



ANNUAL REPORT

2020–21

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ABOUT SRUTI

SRUTI – Society for Rural, Urban and Tribal Initiative was founded in 1983 on the belief that individuals are powerful instruments of social transformation. Originally conceived by social sector leaders Tara Ali Baig, Bunker Roy, Ela Bhatt, Lotika Sarkar, Poonam Muttreja, Samir Chaudhuri and Dr Ramalingaswami, the SRUTI Fellowship Programme supports individual and community action towards securing justice, rights, dignity and opportunity for some of India's most marginalised groups.

In the 37 years of its existence, the organisation has worked to raise resources from within the country to support 145 Fellows and several volunteers from communities who work together to sustain the process of change through community involvement.

SRUTI aims to harness the power of individuals working at the grassroots to attain its vision of a society that is based on the core values of justice, equity, compassion, respect, and dignity for all. Collective social action and local leadership at the grassroots form the crux of the SRUTI Fellowship. SRUTI and its Fellows believe that social change and sustainable economic development can be achieved by empowering oppressed and vulnerable communities to access justice, equality and opportunity and be true stakeholders in a vibrant democracy.

SRUTI's core mission, therefore, is to identify and invest in individuals armed with zeal and a vision to work towards the ideals of a more equitable society within a democratic framework: individuals with idealism, staying power and the ability to mobilise communities at the grassroots and seek solutions for their most pressing issues through 'Sangathans' – people's group that facilitates community social action.

Some key issues addressed by the SRUTI Fellows and the Sangathans include: Access to and Ownership of Natural Resources – Jal, Jangal, Zameen; Land and Forest Conservation; Small Holder and Sustainable Agriculture; Right to Food; In situ Livelihood; Panchayati Raj Institution and Governance; Rights to the City; Education; Right to Information; Caste and Gender.

SRUTI extends a mix of financial support and intermediary inputs to an individual Fellow/a group of Fellows through the Fellowship Programme that has evolved substantially over the decades. The Fellowship Programme is financed by resources mobilised, to the extent possible, from within the country, through support partnerships and a range of fundraising efforts. The Fellowship Programme, its related advocacy and outreach efforts, and the Resource Mobilisation Programme form the key pillars of SRUTI.

For more information, please visit www.sruti.org.in

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTORS: LOOKING BACK AT 2020–21

The COVID-19 pandemic caught the world unprepared in all respects, from health care to governance to socio-economic issues. This severest of crises brought some lessons, the foremost being that the existing system is not able to deal with the fall-out of a calamity of this nature. It also underscored that globalisation is not confined only to finances, but involves a variety of other exchanges, from socio-cultural and geo-political to viruses as well, hence the risk of global pandemics.

First wave of COVID-19 started in the middle of March, and lasted for another 6 months, India remained under strict lockdown for almost 3 months. When the lockdown was suddenly announced, India witnessed the exodus of lakhs of migrant labours, with daily wage earners undertaking reverse migration from the metro cities to their homes in small towns and rural areas. This was mainly due to the deep insecurities embedded in the informal sector over decades of non-recognition and a struggle for survival involving hand-to-mouth wages and expensive health care without the social security of paid sick leave. As the lockdown period stretched, the number of distress calls from across the country – urgently requesting food and other basic requirements including medicines, masks, sanitisers – continued unabated. It was vital that the huge implications of the disaster were dealt with by involving every low-income stakeholder: urban workers, peasants, Dalits, tribes and other vulnerable communities.

Attempting to address the immediate fall-out, we assessed the situation through Fellow groups and mobilised funds to start relief work. A long relief campaign was facilitated covering 14 states and directly reaching out to 20,000 people through the distribution of ration and hygiene kits. In those circumstances the real challenge was to keep alive the struggles built around a range of issues such as forest rights and conservation, agriculture, livelihood, land rights, gender, education and rights to natural resources. We organised regular online meetings with Fellow groups to plan and strategies movements across India, and mobilised funds to run campaigns on forest rights and governance.

Our flagship initiative School for Social Change (SSC) is designed to encourage a scientific temperament and build perspectives of the youth. When the pandemic started, we were about to organise the 4th camp of the year, but like everything SSC also came to a standstill. Knowing full well the importance of the frequent engagements with SSC participants, we organised online talks and webinars with them on a wide range of issues. Later on, under the leadership of one of our senior fellows, we started an online writing platform, Yuvaniya. It was a pleasant surprise to see how well and with what enthusiasm rural youth wrote their stories and experiences. With all these efforts our focus remained on standing shoulder to shoulder with the voices from the ground and facilitating processes of equality, fraternity, and justice through promoting constitutional values.

The pandemic has a very obvious lesson for us all: we are all connected. If the urban workers and peasants can't afford health care or social security, it affects us as well. The learning through the pandemic has brought us even closer together, underscoring the importance of working as collectives for a better future. This Annual Report featuring our collective work and efforts through the crisis reflects our learnings during the period and our keenness to sing songs of hope.

With best regards to all our friends and supporters,

Shweta, Satyam and all members of SRUTI Team

SRUTI FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME AT A GLANCE

The uniqueness of SRUTI's Fellowship Programme is that its outreach is widespread yet deep-rooted. We directly support individuals and communities involved in social work at the grassroots, making the process of change organic and relevant to the ground. SRUTI's focus is on constitutional rights and community-driven interventions; we facilitate the efforts at the grassroots through the intermediary processes of advocacy, engagement, association, capacity building, and solidarity.

A consistent endeavour at SRUTI has been to raise independent funds to supplement resources mobilised by the Sangathans. All the funds dedicated for the Fellowship is raised through Indian funds, and finds resonance in activities at SRUTI – in the Scrap Collection Programme, organising clothes sales, and reaching out through donation drives.

Since its inception, SRUTI has supported the work of 167 Fellows at the grassroots across India. We currently support 33 Fellows and 143 karyakartas (volunteers/activists) in 14 states: Uttarakhand, Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), Delhi, Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh (MP), Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh (AP), Tamil Nadu (TN), Uttar Pradesh (UP), and Himachal Pradesh (HP).

The current outreach of SRUTI Fellows is over 7361 villages and 250 urban clusters covering around 6.8 lakh families and 34 lakh people.

SRUTI Fellows

ANDHRA PRADESH

1. K. Victoria – Navjeevan, Nellore district (dt)

BIHAR

2. Kailash Bharati – Mazdoor Kisan Samiti, Gaya dt
3. Santosh Marandi – Adivasi Mazdoor Kisan Mukti Vahini, Banka dt.
4. Sohini – Jan Jagran Shakti Sangathan, Arariya dt

CHHATTISGARH

5. Jang Sai – Gaon Ganrajya Sangathan, Surguja and Ambikapur dts
6. Rajim Ketwas – Dalit Adivasi Manch, Baloda Bazar and Mahasamund dts
7. Yunus Toppo – Jan Abhivyakti, Korba and Surguja dts

DELHI

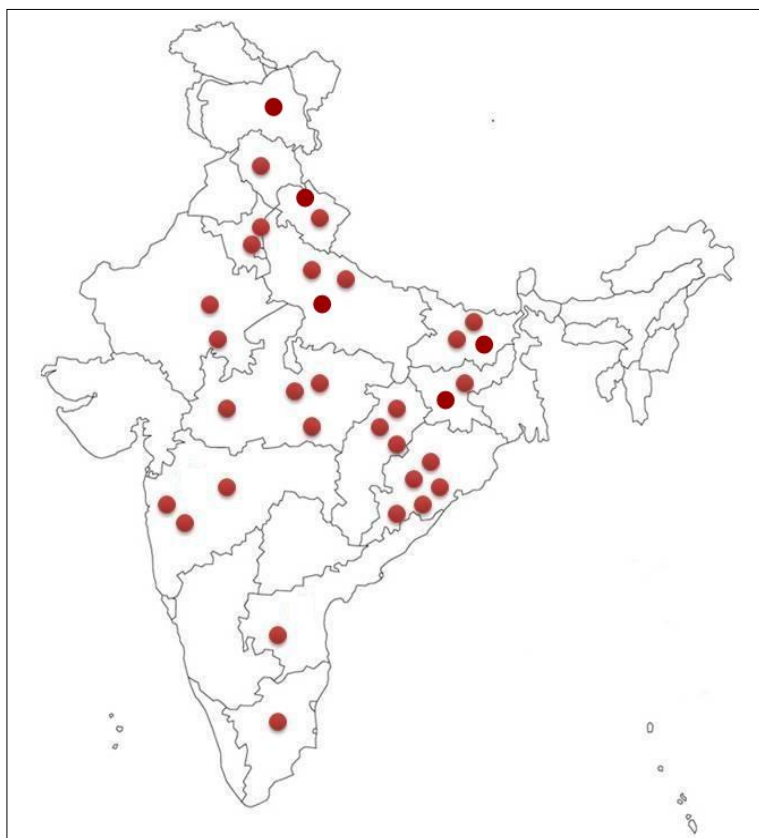
8. Dharmendra Yadav, Delhi Nirman Mazdoor Sangathan
9. Sadre Alam – People's Foundation, Northwest, Southwest, and South Delhi dts

HIMACHAL PRADESH

10. Akshay Jasrotia – Kisan Sabha, Mandi dt.

JHARKHAND

11. Arvind Anjum – Visthapit Mukti Vahini, Singhbhum dt.
12. Jerome Kujur – Jan Sangharsh Samiti, Latehar dt.



JAMMU & KASHMIR

13. Dr Sheikh Ghulam Rasool – J&K RTI Movement, School for Rural Development and Environment, Budgam and Srinagar dt

MADHYA PRADESH

- 14. Jayashree – Adharshila Learning Centre, Barwani dt
- 15. Veerendra Kumar – Bundelkhand Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, Damoh dt
- 16. Aradhana Bhargav – Kisan Sangharsh Samiti, Chhindwara dt
- 17. Abhay and Swapnil – Zenith Society for Legal Empowerment, Shivpuri dt

MAHARASHTRA

- 18. Dashrath Jadhav – Shramjeevi Sangathan, Latur dt
- 19. Ulka Mahajan – Sarvahara Jan Andolan, Raigad dt
- 20. Vilas Bhongade – Kashtkari Jan Andolan, Nagpur, Bhandara, Wardha and Gondia dts

ODISHA

- 21. Amulya Nayak – Adivasi Chetna Sangathan, Dhenkanal and Angul dts
- 22. Pradeep Dash – Lok Chetna Sangathan, Rayagada dt
- 23. Prafulla Mishra – Adim Adivasi Mukti Manch, Nayagarh dt
- 24. Trilochan Punji – Zindabad Sangathan, Balangir dt
- 25. Sarojini Malick – Mati Maa MahilaMorcha, Nayagarh dt

RAJASTHAN

- 26. Hira Lal – Hum Kisan, Manthan Shikshan Kendra, Jhalawar dt
- 27. Suman – Khetihar Khan Mazdoor Sangathan, Chittorgarh dt

TAMIL NADU

- 28. M.S. Selvaraj – Vyavasayigal Tozhilalargal Munnetra Sangham (VTMS), Nilgiris dt

UTTARAKHAND

- 29. Basanti – Maati Sangathan, Pithoragarh dt
- 30. Gopal Lodhiyal, Uttarakhand Van Panchayat Sangharsh Morcha, Nainital dt

UTTAR PRADESH

- 31. Afaq Ullah – Awadh Peoples Forum, Faizabad dt
- 32. Rajnish Gambhir – Tharu Adivasi Mahila Mazdoor Kisan Sangh, Lakhimpur Kheri dt
- 33. Lal Prakash Rahi – Dialogue in Solidarity Harmony in Action (DISHA) Sanstha, Jaunpur dt

Fellowship Exits

- 1. Akshay Kumar Pany, Odisha

ACTIVITY REPORT FOR 2020–21

By the end of March 2020, the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic had forced the Union government to impose a series of lockdowns. The first case in India had been discovered on 30 January 2020 in Kerala. But with business-as-usual continuing, the virus soon had India firmly in its grip. When the government declared a day's Janata curfew on 22 March, many still did not anticipate a complete lockdown would be announced 2 days later. The Union government announced a complete nationwide lockdown for 21 days. There was no warning, which caused untold suffering especially to urban labour. Most were rendered jobless by the lockdown and had no place to even live, resulting in a mass exodus of migrant workers back to their villages from urban pockets throughout the nation.

