



NEWSLETTER

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IMPACT OF NATION-WIDE LOCKDOWN AND EFFECT ON TRIBAL COMMUNITIES IN TAMIL NADU

A 65-day lockdown across the country was imposed from 26 March to 31 May to control the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. All the factories, schools, colleges, universities, businesses, and transport services had to close, while essential services such as vegetable markets, small tea shops, hotels supermarkets and pharmacies remained open. India is a large country consisting of 39 states. Every state has different socio-economics challenges facing the people which the government of each state is hoping to tackle through different initiatives to protect people against starvation. The coronavirus restrictions have placed significant financial stress on the poorest in Indian society.

The Indian government announced a package to aid the poorest who are affected by the coronavirus outbreak. The government plans to provide free wheat, rice, and pulses (varieties of Dhal) to low-income families over the next three months. Tamil Nadu government has also committed three months' free rations, including rice, dhal, cooking oil, pulses, and sugar, to all ration cardholders. They also promised them cash support of Rs 1,000.

How is the coronavirus impacting the economy and TORP projects?

For a long-time we have worked with Tribal and deprived communities to give education support and care to children. During the coronavirus pandemic we met with four students who we support to get a better understanding of their educational and economic needs.

The nationwide lockdown has impacted farmers in a variety of ways such as the absence of labour for harvesting coffee, pepper, and beans. Perishables such as fruit and vegetables cannot be taken to markets due to the lack of transportation. People said that prices of essential commodities increased substantially. Many have been left without an income and as a result are financially struggling to purchase rice, dhal and other essentials. [Continued on page 2](#)

Due to the lockdown, wedding ceremonies, and other significant functions have been cancelled. Tribal people usually collect honey, gooseberries, amla, kadukkai (a jungle product collected from the forest used for tooth powder) and wild grass (lemon grass). However, the government has banned members of the public to go into the forest to gather these products to sell them for money, therefore depriving them of their livelihood. Although the lockdown has been implemented as preventative measure against the spread of COVID-19, it has destroyed people's livelihoods. Tribal people are dependent on daily or weekly wages. As many people struggle to make ends meet, it is imperative the government take immediate steps to not only control the spread of COVID-19 but also to prevent people from dying from starvation.

Recently, the Tamil Nadu government announced that a few industrial areas could re-open with 50% of their employees, while the transportation services, hotels, and religious places of worship could start to open from June 1st.

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

What a year this has been! The effects of COVID-19 have made us all reflect much more deeply on what is important in our lives. The pandemic has reminded us how fortunate we are when we are in good health but also the benefits from contact with other people. Not being able to go to work, and limited interaction with friends and relations, impacts negatively on our mental health and it can be difficult to remain positive about life when one feels alone. I hope that everyone in the 'Goodwill family' is well and knows that, as part of our family, we do think about them.

You may be aware that India has been on lockdown in a similar fashion to the UK. Different states have been affected to varying extents but, Tamil Nadu, where our work is focused, has been one of the worst affected states and remains on lockdown as I am writing this. Like you, I have been wondering about the effects on staff and children in the Goodwill Homes and villages. We have tried hard to keep in contact with as many staff and children in India as we can.

Schools in Tamil Nadu are closed until further notice, re-opening was planned for September but will probably not be possible until the end of 2020 or the start of the following year. Some of the official examinations were possible at the start of lockdown but most have been delayed. Higher Education examinations have all been postponed which has meant that some Goodwill students are left in limbo waiting to complete their studies. The XII standard pupils were able to complete their national exams and I was delighted to be able to congratulate the Goodwill pupils who all passed.

A few Goodwill children remain in the residential homes but any who have relatives have gone back to live with their family for the time being, and Goodwill has been trying to support this with some small financial grants towards expenses and also some schoolwork to complete. You will see from the newsletter how the Tribal OutReach Programme (TORP) helps to support those children who are staying in the villages. I anticipate that TORP will play a larger role in the support we offer to communities in the coming years. Goodwill has not had to lay off any of the staff

Impact of lockdown on student education

Primary, secondary, and tertiary level educational institutions closed from as early as 21 March. The Class 10 SSLC board exams were postponed to beyond June 15th which were due to begin for students of class 1-9 in the state, who will now be promoted automatically considering the closure of schools. On 16 April, the Department of Higher Education postponed the summer semester exams for the academic year 2019-20 to the beginning of the next academic year for all colleges and universities in Tamil Nadu. . [Continued on page 3](#)

REMINDER OUR ADDRESS

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who work in the homes- they have been able to look after those children who remain with us.

