REPORT OF A CIVIL SOCIETY HELPLINE FOR RELIEF FOR MIGRANT WORKERS DURING COVID-19 LOCKDOWN IN ANDHRA PRADESH



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ANDHRA PRADESH CIVIL SOCIETY HELPLINE FOR RELIEF TO MIGRANT WORKERS DURING FOUR PHASES OF COVID LOCKDOWN IN EARLY 2020 IN INDIA – A REPORT

CONTENTS

Background 3

Overall Outreach And Support Extended 4

Who Were The Migrants That The Helpline Was Encountering And Supporting? 7

Issues That The Migrants Encountered And The Helpline Sought To Address 7

Andhra Pradesh Government's Policy Approach 10

Multiple Channels Of Funds Support For The Helpline 13

Modus Operandi Of The Relief Work Undertaken By The Helpline 14

Initial Registration Of Cases, And The Phone Counsellors' Team 16

On-Ground Team And Interventions 18

Direct Intervention By Virtual "Phone Payments" Team 21

Direct Intervention For Large Groups 23

Government Interface And Intervention 25

Gas Refills Support 28

Departure Registration 29

Tracking The Walkers Who Went Back Home 31

"Relay Relief Team" 32

VOICES OF THE MIGRANT WORKERS WHO CAME IN TOUCH WITH THE HELPLINE 34

VOICES OF VOLUNTEERS IN THE PHONE PAYMENTS TEAM 43

ANDHRA PRADESH CIVIL SOCIETY HELPLINE FOR RELIEF TO MIGRANT WORKERS DURING FOUR PHASES OF COVID LOCKDOWN IN EARLY 2020 IN INDIA – A REPORT[1]

PART I

Background

Starting from the 25th of March 2020, a civil society effort began in Andhra Pradesh, to deal with the hardships that migrant workers in the state were facing. This was led by Rythu Swarajya Vedika and soon, it expanded into a large collective effort. At the time of writing this report, several hundred individuals and organisations had taken part in this effort. Compared to many other organisations who have also organised helplines and extended relief to stranded migrant workers, the AP effort is quite minuscule. However, the fact that this did not run with paid staff members and almost entirely on the voluntary spirit exhibited by around 200 volunteers located all over India is the most remarkable aspect of this helpline.

It was clear from the beginning why migrant workers were a particularly vulnerable group in a setting like the COVID lockdown other than some vulnerabilities being present in normal times too:

- It is apparent that many migrant workers that too in the unorganised sector would have taken up their current work in the location of migration out of distress conditions back home; even in the location of migration, they have fragile work conditions – unstable work contracts, low wages, nano enterprises that can collapse any time, irregular incomes etc.
- In the location where they have migrated, they don't have entitlements equivalent to people within the state; for instance, access to PDS ration despite an entire edifice built around Aadhaar and biometric verification.
- No family support in the case of many migrants in that they live away from their immediate families and actually experience the pressure of their own hardship but also of the remaining family left behind in the native place.
- Social kinship networks that are available in the native place are often missing in current location.

For these reasons, it was decided that this helpline would focus on support to migrants, both inter-district within Andhra Pradesh (which was mainly of agricultural and construction labourers) and inter-state migrants. In the initial few days, there was an effort to respond to requests emerging from the ground from RSV activists in Visakhapatnam, Guntur and Kurnool districts. However, it was apparent that this would not be adequate and that a more organised channel of outreach to stranded migrants was needed and that is when a helpline was initiated on 1st April 2020. This Helpline was based on the experience that Rythu Swarajya Vedika has, in the form of Kisan Mitra helpline. The phone system was based on an Exotel package worked out at slightly concessional rates with the frontend helpline number being **9985833725**. After nearly 10 days of such work, the helpline was extended to Telangana distress calls also, with the same phone number at the front end and the same volunteers acting as phone counsellors for both states.

[1] *Subhashini of WASSAN and Kavitha Kuruganti of ASHA coordinated the work of this helpline. This report consists of sections written by different people, pertaining to their own work with the main report written by Kavitha Kuruganti. Contributions from different authors (Abhijit Sreepada, Ajay Etikala, Amrutha Varshini, Divya Veluguri, Riya Behl et al, Subhashini, Vineetha Sreepada and volunteers in phone payments team), were just incorporated into the main report without much editing done. Further, in terms of data presented there might be slight inconsistencies because the work was not designed to be a rigorous academic exercise around data. Photos were avoided in this report so that the document does not become very heavy. If any volunteer/organisation's name does not find a place, it is only an inadvertent omission.*

India's Covid-19 lockdown was done in 4 phases so far, at the time of report-writing:

- Phase 1: 25 March 2020 – 14 April 2020 (21 days)
- Phase 2: 15 April 2020 – 3 May 2020 (19 days)
- Phase 3: 4 May 2020 – 17 May 2020 (14 days)
- Phase 4: 18 May 2020 – 31 May 2020 (ongoing at the time of report-writing)

The entire helpline effort from March 25th 2020 to June 2020 (time of reporting) went through different phases with changing focus of interventions. Based on various developments, ensuing work, teams and systems were evolved, and were dependent on what that phase of intervention needed. This can be best captured by how the migrants themselves would frame the issue when they called the helpline workers.