Responding to the crisis, SRUTI asked all Fellow groups to assess the situation in their areas so that the right support could be provided to the people in need. Following this, immediate support was provided to distribute ration and hygiene kits to people in rural areas; **3167 ration and hygiene kits** were distributed by the end of **May 2020 in 7 states**. Going further into the lockdown period, **17,000 more** ration and hygiene kits were distributed by the end of **October in 14 states**. It was a prompt response to the nationwide crisis, but the road to recovery has many issues aside from the priority areas. Due to restrictions on mobility, SRUTI personnel could not move about, but efforts were still made to connect the Sangathans with a larger network. Dissemination of information – such as details of government-run schemes, guidelines of quarantine centres, etc. – was another task that needed attention. The SRUTI team was actively involved in providing such information. Focused meetings were organised with Fellows to discuss how to use the Panchayati Raj institutions to access government-run welfare schemes. Specific groups SRUTI helped at this time included the pastoral communities of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh who faced a severe crisis of fodder. Funds were mobilised to support them with fodder and veterinary services. Another big group SRUTI reached out to were tribal and other forest-dwelling communities: already facing the threat of eviction, their plight was exacerbated by the closure of government institutions. Fellow groups strategised and organised campaigns and meetings with these groups to make them aware of their rights and position during the time of the lockdown.

When the School for Social Change (SSC), our initiative for building a scientific temperament and youth perspective, abruptly stopped due to the lockdown, we organised regular online talks and webinars to keep the SSC participants engaged with the process. Later on, in September, an online writing platform [Yuvaniya](#) was launched. By 15 March 2021, 89 articles, photo/video stories and poems had been published in 14 editions.

Work undertaken by the Fellows: Thematic areas

More specifically, the work undertaken by the Fellows during the period of the report may be grouped into the following thematic areas:

- ❖ *COVID-19 Relief Work*
- ❖ *Forest Rights and Conservation*
- ❖ *Land Rights and Development*
- ❖ *Panchayati Raj Institutions and Governance*
- ❖ *Agriculture and Livelihood*
- ❖ *Education and Leadership building*
- ❖ *Gender, Caste, and Communal Harmony*
- ❖ *Social Security and Labour Rights*

COVID-19 RELIEF WORK

During the time of the pandemic and associated lockdowns, we all saw the heart-wrenching visuals of the struggles the migrant labourers faced while trying to reach their native villages by whatever means possible. In responding to the crisis, individuals and groups on the ground first engaged in providing relief with ration and hygiene kits, reaching

out to remote areas to tackle issues faced by migrant labourers. **SRUTI facilitated relief work through its Fellow groups in 14 states and 20,000 families were directly provided ration and hygiene kits** through networks that were organised, responding to the needs.

During the relief work new networks were explored and collaborations arranged to reach the maximum number of people. Online modes of communication were explored to establish effective communication with the Fellows and Sangathan karyakartas. We also realised the great potential of technology in such challenging times.

While providing aid to the people it was important that the impact of this crisis be studied and documented on the ground. The question *'To what extent can people be helped by providing food or ration?'* remained a constant concern. A major challenge was posed in this period of the pandemic by new laws and policies brought in by the government related to agriculture, industry, environment, and labour rights, including a complete revamp in the process of coal auctions. Factsheets, memorandums, and information bulletins were prepared and disseminated to all associated

HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ **Over 20,000 families in 31 districts of 14 states** (AP, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, HP, Jharkhand, J&K, MP, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, TN, Uttarakhand, and UP) were provided ration and hygiene kits.
- ❖ **135 migrant workers were rescued** through close collaborations of SRUTI Fellows in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu.
- ❖ SRUTI Fellows coordinated with **10,000 migrant workers** to help them return to their homes in Balangir, Odisha.
- ❖ Migrant workers were facilitated to receive **compensation amounts** of Rs 1500 in Odisha and Rs 1000 in MP.
- ❖ In Uttarakhand, **150 families were supported with fodder** for their livestock in Uttarkashi, Nainital, Haridwar, Pauri, Dehradun, and Udham Singh Nagar districts. Around **500 families were supported with ration in these districts**.

stakeholders on the ground.

Supporting Van Gujjars in Uttarakhand

Van Gujjars of Uttarakhand are a traditional forest-dwelling pastoral community, who chose this region as their abode hundreds of years ago due to the abundance of fodder available for their cattle. **Van Panchayat Sangharsh Morcha (VPSM)** has been organising the community residing in the forests of Jim Corbett National Park to fight for their rights for the last 20 years. Being a pastoral community Van Gujjars have always remained on the margins and been kept away from the benefits of government schemes. Lack of healthcare facilities, education, and electricity is common in the *khattas* (forest villages) of Van Gujjars.

Even as their lack of proximity to cities left many Van Gujjar families struggling for food, with their traditional migration to the hills of Uttarakhand stopped due to the lockdown, they faced severe shortage of fodder for their cattle as well. In such circumstances, the Sangathan provided food support and distributed fodder relief for cattle in Uttarkashi, Nainital, Haridwar, Pauri, Dehradun, and Udham Singh Nagar districts.

Awareness meetings in Uttar Pradesh

In Uttar Pradesh, **Awadh Peoples' Forum (APF)** and **Dialogue in Solidarity Harmony in Action (DISHA)** organised 50 awareness meetings in 10 districts, namely Faizabad, Siddharth Nagar, Ambedkar Nagar, Jaunpur, Varanasi, Azamgarh, Mau, Balia, Deoria, and Mirzapur, specially focusing on migrant labourers. During this campaign 20,000 migrant families from Assam, Bihar, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh were helped with ration and health kits.

A comprehensive study of migration in rural Madhya Pradesh

A comprehensive study of migration in rural areas was done by senior fellows Amit and Jayashree through their experiences of working in Barwani district (Madhya Pradesh). The study was a part of perspective building training for the youth of the district. The main purpose of organising a training and undertaking the study was to engage with Adivasi youth of the area on real-world problems. The local Sangathan is initiating action wherever possible.

HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ In **slums and bastis of Delhi**, COVID-19 response work has been undertaken.
- ❖ A digital online writing platform – **Yuvaniya** – has been created to promote written expression of young minds from tribal, rural, and urban communities to document their experiences and analyses.
- ❖ A 16-day campaign was organised in UP where gender issues during COVID-19 times were discussed. **805 youth** were reached through Jagruktha Baithak, film screenings, discussions, and Zoom meetings.

Online meeting to engage youth in the time of lockdown

When lockdown was eased to some extent, we carried on with assessing, engaging with, and working with our Fellows and other Sangathan volunteers. Our online discussions and learning events continued, and we tried to reach out to and engaged with more and more people than before.

In the month of May, we organised 2 sessions with prominent intellectuals: Professor and economist Dr Prabhat Patnaik (14 May) and Dr Hartosh Singh Bal, Political Editor, *Caravan Magazine* (26 May). These discussion sessions allowed young volunteers involved with SCC, Fellows, and other volunteers to become aware of recent

trends in policy, the fallout of the COVID-19 crisis, and how to understand its impact in their respective regions. These 2 discussions covered social, economic, and political discourses in the Indian context.

Over 6–7 June 2020, we organised a Sathi Milan (online) to share the experiences of relief work, rescue and support work, learnings, challenges faced in each state, and for brainstorming on strategising about the common goals ahead. At the Sathi Milan, laws and policies concerning natural resource management and use were discussed. It was an enriching experience which made cross-learning possible at a time of severe distress. It was also a first step for Sathis to organise and participate in meetings digitally, which made it possible for future events to be organised through these mediums. A session was also organised on the issue of caste – its origins, growth, and relevance in the modern era – with Rahul Sonpimple, student leader and Ambedkarite activist.

Yuvaniya: A digital space for the youth of rural areas for writing and sharing experiences

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, opportunities to meet offline during the lockdown and for months afterwards reduced drastically. It was to counter this scenario that an online blog named **Yuvaniya** was designed and launched on 1 September 2020, with the guidance and support of SRUTI Fellows and the team. A fortnightly magazine, Yuvaniya was started with the aim of sharing the perspectives of the youth, especially those living in rural and tribal areas, on the social, economic and political developments around them. With the rapid rise in the use of and access to technology and smartphones, attempts were made to scale up this unique initiative through online platforms. The idea was that the last 3 batches of SSC, from across the length and breadth of the country, would come forward to participate in this initiative.

45 youth from 10 states have marked their enthusiastic participation in expressing their views through different mediums. Youth from Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, and Uttar Pradesh have come forward and joined the magazine as writers. A total of 89 posts (articles, poems, informative visuals and photo-video stories) were published on the blog in 14 editions by 15 March 2021, garnering around 6000 views in total. The writings revolve around different issues and themes such as agriculture and land rights; mining; water–forest–land; folk culture; Corona pandemic lockdown and its felt impacts in the villages; information; etc.

(Visit <https://yuvaniya.in/> to see the blog.)



*Covid relief work in Barwani (MP) [top left], Delhi [top right];
MGNREGA work during pandemic, Arariya (Bihar) [bottom left]; Covid relief work in Banka (Bihar) [bottom right]*



*Covid relief work in Faizabad (UP) and Gaya (Bihar) [top left & bottom left];
Helping migrant labour in Pithora (Chhattisgarh) [right]*

FOREST RIGHTS AND CONSERVATION

SRUTI has been engaged in the implementation of the Forest Rights Act 2006 (FRA) through its Fellow groups in the states of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. The process of organising meetings and training, and strategising for claiming community forest rights was done in the initial months of the reporting period, but after the countrywide lockdown and the following reverse migration of workers, the primary focus shifted to the very survival of people. Gradually, since June, Fellow groups have tried to get back to this issue, re-strategise, and step up their work on community forest resources (CFRs).

HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ SRUTI facilitated **17 regional level, 5 district level, and 5 state-level programmes** on the theme of forest rights and conservation.
- ❖ Over **300 follow-up village-level meetings** were held by the SRUTI Fellows where CFR claims were filed and are currently in process.
- ❖ **40 meetings** were organised at regional and district levels in the states of HP, Jharkhand, MP, Odisha, TN, and Uttarakhand.
- ❖ 106 training/workshops at the village level, 22 at the regional level, and 6 at the state level were organised to facilitate CFR processes, covering **3000 people**.
- ❖ Expansion of **Lemru Elephant Reserve** (Chhattisgarh) was to include over 3700 sq km of rich biodiverse forests including the entire Hasdeo Aranya region. As a result of consultations carried out with the state government, a clarification was issued that there would be no displacement of people for this reserve which is proposed as a community conservation area where the rights of all inhabitants remain protected.
- ❖ **Post-CFR recognition processes** have started in Chhattisgarh. Training/workshops were organised focused on mapping forest resources, increasing availability of minor forest produce (MFP), and increasing income through sustainable forest management activities. Women were especially involved through discussions, sammelans, and awareness-building activities.
- ❖ A campaign was initiated among 22 villages of Barnawapara Wildlife Sanctuary (Chhattisgarh) to **challenge evictions**. 10 CFR claims were filed in the region and 92 CFR claims were filed in 2 wildlife sanctuaries in Sarguja.
- ❖ A **special drive in 5 districts in Chhattisgarh** led to a considerable win, where 200 CFR claims were filed and 84 CFR titles were received.

SRUTI-supported Sangathans have facilitated FRA implementation processes at different levels, highlighting the issues. A series of village/community meetings, regional meetings, and state-level meetings have been organised. The Sangathans arrange for regular consultations, awareness drives, campaigns, public meetings, press releases, statements, and delegations.

Legal objection to proposed forest diversion projects by 20 Gram Sabhas, Korba-Sarguja (Chhattisgarh)

In Korba-Sarguja region of Chhattisgarh, activism on the issue of illegal coal mining allocation has picked up pace. Here, forest clearances had been provided to a mining company in violation of environmental conservation rules. **Jan Abhivyakti** organised a series of consultations with Sarpanches (especially those affiliated with them) to build collective understanding and facilitate dialogue with the district and state administration. Through press releases, statements, and delegations, representatives from the environment and tribal affairs ministries were made aware of the rich biodiversity of the region, and the legal commitments under Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act 1996 (PESA) and FRA to protect the region and recognise community rights. The Sangathan, on behalf of 20 Gram Sabhas, has also raised legal objections with the National Green Tribunal (NGT) and reached out to the state government and the Union government.

Expansion of Lemru Elephant Reserve, Korba-Sarguja (Chhattisgarh)

In the same region of Sarguja, consultations were carried out with the state government regarding the proposal to increase the Lemru Elephant Reserve area to over 3700 sq km; this included the entire Hasdeo Aranya region. The consultations resulted in

the State Forest Minister issuing a clarification that there would be no displacement of people for the elephant reserve. Further, the Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh also came out in support of this proposal and wrote to the Union government. On the issuance of the order from the forest department for obtaining Gram Sabha consent from villages coming under the proposed elephant reserve area, Gram Sabhas were conducted in different villages, and resolutions were passed in favour of the declaration of Lemru Elephant Reserve.

Efforts against forced eviction in Barnawapara Wildlife Sanctuary, (Chhattisgarh)

In the districts of Baloda Bazar and Mahasamund, the forest department made multiple attempts to evict people in this period. There are 20 villages in the Barnawapara sanctuary's core area, of which 5 villages had accepted compensation after being coerced by forest officials. Regular violations and illegal tree felling were opposed by local Sangathan members that led to further restrictions on their travel and movement. Leaders of **Dalit Adivasi Manch**, who have been organising and training elected representatives and others on FRA, facilitated discussions with the officials who would not recognise the laws and insisted on evictions and resettlement.

In the same region, in Maharaji village in Kasdol block, attempts were made to meet officials regarding issues in the CFR titles of the villagers. After a long delay in the distribution of titles (even though approved by the district level committee/DLC), they were given in the name of the Joint Forest Management Committee rather than the Gram Sabha. After several rounds of discussions, the CFR title only recognised *nistari* rights and allowed for the construction of ponds, burial grounds, and other common property. The villagers of Maharaji along with 11 other villages decided to return this title to the District Collector.

HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ **28 CFRs** were received in Chamba (HP). The process of forming a forest management committee and the inclusion of these claims in the record of rights (RoR) are underway.
- ❖ In Odisha, regular village meetings and regional-level training ensured support to forest dwellers to **collect and sell MFPS**. Around 7000 women earned Rs 10,000–15,000 per year each by selling tendu leaves during the seasonal period of two months.
- ❖ **5279.09-acre land** has been recognised for CFR by DLC in 80 villages of Maharashtra.
- ❖ **Regular campaigns** against wrongful rejection of claims and regional-level training, conferences and deliberations with state-level officials were organised in 4 tiger reserve areas of Tamil Nadu.
- ❖ In Uttarakhand, a **campaign against eviction** and restriction of movement of pastoral communities led to relief for the Van Gujjar community. Issues of land bank creation and classification of deemed forests have been taken up through state-level meetings. The process of filing 4 new CFRs was initiated.
- ❖ After a long follow-up through democratic processes, **CFR claims were recognised in 20 villages of UP**.

Organizing people against eviction in Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary (Madhya Pradesh)

In Madhya Pradesh, notices were served to evict people residing in the Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary, even though some families have received their sanctioned claims for Individual Forest Rights. Following this, there have been reports of harassment of people engaged in agriculture by the forest department. Even the migrant workers were not allowed to reside in and cultivate their land after returning home post-lockdown. Filed claims under FRA were rejected and eviction notices were served to forest-dwelling people, leading to an alarming situation during the entire season of agricultural work. A regional-level public meeting was organised by **Bundelkhand Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan** at Tendukheda (Damoh) to discuss the rejection of claims and eviction notices.

Generating awareness on forest rights by organising a festival in Nagpur (Maharashtra)

In Nagpur, under the banner of **Jungle Adhikar Parishad**, several Sangathans came together and organised a festival at Jamkoli village on 18 February. The idea behind organising this festival was to spread awareness of Community Forest Rights under FRA and train community leaders to thoroughly understand the process of claiming these forest rights.

State-level FRA campaigns in Tamil Nadu

Campaigns against the wrongful rejection of CFR claims were launched in Tamil Nadu. In Nilgiri, 25 CFR claims were rejected at the DLC level. The high rate of rejections can be attributed to the flawed implementation of the provisions of FRA. **Vivasayigal Thozhilalargal Munnetra Sangam (VTMS)**, with other bodies, organised state-level campaigns against the illegitimate action of the DLC. Subsequently, the Gram Sabhas have passed resolutions against the decision of the DLC. The Sangathan organised meetings with concerned government departments – 3 meetings with the forest department, 2 meetings with the revenue department, and 1 meeting with the land commissioner. Memorandums have been submitted to the forest department, tribal department, Chief Secretary, and Chief Minister of the state,

informing them of the flaws in the implementation of the Act. VTMS has also actively tried to train Gram Sabha members and Forest Rights Committee (FRC) members to review the rejected claims and write proper replies. In Machur and Kodaikanal area of Dindigul district, the Sangathan assisted the Gram Sabha in preparing a proper reply to the eviction notice.

On 8 November 2020, a district-level meeting on FRA was organised at Gudalur. 54 people from Kotagiri, Coonoor, Ooty, Masinagudi, and Gudalur participated in this meeting. Eviction notices were sent by the forest department to people residing in the forests (including Adivasi and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers/OTFDs), despite them having submitted claims under FRA; those who have received titles under FRA; and those who are not eligible under FRA but are pre-1980 encroachers who are eligible under FCA 1980 for titles. The effective use of FRA in this context and the framing of replies to the eviction notices for different sections of people were discussed and explained.

Supporting Van Panchayats and Van Gujjars in Uttarakhand

A state-level meeting was organised with political parties, people's movements, and the Sangathan working on FRA in Almora to discuss the implications of the government order to change norms for classifying land as deemed forest. As per the decision of the government, a piece of land will be declared a forest if it is spread over a minimum of 5 hectares and has a minimum canopy density of 40 per cent. In this regard, a virtual meeting was also organised.

A state-level training programme was organised by the forest department with the Van Panchayat committee members, in which Sangathan members were trainers. The Sangathan representatives have also taken an important lead in collaborating with 25 Sangathans in collectively drafting the Van Panchayat Rules, an alternative to the existing State Van Panchayat Rules that have been time and again criticised by environmentalists and grassroot organisations. Regular meetings have been held in *khattas* where Van Gujjars reside to understand their concerns and insecurities following a period of humiliation and violence imposed on them.

Livelihood generation during lockdown in Angul and Dhenkanal (Odisha)

During the lockdown, people could move and collect MFPs in Angul and Dhenkanal, but the main challenge was to sell the forest produce as markets were closed and contractors did not visit the villages. Tendu leaf collection is mostly carried out by women in April and May. The karyakartas of **Adivasi Chetna Sangathan (ACS)** and **Malayagiri Adivasi Sangharsh Manch (MASM)** encouraged the women, including those who returned during the lockdown, to get involved in collecting tendu leaves. Sangathan activists and volunteers helped these women in collecting and depositing tendu leaf bundles at the collection centres. Sangathan karyakartas also played a proactive role in ensuring that quick and proper disbursements of the MFP costs were done through the transfer of money in their bank accounts by the Tendu Leaf Corporation. Around 7000 women earned Rs 10,000–15,000 per year each by selling tendu leaves during the seasonal period of two months.

Another MFP – Mahua collection and selling – was severely hampered due to the sudden imposition of the nationwide lockdown. The collection period, which is the month of April, saw a reduced quantity of Mahua collected. People found it difficult to even sell this small amount of Mahua to the local traders. Both ACS and MASM intervened and demanded that the concerned Gram Panchayats make arrangements for the procurement of the Mahua collected and stocked by the people. Since the Gram Panchayats were overburdened with COVID relief work, no substantial interventions could be initiated by them, thereby leading to losses for the families who had collected Mahua.

A memorandum was sent by ACS and MASM to the government for resuming and hastening the FRA process. Memorandums that were submitted also included demands such as quick and effective implementation of FRA; there were demands for opening of special FRA offices in each block/Tehsil, appointment of special officers for this purpose, and ensuring necessary arrangements for procurement and processing of MFP such as Mahua flowers and fruits, sal seeds, and others. These memorandums were signed by local communities and sent by post to the Collectors of Dhenkanal and Angul districts, Sub-collectors of Kamakshyanagar and Pallahara subdivisions, and the Chief Minister and Governor of Odisha. Copies of these memorandums and press releases were also given to the mass media and local newspapers.



Supporting Van Gujjars in Uttarakhand [top left]; Village meeting in Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary (MP) [top right]
Village meeting in Dhenkanal (Odisha) [bottom left] and in Korba (Chhattisgarh) [bottom right]



Village meeting in Balangir (Odisha) [top left], in Angul (Odisha) [bottom left], and in Sakti (Chhattisgarh) [right]

LAND RIGHTS AND DEVELOPMENT

Local Sangathans have been engaging with communities on land development issues at multiple levels. In 2020–21 Sangathans worked vigorously to identify wastelands for settling landless families and to make the government comply with rehabilitation plans based on which local communities – tribals, Dalits, and other marginalised who were displaced and evicted – could be provided with land.

