Opinion | The lead against covid taken by India’s hinterland

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Innovative initiatives for others to emulate are emerging from the poorer parts of our country
In a remote corner of Jharkhand, a running spirit factory is contributing in a small yet significant way to India’s efforts to combat the covid-19 pandemic. Located in Balidih Industrial Area, Bokaro, an “aspirational district”—among those identified under a government plan to improve local socioeconomic conditions—in Jharkhand, this factory has produced close to 10,000 litres of sanitizer. Called Smiling Bokaro, the fluid has been manufactured in full compliance with World Health Organization norms and is available to residents of the district at an affordable ₹210 per litre.

Four hours away from Bokaro is Dumka, another district in Jharkhand. The administration of Dumka is ensuring people stay at home by organising online games and competitions. Dazzling Dumka is the name of the Twitter account and Facebook page where residents can upload their entries for various skill-based contests. This initiative, “Corona Mein Kuch Karo Na”, aims to inspire residents to explore their hobbies during the lockdown. More than 200 people have sent their entries so far.

The district administration has also partnered with a local cable network and is screening movies so that they have something to do while they are made aware of social issues. As India steps up its fight, with a stringent nationwide lockdown to facilitate social isolation, many of the 112 aspirational districts of India are leaving no stone unturned to strengthen the nation’s efforts.
Jharkhand is brimming with many such laudable initiatives. Situated on the banks of the Koel river, Palamu is a district affected by left-wing extremism with large stretches of dense forest land. Notwithstanding its geographical constraints, the district has made concerted efforts to ensure the home delivery of essential items to all residents. The administration has authorized seven vendors to service on-call demands made by customers. The personnel involved are following a contactless-delivery protocol; every touch point is sanitized. The district administration is also providing free-of-cost ration packets within two hours to all those who need assistance. Ranchi, the capital of Jharkhand, has launched a Mental Health Helpline to assist citizens.

In the neighbouring state of Bihar, a mobile app called Go Corona: Satarkta Hi Bachav, has been launched by Nawada district. Through the app, the administration aims to provide quick tracking and medical help. A few hours westwards, in Gaya and Aurangabad, examples of effective social distancing practices can be seen. Spots have been demarcated in all marketplaces to ensure that individuals stand at least six feet away from each other in queues.
acute malnutrition and moderately acute malnutrition.

In November 2019, a scheme was launched in Assam by Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal to train a group of differently-abled persons at the Rural Self Employment Training Institute in Goalpara district. The group was trained to create shopping bags made of cloth as an alternative to plastic. Today, that group is busy creating good-quality masks, and the district administration enabling their sale, and in the process providing these workers a source of income in the lockdown.

Over 85 isolation beds have been arranged in various government and private healthcare facilities of Goalpara. Quarantine facilities have been identified and administrative roles assigned to make sure that these are kept in clean. Google spreadsheets are being used extensively to coordinate the movements of Accredited Social Health Activist, or Asha, workers, even as local resources are galvanized to bolster the availability of hospital beds and other medical facilities.

The covid-19 crisis highlights the need for better preparedness to overcome similar situations in the future. The pandemic provides India an opportunity to assess and improve its disaster-management capabilities. Digital interventions such as online risk assessment platforms and tracking applications, apart from enhanced training modules for community healthcare workers, greater sensitization of the police and paramilitary forces, and pre-emptive socioeconomic measures to protect and support the underprivileged must be prioritized even after this crisis is resolved.
The real struggle is to keep our citizens safe, motivated and optimistic. These heartening stories from grassroots India offer testimony to the unwavering spirit of Indians in the wake of this pandemic. These practices are emerging from some of the most underdeveloped states of India, and can serve as touchpoints for other states as they ramp up their mitigation efforts. The aspirational districts of India account for almost 18% of the country’s population and are critical to its growth story. They also happen to be some of the most backward districts on key parameters of nutrition, health and education. However, with a multitude of successful initiatives and on-ground activities, these districts are taking the lead in India’s relentless fight against the novel coronavirus.

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These are the authors’ personal views
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The exemption will be applicable from 20 April, in those areas of the country where the effect of coronavirus is negligible.

The govt has given exemptions for the essential activities and services to maintain the supply chain.

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This brings total cases to 219, out of which 31 have recovered and 16 have passed away

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'No decision has been taken so far to commence operations of domestic & international flights post the lockdown,' Hardeep Singh Puri tweeted on Sunday.