

# COVID-19: Can corporates be leaders in community support?

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*This blog is part of [a series on tackling COVID-19](#) in developing countries. Visit the OECD [dedicated page](#) to access the OECD's data, analysis and recommendations on the health, economic, financial and societal impacts of COVID-19 worldwide.*

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It is invigorating to see people, communities and organisations across the world answer the clarion call to provide support to those in need. We are seeing waves of good news roll in – from students driving out to show their appreciation to teachers, to families standing outside hospitals to thank front line medical staff.

Corporations have also pitched in to help governments and citizens fight the coronavirus pandemic. Many businesses are using their resources and expertise to shape their response. T-Mobile partnered with Verizon, AT&T, and iHeartMedia to donate nearly 40,000 phone chargers to hospitals in the US for isolated patients to stay connected to loved ones. Subaru has partnered with Feeding America to help provide 50 million meals nationwide to people impacted by COVID-19. The Tata Group pledged Rs 1,500 cr towards relief funds. 3M, Prada, Gucci, Tesla, Ford, Apple, the maker of Absolut Vodka and Jameson Irish Whiskey, owner of Zara, and many other businesses, have converted production lines to manufacture short-supplied personal protective gear and medical supplies. In short, they are stepping far beyond their ordinary workflow.

To respond, adapt and recover from this crisis, I believe companies ought to focus on three basic fronts.

First, organisations need to ensure resilience by bringing back their focus on cash. Cash is the blood of any business. In the current situation, the entire response needs to be focused on cash flows. Implementing a traditional cash-based accounting system could be an option. Pipelines need to be protected and cash needs to be conserved with empathy. Bigger organisations need to treat their partners fairly, share the burden and work alongside them to ensure that neither collapses. We can reach out to stakeholders, enquire about pain points they are currently experiencing, co-create solutions, and offer resources and support to quicken their turnaround. Mahindra First Choice Wheels conducted a townhall with around 400 of its dealers to co-create solutions to help small units survive and thrive in this environment. This will determine whether or not organisations will find their supply chain in tatters once the lockdown is lifted. Businesses must also focus efforts on innovative business models. The current pandemic has thrown global production and supply chains into a major fix. How companies evolve their business models having undergone this crisis is probably the most important question for management and boards to address. From our current experience, it is interesting to note that until now mobility revolved around smart, sustainable and shared solutions. The current crisis has brought in a new dimension of safety. Furthermore, transportation companies have begun to operate on business models to serve as goods carriers.

Going forward, autonomous cars operating on a fixed route may even become a reality in developed markets, as will autonomous tractors across the world.

The second front is employee wellbeing. It is imperative that managers adopt new measures to ensure that employees feel safe, secure and motivated during such unsettling times. Many companies are taking well-defined employee initiatives. Recently, a Mahindra & Mahindra Group company conducted a virtual employee townhall with 375 participants to address each employees' issues and recognise star performers. The Mahindra Group has a 24×7 emergency helpline for employees, a dedicated site for tracking COVID-19 cases in India with latest information from credible sources, and is conducting engagement sessions online, including yoga and kickboxing. Engagement with employees on multiple channels at multiple levels, keeping in mind their new work from home environment, will go a long way in improving their wellbeing.

The third front to focus on is community support – personally, I accord this the highest importance. This is the instance when our well-crafted vision statements should reflect in our actions, or else there will be a vast variance in what we preach and what we do. We need to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our country and administrations and be model citizens.

At Mahindra, domestically, we have contributed to the Prime Minister's relief fund, and set up our own relief funds [to support the most affected](#). Being a manufacturing company, we were able to quickly convert production units to manufacture and distribute critical goods like PPE, face shields, masks, sanitizers, [low cost ventilators](#) and ambu bags (manual resuscitators). Mahindra Holidays has offered 50 resorts across the country as temporary care facilities. Mahindra Logistics has launched free [emergency cab services](#) in 10 cities for doctors, nurses, single mothers, differently abled individuals and senior citizens in need.

Globally, Mahindra's American business units have also [converted manufacturing lines](#) to produce aspiration boxes, face shields and masks. Mahindra food trucks are distributing free meals to Oakland County healthcare workers and first responders.

If there is one thing that COVID-19 has highlighted, it is that organisations and communities need to rise together to support and enable each other to not just survive but also come out on the other side more resilient than before. The virus is contagious, but so are actions of support and courage. If a few organisations take the lead and pave the way towards community support, the momentum can change the outcome of not just their business, or their country of operations, but the world. All corporations need to reflect on how they can respond and provide support in this situation. They need to evaluate the scope of reach, identify best practices, and understand the importance of how their value system inculcated over years has positioned them – or failed them – in reaching out to help.