Facilitating titles for their gairon (grazing) land for 150 landless Dalit and poor families in Latur (Maharashtra)

HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ **171 meetings/training** were carried out in 7 states – AP, Bihar, Jharkhand, MP, Odisha, Rajasthan, and UP – by SRUTI Fellows. Out of these, 143 were village-level meetings and 24 regional-level meetings. There were 16 skill-building workshops and perspective-building meetings among these.
- ❖ In Andhra Pradesh, 342 landless families were identified by Navajeevan. To ensure the land rights of the landless people 754 acres of land were identified and claimed. **152 acres of land for 152 families** were successfully claimed through the processes.
- ❖ **30 village meetings** and **1 follow-up meeting with 23 FRCs** were organised to resist land acquisition in Tamil Nadu.
- ❖ **1000 families** displaced by the Ghosikhurd Dam Project got a package of Rs 3,00,000 per family to start small businesses in the Bhandara district of Maharashtra.

More than 100 awareness meetings on land rights legislation that targeted Dalit and landless were organised by **Shramjeevi Sangathana**. It helped in raising awareness on land tenure issues and encouraged people to claim lands under different state and central schemes.

Meetings were organised with farmers from the districts of Dharmapuri, Kancheepuram, Krishnagiri, Salem, and Tiruvannamalai, to discuss the adverse impacts on the coconut, paddy, and horticulture yield of the proposed 8-lane Salem–Chennai corridor.

Sangathans working in Angul, Balangir, and Dhenkanal districts identified and successfully claimed 585 homestead land titles under the Vasundhara Scheme. Each family got 4 decimal of homestead land.

Asserting traditional land rights in Tamil Nadu

VTMS organised a series of meetings in different villages of Nilgiri district. The necessity of ensuring proper implementation of land policies was discussed. The need to facilitate more outreach programmes and awareness building to secure titles for agricultural land under Section 17 of the Gudalur Janmam Estates (Abolition and Conversion into Ryotwari) Act 1969 was identified in the meeting. As per the new amendments framed in 2019,

Section 16A was added to the Tamil Nadu Forest Act 1882, enabling the conversion of agricultural land into a reserve forest under Sections 53 and 17 of the Janmam Act. Following the meeting, a press conference was organised; the resolution passed in the meeting was shared with the media.

Reclaiming community land in Jaunpur (Uttar Pradesh)

It has been decades since the abolition of the zamindari system, and many land reform initiatives have come and gone. But even today we are witnessing a huge gap in the ownership of land. This inequality along with caste discrimination contributes to the oppression and marginalisation of the working class.

In Kashidaspur, Jaunpur, 70 Dalit families comprising 1500 members have been residing in a Dalit basti for a long time. Other than their homestead land, they had only 2 acres of community land for collective use. The local dominant upper-caste community of Thakurs had captured this community land (for collective use) in the late 1960s. In the 1970s the local youth from the community mobilised and unionised themselves and reclaimed their community land. But through some undemocratic ways, the dominant community encroached on the lands of Dalits again. Later on, this land became a trigger for physical fights, caste-based violence, and exploitation of Dalits.

In April 2020, **DISHA** Sangathan initiated the campaign to reclaim the possession of the land politically through the intervention of the administration. The campaign went on for 10 months and in February 2021 the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) agreed and assured the community of rightful possession of the land. The SDM also assured them that an Ambedkar Community Bhawan and a Health Centre would be built on the land.

Rehabilitation and resettlement of displaced Sahariya Adivasi, Balarampur, Shivpuri (Madhya Pradesh)

In 2002, under the Project Tiger Scheme, the Sahariya tribals living in Balarampur (falling under the buffer area of Madhav National Park in Shivpuri) were displaced. The displaced tribal families were promised proper rehabilitation, which included homestead and agricultural land. However, out of 100 displaced families, only 61 families were given land; the remaining 39 families were deprived of land rights. The Madhya Pradesh Human Rights Commission, through its order dated 26 December 2017, directed the Collector to expeditiously provide 2 hectares of land to these 39 Sahariya families. The Commission also granted compensation of Rs 3 lakh each to the 39 families for the delay and another Rs 2 lakhs for deaths.

Despite the recommendations of the MP Human Rights Commission, the authorities have failed to take any action. **Zenith Society for Legal Empowerment (Zenith)** has been unflagging in pushing for rehabilitation of the community. There were at least 5 public hearings conducted where the Collector herself called all the concerned officials and directed them to expedite the rehabilitation process.

Resettlement of Pandu and Kodaku tribes by Gaon Ganrajya Sangathan, Sarguja (Chhattisgarh)

24 families of the Pandu and Kodaku tribes, the forest-dependent communities in Sarguja (Chhattisgarh) were forcibly evicted from their land by the forest department. Eventually, their houses and other settlements were also demolished. Without education and employment, these communities have found it difficult to adjust to the outside society.

Gaon Ganrajya Sangathan (GGS) has been working in this region which comes under the Fifth Schedule area by the PESA Act of 1996. By using the powers granted by the Act, the Sangathan has settled these 24 families in the village of Loluati in Balrampur block on village community land.

It is noteworthy that under the 73rd and 74th Amendment of the Constitution through the PESA Act, these Gram Sabhas have been enabled to continue their practice and traditions of tribal society, customs, cultural identity, community resources, and traditional methods for dispute resolution. The Sangathan is strengthening the traditional system by extending its outreach from village to village.



A meeting organised by Zenith in Balarampur, Shivpuri (MP) [left]; Resettlement of Pandu and Kodaku tribes by Gaon Ganrajya Sangathan [right]

PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTION AND GOVERNANCE

COVID-19 proved to be a real test of various administrative systems in India, with the Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) being one of the most critical. SRUTI fellows played a key role during the pandemic and through the following lockdowns in liaising with the PRIs. When migrant labourers were returning to their villages, arrangements for quarantine centres were made by the Fellows in coordination with the local governance systems. During lockdown, they made sure that utilities and facilities such as fodder supply, milk trade, and veterinary services were available for the communities. Proper distribution of ration through the public distribution system (PDS) was ensured through PRI. The pandemic was a reminder that basic civic services (health, education, food security, etc.) are highly vulnerable and minimal in the rural areas, and these can only be improved with a robust PRI system.

HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ SRUTI facilitated 2 perspective-building programmes before the lockdown in Maharashtra (with women gram sabha members) and Madhya Pradesh (legal aid clinics workshop involving the gram sabha members) and 4 online meetings to build perspectives on access to welfare schemes and programs through panchayat bodies during the lockdown.
- ❖ 135 meetings/trainings were held in 2020–21. 120 meetings were organised at the village level, 11 at the regional level, and 4 at the state level. A total of 5880 people were reached through these meetings.
- ❖ Mobilisation of people for Panchayat elections was done in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. Kisan Sabha in HP made a list of issues that Panchayats should deal with in villages and campaigned for them. In **TN, 45 candidates from VTMS contested in Gram Panchayat elections** and 25 of them, including 10 women, won. In **Uttarakhand**, Van Panchayat Sangharsh Morcha actively participated in Panchayat elections ranging from candidacy to campaigning. **5 Sarpanch, 1 Jila Parishad, 1 BDC candidates identified by the Sangathan won the election.**
- ❖ **Panchayat watch monitors** were selected for **15 Panchayats** in Rayagada, Odisha. A series of training were organised to enhance their understanding of peoples' rights and entitlements. It helped citizens to access their entitlements, enhanced their ability to write applications, and also facilitated them in following up with the authorities at different levels.
- ❖ In Odisha, **a union of elected PRI members was formed.** Training and workshops were organised to make them aware of their roles, responsibilities, functions, and deliverables in PRI.

With the aim of bolstering decentralisation, Gram Sabhas were strengthened through regular meetings, capacity training of elected representatives, community members, and Sangathan leaders in 8 states: Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand. This has increased the participation of Gram Sabhas, both in PESA and non-PESA areas. A total of 5880 people were reached through village-, regional and state-level meetings/trainings organised during the period.

Empowering the women Gram Sabha members in Latur (Maharashtra)

Elected women representatives of Panchayats have demonstrated that if they have critical information about community resources, they can quickly learn to lead effective community-centred development and are inclined to be more inclusive. Despite such positive results, women remain largely excluded from the PRI and local governance structures. **Shramjeevi Sangathan** in Latur (Maharashtra) initiated a series of training meetings with women members of the Gram Sabha and elected representatives to build and enhance their capacities. The Sangathan facilitated trainings and workshops to develop essential civic knowledge of women PRI members about the Constitution, various Acts, and government orders and guidelines.

Access to Justice: Legal Aid Clinic, Madhya Pradesh

Under this programme, **Zenith Society for Legal Empowerment** has been running legal aid clinics (involving the gram sabha members) in Gwalior and Shivpuri providing free/affordable legal aid to the poor

and marginalised individuals and communities. The clinics have been functional for over 2 years now and have lived up to the responsibility of providing quality legal services to people who find it difficult to afford such services. These legal aid clinics provided litigation services to 12 victims on the issues of violence against Dalits, bonded labour, domestic violence, and prisoners' rights.

Ensuring basic rights by empowering local governments, Nainital (Uttarakhand)

At a time when everything was closed in the country due to the pandemic, people needed support from the government to keep their stoves burning, but people of the Van Gujjar community did not even have ration cards to access public supplies. The social security of the community remained a matter of grave concern. In August, **VPSM** organised a celebration of the traditional Van Gujjar festival Sela Parv and invited the local MLA and the Forest Ranger of the area to the event. Women of the community presented the issue of lack of ration cards in the programme. The

HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ A series of meetings were organised with the elected PRI members in rural Rajasthan, post lockdown, to hold the local government accountable for the deliverance of basic rights, entitlements, and services like MGNREGA, pension, and PDS.
- ❖ Kendriya Jan Sangharsh Samiti, working in Latehar (Jharkhand), organised meetings with 30 Gram Sabhas to empower and equip them to ensure their rights over their resources, land, mines and minerals, MFP, etc.
- ❖ In Odisha, through the Taluk legal aid committee, 15 family disputes, 15 land disputes, and 12 vehicle cases were settled and justice was ensured to the victims.

MLA immediately accepted this demand and talked to the Food Security Officer. Consequently, the Sangathan met the Food Security Officer, a list of 6 villages in Van Gujjar *khattas* of Nainital district was prepared, and ration cards were provided to 275 families. Following this initiative, the process picked up pace and monthly camps were set up in the village *khattas* of the Van Gujjar community to make their ration cards.

Health and local governance campaign in Arariya (Bihar)

A robust health campaign was initiated by Jan Jagran Shakti Sangathan (JJSS) in Arariya (Bihar) to address health needs at the time of the pandemic. One of the ideas that took off was popularising the government helpline number for ambulance services. The Sangathan organised frequent village meetings which made women confident about becoming leaders in their own right. They started

negotiating with the Primary Health Centre (PHC) officials for medicines and refused to pay any bribes. The Sangathan's initiative made them aware of the fact that they can call up ambulances to take pregnant women to the hospital. The women in the Sangathan area have now started insisting on using the government hospital for childbirth and other maternal care facilities. They are now empowered enough to reach out to the hospital management or even the district civil surgeon when required.