Please be patient if you are waiting for news of specific children or expecting letters from India. Free movement is restricted in Tamil Nadu and it is not easy for Goodwill staff to make additional visits to deliver letters. I hope you will also be patient in your dealings with us in the UK. Theresa, our administrator, is on furlough, so it is taking us a little longer than usual to respond to enquiries and to publish this newsletter. Post is still being collected, and we are contactable via email. Phone calls are unlikely to be answered but we are checking the answerphone so please leave a message and we will get back to you.

As in the UK, life in India carries on and the children in our Goodwill family will still need support to give them the chance to escape destitution and lead more productive and fulfilled lives. Education remains important to them because it provides a genuine opportunity to improve their prospects, but I suspect that we will need an increased focus on healthcare as the effects of COVID-19 in the rural communities becomes more apparent. You will see an interesting article on page 7 about a health appeal for the rural communities covered by TORP. Fundraising has been difficult during lockdown and our income has been affected, especially since the UK schools who fundraise for Goodwill as part of the visits have been unable to go to India this year. We appreciate your support more than ever during this challenging time.

David Neill

TORP staff visited a few higher education students to find out how COVID-19 impacted their studies



Raghu, one of our Tribal students from Korancombu village is doing a (MSW) Master of Social Work at the American College in Madurai. He said that COVID-19 is affecting his course due to the uncertainty of the lockdown.

“My studies have been postponed for a few months. I am especially upset about my semester exams being postponed because if completed, I would have been able to start working. COVID-19 has disrupted my efforts securing a good job somewhere in India, or in Coimbatore. As of today, I am going to work in the agricultural field to support my family earnings. I would prefer to work for a non-governmental organisation to support poor communities such as mine. I am very proud to help my mum in her housework, as she is grateful for me looking after her during the pandemic. COVID-19 is teaching people to keep their hands and parts of the body clean to protect them from the coronavirus. Now, not only my family, but most of our villagers are using soap to wash their hands and we always wear a mask to protect from COVID-19. We are lucky to live in the hills, therefore we do not have any corona pandemic in our area. Thanks to God for not admitting this bad pandemic virus in our area”.



R. Malini from Paraipatti Village is studying for a diploma course in Computer Education at the Christian Polytechnic College in Oddanchatram.

We met in front of her house in the village where our staff members interviewed her to understand the impact COVID-19 was having. She performed well telling us about the impact of lockdown. She said that she did not fully understand the reason for the lockdown and why people working in industries such as transportation, hospitals, hotels, and education are unable to do so, and are not allowed to gather in one place together. This is all a new experience to her. Her parents have still been working in the field doing labour work, while her exams have been postponed for the next few months. “The postponement of exams has upset my household as my parents keep asking when I will be writing my exams. I have told them that I do not know when it will change. My college is now providing study materials online. I access learning materials and write tests which I then send back to them using my cell phone. Sometimes I am very inconvenienced by the fact that I live in a very rural area with power failures interrupting my internet connection. I am very concerned about the huge death toll because of the pandemic and how this situation will develop. I prefer not to go out in public to prevent and keep away from this pandemic. I know I must wear a mask and clean my hands with proper soap. The cost of food provision has increase significantly, forcing us to collect green leaves, jackfruits, and beans from the jungle for cooking meals as there is no cost involved in doing so”.



P. Selvi from Paraipatti Village is studying towards a diploma in Electronics and Electric Engineering at the Christian Polytechnic College in Oddanchatram. We had a meeting in front of her house in the village.

