

Dr. Harsh Vardhan interacts with Civil Society Organizations/NGOs via Video Conferencing

Work together in consonance and observe social distancing to defeat COVID-19: Dr. Harsh Vardhan

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Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare along with Shri Amitabh Kant, CEO, NITI Aayog interacted with Civil Society Organizations and NGOs registered on NGO Darpan in a Video Conference (VC), here today.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan expressed gratitude on behalf of the Prime Minister and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare over the selfless work done by more than 92,000 NGOs in terms of providing food and other necessities to different sections of society. He appreciated the contribution of these organizations as vital in the management of COVID-19. He also highlighted that such work by these institutions also inspired other people to come forward and contribute.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan briefed the participants about the chronology of efforts made to combat the COVID-19 situation. He highlighted that India was one of the first countries to prepare a strategy at national and international level along with International Organizations like WHO to tackle COVID-19. The Government of India has taken pre-emptive and pro-active action and escalated the response as per the situation.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan highlighted the steps taken by the different ministries under the guidance of the Prime Minister and the Group of Ministers constituted specially to contain COVID-19. The steps include detailed advisories for states, ramping up health infrastructure and provision of protective gear, screening of all passengers at all ports of entry, Community Surveillance, detailed contact tracing, Rapid Response Teams, etc. He highlighted the importance of measures like *Arogya Setu* App as well as launch of economic package - Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana for vulnerable sections in easing the problems posed by the COVID-19 outbreak. He also noted that the Migrant labor problem has seen an ease with the issuance of latest guidelines by Ministry of Home Affairs.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan thanked the Prime Minister for leading the containment effort by first preparing the minds of people for lockdown through Janta curfew and then announcing lockdown as part of the graded response to the evolving situation. "The doubling rate of the country has been showing regular improvement and stands at 12.5 days when seen over a period of 3 days, 11.0 days over a period of 7 days and 9.9 days over a period of 14 days. These indicators may be taken as positive effects of the Lockdown in the country along with the cluster management and containment strategies", he said.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan praised the efforts of NGOs in helping to ease the problems faced by stranded people all across the country. He praised the total synergy and enthusiasm seen in the efforts of the Government and Non-Government organizations. He also discussed the main issues seen during COVID-19 outbreak in which the role of NGOs was very important. These include stigmatization of COVID-19 patients, stigmatization, ostracisation and harassment of medical professionals involved in the management of COVID-19 and the possible issues that the migrant laborers might face as they return home. He highlighted the dynamic role of NGOs in fighting this stigma through their field work.

After this, while thanking NITI Aayog for helping in their smooth functioning, the NGOs raised concerns such as limited availability of medicines, lack of services for geriatric care especially in Aspirational Districts, issues faced by women, mobility problems faced by NGO workers during lockdown, malnourishment and food security, issues of stigma associated with certain livelihoods and problems in last mile provision of entitlements to migrants among others. They also urged the Union Health Minister to take appropriate measures to promote boosting of immunity through traditional knowledge, dispel fears of communicable diseases in the people, financial support for MSMEs after economy opens up again, etc.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan assured help to the representatives of NGOs. He said that classification of districts in red, orange and green zones will help the NGOs in prioritizing their work. He requested them to communicate their concerns about COVID-19 management to the Government through existing communications channels as well as through social media such as through dedicated twitter handle @CovidIndiaSeva.

He also urged everyone to follow simple guidelines issued by the Ministry and maintain hand hygiene, use face covers, take care of high-risk population, work from home, whenever possible, and follow lockdown and social distancing etiquettes. Dr. Harsh Vardhan reiterated that Social Distancing and lockdown continue to be the most potent social vaccine in containment of COVID-19.

The Union Minister further informed that for all authentic and updated information on COVID-19 related technical issues, guidelines and advisories one can always log on to the Health Ministry's website <https://www.mohfw.gov.in/> which is updated at least twice a day to keep it up-to-date.

At the end, CEO NITI Aayog Amitabh Kant thanked Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Civil Society Organizations and the NGOs and their representatives for attending the session and giving valuable suggestions.

MV/MR/SG

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