeLiye (This time for the elders) campaign under the umbrella brand of Jaago Re (Wake up) to draw attention to the plight of the elderly in India and to encourage citizens to support and protect them. It partnered with HelpAge India and donated over 5,000 grocery kits to senior citizens. It is also serving breakfast to them through its Tata Cha stores in Bangalore.

Indian Hotels opened its hospitality services to

the doctors and healthcare workers who are catering to those affected by the virus. They are also providing 25,000 meals per day to the doctors and medical staff, police, catering over 1.5 million meals, so far.

Tata Chemicals volunteers have created local networks to help directly connect farmers to families as part of a Farm-to-Home initiative. Tata Power has provided over 5 lakh meals to migrant workers in coordination with local governments.

In Thailand, Tata Steel has trained community youth to make cloth masks, hand sanitizers and liquid soap in Rayong, Chonburi and Ayutthaya Province.

There is no doubt that these efforts are commendable and are addressing immediate needs. Yet we need to put on our thinking hats and adapt to the new normal by focusing on building strong partnerships with communities and address upcoming challenges, while also channeling our workforce to create a lasting impact.