“I am Selvi from Paraipatti village. I am currently in my final year doing a Diploma in Engineering in Oddanchatram with the help of Goodwill TORP. My parents have gone to work as day labourers in the agricultural field. The lockdown does not impact much of the agriculture work, but most farmers are reluctant to offer work due to the impact the lockdown restrictions has had on transportation services, with the markets also remaining closed preventing farmers from selling products. My family is suffering a lot due to the increase in prices. If I were able to finish my exams before the lockdown, I would have joined a good company in Tamil

Nadu to earn money to look after my family. Usually, my father abuses alcohol but due to the lockdown forcing liquor stores to be closed, he is not able to drink and waste money. This has made me and my mum very happy. I am now also learning online and unsure when the college will open again to write my exams”.



G. Madhumila hails from Kavitchicombu village. She is studying for a diploma course in Computer Education at the Christian Polytechnic College in Oddenchatram.

“My family consists of me, my mother and my four sisters as my father died a few years ago. My mother is taking care of us. My eldest sister Uma has married and gone to live with her husband. My second oldest sister Prema is studying B.B.A (Bachelor of Business Administration) in Chennai with support of Goodwill TORP. My other sister Swarthy do not want to study further and stays home with my mother. Goodwill staff have tried to stress the importance of education to her through counselling and support. During this woeful situation, we both are helping my mother by going to work with her to earn a small piece of bread. The College is now conducting online education, but unfortunately, I do not have a cell phone to use for online teaching. This is making me depress but I do not want to trouble my mum to buy me a new device. We are suffering unbelievably due to price increasing day by day. On the one side it is the increasing prices, while on the other side our low income does not help us to stay happy. I am looking forward to College re-opening so that I can go back to learn. This is a challenging time to study for exams. I pray to God that everyone stays safe”.

Conclusion

Lockdown continued until the 30th of June with significant relaxation, including 50% of transport and other official works being allowed start. Our people in the TORP areas have not been affected by the Coronavirus and remain careful and cautious. They are willing to follow the safety precautions of hand washing and wearing of masks. However, they are suffering a lot trying to ensure the family can survive while being safe. We are confident that everyone will remain cautious though and follow the necessary precautions. With the lockdown partially lifted many daily wage labourers should get work. The government is now extending free

rations to family cardholders for the next 3 months. It is supplemented by locally available forest-based products. The students are expecting the re-opening of schools and colleges to study for their final exams.

With thanks to R M Selvam and TORP staff who made this contribution possible.

Note: Since this article was written in May, the lockdown has been extended till 30 June and further extended until 31st August.

After announcing relaxations as part of Unlock1 across the state from June 1, the Tamil Nadu government re-imposed intense lockdown measures in Chennai and neighbouring areas. With the addition of fresh infections, the state tally on 30 June spiralled to 86,224 with Chennai alone accounting for nearly 54,000 cases. The move from the government was taken as the coronavirus cases continued to spike in Tamil Nadu and on Monday, 29 June the state reported nearly 4,000 fresh cases.

After Chennai and three other districts went under complete lockdown from June 19, the government also extended a complete shutdown in Madurai and surrounding areas.

At the end of July, Tamil Nadu recorded 277,688 cases including 96,438 in Chennai and 10,392 in Madurai. To date 3,659 fatal deaths were reported.

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GOODWILL TORP IN THE COMMUNITIES

The education of tribal children is the core of the Tribal Outreach Programme (TORP), but it was realised that unless parents and adults of these communities were supported and motivated, the programme could not succeed. A two-pronged strategy was proposed for funding from Goodwill UK; first to provide material support to enable tribal children to attend school, and secondly to ensure that tribal communities can participate in their own development and have access to the basics for a healthy life; water, healthcare, electricity and knowledge.

Health problems of children, and elders in the family, are major factors contributing to high dropout levels in schools. To address the situation, TORP regularly organises hearing and eye camps, while doctors visit the villages, TORP provides financial support for treatment of serious problems. Other smaller problems are attended to by staff at the local clinic at KC Patti village.



TORP re-introduce Health Screening Programme for Children

The TORP team work closely with Dr Rajkumar's team to ensure tribal communities are in good health. In the past, Dr Rajkumar and his associates examined all the tribal children supported by TORP, every three months, but due to lack of funding this programme has been halted in recent years. Fortunately, due to the generosity of a UK donor, we are now once again able to start the health screening programme. The medical screening will be comprehensive and involves checking medical and family history, physical examinations, vision and hearing, urine testing, screening for mental health issues and point of care testing for haemoglobin levels (because anaemia is so common).

