

Gethu Post

A newsletter from workers on the margins

Volume 4/ 2020
April 15, 2020

GETHU
GROUP



PARTNERS IN CHANGE
Promoting Human Rights in Business



Analysis of Information Collected from Families with Migrant Workers in Odisha During the COVID-19 Lockdown

As on April 13, 2020

1. INTRODUCTION

[Partners in Change](#), in collaboration with [New Hope India](#), Bargarh, Odisha conducted a rapid survey in Bargarh. The research team carried out the assessment keeping two main objectives as the focus:

- Coping mechanisms of the families with migrant workers during the COVID-19 lockdown
- Access to government schemes, such as Public Distribution System (PDS), Ujjwala scheme, loans and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA)

Interviews were conducted with 22 BPL families (of whom 20 were Dalits and two tribals), having at least one family member working as migrant. The families belonged to five villages (Adgaon, Tora, Jamurda, Sarla, Saharapali) and one urban pocket (Bargarh). The interviews were conducted with the respondents (19 of whom were men and three were women) between April 12 and 13, 2020.

The key highlights from the findings are detailed in the sections below:

2. FINDINGS

2.1 Wages

All families stated that their family members working in Tamil Nadu, as on April 13, 2020, had received only the wages for the days worked. Of them, 15 reported that the family member approached their employers/ contractors with the request of payment for the lockdown period but were yet to receive a response while seven others did not know if the family members had approached anyone for the payment for the lockdown period.

Further, all families stated that the family members were staying back without any work as most of the work places were observing lockdown. They expressed fear about how their family members would pay the house rent in the absence of work for the past three weeks. Majority of the respondents mentioned that the sudden lockdown not only left their family members without work but also disrupted their attempt to return home. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has requested employers to pay salaries to all workers even for the lockdown period. This does not seem to be happening anywhere here.

2.2 Indebtedness

Of the 22 families interviewed, none of them had taken a loan during the lockdown period as they had received money from the family member working in Tamil Nadu. But they

expressed fear, in the absence wage for lockdown period and extended lockdown period, it will be difficult for them to meet the family expenses with just the government schemes.

2.3 Right to Food

Of the families interviewed, all of them had been able to get three square meals a day. None of them had gone hungry yet. Two out of the 22 had at least one family member who was ill, which meant that the family required money for medicines. The Government of Odisha proposed to reach out 95 lakh beneficiaries through the Public Distribution System, and provide 5 kgs of rice per person per month for the next four months and also provide Rs 1000 to each ration card holding family.

In Bargargh, all the 22 families we interviewed had PDS cards. Except one, all families availed of PDS and also stated that they got the extra ration of 5kgs of rice as promised. At present, most villagers are surviving with the ration received. None of the villagers stated that they accessed food through other individuals, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Panchayat and / or the local MLA. This means that the state was able to ensure right to food for all its citizens in the area surveyed.

2.4 Covid-19 Relief Entitlements

Jan Dhan Account: All 22 families interviewed have a Jan Dhan account. Of them, all but one woman said, that they received Rs 500. The government has claimed to have completed transfer of first installment of Rs 500 to about 20 crore women Jan Dhan account holders

Old Age or Disabled ex gratia payments: 18 families have at least one person registered under these schemes and all of them have received this month's pension along with 3 months advance allowances as announced by the Odisha Government. Besides this pension, they reported receiving Rs 1000 ex-gratia amount.

Ujjwala Scheme: Of the 15 villagers who were aware about the Ujjwala scheme, 10 shared that they were part of the scheme. Of the seven registered during the lockdown period, 5 had received free cylinders, which shows that lockdown did not affect the provision of essential services. The central government has announced that gas cylinders, free of cost, would be provided to 8 crore poor families for the next three months.

Kisan Samman Nidhi Scheme: Of the 22 interviewed, none of them owned any land, therefore they were not eligible to receive the relief amount.

MNREGA: All 22 villagers have a job card but none of them have got any payment or any job for the last few months. The Centre has stated that MNREGA wages would be raised to benefit five crore families. Every worker will get an additional wage of Rs 20 per day that amounts to Rs 2000 for 100 days of work. The Centre has just released Rs 4431 crores to clear pending wages dues for MNREGA workers. However, none of the villagers seem to have benefitted from this announcement, which indicate that the local governance could not generate any work in the recent past.

3. REFLECTIONS BY ANALYSIS TEAM

The findings shows that the people have been able to access the government schemes without any difficulties because of the well coordinated efforts of administration, police, PRI,

health department, civil society and SHGs. However, in the context of extension of lockdown, all the families interviewed expressed concern about the situation of their family members at the destination place. They requested that the government of Odisha should take appropriate measures to bring back the migrant workers from in Tamil Nadu to address the mental agony faced both by the workers and their families.

Awareness and access to Ujjwala scheme is less popular among one-third of poor families interviewed. Similarly, MNREGA, which is one of the key strategies to address distress migration, could not create works and prevent the distress migration of the landless community.

Status of Receipt of COVID Relief Package by Villagers in Odisha (n=22) as on April 13 2020			
	Received	Listed	Eligible
Women Jan Dhan Account Holders to receive Rs.500 for the month of April, 2020	21	22	22
Old Age/ Dsabled/ Widow exgratia payment (additional exgratia of Rs.1000)	18	18	18
Ujjwala scheme (Free gas cylinder)	5	7	10
Kisan Samman Nidhi (Rs.1000 as advance payment for 2020-21)	0	0	22
MNREGA (Past dues and new job with additional wage)	0	0	22
<i>Eligible: Qualify for the respective scheme; Listed: Registered in the scheme</i>			
<i>Received: Benefitted from the scheme</i>			

4. INTERIM RECOMMENDATIONS

Government need to focus on addressing the economic problems to be faced by the families with migrant worker stuck in destination without work and wage. Further, PM Kisan scheme need to be expanded to cover the landless and migrant workers as they are the hardest hit.

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Gethu is a workers' think tank on the garment supply chain. It is an informal group consisting of workers from across the supply chain from cotton farming to stitching and packaging of garments. The group meets every month to discuss diverse issues faced by workers in this textile supply chain. They have contributed tremendously to building an understanding of the making of school uniform from the lens of science as well as a social dimension. **Partners in Change (PiC)** is currently the group's Secretariat.



Vaanavil Research Collective is a grassroots organisation in Tamil Nadu that promotes rapid community-based studies to inform narratives and policies related to communities at the margin. They are facilitating a project with garment workers, supported by Freedom Fund.