



## Friends Update

November 2020



Distribution of emergency food supplies at BD Colony

**In 2020, West Bengal suffered the double blow of COVID-19 and Cyclone Amphan  
Our appeals raised £17,000 in just four months  
Emergency relief helped around 4,000 families  
Efforts now turn to rehabilitation with a focus on children and women  
We're looking to raise £5,000 to support the shift to online teaching**

***Thanks to all our supporters for generous donations,  
thoughts and prayers during this very difficult year***

## Pandemic lockdown, emergency appeal

The Indian Government imposed the first lockdown to slow the spread of coronavirus in April.

The CRS team were immediately concerned about the impact this would have on the communities they support. Families already live below the poverty line but with no one able to leave the house and work, thousands faced hunger, with women and children most at risk.

CRS drew up a plan with the Diocese of Calcutta to distribute basic aid to those most in need in the 12 city slum areas where CRS works and 36 Diocesan pastorates (parishes). The estimated budget was £11,500. The Friends issued an appeal in April and £9,000 was raised within a month.

Distribution of emergency supplies began just before Easter and continued through April and May. The collaboration between CRS and the Diocese was very successful.

St Thomas's School led the purchasing and packaging. Packs contained staple foods such as rice, lentils, potatoes, sugar, milk, and cooking oil, as well as medicated soap.

The police gave CRS permission to use their vehicles, despite the lockdown, and ensured that there was social distancing at distribution points.

CRS staff worked alongside local clergy and pastorate members, as well as Director of CRS, Rig David, and Bishop Paritosh. This was teamwork at its best! In total around 3,000 families received packages.



Supplies of essentials including rice and potatoes ready for separating into family-sized packs



Loading the CRS vehicle with emergency food packs for another delivery



Ready to start at GB Lane



A socially distanced queue at Mahamaya (left) and people waiting in chalk circles at Brace Bridge (right)



Distribution of essential food supplies. Clockwise from top left: Bibibagan, Topsia, Hastings and Sukantanagar

## Cyclone devastation, extended appeal

As if the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic and lockdown were not enough, West Bengal and Bangladesh were struck by Cyclone Amphan at the end of May.

In Kolkata, streets were flooded, and trees fell on roads and buildings. There was widespread flooding in low-lying rural areas to the south of the city, inundating villages and destroying cropland. Many people found themselves without shelter, food, water and electricity.

Once the flood waters receded, CRS partner organisations in each project location were able to send an assessment of damage.



Flooded street in Kolkata



Thatched roof collapsed onto home

Overall, an estimated 1,150 families supported by CRS were rendered partially or fully homeless.

CRS, in partnership with the Diocese, had already planned a second phase of emergency food deliveries to communities in response to the pandemic lockdown, but this was given added urgency in light of the new crisis.

Families at Hastings and Brace Bridge, who live in makeshift shelters created from scrap materials, were very severely affected and left very vulnerable without adequate shelter.

In slum communities where many families live in single-room houses with tin roofs, there was significant damage. In rural areas, many homes have thatch roofs which were severely damaged by the high winds and torrential rain. Also, community buildings that CRS uses sustained roof and other damage due to fallen trees and debris.



CRS headquarters: signs torn down, trees uprooted

Another appeal went out to our Friends and – thanks to your generosity – more money came in.

These funds were used to purchase 400 tarpaulins and 400 sets of cooking utensils for families whose homes were destroyed or damaged during the cyclone.



The team makes packages of cooking pots and utensils



Distribution of emergency supplies.  
In the city (left from top to bottom) at Bibibagan,  
Hastings and Brace Bridge  
In rural villages (above) at Jharkhali



In June, the Government of West Bengal began to distribute food in Kolkata and other districts in West Bengal and so emergency food distribution by CRS gradually wound down.

## Looking forwards

Unfortunately, this is not the end of hardship and suffering for families and communities in Kolkata and West Bengal. CRS remains committed to supporting poor and underprivileged communities as they rebuild their homes and livelihoods. The focus for CRS and the Diocese is children and women.

### Children and teachers

While not attending school, children can be very vulnerable. A great concern is that family impoverishment can lead to children being having to work, being given to traffickers, or forced into marriage.

While private and government-aided schools have resumed education with online teaching, CRS Education Centers in slums and villages lack the equipment to pivot to a different model.

CRS drew up a plan to acquire and distribute smart phones to CRS teachers as a way to stay in contact with children and provide opportunities for learning in a new way.

Teachers from several centres have attended a two-stage training in how to use smart phone apps such as WhatsApp and Google Meet as tools for communication and learning. Rig recently reported that “In some of the education centres online education has commenced with a few children and their parents participating with great enthusiasm.”

### Women and livelihoods

The women and instructors of Nari Dana made use of their time under lockdown to make face masks. Batches of cotton material were delivered to their homes and they set about making masks for their families and neighbours. Then orders began to come in: 500 masks for Larsen & Toubro, 200 for the Diocese of Calcutta, and 300 for another customer.

This was a great opportunity for Nari Dana women to maintain their livelihoods during a very difficult time. Hopefully, orders for face masks will continue so that this can become a permanent product line in addition to the other items that are made.



Rashmi delivering smart phone training to teachers

Teachers in Derbyshire who have been paired with CRS Education Centers for the past few years have kept in touch with teachers in their link schools throughout the year via WhatsApp, and have also been offering encouragement to CRS staff.

The annual visit of the Derbyshire team to Kolkata to conduct professional development for CRS teachers will not be possible in January 2021 so they are exploring the possibility of delivering some kind of online training instead.





Women working at the DORCAS centre at Bishop's House

The Nari Dana programme has now resumed operations. Currently, women are travelling to the production centres and working in smaller groups on a shift basis, as well as following social distancing protocols as best as possible.

The training in using smart phones for CRS teachers has been extended to those who teach skills development courses to women so they can also use digital communication methods to keep in touch with their students and continue efforts of women's empowerment.

### Staff

At CRS headquarters, a restructuring of staff has been initiated in response to the pandemic, as well as a systematic evaluation of how the different programmes are going to be implemented in future.

**Thank you!**

In total, including Gift Aid recovered, we raised nearly £17,000 from April to July for the coronavirus and cyclone appeals. Thousands of families received a lifeline to survive in a time of great need.

Earlier this year, CRS Director, Rig David sent the following message:

*On behalf of all our communities in the slums and villages of West Bengal we are deeply moved by the donations you have made to the Appeal. We are so thankful to you that, regardless of this universal pandemic in all our lives, you have found the time and resource to respond without any question. With the donations you have given, food and medicines have been distributed to thousands of weak and vulnerable families, bringing a lifeline to children, women and communities at large. May the good Lord shower His blessings on you during this dark period. May it soon be over. With faith & goodwill -- CRS Team*

**If you wish to donate to CRS via the UK Friends, please use our Just Giving page (<https://www.justgiving.com/calcutta-crs>) or contact us at [secretary@friendsofcrs.co.uk](mailto:secretary@friendsofcrs.co.uk)**