Since the children live in dispersed settlements, TORP staff cannot coordinate all the children for the same dates, and the clinic does not have sufficient space and equipment to accommodate large groups. The programme will be rolled out over the next few months and 262 children will be screened. Due to the current Coronavirus epidemic, it was decided to divide them into smaller groups between the KC Patti and Pachular clinics to ensure all tests could be done. It was agreed that parents should accompany their children to learn about their medical status. Children who are found to be at risk will be assisted and TORP will support them with follow up treatment.

Health Screening commenced

We can report that health screening of about 33 children supported by TORP was completed in June. Given the current conditions, only about 20 children can be screened in a week to avoid breaking social distancing rules.

Dr Rajkumar reported in his interim finding that there are no children with serious health issues now, however, a few need specific interventions which will result in additional costs. According to him, anaemia cases is not as severe as in the past due to encouragement to take preventive doses, but it continues to affect a significant number of children. Many children require specialised dental care affecting permanent teeth such as fillings and root canal treatment.

Due to warning signs of an impending Coronavirus epidemic in the local areas, Dr Rajkumar needed to suspend the screening and will resume once it is safe to do so.

SPOTLIGHT ON KORANCOMBU VILLAGE

A small village near Kodaikanal in the Dindigul District, supported by Goodwill TORP

Our Tribal Outreach Programme (TORP) currently support 13 boys and 20 girls at the local government and other schools or institutions outside the area. Furthermore, we supply the local school with part-time teachers to help children with learning and other special needs. Moreover, TORP provide support for their health care and sanitation in the school. Since 2002, TORP supported a total of 445 (227 boys and 230 girls) from Korancombu.

Thanks to the support of Canterbury Christ University, England a new roof was added to a building which then served as an additional classroom for class V. In 2008, a separate classroom was constructed again with the help of Canterbury Christ Church University. This classroom is still being used today.

In 2017-18 a new school block was constructed by the Tribal Welfare department which cost 15 Lakhs.

The sinking of bore wells commenced in 2007 to partially solve the problem of clean drinking water. Later, the water level dropped, and the bore well dried up and is not in use anymore. In 2014-15 the government erected a water tank to supply drinking water to all families in the village.

In the 2010 Canford School from Wimborne, England supplied 12 families with hollow bricks to upgrade their homes to be free from water and damp.

Revathi and Nagaraj both born and got married in Korancombu village. They are working on the agricultural fields as day labourers and have three sons. The eldest, Karthick Raja did class IX but discontinued his education and is now working in the textile industry in Tirupur, Tamil Nadu, the second son, Sakthivel, did the same class as his elder brother and is now working in the village looking after his family, and the youngest son, Prakash is studying class X in St. Xavier Higher Secondary School with the help of Goodwill TORP. He was unable to sit his exams due to lockdown, but the government has since allowed them to write their exams from June 15th.

Nagammal was born in Pattiyakadu village which is one of the Tribal villages located in the forest near Kodaikanal. She married her husband from Korancombu, 30-years ago and now lives in Korancombu. She spoke to our staff members about her family situation. She lives in a thatched roof house with her mentally handicapped son. Her husband died because of a heart attack 4-years ago. She depends on agricultural wages for her livelihood. Her low income is not enough to support her family efficiently. She has 4 sons and 2 daughters of whom 5 are married. She said the Coronavirus is challenging them in many ways. She is not able to find work to earn an income and if she goes out to work, she will need someone to look after her mentally handicapped son.



BEFORE



AFTER

Local children standing in front of the TORP funded classroom



BEFORE



AFTER



Nagammal speaking to TORP volunteers

TORP SUPPORTS COMMUNITY HEALTH INITIATIVES

Goodwill TORP played a vital role in facilitating a hearing camp in January.

Dr. Rajkumar Ramasamy, director of the Primary Health Care Centre in K.C. Patti welcomed all. Volunteer staff from Goodwill TORP together with staff from the Health Centre assisted with the registration and food preparation and issued medical cards to manage the crowd. A temporary pharmacy was also set up.

“Such initiatives are helpful for the poorest people like me who cannot afford expensive procedures and hearing aid”, said V. Subramani a patient, from Nadupaati village.





