



## Consequences of Pandemic and Interventions Undertaken in Dharamshala

### COVID-19 turmoil in Himachal's winter capital



Kangra district is facing the second highest number of COVID-19 detected cases i.e., 116 active cases as on 5<sup>th</sup> August in the Himachal Pradesh State. Dharamshala, the winter capital of the state is located in the Kangra district. Mcleodganj situated in Dharamshala, is the seat of His Holiness Dalai Lama, adding onto the city's attraction to tourists from all over the world throughout the year. However, with the circumstances of the COVID crisis, tourism associated businesses in the city has witnessed large scale downfalls in profits, in most cases, spiralling down to nil over the last few months. Although the state government had proposed the idea of '[Quarantine Tourism](#)' (attracting

tourists who wish to spend time in the state in quarantine), various tourism sector stakeholders have been largely opposed to the idea. Hence, there has not been any concrete solution with regard to this concerning issue for many citizens of the city.

### Interventions by the District Administration (DA) and Dharamshala Municipal Corporation

Keeping the tourism related issues aside, the DA has been fighting the crisis at the frontline especially with healthcare interventions starting from screening and testing to quarantining of all returnees from other states to their homes. In the wake of the announcement of the lockdown, the administration faced the challenging situation in trying to cope with the numerous stranded tourists across Dharamshala. The DA instantly jumped on, to make transport arrangements for the foreign tourists to Delhi, for further air travel to their respective countries.

Another intervention followed, was the door to door survey by ASHA workers of the State Health Department, which involved identifying symptomatic persons from the households if any and helping them shift to quarantine facilities. This was done with active coordinated effort of the police and councillors of the Dharamshala Municipal Corporation (DMC). The councillors also helped in identifying DMC properties or areas that could



be used as dedicated quarantine facilities and monitoring existing ones in their wards. Council of the DMC has had online meetings regarding the situation and all possible ward level interventions had been discussed which the councillors across the city are trying best to follow.

On the other hand, the DMC administration has been focussing on the sanitisation of the city with maintenance of garbage collection services. DMC has also proactively allotted special trucks for collection of garbage and medical wastes from COVID dedicated quarantine facilities and hospitals.

### **Co-ordinated responses to help the needy**



Food and mask distribution to the poor and migrant workers are being done in large numbers with co-ordinated efforts of the councillors, NGOs and Self-Help Groups (SHGs). Waste warriors was one among the many NGOs that managed to distribute large quantity of ration in just a few days. Many SHGs have also contributed by making masks on their own. Religious institutions including many of the Monasteries have offered the premises to be used as institutional quarantine centres. This incident has not only brought the Government administration and CSO groups in the city closer, but also brought out the already rooted community spirit within the city much more strongly.

The city will have to now work out how and when to open their doors to tourists in a staggered manner to revive the economy and bring relief to tourism and allied businesses in the region. Also, the capacity building of the DMC needs to be a key priority post COVID-19 crisis, as this young corporation will need to be given responsibilities of handling such crisis entirely within its jurisdiction in the foreseeable future, and such decentralisation will only promote better and rapid localised management.