Phase I (for 3-4 days initially): *Is there some way you can arrange some transportation to take us back to our native places?*

Phase II (for about 45 days): *There is no income and nothing to eat. We are starving. Can we get rations or cooked food?*

Phase III (for about 15 days): *We are out of gas for cooking and there is no cash – can you help?*

Phase IV (for about 30 days): *We want to go back home and can you register us or help with information about transportation back?*

Phase V (for about 15 days): *It has been many days since we registered but no information about trains. We are feeling desperate now and have decided to begin walking or finding some way of going home.*

Phase VIa (for about 10 days): *We have been walking or cycling for many days now – is there some help you can provide for transportation costs to pay the lorry driver?*

Phase VIb (for about 7 days): *We have been picked up from the highway and put into a relief centre. Food here is not good, there are no soaps for bathing or washing, we have been imprisoned for many days now, no information on train or buses and we are desperate to get back onto the road. We will now protest by not eating anything/Can you help?*

While it cannot be termed a "phase" in the life of the helpline, there was one more development at the time of this report being written. From Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha, there were several calls from people who went back, asking us to help them there (quarantine facilities are not good, no work and income and therefore, no food) or to even bring them back to Andhra Pradesh! Can you please provide us ration here, they would call up and ask. "Madam, *aap hame waapas andhra pradesh bulao*" was not a refrain heard from states like Jharkhand, however.

The overall approach that the Helpline took was that of collaboration with the state government of Andhra Pradesh even though key volunteers may not have agreed with the sudden and extended lockdown as a strategy of tackling with Covid-19 pandemic or the relief packages announced by the central and state governments, or their imagination of the issues of migrant workers. The approach of the Helpline was one that said that every disaster situation requires all players to join hands for immediate relief work.

OVERALL OUTREACH AND SUPPORT EXTENDED

The helpline in Andhra Pradesh registered 2445 case entries from April 1st till May 11th 2020. The number of persons covered in these calls, as per the numbers reported by the callers was around 31000 persons. There were also some cases that were registered before the helpline was initiated and these numbered 19 in all, covering about 2150 persons. Several of these cases got re-registered in the helpline and this list was not monitored or followed up thereafter, except for the case of spinning mill workers in Ganapavaram in Guntur district.

However, many of these cases were duplicate registrations of the same group of people while some were of people stranded in states outside AP, while there were also cases of locals of AP seeking help from the helpline. One registration was of an NGO person just talking about the estimated magnitude of the problem in his district (Nellore) which was also registered as a case. If all such cases are removed, then the actual picture of the groups that were indeed of migrants in AP which needed our support, emerges.

- ✓ 39 cases were from other states. For 3 cases, we still gave rations support from this helpline.
- ✓ 165 cases were marked as duplicates by the data management system. 18 more cases were later identified as duplicates in the course of interventions being implemented.
- ✓ A further significant number of cases, totalling 409, were Local cases. Some of them registered themselves as cases from Bihar, Telangana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu etc., but were found to be Locals. A few of them would have received rations support.

In effect, 613 cases were not counted for actual interventions (though some help was rendered for some of these callers) and ***the total number of registered cases effectively stands at around 1830 in this helpline***. Out of this, around 40% were all-men migrant groups.

In terms of the number of people that the helpline supported, getting accurate numbers has not been easy since not-very-accurate numbers were mentioned during the initial time of registration. The only channel in which accurate numbers were possible to glean out is the rations purchase channel using phone payments, or direct distribution of rations by helpline volunteers (not on-ground NGOs, however). The phone payments system had a way of verifying congruence between group photographs and number of people. This was done mainly for accounting purposes for monies spent.

- ➢ A broad estimate is that **at least 16,100 persons** were covered by the interventions of the helpline (this is a conservative estimate).
- ➢ Just in the phone payments system, more than 8000 persons were supported uptil May 24th 2020. Several migrant groups got multiple rounds of support for purchase of rations and this was around 12250 person-weeks of rations purchased by this helpline to address food needs of caller groups.
- ➢ About 2850 persons were supported (many of them twice, in two rounds of rations support) through on-ground direct intervention with the help of local NGOs and activists.
- ➢ On-ground NGOs supported food needs of around 3000 persons at least if not more.
- ➢ Apart from this, our interventions with the government, corporations and charities ensured some supply of food rations to around 1500 persons.
- ➢ Additionally, there are at least 750 number of migrants in 180 groups who got registration help from our helpline on the online official portal of Government of Andhra Pradesh called Spandana, who were not registered caller in our helpline. These were on a “NHL” series of case numbers assigned, whereas in the “APH” (AP Helpline), there were 175 groups consisting of more than 1100 persons who were registered on the Spandana portal. We also supported the travel of more than 500 persons to their native places through buses, commercial trains etc.