Health Appeal

Good health is a prerequisite for the development of any child, but government health care in rural India is woefully inadequate and the poor lack the necessary funds to go to private doctors. However, tribal communities and other needy groups are well served by the KC Patti Primary Health Centre, a project run by the Palani Hills Development Trust. It is managed by Dr Rajkumar Ramasamy, a physician trained in Cambridge, England, who now devotes his time to treating mainly, but not exclusively tribal people. His wife, Mary is an obstetrician who visits the centre and tribal villages when she is free from her work at the Christian Fellowship Hospital in Oddanchatram. The centre is well staffed and equipped, and capable of dealing with all but the most serious of cases. Perhaps the greatest achievement of Dr Rajkumar is his role in the almost complete eradication of tuberculosis in tribal villages.



Donation Form

The Coronavirus is a urgent public health emergency which is having significant consequences on the lives of many poor families. Please help us continue providing the necessary health screening in our TORP supported villages by donating.

Please Tick ✓

£10

£25

£50

Other Amount: £ _____

BANK DETAILS: Goodwill Children's Homes **BANK:** HSBC **SORT CODE:** 40-35-09

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FRENCH COUPLE'S EPIC CYCLE TRIP TO INDIA

In April 2019, Thibaut Limon, a civil engineer and Lola Lebel, a statistician embarked on a cycle trip from France to Asia over a period of 15-months. They departed from Paris and cycled through Central Europe, the Balkans, Greece, Turkey, Caucasus, and Iran to Dubai where they embarked on a flight to Chennai arriving at Sanarpatti after cycling 9000+km over a period of 8-months.

It was a first visit to Goodwill for both, and Thibaut said their main observations were “the joy and well-being of the children, the very professional and caring staff and the very good welcome they received from all at the different sites”.



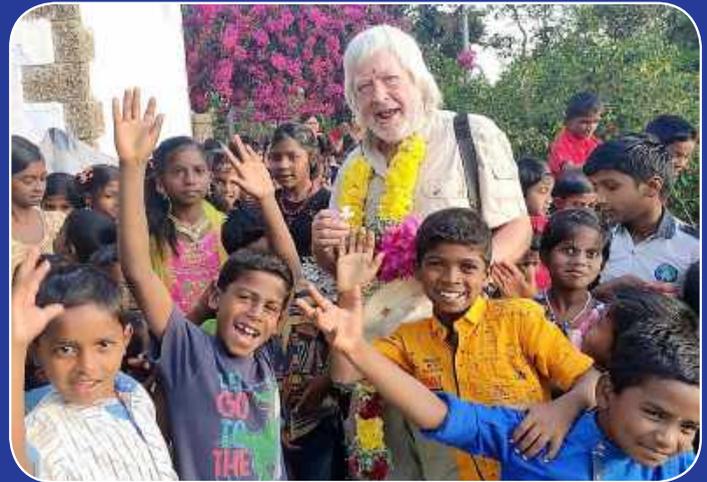
SILVER JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS

Goodwill Primary School has developed a good reputation based on the way in which it looks after its children and the educational standards they achieve when they leave and move on to secondary education. At the start of 2020, Goodwill Primary School hosted a special event consisting of cultural dances and speeches by dignitaries and alumni to celebrate 25-years of excellence.



UK Chairman, Dr David Neill congratulated the GCHS Committee and said they can be proud of the vision displayed in setting up the school and for the manner in which they have supported the school and guided its progress over the last twenty five years. He further extended his thanks to all the teaching staff (past and present) for the effort they put in to providing educational opportunities for the young people who pass through the school. “The UK are proud to be associated with the Goodwill Primary School and look forward to hearing about its continuing success in the future”, he said.

GOODWILL CHILDREN LOVE WELCOMING VISITORS



Supporter, Roger Hoyle was the last person to visit Thandigudi Home before the lockdown. Roger wrote, “I had a wonderful time out there, by the way, you are all doing a great job. The children were happy, inquisitive, and delightful – the place has a really good atmosphere”.

If you would like more information on how you can support Goodwill Children's Homes, please send an email to admin@goodwillhomes.org.uk or contact our office on 0117 3250 550.