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Mala News

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An action programme for the elimination of child labour in rural India

Greetings!

India in Lockdown

I arrived in India in early March, eager to work with the staff and children. I expected to be there for two months, but my visit was cut short when Prime Minister, Modi, announced a lockdown. Schools across the country were told to close immediately, so with little time to organise things, we sent the children home and began to prepare the staff for a long period of isolation.

Police are draconian in their determination to restrict movement. Beatings are given to anyone found travelling outside their village and we do not want staff to take any risks while continuing to monitor the welfare of the children.



Teachers were shown how to support each other remotely and small groups formed to work on lesson and curriculum planning at home. Most villages now have access to a mobile phone but few, if any, of the pupils or staff have laptops or wifi. We arranged for senior pupils to help tutor younger children living nearby and to work and study together as far as restrictions will allow.



Where staff have a mobile, we set up WhatsApp to keep in contact with them and pupils. Admin staff were issued with laptops to work at home, but much work on preparing student profiles for the new academic year has been halted as it is impossible to conduct interviews, take photos or complete registrations remotely. The new academic year will inevitably be delayed, and we have no idea at present when we will be able to start again.

We also had other important things to worry about. The families in these rural villages are always hovering on the edge of poverty and if food began to run short, they would suffer badly. None of our children's parents have the luxury of a cushion of savings or store of food to fall back on. Many of our families are supported by one or more members who work as casual labourers. Without those incomes the families would struggle and there would be a huge influx of people from the cities back to the villages once jobs dried up.



I was lucky to find a seat on the last BA flight out of Delhi. Since I returned to the UK, things have become worse, as hundreds of thousands of poor labourers are making their way slowly and painfully on foot from the cities back to their villages. India has been

completely locked down, all transport stopped and movement curtailed.

These are difficult times for everyone, wherever you are in the world, but the poor in India have more to fear than anyone from the current crisis.

Anne Gilmour
Trustee and Teaching Advisor

If you know anyone who you think might be interested in this newsletter, please forward it on.

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