
ANNUAL REVIEW 2019-20



Brooke India



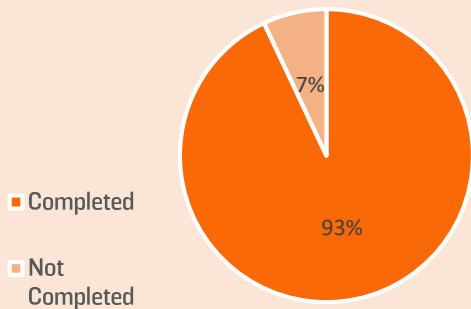
Brooke India

Annual Review 2019-20

Brooke India (BI) continues to pursue the mandate of 'Ensuring equine welfare activities by improving Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability, Affordability, and Quality (4AQ) of services and enhancing the knowledge and Animal Husbandry practices of the equine owning communities'.

In the Financial Year 2019-20, BI reached out to 41 districts in 10 States/Union Territories of India (Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Delhi, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir & Punjab).

Brooke India Overall Activity Completion for FY 2019-20



Practically all targets for planned activities for the financial year were met. Only 7% activities were not completed due to the COVID 19 Lockdown imposed with effect from March 2020.

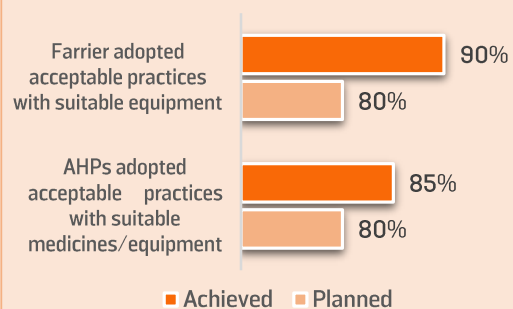
BI has demonstrated improvements in Animal Health & Welfare, Service Provision and strengthened the working equine owning community's through formation of Equine Welfare Groups (EWGs) thereby contributing to building up of community savings, involvement in Income Generating Activities (IGAs), promoting women's empowerment and building up resilience as illustrated by data and case studies.

Capacity building

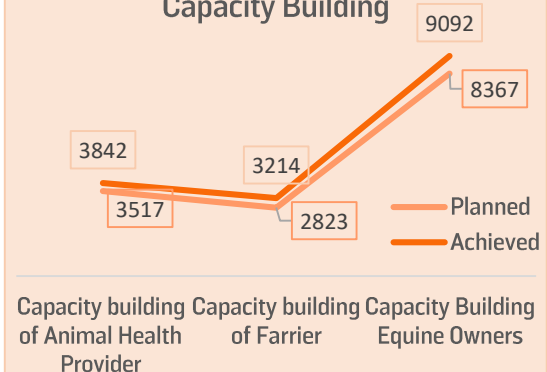
Care of equines primarily lies in the hands of their owners and family members supported by LHPs (Local Health Providers) and Local Street Farriers (LSFs). To enhance knowledge and skills on good equine husbandry, welfare and preventive practices amongst them, orientation training and capacity building sessions were organised.

- Usually local animal health practitioners are found to be more adept in treating bovines and have little or no knowledge on equines and their handling and treatment. BI organized **3240 on-site** (hands-on training) and **519 in-house trainings** for LHPs, Govt. Vet Officers (GVOs) and Paravets to build their capacity in equine handling and providing quality treatment for Equines
- In India, there is a dearth of professional Farrier training institutions. Most of the LSFs learn farriery as a family trade. To ensure quality farriery BI organized **2839 on-site and 375 in-house trainings**. BI in collaboration with the State Animal Husbandry Department (AHD) evaluated and certified 146 of these trained LSFs using the Farrier Mentoring Framework (FMF).
- 10,277** orientations for **133,314** equine owners & women from EWGs were held. Ashwamitras /Ashwasakhis continue to play an effective role in the formation of EWGs in.
- 204 Exposure visits** for cross learning from other Equine owners were conducted.