Defining self-governance and asserting the rights of Van Panchayats through Heritage Tourism: The case of Bhalugaad waterfall, Nainital (Uttarakhand)

Bhalugaad waterfall was a seldom visited spot for the 3 forest Panchayats, namely Gajar, Buranshi, and Chaukhuta, which have been settled here and share boundaries around this waterfall. In 2017 the community and leaders of the 3 Panchayats summoned a meeting near the dumping areas alongside the tourist destination. The aim was to understand and find out the authority and the source of funds being directed towards this tourist destination. Another meeting with the Sarpanches and Van Panchayat members was convened by the Van Panchayat Sangharsh Morcha the same year.

The Sangathan shed light on the rights and responsibilities of forest Panchayats (Van Panchayats) and the ambit under which these forest Panchayats could themselves take ownership of this site. Awareness was also built about the Forest Rights Act 2006 and suggestions towards a course of action in terms of filing community forest right claims over the area were made.

As a result, along with saving the environment of Bhalugaad, creation of employment opportunities for the youth of the 3 Panchayats was triggered. The 3 forest Panchayats together formed a 15-member Bhalugaad Waterfall Committee. In the last 4 years, the Committee has initiated a series of activities including regular cleaning and maintenance of the site, setting up of dustbins, tree plantation, appointment of local guides from within these Panchayats, small stalls/shops for snacks and locally made products, and environmental awareness campaigns, among other things. The Committee also introduced entry tickets for the visitors and fees for the local guides. With time the systems have been streamlined and ever since the Committee has continued to charge ticket fees from the visitors. The money generated is annually audited. It is used for the management and maintenance of the waterfall site and also distributed for the management of the 3 concerned forest Panchayats.



*Legal aid workshop with Gram Sabha members, Shivpuri (MP) [top left]; Meeting at Bhalugad waterfall (Uttarakhand) [top right]
Meeting with women PRI members (Maharashtra) [centre left]; Village meeting in Arariya (Bihar) [centre right]; Van Panchayat (Uttarakhand)[bottom]*

AGRICULTURE AND LIVELIHOOD

The employment crisis caused by the pandemic was a primary concern for the SRUTI Fellows and Sangathans in the year 2020–21. There were a great number of new initiatives and creative ways taken up by the Fellow groups to tackle this concern. At a time when meetings and mobility were severely restricted, SRUTI fellows were active in their respective areas and were reaching out to people in need in all possible ways. Due to the closure of government offices, they also played a key role in coordination with the administration and dissemination of information about welfare schemes. **SRUTI facilitated 2 capacity-building programmes and a skill-building programme on the theme of livelihood.** Online meetings, webinars, and discussions were also facilitated by SRUTI at regular intervals.

A livelihood initiative in Dhenkanal (Odisha)

Tribal communities and farmers have been deeply affected by the pandemic and lockdowns. To support these 2 groups **Adivasi Chetna Sangathan** launched the initiative of selling their produce directly to the residents, which also eliminated the middlemen. The Sangathan identified 250 farmers, volunteers, and vendors from the Adivasi communities; police and local government were informed and their permission obtained to sell the vegetables. More than 250 youth and vendors were mobilised and engaged to provide vegetables to the Adivasi hamlets. Through this initiative, 300 hamlets were provided with vegetables, and vendors were able to earn around Rs 10,000 each.

Women-centric approach towards environment-friendly agricultural practices in Uttarakhand

Recognising that women cannot step out of their homes and participate in the collective process unless there are efforts to provide livelihood support, **Mati Sangathan** has been finding various means for women to earn. This year, women-run nurseries were formed to encourage group farming and organic farming. This provided local women with nutrient-rich food and also a livelihood opportunity. These nurseries were formed in 10 villages with about 100 women farmers who have around 100 acres under cultivation. They cultivate varieties of vegetables including capsicum, cherry tomatoes, cabbage, and brinjal.

The Sangathan is also encouraging women farmers to experiment with agricultural technology. During the period, **Mati Sangathan** helped women farmers in building 19 polyhouses with the support of the agriculture department. Local women were also introduced to the drip irrigation system, which

HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ Sangathans from **13 states** – AP, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, HP, Jharkhand, Kashmir, MP, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Odisha, TN, UP, and Uttarakhand – made concrete efforts to establish sustainable agricultural practices in their working area.
- ❖ A total of **451 meetings/trainings** were organised of which **346 were at the village level, 99 at the regional level, and 6 at the state level.** Of these programmes, 4 were seminars, 49 skill-building workshops, and 65 perspective-building meetings. A total of **10,667 people were reached** during the reporting period.
- ❖ **11 Self-Help Groups (SHGs)** were formed in Uttarakhand who were helped in the acquisition of 25 mini tractors, 10 grass cutters, and 20 pesticide sprayers on 80% subsidies. 200 families received the benefits of these schemes.
- ❖ VTMS has worked persistently with women in Nilgiri to generate awareness on horticulture, organic farming, and sustainable agriculture. The Sangathan organised a couple of trainings with the horticulture department to impart awareness on the government schemes. Along with awareness generation, there have been efforts to create livelihood by providing vegetable seeds and natural fertilisers. More than **20 families** in Gudalur were supported. A campaign was organised to promote kitchen gardening.
- ❖ **1100 new fruit-bearing saplings were distributed to 1000 families** on special days such as Indigenous Day, Constitution Day, Human Rights Day, Gandhi Jayanti, Hul Diwas, Birsa Ulgulan Diwas, and Sobran Majhin Diwas.

addressed the issue of irrigation to some extent.

The Sangathan distributed vermicomposting bins to 40 families to encourage farmers to compost food scraps. Composting demonstrations and workshops were also organised to educate the farmers. Through these efforts, **Mati Sangathan** intends to spread the message of sustainable farming.

Exploring new paths to revive organic farming by involving tribal youth, Indore (Madhya Pradesh)

The agricultural crisis in the country is revealed through the condition of the farmers due to the green revolution model of agriculture. While the farmers' lives have become increasingly precarious over the years, companies in the food business have been making huge profits using the raw material grown by farmers for thousands of food products. The next generation of farmers is now forced to migrate to cities in search of employment.

Sustainable agricultural practices were one idea that seemed feasible in the area around Indore (MP) based on the need. A brainstorming session was carried out by **Adharshila Learning Centre (ALC)** with the youngsters, farmers, and people working on agriculture in Indore. The idea was to start short-term courses for youth around organic farming, skill building for value addition of farm produce, and marketing. The main aim is to explore possibilities of employment for youngsters in their respective areas, also attempting to stop migration.

ALC has also undertaken the study of traditional seeds and crops for revitalising rain-fed agriculture. The purpose was to study the coexistence of different seed systems in rain-fed areas. For this, 2 villages from Barwani (Kali Kundi and Bhura Kuwa) and Niwali tehsil (Sakad and Segi) were chosen. Focused group discussions were conducted with elderly people to know about the crop varieties during the 1960s through 2020.

Tree plantation drive in Uttarakhand

Harela Parv is a widely celebrated festival in the hilly areas of Uttarakhand. During the festival, people plant fruit-bearing trees. Inspired by this, **VPSM** started celebrating Sela Parv in the plains of Uttarakhand and started a tree-planting campaign. Sela Parv began on 14 August this year. The Parv attracted youth and children along with women and elderly members of the Van Gujjar community in great numbers. About 700 families from 40 villages in the plains and 2000 families from the hilly areas of Uttarakhand participated enthusiastically in the campaign, planting more than 1 lakh saplings, with each family planting 10 trees of mango, guava, litchi, mulberry, blackberry, etc.

Exploring creative ideas for marketing handloom during lockdown, Jhiri (Rajasthan)

The handloom sector has been badly affected by the COVID-19 and subsequent lockdowns, which caused a sudden decline in orders. Being part of the informal sector, handloom workers have not received support from the government. Responding to the grim situation, **Adarsh Handloom Cooperative** in Jhiri (Rajasthan) started exploring WhatsApp marketing to offload the stocks. The experience of WhatsApp marketing has been satisfactory for the

HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ Mati Sangathan (Uttarakhand) started **2 shops** to provide a wider market for the products made by women involved in local SHGs. This year it had a turnover of Rs 6,77,588. This initiative enabled **100 micro weavers and artisans** to showcase their handmade products and connect with a larger community of buyers across the country.
- ❖ JJSS (Bihar) started a **grocery shop and canteen as an income-generating initiative** and to provide people with good quality commodities at cheap prices. Both initiatives are being run by the youth team of the Sangathan.
- ❖ In Odisha, migrant workers who returned during the pandemic were motivated to engage in their agricultural land. More than **1700 migrant workers earned Rs 5000–15,000 by practising agriculture**. **1300 families received tree saplings and seeds** through various government schemes. Similarly, an initiative of collective farming was launched; **210 migrant families are farming** under this initiative on more than 1000 acres of land in Odisha.
- ❖ To conserve and promote indigenous paddy seeds, an initiative was launched in Odisha. **12 rare varieties of paddy seeds were collected** from different villages and during the cropping time, these seeds were distributed to **farmers of 17 villages**.
- ❖ **50 women farmers from 5 villages** of Mahasamund (Chhattisgarh) were provided with the seeds of tomato, spinach, fenugreek (methi), coriander, gourd, and local variety of beans to boost their vegetable farming initiative.
- ❖ **50 women in 4 villages** of Balodabazar (Chhattisgarh) were given training on the cultivation of mushrooms.
- ❖ **17 new SHGs** were formed in **10 villages** of Mahasamund and Baloda Bazaar (Chhattisgarh) to strengthen the economic status of women.
- ❖ **45 families** were provided **medicine** for more than 3000 sheep in **13 villages of 3 districts** of Himachal Pradesh.

Cooperative so far. Despite technology-related challenges, the Cooperative has also decided to explore online marketing. At present, more than 60 families are engaged with Adarsh Handloom Cooperative. Weavers of the handloom cooperative received the first and second prizes in the state for weaving handloom varieties with the best designs and quality.

Creating livelihood for rural women, Jhiri Rajasthan)

To empower young women and provide them with a means of livelihood, a month-long hand embroidery training was organised for 10 women from disadvantaged backgrounds, aged 19 to 33, by **Adarsh Handloom Cooperative** in Jhiri. The young women who participated in the training showed great interest in learning new skills. According to the trainer 7 out of 10 of these women are capable of taking things to the next level. Th

e Cooperative is now planning to engage them in their activities which will bring positive changes in the livelihood practices of these women. The training does not only focus on technical skills but also aims to educate them on the themes of gender disparity, domestic violence, and the importance of financial independence.

Awareness drive on COVID-19 and welfare schemes in Jaunpur (Uttar Pradesh)

Following the imposition of nationwide lockdowns, marginal farmers faced enormous problems. It affected their access to ration and livelihood opportunities. There was limited medical care available for them, and many also showed a casual approach towards the spread of the virus. Most of them are sharecroppers or landless farmers who were forced to undertake wage labour to meet their needs.

