



BAIF DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH FOUNDATION

COVID-19 Relief Work

“Relief, rehabilitation and welfare measures for stranded migrant laborers who were hit by lockdown”

“When the going gets tough, tough gets going”

1. Introduction

Heart-wrenching images of hundreds of thousands of poor migrant labourers and their families fleeing cities for their home villages in a mass migration is a stark reminder of 1947 partition that gave birth to modern India and Pakistan. When Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared an unprecedented three-week “lockdown” of the country starting March 24, many migrant labourers panicked and started to walk hundreds of kilometres to their hometown with paltry belongings in their head. Some of these images of men and women with feet worn bloody by walking hundreds of miles in brutal heat; children clamouring for food; crowds clinging to the roofs of the few overcrowded buses still running; migrants cowering under the batons of police and, in one appalling case, drenched by “disinfectant” sprayed on them as if they were livestock send shivers down in our spine.

Now, the biggest question then arises is who would come forward to help these poor migrants who have been left at the mercy of God to fend for themselves. It is a collective duty of government, corporates and NGOs to collaborate to provide aid to stranded workers, homeless and migrants amid the lockdown imposed to control the spread of coronavirus.

2. A heroic tale of grit, determination and valour shown in the face of unfathomable risk

Not all superheroes wear capes. Sometimes they are just a workforce of hundreds of dedicated staff of one of the pioneer and reputed voluntary organisations known as BAIF Development Research Foundation. These passionate bunch of staffs have taken upon themselves to carry out relief and rehabilitation measures for the welfare of stranded migrant workers and serve as the frontline of the Organization’s rapid response to the crippling crisis. These staff fan out in different areas of the Maharashtra state and are involved in the myriad of relief measures from distribution of ration kits and meal to the deserving poor and the needy to providing shelter to the stranded needy families. Following are the two such incidences where BAIF’s employees risked their life to support desperate and poor migrant workers.

A. Welfare activities for needy families in Jawhar block

1. Stranded Migrant workers who came from Rajasthan

Background: This is one such story where three migrant workers came from Rajasthan to Jawhar block in the state of Maharashtra for the construction-related work and got stuck in the village due to sudden announcement of nationwide lockdown. Mukesh Kumar and Sispal Chowdhary belong to Village Datara and Chandu Jath is from village khachriyavas in the Rajasthan state. These workers came to Jawhar block on 5.1.2020 and were involved in the construction-related work in the village Akare for the Hinduja Foundation phase-2 project. As lockdown has created severe restrictions on water-related interventions, hence

contractor also had to stop all these works. However, the contractor has not made any arrangement of food and shelter for these migrant workers and they had to fend for themselves. Their conditions were deteriorating with each day as not only they don't have any place to stay but also their limited food supplies were depleting quickly. Devoid of food, shelter and money they were looking at their imminent doom.

Relief Measures Taken:

- A. Arranged temporary accommodation for them:** With no roofs on their heads, these migrant workers have to sleep in the open spaces and given the fact that they were outsiders they also feared for their security. After witnessing the macabre situation of these migrant workers, BAIF's officials quickly sprung into action and arranged temporary safe shelter for them away from the prying eyes of people.
- B. Coordinated with Government department:** BAIF's officials also contacted tehsildar of Jawhar block and explained the misery and plight of these desperate migrant workers. On 5.4.2020, government officials arranged and distributed ration package to these migrant workers which comprise of 8 kgs of flour, 5kgs of rice, cooking oil of 3 litres, 2kgs potato, 2kgs onion, 2kgs brinjal and cooking masala, turmeric and chilli powder of one packet each.
- C. Collaborated with Hinduja Foundation:** Given the uncertainty of the lockdown, it was highly unlikely that the government ration would last long. Hence, BAIF further collaborated with the Hinduja Foundation and ensured distribution of additional food ration for them on 6.4.2020 and 14.4.2020. The food ration comprises of 6 kgs of flour, cooking oil of 3 litres, 2 kgs potato, 3 kgs onion, 3 kgs brinjal and 2kgs tomato.