Achievement in AHMF & FMF

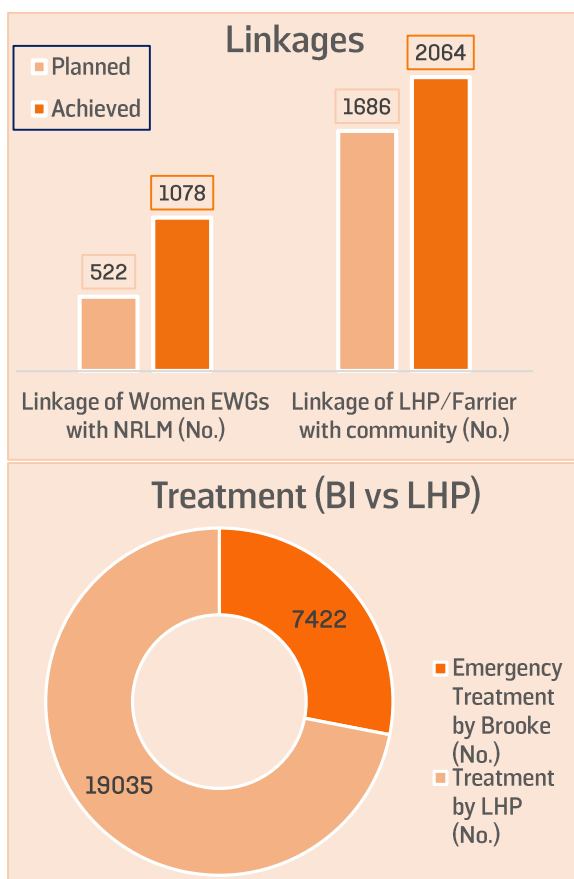


Capacity Building



Ashwamitras/Ashwasakhis play a key role in facilitation of Participatory Welfare Need Assessments, EWG management and providing primary care to the needy animals thus ensuring sustainable Animal Welfare

Brooke India



Developing Linkages

Developing long-term linkages between EWGs and various Government schemes is the key to sustainable change in Equine Health & Welfare and community development. They facilitate empowerment and promote resilience in working equine owning communities.

During this FY, BI facilitated the formation of **529 new EWGs**. **1078 EWGs** were then linked with the **NRLM** (National Rural Livelihood Mission).

These EWGs were encouraged to collaborate to form Associations of EWGs (AEWGs) to promote sustainable development in the community. Established Associations have further confederated to form 18 district level Equine Welfare Federations to give a united voice to the community.

The LHPs and LSFs are linked to the equine owning communities through AEWGs/EWGs to ensure long-term sustainability of quality service provision. The chart shows increase in treatment by LHPs and a decrease in Emergency Treatment by Brooke

EAC Activities

BI's EAC team worked towards enhancing the profile of the organization and its advocacy efforts amongst various stakeholders, and created relevant collaterals like IEC material and films for donors and programme team.

Completed a 360-degree virtual reality film on equine fair for international donors.

Conducted a Media Workshop to enhance BI's profile and disseminate equine welfare and policy issues amongst leading media houses.

Instituted a Media Fellowship to investigate the reasons for drastic reduction in equine population. This fellowship is on hold due to COVID 19.

Launch of Brooke India' social media pages (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter)

Brooke India contributed a feature article on Glanders Compensation enhancement in TOI.

Keeping in view of the BK guidelines submitted to AWBI, BI made a Model BK film.

Propagated Equine welfare awareness through Community Radio Badaun, to reach 1400 equine owners.

Qualitative Evidence of Equine Welfare & Reach

[BI-Equine Fair](#) (Govt. Vets and Brooke India's Synergy)

[BI- Women Empowerment](#) (Story of Poonam)

[BI-Resilience](#) (Nanded Equine Welfare Camp)

[BI-Community Engagement](#) (Equine Fair)

[BI-Upskilling Farriers](#) (Story of Brooke India's youngest Farrier)

[BI-COVID 19- Emergency Treatment for Equines](#) (COVID 19 Response)

[BI-COVID19- IGA](#) (COVID 19 Response)

(Please see Annexure)