At this juncture, the Jaunpur-based **DISHA** Sangathan, in collaboration with other organisations, decided to conduct Nukkad Sabhas (street theatre) to spread awareness and provide information about the COVID-19 pandemic. They also gave information on cooperative farming and government aid for the losses incurred during the lockdown.

These Sabhas took place during 15–20 November 2020. In this period, the group of volunteers connected with 8 villages (Murki, Sarki, Senapur, Kujji, Kashidaspur, Buldih, Taraw Baghi, and Suratpur) and conducted 22 meetings which also included cultural events. In these meetings, Sangathan karyakartas discussed a series of legal updates and welfare schemes. Issues of agriculture and livelihood, agrarian crisis, labour rights, migrant labour, gender discrimination, and youth leadership were also discussed.

A ray of hope for pastoral communities of Himachal Pradesh during the lockdown

Kisan Sabha Sangathan is working with the Gaddi (pastoral) community and farmers in 3 districts: Chamba, Kangra and Mandi. The Sangathan actively supports people on the issues of forest rights, agriculture, pastoral communities, and the marketing of minor forest produce.

Selling milk is the main source of income for these pastoral communities. Lockdown restrictions disrupted the primary source of their income. Usually, there is a shortage of fodder in the hill areas during summer, so most of the people buy straw as fodder from the neighbouring state of Punjab. But this year people could not buy fodder due to the travel restrictions brought on by the pandemic. To resolve this issue the Sangathan took the initiative and communicated with the administration of both the states to allow 500 pastoral families to buy fodder and trade milk from the neighbouring state of Punjab.

A disease called foot disease spread in the sheep herds of the local pastoral community. This bacterial disease transmits to other animals by soil, spreading from one animal to the entire herd. Due to the lockdown, animal hospitals were closed and people could not get their animals treated. It resulted in people selling their entire herd of sheep. To tackle this issue, the Sangathan reached out to retired veterinarians and sought their help. A team of doctors came forward and treated the animals. During the initiative, 45 families were provided medicine for more than 3000 sheep in 13 villages of 3 districts.



*Livelihood training in Jhiri (Rajasthan) [top left]; Celebrating Sela Parv in Nainital (Uttarakhand)) [top right]
Indigenous seed conservation campaign in Barwani (MP) [centre left]; Village meeting in Jaunpur (UP) [centre right]
Promoting organic farming in Munsyari (Uttarakhand) [bottom]*

EDUCATION AND LEADERSHIP BUILDING

Year 2020 was a traumatic period for all age groups throughout the globe. The impact of the pandemic on children and youth is yet to be measured in detail, but there is little doubt that the retrenchments in education and employment opportunities have severely affected their physical and mental health.

HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ SRUTI facilitated 2 perspective-building programmes on youth leadership building, 1 capacity-building training on education, 2 regional school for social change programmes, and in establishing 3 resource centres (2 in Delhi and 1 in UP).
- ❖ **445 meetings/trainings** were organised in **12 states – Bihar, Delhi, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, MP, Odisha, Rajasthan, TN, UP, Kashmir, Chhattisgarh, and Uttarakhand** – on ‘Education & Youth Leadership’. Out of these **267 were village level meetings, 175 were regional level, and 3 were state level**. The meetings were aimed at **building awareness** on the changing socio-economic and political scenario of the country and empowering the youth with leadership competencies. Through these activities, **15,458** youths were reached. These youth from the communities, with the support of local Sangathans, have taken up community interventions including conducting surveys, formation of peer groups, sensitisation on gender-based issues, etc.
- ❖ Unique camp experiences such as **wildlife photography, bird watching, and organic farming** were made available to **150 rural children** in **7 schools** of Uttarakhand, which provided them with a comprehensive understanding of forests, creatures that live there, and soil conservation.
- ❖ More than **1000** school-going students were supported to attend online classes with the setting up of Zoom centres in Bhalaswa and Bawana (Delhi).
- ❖ **500** young girls were engaged in preparing handmade COVID-19 awareness posters. Various COVID-19 awareness campaigns have been carried out in the resettlement colonies of Delhi: issue-based discussions were organised and awareness banners installed.

Children and youth studying in government institutions have been worst hit by COVID-19-induced lockdowns. The lockdowns have left school education in chaos, with the alternative online education systems making education costly and out of reach for under-privileged students. The overnight shift towards the online mode of education excluded the students from the working class and marginalised communities. Limited accessibility of internet in rural areas also proved to be a challenge. The reading and writing capacities of students of elementary classes have deteriorated. Being deprived of books and classroom interaction has put the brakes on many children achieving their full potential.

We are at a critical juncture where social and economic inequalities are exacerbating; it is vital to engage with youth to understand their issues and form strategies to overcome the crisis. Despite restrictions in mobility, SRUTI continued facilitating online discussions and talks concerning the education and social perspective of youth; SRUTI Fellow groups took up various campaigns, workshops, and FGDs on the theme of education and youth leadership. Here are some initiatives taken up by the SRUTI Fellow groups to engage with children and youth from under-privileged communities.

New resource centres: Learning beyond the classroom in Pradesh and Delhi

Delhi Young Artist Forum (DYAF) working in Bhalaswa and Bawana (northwest Delhi) realised the need to set up Zoom centres to facilitate online classes for

students in their community. During the lockdown 5 Zoom centres were set up at Bhalaswa and Bawana. Not only online classes but also various discussion sessions and meetings were facilitated in these centres. DYAF conducted a 16-day campaign against gender discrimination through these Zoom centres in the month of November 2020.

Similarly, through a series of discussions and deliberations with SRUTI, **Awadh Peoples’ Forum (APF)** (Uttar Pradesh) realised the massive impact of school closures on students, with an alarming decline witnessed in the learning abilities of school-going children during the lockdown period. In tune with the needs, the forum set up 3 resource centres under the initiative **Apna Talim Ghar** to engaged students in activities of reading, writing, and other forms of expression to promote values of peace, justice, and fraternity. Another 2 resource centres under initiative **Kishori Vikas Kendra** were set up to engage with adolescent girls. Books worth Rs 52,000 – around 500 in number – were mobilised by APF for their resource centres. The idea is to inculcate an interest in reading among youth. Around 1200

youth and children are estimated to have access to these 5 resource centres through the Kishori Vikas Kendra and Apna Talim Ghar initiatives.

Lokadhikar has been working among the unorganised sector workers for the last 20 years. In Delhi, they have been working with ragpickers. Due to their extensive work with the ragpickers over a long period of time, Lokadhikar identified the need to build and writing capacities in the youth and children of this group. Lokadhikar and SRUTI together initiated a resource centre to inculcate the habit of reading among the youth. Around 200 books were added to the resource centre set up in Shahbad Dairy in northwest Delhi. These books will help youth in understanding society, the laws, movements and struggles during pre-independent India, and also the current scenario. In addition, it will help them study better, improve their performance in school, and develop a better understanding of the society in which they are gradually finding their way.

HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ **150** students took part in a series of **training workshops** on Right to Information (RTI), social welfare legislations, biodiversity, and the role of law students in the change-making process organised in Madhya Pradesh.
- ❖ A **youth forum was formed in Shivpuri, Madhya Pradesh** engaging with young lawyers from different cities of Madhya Pradesh with the aim of involving and engaging youth in the creative process of making the city youthful, vibrant, and inclusive.
- ❖ In Kashmir, **daily online language sessions** with young tour guides from the marginalised sections were organised. These young people come from different walks of life and have varied educational backgrounds. The aim of these daily sessions was to improve their communication skills, especially spoken English.
- ❖ Over **1500** students from the economically weaker sections in the resettlement colonies of Delhi are being provided with **study material**.

Community pathshalas: Ensuring the education of Adivasi children in Odisha

Adivasi children from remote villages in Odisha could not attend online classes and students dropped out rapidly during lockdown as they were not able to access the internet or smartphones. SRUTI Fellow groups in Odisha – **Adivasi Chetna Sangathan** and **Malayagiri Adivasi Sangharsh Manch** – decided to address the educational needs of these students. The Sangathans conducted meetings in the villages and identified young people from every village who could conduct classes for students from 1st to 7th standards. It was decided that the classes would be conducted in their localities from Monday to Friday following the school syllabus.

At present both Sangathans are running community pathshalas (schools) in 165 villages of Angul and Dhenkanal districts. So far 500 Adivasi students are attending these classes.

Manthan School: An effort to ensure quality education in rural Rajasthan

Manthan Shikshan Kendra is a community school in Jhiri village of Jhalawar district (Rajasthan), established in 2001. It was envisaged as a space for children to get quality education, and at the same time, be introduced to a new pedagogy of thinking and living. Due to the lockdown protocol, the school was not able to conduct regular classes.

Students here hail from the most marginalised sections of the society, and could not access online classes during lockdown. In this backdrop, to continue the classes for children without internet connectivity, was a challenge for the school. After a series of meetings with parents, it was decided to conduct community classes in the open. At present, 16 community centres are functioning. During this educational year, 75 children including 40 girls were enrolled. Due to the continued efforts of the teachers at Manthan Shikshan Kendra during the critical period of the pandemic and the lockdown, the school achieved a pass percentage of 100% in their exams.

Chalti Kitabe: An initiative to impart the reading habit to youth in UP

In order to reconnect children to the reading and learning process, mobile book fairs called Chalti Kitabe were organised at different places in Faizabad under the Apna Talim Ghar initiative of **Awadh Peoples' Forum**. The initiative was launched with the aim of encouraging children to inculcate reading habits and positive attitudes to reading. The fairs covered more than 12 mohallas (neighbourhoods), connecting 2000 children in Faizabad. The programme ran for 3 months.

Besides children, adults also came to this fair to look at and read books. Along with reading books of their choice, children and adults also carried books back home.

This journey is stimulating interest in reading and writing in children. For the children of poor and marginalised sections of the society who have been most affected due to this pandemic, the book fair was a dream come true.

Towards learning indigenous languages in Odisha

Adivasi Chetna Sangathan runs a school in Mohanpati, where Santhali tribal children are trained in their native language, namely Santhali. Teachers are selected from the same community, and they teach using different folk methods. At present 22 children are enrolled. This creative initiative is not only helping the students to easily understand the concepts and remember their lessons, but also preserving the culture and values of the community. Santhali is widely spoken among the tribals in Odisha from Angul, Dhenkanal, Keonjhar, and Mayurbhanj districts.

Campaign to boost scientific temper in Jaunpur, UP

SRUTI Fellow Lal Prakash Rahi of **DISHA Sangathan**, Jaunpur, a participant of SSC (2018–19), felt the need to spread and promote the scientific temper to build rational perspectives of the community. His aim was to engage with school students from 8th to 12th standards. The initiative started from August 2019. The programme includes lectures, discussions, activities and film screenings on various subjects such as the origin of the universe, earth, life, evolution, religion, caste, class, gender, and identity. The primary focus of these sessions is to make participants understand the ‘cause and effect’ theory. Another important aim of the sessions is to develop the habit of questioning, which is key to being rational.

