

Meeting of Empowered Group-3 with NGOs/ CSOs on COVID Management

Posted On: 26 APR 2021 5:24PM by PIB Delhi

In a bid to address the challenges arising due to COVID-19 pandemic, Empowered Group-3 chaired by NITI Aayog CEO Shri Amitabh Kant reached out to more than 1 lakh Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) today to deliberate on coordinated strategies to navigate through the impact of recent surge in COVID cases. The meeting was attended by Principal Scientific Adviser Dr. K Vijayaraghavan; Shri Kamal Kishore, Member, National Disaster Management Authority and other senior officials from MEA, MHA, Cabinet Secretariat and Prime Minister's Office.

Members of NGOs/ CSOs were informed of the recent initiatives taken by the Government viz. waiver of import duties on oxygen and related equipment, opening of vaccination for 18+ population, providing free foodgrains for 80 crore people for two months and resolving logistical bottlenecks. CEO, NITI Aayog appreciated and thanked the CSOs for their efforts in combating COVID-19 in India and requested for continued support and efforts in managing the COVID-19 infections in the second wave. He stressed upon them to reach out to the people with awareness campaigns which can be downloaded in regional languages and made available from *indiafightscovid.com* to dispel common myths and provide accurate information regarding COVID vaccination (anthem, radio jingles, out of home creative's).

The Chairman of the Empowered Group sought support of CSOs and requested them to complement the efforts of the Government – at districts, Panchayats and Resident Welfare Associations, in the following activities:

- Creating awareness about and emphasizing the need for people to continue to follow COVID Appropriate Behaviors (CAB) including wearing masks even after vaccination.
- Supplementing Government efforts and providing needed support to urban poor families
- Making communities aware of the benefits offered by various Government initiatives/packages which could be helpful for them in these times of crisis such as the “One Nation One Card” scheme for enabling beneficiaries to access subsidized food grains.
- Extending support for the distribution of PPE kits and other personal health and hygiene products such as sanitizers, soaps, masks and gloves for community workers and volunteers.
- Supporting the State Governments and District Administration in filling the gaps in the routine delivery of public health services.
- Assisting the local administration in identifying hotspots and deputing volunteers and caregivers to deliver services, with a special focus on elderly, persons with disabilities, children, transgender persons, and other vulnerable groups.
- Partnering with State and Local Governments for enlisting volunteers from among individuals and communities to support the COVID response efforts.
- Alleviating social stigma and discrimination against COVID-19 patients and their families through large scale and targeted communication strategies.
- Amplifying the information put out by the Government related to the practicalities of COVID vaccination and filling any gaps in awareness among communities.
- Address vaccine hesitancy, dispel myths and misconception and encourage people for COVID vaccination.

Civil Society organizations such as AkshayaPatra, Narayan Sevasansthan, Indian Cooperative Network for Women (ICNW), Narayan SevaSansthan, Karuna Trust, Marico Innovation Foundation, Dharma Life, Swasth Foundation, Dadi dada Foundation, HelpAge India, Grassroots Research and Advocacy Movement, VANI, Lupin Foundation, Public Health Foundation of India, International Centre for Red Cross, Disha Foundation etc. made several suggestions for addressing these challenges. Some of the measures suggested include issuing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for Home Care Services, creating awareness on vaccine hesitancy, helping the senior citizens poor and migrants to enroll of vaccinationand providing short term relaxation in guidelines pertaining to CSR, 80-G exemptions, FCRA relaxation etc. CEO, NITI Aayog also stressed upon CSOs to ensure that food reaches the right beneficiaries and nutritional issues are also properly addressed.

Government has set up six Empowered Groups to address various issues pertaining to management of COVID-19. The Empowered Group-3, which is chaired by CEO, NITI Aayog is entrusted with the responsibility of coordinating with private sector, NGOs and international organisations for COVID-19 response related activities. This group is playing an important role in galvanizing over 1 lakh Civil Society Organisations, NGOs, UN agencies, industry partners and international organisations to create synergies with the Government in creating a unified response system to the pandemic.

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(Release ID: 1714157)