Brooke India

Strengthening System, Process and Compliances in FY 2019–20

- For strengthening BI and partner's systems and processes, a series of workshops and trainings were organised.
 - POSH/Safeguarding Workshop for BI direct staff.
 - Staff Development Workshops were carried out which covered themes of Workplace Happiness, First Aid and Team Building for BI and BI Partner staff.
 - Strategy Development Workshop was organised by Tamara from Brooke UK attended by BI Board members and BI Senior Management Team.
 - One-day Gender & Generation Diversity workshop. (Attended by 35 mid/senior Staff).
 - One-day Workshop on "Livelihood, Resilience, and human behaviour change".
 - BI Finance team has organised 2 trainings for the Project Director, District Managers and Manager cum VO and partner accountants on the Financial and Accounting management aspects.
- Staff recruitment, orientation and induction of partner organisations towards animal welfare perspectives, Interactive sessions with partners to address livelihood and developmental needs of equine owners, Financial Capacity Building of Partners happened during the Quarterly meets of the regions, Financial Capacity Building of Partners
- Other administrative changes:
 - Cash transactions have been minimised.
 - Credit cards have been issued to most of the staff.
 - Net Banking is used for payments.
 - Revised Staff Handbook and Finance Guidelines were issued.
 - Completed Salary Revision as per Birches Reward proposal approved by Brooke UK.
- Change of partner NGOs Partner in PEWU Ballia changed from Purvanchal Gramin Chetna Samiti (PGCS), Ballia to Gramin Vikash Sansthan (GVS), Ghazipur; Partner in PEWU Amritsar changed from Volunteers for Social Justice (VSJ) to Society for Environmental and Rural Awakening (ERA).

Exit from 15 EWUs

At the end of this FY, Brooke India has decided to exit from 15 EWUs after completion of program implementation. BI observed significant improvement in indicators of **Animal health, behaviour of the equine owners and skill level of the service providers**.

BI conducted formal exit evaluation on the above indicators (sample size-15%) in Bareilly, Raibareilly, Badaun, Bageshwar, Baghapt, Etah, JP Nagar, Katra, Lucknow, Meerut, Moradabad, Rampur, Roorkee, Shahjahanpur, Unnao.

Key End Line/ Exit Criteria for BI program

- BI will exit, if the unit has achieved 70% success based on the result of Annual Review by the completion of 4th year of program implementation.
- If based on assessment BI decides to consider the project completion, then this will be considered as the End Line.
- If not, the voids that emerge will be identified and corrective measures put in place to permit exit in a fixed period.
- There will be a light touch post-withdrawal of Brooke from the unit.
- In the unit having some minor slip offs in deliverables will require a specific plan of action with the defined duration being put in place which will be a case to case basis depending upon the context and feasibility.

Government Vets and Brooke India's Synergy at Chaubari Equine Fair

The famous Chaubari Equine Fair in Bareilly district of Uttar Pradesh attracts a large number of visitors from far and wide. The devoted take a holy dip in the Ramganga river as a matter of tradition and faith. However, in addition to this devotional religious practice, its economics that make people congregate at this location biannually, as they actively partake in the animal fair held alongside. It's here that horses/mules are bought and sold by equine owners from the nearby districts like Rampur, Badaun and Pilibhit.

The Brooke Training and Extension team constantly works with the Animal Husbandry department of the State to make sure that animal welfare doesn't get compromised at such a large congregation. The Animal Husbandry department has been on the alert after 3 horses tested positive for Glanders, a zoonotic disease in Bareilly.

When you visit the fairgrounds you will invariably see Dr Ajay Kumar, Government Veterinary Officer, dressed in his white apron collecting serum samples from horses/mules at the Chaubari fair. Dr Ajay joined the Animal Husbandry department in 2011 after completing his post-graduation degree in Veterinary Science with specialisation in Pharmacology. Speaking about his role as Veterinary Officer in-charge at the Chaubari fair, he elaborates, "Our veterinary team which consists of Livestock Extension Officers will remain present 24x7 to give veterinary services to the needy equines".

He is quoted to be saying, "We offer advice to equine owners on government schemes, tips for buying healthy animals and information on fatal zoonotic diseases, especially Glanders". He is quite happy to work with the Brooke India team, as it offers him an opportunity to get hands-on training in nasogastric tubing, use of mouth gag, lameness examination etc. About collaboration with Brooke India, Dr. Ajay shares that he eagerly waits for Brooke India's capacity building sessions training conducted at Bareilly, so as to improve his practical skills in equine treatment. Elaborating further, he says that these training offers a unique platform for knowledge sharing, learning new animal welfare concepts and in getting new insights on the working equine.

Dr Ajay is also quite impressed with the audio-visual material developed by Brooke on serum collection, fatal equine diseases, nutrition and farriery. He feels Brooke India is quite different from other NGOs working in India. Explaining further, he says, "Brooke, being an international organisation, it brings in a lot of latest information on welfare-friendly handling, treatment. Even the local Brooke India staff members are well-equipped for handling equine emergencies and have a good network with equine owning communities." He also remarked "I personally believe that Brooke should continue to train equine owners, local health providers and invest in capacity building of government vets so that working equines get access to good veterinary care at a nominal cost, in the long run."