Till the month of March 2021, 544 students from 7 schools of Jaunpur – Primary School Tarao (85), Swami Vivekananda Smarak Inter College (65), Primary School, Jarasi (90), Azad Inter-College, Murara (83), Govardhan Inter College, Muftiganj (70), Girls Higher Secondary School, Rasmandal (56), and Nagar Palika Inter College, Dalgah (95) – participated in this initiative to promote the scientific temper.

Addressing the issues of tribal students in rural Madhya Pradesh

Adharshila Learning Centre is located on a hillock in the village of Sakad, 6 km away from Sendhwa town of Barwani district (MP). In 2020–21 there were 125 students living and learning at Adharshila, the majority being from tribal communities from various villages. The Centre had to close down due to the imposition of lockdown and children were sent back to their homes. Similarly, their parents, most of whom were working in nearby cities because of the lack of stable local employment, had to return to their villages without any savings at the time of lockdown. In such circumstances a need assessment was conducted and the Sangathan distributed food kits to 1000 tribal families in the area based on the assessment.

Engaging the tribal students was a big challenge for the Sangathan. With the consent of community, it was decided to organise Bal Melas in open places to engage with the youth on developing creative art forms. For 4 months different activities including song making, poster making, and skits were organised, to teach them about the precautions to be taken during the pandemic. These Bal Melas and a comprehensive COVID-19 awareness programme were organised in 40 tribal hamlets. Varla, Niwali, Barwani, Rajpur, and Sendhwa blocks were identified and books were distributed in the villages of these blocks as Adharshila students come from these villages. The school never fails to celebrate Children’s Day, Birsā Munda Jayanti, and Republic Day.



*Chalti Kitaben drive in Faizabad (UP) [top left]; Shahbad Dairy resource centre (Delhi) [top right]
Faizabad resource centre (UP) [centre left]; Community pathshalas, Kamakhyanagar (Odisha) [centre right]
Santhali learning centre initiative, Parjang (Odisha) [bottom left]; Scientific temperament campaign with youth in Jaunpur (UP) [bottom right]*

GENDER, CASTE, AND COMMUNAL HARMONY

Along with the health crisis, the economic and social disruption caused by the pandemic has been devastating. The economic crisis is starkly visible. Even as people strategised to overcome the crisis, the existing social inequalities only worsened. Discrimination against the oppressed and the marginalised increased manifold during this period. SRUTI Fellows very actively intervened to ensure social justice and communal harmony in their respective areas of influence. SRUTI facilitated the organisation of 2 awareness campaigns, 3 perspective building programmes on gender, and 2 perspective building programmes on the theme of caste during this period.

HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ Fellow Sangathans organised **328 programmes** in **10 states**: Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, MP, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, and UP. Out of these **288 programmes** were organised **at the village level, 35 at the regional level, and 5 at the state level**. These activities included **26 seminars, 49 skill-building workshops, and 68 perspective-building meetings**. **8066 people were connected** through these meetings.
- ❖ A 16-day campaign was organised in UP and Delhi, where gender-based issues during the time of the pandemic were discussed. More than **2000 youth** were connected through Jagrukta Baithak, film screenings, discussions, and Zoom meetings.
- ❖ A cycle rally across **10 districts** in UP, called Journey for Equality, was organised to spread the message of peace and social justice.
- ❖ During the lockdown, there was a spike in cases of domestic violence. While intervening in these issues Sangathans filed **FIRs in 403 cases of domestic violence in Chhattisgarh and Odisha**.
- ❖ **50 Nukkad Sabhas** (neighbourhood meetings) were organised under the Samantake Sathi initiative in Ayodhya (UP) to spread the message of peace harmony, and equality, **connecting 1000 people**.

Campaign to build equality and address gender-based violence

In UP, **APF** has been organising dialogues since 2011 to tackle inequality and build a healthy environment with community members to address gender-based violence. In 2020, the pandemic deeply affected the Sangathan's regular campaigns and awareness-building activities. Lockdowns posed a great threat to the young girls, who were regularly at the receiving end of harassment, violence, and abuse. To respond to this situation, a 16-day campaign against gender-based violence was organised, where these issues were addressed through the following activities:

A. Documentary screenings were held for young people, which were followed by discussions on education, health, and their everyday challenges. An online meeting of 50 young volunteers from Jaunpur, Ambedkar Nagar, Gondia, Faizabad, and Delhi on Constitution Day (26 November) focused on understanding the Constitution, its significance in the current context, and understanding provisions and the spirit behind equality and equal opportunity for all.

B. Community-level dialogue building was done in 5 mohallas to discuss issues of education, health, and equal opportunity. The campaign also reached out to educational institutions like inter colleges where the importance of education, especially for young women, was discussed.

C. At the culmination of the campaign on international Human Rights Day, documentary screenings and discussions were organised with women police officers who interacted with young members associated with the campaign. The young women were advised to develop their analytical

ability to comprehend their surroundings and make themselves aware of any dangers. Looking at the rising cases of online abuse, the police officers committed to tackling harassment and curbing all crimes against women. A message of hope and mutual understanding was developed that incorporated the range of issues around gender-based discrimination and violence.

'Journey for Equality' in Uttar Pradesh

The daily lives of most of the families were severely impacted due to the pandemic and lockdowns: people were losing their jobs, there was a mounting fear of shortage of ration and lack of proper healthcare facilities, including its access. In these times of hopelessness, uncertainty, and fear, we also saw the benevolent side of many institutes, firms, and individuals who decided to reach out to those in need, while facing many odds themselves. The COVID-19 pandemic has taught a lesson to all of us that our survival depends entirely upon our collective efforts.

As the lockdown was eased **APF**, along with other groups, organised a cycle rally on the theme of 'Journey for Equality'. The rally aimed to spread the message of peace, fraternity, harmony, and equality. Spanning 10 districts, the rally started at Shravastya on 5 March and ended at Sarnath on 12 March, covering close to 400 km. During the rally, Sangathan karyakartas spoke to people on the issues of education, environment, gender, communal harmony, etc. On 8 March, i.e. Women's Day, a convention on gender equality was organised at Faizabad, where 150 young girls participated.

During the rally, APF could reach more than 1000 people in the districts of Shravastya, Balrampur, Gonda, Ambedkar Nagar, Ayodhya, Faizabad, Bahraich, Jaunpur, Shagunji, and Varanasi.

Promoting communal harmony among the youth of the resettlement colonies in Delhi

India has always been truly a plural society with a variety of cultures, different religious groups, many languages, and ethnic groups achieving unity in diversity. But in the recent past, Indian society has seen widening gaps between religious communities. This has become a matter of great concern and constitutes a threat to the traditional values of communal harmony.

Delhi Young Artists Forum in the year 2020-21 organised festive celebrations on festivals such as Ramzan, Diwali, Holi, Sab-e-Barat, and Christmas involving youth and children from all religious groups in the resettlement colonies of Bawana and Bhalaswa. During these programmes, they sought to spread awareness among the people on values such as peace, fraternity, and harmony which all festivals signify. Over 1000 youth participated in these programmes.

Voicing against Dalit violence in Bhangarh Village, Shivpuri (Madhya Pradesh)

In a case of violence against the Dalit community in Bhangarh, Pohri block of Shivpuri district, 13 persons from the upper caste inflicted serious injuries on 10 persons belonging to the Dalit community. A person named Banwari Jatav succumbed to his injuries. While Banwari Jatav was injured and unconscious and was being taken to the hospital in an auto, the accused came in a tractor, blocked the auto, and beat up Banwari Jatav and others again, damaging the auto as well. Jatav was brought back to the village, and only after the interventions of the police, could he be taken to the hospital. By the time he reached the hospital, he was declared dead. An FIR was registered on 17 May 2020 under 302/294/323/188/149/148/147/341 of the IPC and the provisions of the SC and ST Orders (Amendment) Act 1976. The 13 accused were arrested due to the Sangathan's efforts. The accused had also filed bail applications in the High Court, but SRUTI Fellow group **Zenith** successfully managed to oppose the bail applications of 10 applicants in 2020.

POCSO Rape Case, Gujarat

In this case, as per the complaint, the said rape survivor, a 14-year-old girl from Gujarat, was sedated and raped by an unknown person. An FIR was registered, crime no. 261/20 and offenses under 376 (1), 354A, 34, 114 IPC (Indian Penal Code) and under section 5, 6 of the POCSO (The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) Act, 2012.

The rape survivor was found to be 20 weeks pregnant at the time of the complaint. Despite running from hospital to hospital to get the pregnancy terminated, she was unable to get any medical professional to agree to do so. After deliberations, it was decided to approach the district court under section 3 (2) (b) of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act. By the time the petition reached the court, the girl was into her 23rd week of pregnancy. The court set up a medical board to find the medical opinion regarding termination. After deliberation, the court decided to not terminate the pregnancy as it had exceeded 20 weeks, as per the MTP Act.

Following this, **SRUTI fellows Abhay and Swapnil** filed an appeal in the High Court. By this time, it came to light that the girl had known the rapist all along and was trying to save him from prosecution. The offender was a 40-year-old married man with 2 children. In High Court, the girl testified that she wanted the child and did not want to terminate the pregnancy. All the efforts put in by the team of lawyers working on this case went in vain. Despite the failure, it was one of those cases which taught the team a lot about human behaviour and the rigged system working against the protection of women and children.



Journey for Equality, Faizabad (UP)



Campaign against gender violence, Jaunpur (UP)

SOCIAL SECURITY AND LABOUR RIGHTS

Multiple lockdowns affected the unorganised sector severely, especially migrant labourers and workers. The unprecedented crisis migrant workers had to face during lockdown 1.0 resulted in an extraordinary national emergency. After nearly 2 months of waiting to go home, many workers took it upon themselves to walk back home, covering hundreds of kilometres on foot; thousands of others waited for state-backed transport. Although a few special trains for workers, called Shramik trains, were operated by the state governments, many still found themselves stranded with no hope of an early departure.

HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ SRUTI facilitated **3 programmes focusing on labour rights**: 1 on labour rights and community health in Bhalaswa (Delhi), 1 on manual scavenging in Delhi, and 1 on tea estate workers' rights in Gudluru (TN).
- ❖ In **12 states** – Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, MP, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Kashmir, Jharkhand, Odisha, TN, UP, and Uttarakhand – Fellow sangathans organised **588 meetings** for workers. **44** of these programmes were held at the **district level**, **4 at the state level**, and the rest **540** were held **at the village level**. During this period, **20 skill-building workshops**, **31 perspective-building meetings**, and **5 seminars** were conducted. These meetings enabled the participants to become aware of their labour entitlements and rights. **23,532 people** were reached through these programmes.
- ❖ Sangathans made efforts towards mobilising the community, participatory planning, ensuring the quality of assets created, and ensuring livelihoods. **20,538 job cards** were issued under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) 2005. Work undertaken includes water conservation to revive traditional water bodies, soil conservation, construction of farm ponds and drainage, rainwater harvesting, construction of rural link roads, maintenance and repair of canals, etc. in AP, Bihar, MP, and Odisha.
- ❖ Workers associated with MGNREGA from AP, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and Odisha went to the offices of the block development officer and Collector and demanded 200 days of work for each household. Similarly, Sangathans facilitated the process of issuing job cards to returned migrant workers. As a result, more than **200 families got 100 days of work**.
- ❖ **1233 labour cards** were issued by the labour welfare board after continuous efforts made by karyakartas of Sangathans in Odisha, Delhi, and UP.
- ❖ Sangathans from AP, UP, and Delhi helped people access their social security entitlements by reaching out to Panchayats and blocks. **492 ration cards** were issued which ensured food for **more than 2000 individuals**.

