

Facilitating A Welfare State Approach to mitigate Migrant Workers Crisis during Covid-19

Context

The nationwide lockdown announced on 24th March 2020, on account of COVID -19 pandemic brought into light an unprecedented migrant workers' crisis, which saw millions of migrant workers across India losing their jobs, livelihoods and shelter. During the nationwide lockdown and subsequent phased unlock periods, the country witnessed an unprecedented reverse migration of nearly 40 million migrant workers. So far invisible to policymakers and elected representatives, migrant workers and their plight made national headlines every single day, with stories of agony, apathy and lackadaisical administrative attitude.

Jharkhand with nearly 27% tribal population and low human development indicators, has one of the highest outflow of the working age population in the country. Between March-July 2020, nearly 9 lakh migrant workers returned to the state, laying bare deeper policy challenges of social welfare , food security, livelihoods and health management.

Our Involvement

During the first phase of the Covid-19 pandemic, PDAG worked directly with the Chief Minister himself and key bureaucrats including the Chief Secretary, Secretaries and other officials at the CMO, state and national CSOs, journalists and grassroots activists to deliberate, design and facilitate the implementation of following initiatives executed by the State Government to mitigate this unprecedented migration crisis.



Provided strategic coordination and drafted intra departmental framework for 24*7 migrant labour control rooms and COVID-19 State Control Room. Operationalized the Social Media Platforms of Chief Minister's Office and Hon'ble Chief Minister to set-up direct communication lines with citizens, CSOs, journalists and other State Governments



Drafted the Operational Guidelines of multi-level community driven community kitchen initiative to provide cooked meals to vulnerable population groups across all villages, panchayats, blocks, district headquarters and towns. (6595 CM Didi Kitchens operated across 4500 Gram Panchayats and 1300 Daal-Bhaat Centres served over 5 crore food plates)



Designated as Special CM's Team to actively coordinate with Army, Border Roads Organization, other state governments, CSO's and grassroots activists to organize seven airlift missions by Government of Jharkhand to evacuate over 650 workers from remote regions including Leh-Ladakh & Andaman and Nicobar islands



Ideation and formulation of three special employment projects focusing on community horticulture, water conservation and Panchayat level playgrounds under MGNREGA to ensure adequate sources of livelihood for returning migrants. Jharkhand generated over 9 crore person days till December 2020, providing a much need income support to rural populace in the economic transitory period in post COVID-19 phase



Conceptualised and drafted operational guidelines for the Chief Minister's Urban Wage Initiative Scheme for migrant workers, guaranteeing 100 days of paid work in urban and peri-urban areas



Undertook Track-II Negotiations, drafting and design of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Border Roads Organisation (BRO), initiated by Department of Labour and Employment- Government of Jharkhand to facilitate a systemic institutional framework for induction and employment of migrant workers in remote job sites across the country, with necessary compliance norms to safeguard workers' rights, welfare entitlements and social security measures



Undertook rigorous data analysis of Migrant Workers Skill Mapping database of over 5.17 lakh workers enabling Department of Industries – Govt of Jharkhand to initiate job matching initiatives to provide localized employment to skilled and semi-skilled women migrant workers in apparel sector

A Welfare State Approach

The proactiveness demonstrated by the Government of Jharkhand led by the Chief Minister himself ensured safe return and access to necessary welfare services to all returning migrant workers, resulting in minimal deaths to COVID-19 and other socio-economic vulnerabilities. (Jharkhand's mortality rate is 0.90% compared to India's 1.40%)

- > Chief Minister Hemant Soren was recently invited to deliver the keynote speech at the 'Thinc Migration: Decoding India's Internal Migration' conference jointly organised by Omidyar Network India and Indian Express, where he spoke at length of the need to have an empathy driven policy making to resolve the migrant workers' crisis
- > PDAG's sustained policy analysis and evidence informed and data driven advisory support to the CMO has resulted in Chief Minister instructing Labour Department to undertake an initiative to build a 'Responsible Migration Platform' for all workers undertaking outbound migration in Jharkhand

Our Reflections

As we move forward, PDAG would want to build upon this unique experience of a State Government including the Chief Minister during this unprecedented crisis, to further deliberate and work towards contributing rigorous evidence backed knowledge and systemic learnings to inform the policy debates around internal migration in India. We would sum up with the following reflections based on our insider views of policymaking in this period –

- > Complete lack of any credible real-time database on interstate/intrastate migrant workers in India, including a holistic mapping of their entitlements to social security schemes at both source and destination
 - > Excellent policy window to design and assess the efficacy of a 'Universal Workers Smart Card' linked with a State Migrant Workers Platform to map migration patterns and map socio-economic outcomes
 - > The need for inter-state governmental dialogues to universalize access to welfare schemes and social security benefits for migrant workers in destination centres as applicable to them in their source districts /states.
- 