The Brooke India team also motivates fair organisers and the local administration to ensure provisioning of clean water facility, shade, proper loading and unloading sites etc.

Brooke India

Brooke trained Community Resource Person (CRP) Poonam: The transformational change maker

Like many youngsters, Poonam Shekwal had many aspirations in her life. After completing her 10th exams, she wanted to pursue a career in teaching. However, things did not pan out as desired. Her family couldn't support her higher studies due to economic constraints.

Her desires got wings, when she came in touch with Brooke India team during one of the community engagement sessions. It all began, in 2012, when Brooke India set up the unit in Roorkee district. The initial scoping in Jhabreda administrative block revealed that majority of equine owners mainly relied on transporting raw bricks at nearby brick kilns. There were 32 equines and 28 equine owners residing in the area. The initial welfare assessment threw up many equine welfare challenges. The equine owners were not aware about equine diseases, they relied on local healer for treatment, and for their financial needs totally dependent on moneylenders. And, majority of owners were not united together.

Brooke team gradually developed rapport with the community. And, Poonam clearly emerged as one of key leader among the womenfolk. Soon, the Brooke team decided train Poonam on the nuances of self-help groups, micro finance and veterinary first aid. She also received training on production of Mushroom cultivation and its marketing.

Soon after receiving training from the Brooke, Poonam initiated the formation of Pooja Ashwa Kalyan group in Jhabreda. And, began imparting community training among women members on formation of equine welfare groups, basic first aid, importance of timely vaccination and identification of signs and symptoms of fatal equines diseases.

Once she had established her credentials in Jhabreda block, the Brooke India team motivated Poonam to lead in the formation Women Equine Welfare Groups (WEWGs) in Narsana and Bhagwanpur blocks, which she did with great ease.

After successfully running the WEWG in Jhabreda, she graduated to the next level and led the formation of the Nai Kiran Mahila Ashwa Kalyan Samiti* (Association) in Jhabreda comprising of 10 villages and 15 Women EWGs.

After the formation of the Association, Poonam began to explore other means of getting loans from banks, cooperative and micro finance institutions. Through her efforts she was able to bring the Block Development Officers and the Bank manager at a common platform through a Block level workshop, where the officers presented various government income generation schemes, eligibility and fund availability. Soon after the workshop, she helped 8 WEWGs to open their accounts in the bank.

As a Secretary of Nav Kiran Mahilya Ashwa kalyan Samiti, Poonam has been relentless in providing support to WEWGs through her Samiti.

In 2018, 11 women EWGs have received revolving funds of Rs 15000 each (£ 161 approximately) and two EWGs have received Cash Credit Limit (CCL) funds of Rs 110,000 (£ 1182 approximately). These EWGs which have received the funds under National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) are now venturing out and initiating other Income Generating Activities (IGA) like purchase of sewing machines, setting up cosmetic shops, purchasing draught or milk animals etc.

Poonam has also started charging a minimum fee from groups that require her services for account keeping and preparation of income expenditure statements. She is quite elated with her achievements and attributes her success to Brooke India's constant encouragement and training. Adding further she says, "I will continue the journey of success and will keep supporting the newly formed WEWGs in the area even after Brooke's exit".

Brooke India has been trying to identify and train more CRPs like Poonam in its operational areas. These CRPs would eventually ensure a sustainable future for equine owning communities in India.
*Samiti (Association)

Brooke India

Equine Welfare Camps for Donkeys in Nanded District (Maharashtra)

Brooke India's (BI) vision of sustainable equine welfare has been constantly shared and adopted by its NGO partners, across all its ten operational states. For the past one and a half year, Maharashtra state team (Nanded, Latur, and Beed) has worked extensively towards bringing sustainability for the working equines (donkeys) and their owners. However, it was realised that to achieve this long-term goal of sustainability a structured approached should be adopted. Soon, "Saint Gadge Baba Ashwakalyan Federation" was formed with an idea to provide a platform to equine owners for sharing their ideas and finding solutions for various equine-related health issues. The federation was established in Nanded district, which has approx. 6000 equines reared by 950 families. This population majorly consist of stallions (male donkeys). Their physical strength is utilized to transport agricultural goods from farms either to the owner's home or directly to the market. However, in this process their health is often compromised.