Fellow Sangathans played a key role in reaching out to the communities and supporting the informal sector workers by providing basic amenities, including medical and protective gear, and creating awareness.

Migrant coordination campaigns in association with Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand governments

During the migrant crisis, **Zenith**, Shivpuri (MP), formed student teams in various law schools to undertake the herculean task of coordination and relief to ensure that stranded migrants reached their homes safely.

Zenith assisted the state governments of MP and Jharkhand to help migrant workers by securing their safe passage home. Along with other organisations, Zenith helped the state governments to coordinate with more than 46,000 workers and assisted them in registration and relief. Over 400 volunteers, mostly law students, contributed to this work. Their COVID response team members were able to provide the state governments with comprehensive lists of stranded workers in different districts across these states. With support from the on-ground NGOs, Zenith reached out to those who required immediate food/health support, communicated information related to the buses, and arranged alternative transport.

While compiling the status report itself, volunteers came across several migrant workers facing issues of non-availability of food, possible eviction due to non-payment of rent, lack of medical care, and other similar problems. These concerns often required immediate attention; in response to this, a dedicated team to deal with 'Distress Queries' was created. Volunteers working on the status report promptly notified the team about urgent problems via common online forums, also providing necessary information such as name, address, contact details, nature of the issue, etc.

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Similarly, there were other initiatives to inform migrant workers about details of available trains to reach home. Over time, the initiative progressed from assisting during one part of the process, to successfully organising and coordinating entire trains and allied logistics for migrant workers trying to reach their homes in MP and Jharkhand.

HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ Efforts made by Sangathans in Odisha, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh helped 451 families to avail of housing facilities under state government schemes and the Union government scheme Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY).
- ❖ **3057 families** were helped in receiving their entitled hand pump for drinking water in Delhi, Odisha, AP, and UP. **58 families** got new electricity connections in TN and Rajasthan.
- ❖ VTMS with the National Fish Workers Forum and Tamil Nadu Land Right Forum initiated a campaign from 15 October to 29 November 2020 to **raise awareness about the changes in labour laws**: welfare laws, Minimum Wages Act, trade union laws, labour dispute laws, and the Environmental Impact Assessment 2020. Meetings were held at Kanyakumari, Nagapattinam, Chennai, Karaikal, Rameshwaram, and Nilgiri districts. Hundreds of youths participated in this campaign along with women and local leaders.
- ❖ A **survey** was conducted in April–May to **assess the impact of the COVID-19 on the poorer sections** of society in Nilgiri, Coimbatore, Erode, and Tirupur districts of Tamil Nadu. As per the finding of the survey, relief work was commenced.
- ❖ In Odisha **70 migrant women workers and 25 children were rescued and rehabilitated** during the lockdown.

Tamil Nadu Tea Corporation (TANTEA) workers in distress

The demands of the workers at Tamil Nadu Tea Corporation (TANTEA) have remained unresolved for years. TANTEA was established in 1968 in the Nilgiri district for the benefit of repatriates from Sri Lanka. There are tea estates in Connoor, Gudalur, Cherambadi, Cherangkode, Nelliylam, Naduvattam, Kotagiri and Valparai. Tea is cultivated in 4431.92 hectares by TANTEA. The company employs 5600 permanent workers and 400 temporary workers from the families of the permanent workers.

For the past several years, TANTEA has been facing a severe financial crisis; employees have not been provided their entitled benefits. VTMS has been successful in raising the issues at the state level through organising meetings with government officials and publishing news. Different steps have also been taken to pressurise the estate management. As a result of these collective actions, the estate management has initiated steps to sell tea in the European market and to get export certification.

A letter has been sent seeking funding under the special areas' development programme for the complete renovation of workers' dwellings and toilets in areas under TANTEA. Preliminary work has been completed to hand over the Cherambadi hospital to the health department, which will soon receive

approval, and to renovate the houses and toilets. The structure of the hospital will also be upgraded soon. Steps have been taken to gradually pay the workers the outstanding amount. Workers who have completed 480 days of work were assured of permanent status without any delay.

Addressing forced labour of tea estate workers in Nilgiri (Tamil Nadu) during COVID-19

There have been regular complaints emerging about tea estate managements forcing estate workers to work even during the lockdown. Estate managements have not provided any facilities to the workers to protect them from the pandemic, and the workers continued to work in the estates amidst the fear of catching the coronavirus.

To address these issues, VTMS organised meetings with tea estate workers and documented their requirements. Following this, the Sangathan also set up meetings with the estate management but this did not yield any positive results as the management was not ready to accept the demands of the workers. The tea estate workers' union along with VTMS submitted a memorandum to the District Collector, detailing the abysmal working conditions of the tea estate and the management's ignorance about the spread of COVID-19 and lack of precautions related to it.

It resulted in the Nilgiri District Collector issuing an order stating that agricultural activities can only be commenced with adequate safety precautions against COVID-19. The Collector's office provided a list of precautions to be followed before reopening. Meanwhile, a list of demands was also sent to the Chief Minister. Representatives of the Sangathan

met government officials and demanded financial assistance on a monthly basis for the workers until the COVID-19 situation improves.

Discussion with migrant workers and addressing hunger in the resettlement colonies of Delhi

On 15 September 2020, DYAF organised a discussion in Bhalaswa on the issues of migrant workers in Delhi. During the meeting, the social security of the unorganised sector was discussed. It was reiterated that the government's inability to provide necessary services to the migrant workers should also be a lesson for civil society and community-based organisations to understand the gaps in the system. DYAF decided to reach out to the concerned citizenry to provide medical and psychological support and entitlements to the migrant workers, along with food and shelter requirements.

DYAF was very proactive in screening and testing the residents of resettlement colonies for COVID-19. The Sangathan organised fever camps and citizen surveys which helped them to identify patients in their community at an early stage. DYAF ran a community kitchen throughout the lockdown period and even when the processes of 'unlock' were started they kept the kitchen open so the working class of the resettlement colonies continued to get support. DYAF supplied lunch every day to about 120 families in Bhalaswa, Bawana, and Wazirpur resettlement colonies. It also distributed 14,400 food kits. Apart from this, sanitary pads and medicines were also supplied to the poor families.

Integration of informal waste pickers into the formal structure, Delhi

Lokadhikar Sangathan (Delhi) has been working on the issues of ragpickers for a long time. Rag picking as a profession comes with its own set of inhuman challenges. The daily life of a ragpicker revolves around the toxic trash of numerous households, and they play an important role in managing the waste. Most of the ragpickers belong to marginalised communities who are already highly vulnerable to social, political, and economic exploitation. Their entire family gets involved in the process of collection, segregation, and then extensive bargaining to sell the segregated materials.

At the peak of the first wave of the pandemic Lokadhikar worked on a war footing to compile data regarding various issues of ragpickers. During this period Lokadhikar conducted advocacy campaigns with the concerned government institutions with the aim of better addressing environmental health and social justice concerns of this group of the population.



Mobilising waste pickers in Delhi [left]; Labour of tea estate workers in Nilgiri (Tamil Nadu) [right]

PEOPLE AT SRUTI

Structure of the Sruti Team (2019–20)

<i>Slab of monthly salary (Rs) plus benefits paid to staff</i>	<i>No. of male staff</i>	<i>No. of female staff</i>	<i>Total</i>
10,001–25,000	0	1	1
25,001–50,000	7	2	9
50,001–100,000	3	1	4
<i>Total</i>	10	4	14

People

SRUTI General Body

1. Ms Abha Singhal Joshi
2. Ms Amita Joseph
3. Mr Apoorvanand
4. Mr Avinash Kumar
5. Ms Enakshi Ganguly Thukral
6. Mr G.B. Panda
7. Mr Jamal Kidwai
8. Ms Kanika Satyanand
9. Mr Nitin Sethi
10. Mr Prabhu Mohapatra
11. Ms Rajeswari S. Raina
12. Mr Ravi Rebbapragada
13. Ms Rita Sarin
14. Ms Shibani Chaudhury
15. Ms Uma Chakarvarti

In the year 2020–21, 1 annual and 1 extraordinary General Body meeting (both online) were organised.

SRUTI Executive Board

1. Ms Enakshi Ganguly Thukral, President
2. Mr Prabhu Mohapatra, Vice President
3. Mr Apoorvanand, Treasurer
4. Ms Rajeswari S. Raina, Member
5. Mr Ravi Rebbapragada, Member
6. Mr Jamal Kidwai, Member
7. Ms Amita Joseph, Member

In the year 2020–21, 5 meetings including 2 extraordinary (3 online and 2 offline) of the SRUTI Executive Board were organised.

SRUTI Team

1. Asha Raveendran, Asst. Programme Executive
2. Baldev Thakur, Finance Officer
3. Elin A. Lakra, Asst. Programme Executive
4. Jojoy Mathew, Asst. Officer, Finance & Admin.
5. Juheb Jhony Choudhary, Asst. Programme Executive
6. Mahipal Singh, Fellowship Assistant
7. Rakesh Sharma, Asst. Manager, Resource Mobilisation
8. Sanjay Kumar Verma, Asst. Manager, Resource Mobilisation
9. Satyam Shrivastava, Director
10. Saurabh Sinha. Sr. Programme Executive
11. Shweta Tripathi, Director
12. Siddharth Bhatt, Programme Executive
13. Tejasvita Malhotra, Asst. Programme Executive

*In alphabetic order

Internal Complaints Committee Members

Name	Committee	
Elin Archana Lakra	Presiding Officer (Chairperson)	SRUTI
Asha Raveendran	Member	SRUTI
Jojoy Mathew	Member	SRUTI
Purwa Bhardwaj	Member	Trainer and Subject Expert
Seema Mishra	Member	Delhi-based Lawyer
Jayashree	Member	SRUTI Fellow

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

<i>SRUTI Income for the financial year 2020-2021</i>		
<i>Sr.No.</i>	<i>Details</i>	<i>Amount (Rs.)</i>
1	Fixed Assets F.Y 2021-2021	18,71,714.08
2	Interest (Investment and other funds)	29,68,249/-
3	Donations	1,35,88,464/-
4	Scrap Donation	6,58,932/-
5	Grants from Donors (inc. previous year's)	1,26,93,014/-
6	SWSF including revolving contribution	2,00,000/-
	Total Income	3,19,80,373.08

<i>SRUTI Expenditure for the financial year 2020-21</i>		
<i>Sr.No.</i>	<i>Details</i>	<i>Amount (Rs.)</i>
1	Fellowship Programme	1,75,60,595/-
2	Resource Mobilisation	10,12,324/-
3	Emergency relief and welfare	63,31,338/-
4	Administrative Expenditure	52,56,269/-
5	Depreciation and loss of fixed assets	3,98,325/-
	Total expenditure	3,05,58,851

CONTRIBUTORS

We thank our institutional, individual, and scrap donors for their continued support.