2. Distribution of ration and essential items to needy families

Background: As soon as the news of stranded migrant workers started to come in print and media channels, BAIF swiftly responded to this crisis and collected details of all needy families with the help of local staff and CRPs in the Palghar district. The needy families were selected based on several criteria which include unavailability of ration card, migrant, women-headed families, landless and daily wage workers. Of those needy families, 500 families have been identified from the Hinduja Foundation project areas. Hence, BAIF collaborated with Hinduja Foundation and ensured door to door distribution of essential commodities and food ration to the identified needy families. Each ration kit comprises of 5 kgs of rice, 2kgs of dal, 1 kg sugar, 1 litre of cooking oil, 2kgs of potato, tea leaves, chilli powder, turmeric powder and garam masala of 200 gm each.

Staff Involved: Following staff were in the frontline during the organization's rapid response to the devastating crisis in Jawhar cluster. **Mr Darshan Bhoje, Mr Shubham Kamble, Ms Jagruti Bhoje, Ms Sandip Bambre, Mr. Krishan Choudhari, Mr Bhupesh Tare, Mr Krishna Bhoje and Mr Rajesh Pawar.**



B. Welfare activities for migrants in Ralegaon Taluka

Background: Another such distressing incident happened in Ralegaon taluka of Yavatmal district where 17 construction workers who came from Washim district got trapped due to the abrupt announcement of lockdown. On 22.2.2020, they arrived in Shelichamad village for the NRM related activities of shelichamad watershed project which is funded by NABARD MCX. The group has 11 males, 6 females and 2 children with them. Hence, the situation was much direr as they feared for the wellbeing and safety of their women and children. They were left to fend for themselves and they had no money left to pay their rents or buy food.

Relief Measures Taken:

- A. Arranged temporary accommodation for them:** After hearing their predicament and distressing situation, BAIF responded to this humanitarian disaster. Officials of BAIF immediately sprung into action and arranged their stay at gram panchayat Zila Parishad primary school. Some good-hearted villagers also provided them with pots for storing drinking water.
- B. Distribution of Ration:** BAIF further collaborated with the NABARD and distributed food ration which comprises of Wheat 180 kg, Rice 40 Kg, Sugar- 20 Kg, Tea powder 1 kg, Cooking oil -20 Lit, Tur dal -15 kg, salt 6 packet, chili powder, gram powder 10 kg, Jira- 500 gm, toothpaste -6, hair oil and weekly vegetable like onion, potato, tomato, green chili, brinjal to these distressed migrant workers and hence took care of their food security. Village watershed committee utilized Rs.20,000 from project accounts to purchase food ration.
- C. Coordination with Government Department:** BAIF's officials also coordinated with government departments like health, revenue, ZP and facilitated the distribution of sanitizers and ration support for these migrant workers.
- D. Distribution of Masks:** Even astonishingly, wives of these officials volunteered to make masks for the stranded migrant workers.

Staff Involved: Following staff were in the frontline during the organization's rapid response to the devastating crisis in Ralegaon district. **Mr Sandip Nighut, Mr Moreshwer Yerne and Mr Kanawade.**



3. Precautions and Safety Measures maintained by Staff

While distributing food rations and essential commodities to migrant workers and needy families, BAI's officials diligently followed safety protocol and precautionary measures. They made sure that everyone followed social distancing while receiving ration and essentials. Such was the effectiveness of these relief measures that not a single incidence of coronavirus outbreak reported after distribution of food ration and essential commodities.

4. Conclusion

In the face of adversity, uncertainty and abnormality, these staff stood heroically, stoically and selflessly in the frontline and displayed an act of sheer bravery amid unprecedented crippling crisis. These unsung warriors put everything down the line, even risked their lives to provide rations and essentials to hundreds of needy and desperate migrant workers and their families. Our brave team is soldiering on, battling all hurdles, to ensure food ration and essential commodities reach all of them and making sure that their dignity remains intact in this acute food crisis.

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