Over the time, Federation team has undertaken several activities. Some of them being running awareness camps related to equine insurance, providing vaccination, and deworming at a nominal rate of INR 10 (₹ 0.13). These awareness campaigns were undertaken with the support of Local Health Practitioners (LHPs), Animal Husbandry Department officials including Government Veterinary Officers (GVO) and Livestock Extension Officer (LEO). The participation of government veterinary officers ensured regular supply of medicines and deworming facilities. In the past six months, it was observed that cases of tetanus, colic, worm load, and lameness have decreased substantially. With these visible results, equine owners too have understood the importance of timely healthcare and equine insurance.

Since last three months, the federation has successfully organized three equine centric camps, two in Arali (Biloli block) and one camp in Eklara (Degloor block) of Nanded area. This has benefitted around 1500 donkeys in the form of vaccination (Tetanus Toxoid), deworming and medicines and mineral mixtures.

In these three camps, about 400 equines were insured, and 7 equine owners got insurance settlement after the sudden demise of their animals from insurance company, with administrative support of the federation.

The local equine owners Mr. Ashok Ibitdar and Mr. Sainath Ibitdar from Kasrali, Block Biloli, district Nanded said that they are grateful to the Brooke India's PEWU team for organising these camps. These camps have helped them get a sense of security as their equines are insured and have received timely vaccination and deworming.

Saint Gadge Baba Ashwakalyan Federation is continuously taking efforts for the betterment of donkeys and providing timely information about new schemes and benefits granted by the government to equine owners.

Brooke India

Community Engagement at Equine Fairs – Eradication of Surra Amongst Equines of Nath Community in Lucknow

The Nath community in India traces back its origin to the 9th century. For their survival, the community was traditionally involved in various entertainment-based activities using animals, but with introduction of stringent animal welfare laws, most of such activities have been banned by the government. At present, the community buys and sells foals after rearing them for a certain period.

Jagaraj is one such leader of this community, settled on the outskirts of the Lucknow, the capital of the State of Uttar Pradesh. The community has 150 families each rearing 10-12 foals each. Brooke India's (BI) team met Jagaraj in 2011 at Dewa Equine Fair. At this point, the community has been struggling with the prevalence of Surra, a disease of vertebrate animals, including horses and mules caused by the protozoa *Trypanosoma Evansi*, which is transmitted by horseflies. As Jagaraj explains, *"Our community was losing 2-3 foals in a day, it was disheartening to see them die just like that, even when we were investing so much in their care."*

BI team after observing the foals, determined that they were being infected by the horsefly when they were taken for grazing near the water bodies, whether it was in the fair or near their settlements. Also, due to lack of knowledge regarding the Surra disease, the community members were unable to detect an infected foal and often end up buying them from the fair.

The need for awareness among the community members about Surra was clear. However, the reluctance shown by the community to a stranger created deterrence in imparting correct knowledge. Equine Fairs, in this case, became a platform for community engagement, and BI's meeting with Jagaraj paved way for convincing the community to listen. Further, the correct line of treatment against Surra displayed by BI's expert Veterinarians in fairs proved to be successful in winning the trust of community members. Jagaraj played his role as a leader and facilitated the building of various Equine Welfare Groups (EWGs) to initiate a dialogue regarding the issues.

With the intensive conversations held in these EWGs facilitated by Jagaraj and BI's team, using the Information Communication Education (ICE) material, an understanding regarding the disease slowly developed throughout the community. The death rate decreased as the knowledge increased and since 2015, the death rate due to Surra remains at zero. The community meetings were also utilized as a platform to introduce the Animal Health Practitioners (AHPs) working in the district. The hesitance towards allowing strangers have decreased and the community now reaches out for help.

Currently, Jagaraj's community has 120 EWGs working effectively towards the welfare of equines and community members. The highlight of these EWGs is that they were able to buy equines worth INR 7 lakhs using the savings generated by the groups. The community is also now famous for their entertaining dance performances, which was started as an income generating activity and have received recognition from Uttar Pradesh Cultural Department.

"BI's team has helped our community save our equines and our livelihood. The lack of information such as allowing the equines graze near water resources during particular hours of the day was costing us their lives. We will never forget the big change that they have brought into our lives and will always be grateful to the team." – Jagaraj

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Brooke India's Youngest Master Trainer Farrier – Improving the Farriery Services in Gujarat and Maharashtra

Bhishma's journey with Brooke India (BI) started four years ago when he met Dr Sachin Wadpaliwar, BI's then Veterinary Officer and now Senior Veterinary Officer, during one of his field visits to Nanded, Maharashtra. Faulty farriery techniques have been identified as a key issue in BI's operational regions of Gujarat and Maharashtra. Some of the bad practices prevalent under farriery were dumping, imbalanced feet, overcutting of sole and removal of frog, and improper handling of the equine. It was difficult for Dr Wadpaliwar to convince the local farriers to adopt the right techniques as they were adamant about not changing the traditionally inherited ways.

Bhishma was also one amongst the other local farriers who was following the same bad practices. However, rather than showing reluctance towards newer techniques and tools, he understood the issue and showed keenness in learning the right techniques. Expressing the same Bhishma says, *"When I was a child, I always wanted to own a horse and take care of it and as I grew up, I realized that my dream could only come true by starting working for them."*

He first received training for capacity building and technicality of farriery from Dr Sachin. Bhishma with his good grasping ability, learnt all the techniques in a very short span of time and was soon accredited using the Farrier Mentoring Framework (FMF) as an 'A' grade farrier of the region.

A year later, when a vacancy was announced for the post of Master Trainer Farrier (MTF) by the BI, a number of local farriers were called for the interview and demonstration of their skills. Bhishma applied for the post and outperformed every other farrier with his improved and extensively practised skills. Since then, Bhishma has been part of the MTF team which provides training provided to the Farriers.

Bhishma has also been getting trained under the Global Farriery Project, which envisions to make farriery a recognized profession. Under the aegis of this project, International Farrier trainers have visited India and imparted training to MTFs. This training has been conducted thrice in the last one year and has proven to be beneficial in honing the skills of all the MTFs.

On his expression of the training received under the Global Farriery Project, Bhishma shares *"I have improved on all gaps and shortcomings that have been observed by the trainers. Balancing the hoof was the biggest challenge for me, especially amongst the working equines as my previous experience involved working only with the horses used for racing"*.

Bhishma's performance has been closely observed by the people concerned. His enthusiasm towards his work and effective sharing of knowledge and skills with local farriers of the region is unmatched. He is capable of identifying equine owners who hold the ability to be the future farriers and who can provide quality farriery services to their community, thus ensuring sustainability.

After identification of selected community persons, Bhishma further develops their skills through various standardized trainings and builds their capacity with the help of BI's Senior Veterinary Officers. He is currently responsible for ensuring the capacity building of farriery skills in BI's intervention areas in Maharashtra and Gujarat. The majority of the equine population in these regions consist of donkeys, wherein trimming for improving hoof balance is the most important skill required.

Bhishma's performance has not only received appreciation from the international farrier consultants. The equine owning community has also been inspired by his work.

Describing his journey so far, he says *"Now, when I visit the communities, the equine owners are impressed with my skills and ask me about the place I have learnt them from. BI has given me the recognition I always desired for and now I am capable of displaying my love for equines through my work."*

Brooke India

Keeping Equids healthy: Brooke India Provides Veterinary Services during the COVID 19 Lockdown

India announced a countrywide lockdown on March 24, 2020 following the increase in COVID 19 cases in the country. Just before announcing it, the central government released an exhaustive list of essential items and services, which included veterinary. The Government of India wrote letter to State Chief Secretaries¹ that veterinary hospitals and dispensaries in the states, including private veterinary clinics, veterinary pathologies, animal shelters, etc. should function in the normal course². Elaborating on veterinary services, the letter mentioned "*These May include but are not restricted to, emergency services like disease diagnosis and treatment, monitoring of any emergency livestock and poultry diseases, immediate disease reporting, etc.*" Strict instructions were also issued for veterinary staff to ensure that they adhered to personal safety and hygiene. The Animal Welfare Board of India also issued an advisory to the state governments and law enforcement agencies to ensure that animals and birds do not suffer due to hunger during the lockdown.

Brooke India (BI), immediately responded to the critical situation, and reached out to various central, state and local bodies and offered its services during the lockdown. The communication was sent to the State Animal Husbandry Departments (AHD), National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMA), District Magistrates, NITI Aayog³ and the All India Brick and Tile Manufacturing Federation. It conveyed BI's availability of skilled veterinary staff and its reach in ten states.

Special COVID19 passes were initially obtained by staff of BI's 10 PEWU units, namely Ghazipur, Lakhimpur, Pilibhit, Kausambhi, Udham Singh Nagar, Vadodara, Bahraich, Pratapgarh, Ballia & Beed. These passes enabled smooth movement of our field staff, as a result, they were able to handle severe Colic, abortion, eye injury emergency cases. Similarly, BI trained AHPs linked with our Community-Based Organisations were also issued special passes in Agra, Saharanpur, Shamli, Muzaffarnagar, & Kausambhi for handling equine emergencies. Given that these authorities would be extremely busy and the information furnished to them could take time to percolate, BI, through its network of NGO partners in 10 states, started contacting other State AHD officials, local government staff and got obtained special passes to facilitate movement during the lockdown for providing emergency veterinary treatment as per government instructions. BI is now not only treating the emergency cases, its vehicles are also being used to take Government Veterinary Officers (GVOs) to treat suffering equines, as no other mode of transport is available. The vehicle passes have proven to be a boon and are serving as a medium of "distressed call" for the poorest of our beneficiaries. Till date, BI and Partner PEWUs have treated more than 200 emergency cases.

Since BI started visiting the sites and addressing emergency treatments, these visits have given the community a renewed confidence and a number of equine owners showed their gratitude towards BI staff for remembering them during these tough times. BI staff is also taking this opportunity to inspect the area and gather information of delivery of emergency rations⁴ in the vicinity. In case the ration has not reached the area, BI staff reports the same to the district officials, who then facilitate its issue.

¹ State level Chief Secretary is the senior-most position held in the state government administration

² <https://theprint.in/india/veterinary-services-must-go-on-animals-cant-suffer-during-covid-19-modi-govt-tells-states/386538/>

³ National Nodal Agency for coordinating all relief work of national and international NGOs during COVID 19 pandemic.

⁴ State governments' have made provisions to provide basic ration (rice and wheat) to the poor population.

Brooke India

Women Equine Welfare Groups: A New Income Generation Activity during the Lockdown

The countrywide lockdown has spiralled out multiple socio-economic vulnerabilities, especially for the equine owners working at Brick Kilns (BKs). These equine owners belong to some of the most financially distressed communities of the country. The sudden and unprecedented loss of work due to spread of COVID 19 pandemic and subsequent countrywide lockdown has left these owners shattered and vulnerable.

Brooke India's (BI) Partner Equine Welfare Unit (PEWU) teams spread across ten states of India discussed the situation with the Equine Welfare Groups (EWGs) – a form of self-help group. The need was of bringing forth income generating activities (IGA) which are feasible even during the lockdown. In the meantime, it was observed that face masks were high in demand, and the price escalations were making them unaffordable for the masses. On the other hand, there was the government guidelines of mandatory wearing of masks to follow, so the demand for face masks skyrocketed while their supply shrank drastically.

Considering the demand for face masks, Women EWGs (WEWGs) in consultation with BI staff in Ahmednagar, Maharashtra, decided to initiate a pilot project of stitching face masks. The project proved to be successful as the WEWG involved was able to stitch and sell 972 masks to the community members at an affordable rate. Observing the success of this initiative, the BI field staff, across the its operational areas, started promoting the adoption the same IGA amongst the EWG members. Simultaneously, a positive thrust was given by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, wherein it directed the State Rural Livelihoods Mission (SRLMs) to involve Self Help Groups (SHGs) for making facemasks.

Gaining the confidence through BI's staff support and understanding the need of the hour, some of the equine owners utilised their savings for procuring the raw materials and sold face masks for INR 10-15. The training on stitching face masks was provided to them by the BI team through YouTube tutorials and manuals. Further, the team also facilitated meetings of WEWGs with SRLM authorities to seek their support in their respective locations. The SRLM authorities agreed to provide the required grant/raw material for stitching of cloth facemasks. For the WEWGs which received the raw material, it was decided that each women will receive the stitching cost of an average INR 4-5/per piece.

Collectively, over 100 WEWGs across BI partner units have stitched approx 20,000 face masks and made a significant contribution towards availability of affordable facemasks in rural areas. By making the choice of adopting this IGA, the women in these groups, across the country, not only benefitted themselves but also provided a low cost solution in the fight against COVID 19 in the country. This contribution of WEWGs has been communicated to the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), in one of the high level Civil Society Organization meetings in May 2020. NDMA officials were impressed and lauded the efforts of our women EWGs during these dire times.