Of the groups that are considered as the kind of groups for whom this helpline was set up, the following is the broad break up as per origin state of the caller groups:

State	Percentage of the helpline cases
Uttar Pradesh	66%
Bihar	06%
Jharkhand	06%
Odisha	06%
Rajasthan	3.5%
Madhya Pradesh	02%
West Bengal	02%
Remaining, incl. Nepal cases	8.5%

In terms of the districts from where the callers were located when they reached out to the helpline, the following is the picture:

District from where the call was made	Percentage of helpline cases
Anantapur	04.1%
Chittoor	07.0%
East Godavari	05.7%
Guntur	**26.3%**
YSR Kadapa	02.0%
Krishna	**17.9%**
Kurnool	04.5%
Nellore	06.0%
Prakasam	05.5%
Srikakulam	00.7%
Visakhapatnam	**12.4%**
Vizianagaram	00.4%
West Godavari	07.5%

We believe that neither of the above tables (of the origin states or of the district in which the calls originated from) might be truly reflective of the actual situation of migrant workers – whether it is number of migrants present, or proportion of origin states, work profiles etc. in the state of Andhra Pradesh and therefore, would not like to use this information for any such generalisation or speculation (for instance, that most migrants in Andhra Pradesh are from Uttar Pradesh, or that most of them are in Guntur district and so on).

Early on in the work of this helpline, an official Uttar Pradesh helpline coordinator (who is an official of the irrigation department of the state government of Uttar Pradesh) called up the helpline number just to verify whether we were functional and effective or not. Based on his interaction with us, this official not only sent us his database of callers, but apparently called up migrants of Uttar Pradesh stuck in AP and encouraged them to register in this helpline. It appears that this resulted in a lot of UP cases registering themselves, other than social networks getting activated. In fact, given that an official helpline directed Uttar Pradesh people to this civil society helpline, many callers would assume that this is a helpline being run by the UP state government and would become belligerent with their demands and conversations with the volunteers!

WHO WERE THE MIGRANTS THAT THE HELPLINE WAS ENCOUNTERING AND SUPPORTING?

Callers were from various professions and services in the unorganised sector:

- Agricultural workers;
- Construction workers – ones attached to particular companies as well as ones who are not;
- Workers employed by contractors for outsourced services by big companies like Siemens Gamesa, Pepsi, Apollo Tyres, IFF, HPCL, Ramco, Indus Coffeee, aquaculture firms, rice mills, spinning mills, market yards, railway construction and institutions like ISRO. Here,
- Nano-entrepreneurs like pani puri sellers, ice cream sellers, itinerant cloth sellers, tea stall owners, samosa makers etc.
- Skilled workers like painters, plumbers, electricians, carpenters, plaster of paris ceilings etc.;
- "Maggam" workers taking up zari work and special embroidery on blouses etc.;
- Workers engaged in loading and unloading;
- Workers on sand ramps on river banks.

However, a break-up of the registered groups based on their work profile is not possible at this point of time for a variety of reasons including the fact that this information has not always been captured and the captured information may not be accurate for all members of the group other than the caller. Another effort can be thought of subsequently, to capture those details.

For the ones who were working for various well-established as well as other companies, we tried our best to get the company involved to pay them wages and rations, but did not always succeed.

ISSUES THAT THE MIGRANTS ENCOUNTERED AND THE HELPLINE SOUGHT TO ADDRESS

- **Invisibility and lack of recognition of the existence and contribution of migrant workers** – In the places of migration, migrants do not always appear in government enumeration for various schemes and programs, or for their voting franchise and so on. Migrants do not get their names struck off PDS listing in their native places because migration is often for short periods of time, seasonal, not always to the same destination and so on. In any case, in many cases, the entire family does not migrate and it is often the men who migrate especially in some sectors of work. In effect, they are invisible to the local administration and they are not recognised as citizens with entitlements by the administration in the place of migration. One of our first demands to AP government as soon as the helpline work started was to get a ground-upwards enumeration of all migrant workers done by frontline staff of any appropriate line department, or the Grama Sachivalayam volunteer.

- **Food security** – The helpline was conscious of the fact that migrants do not have access to government PDS rations, despite all the hype around Aadhaar-based biometric verification systems that are supposed to make such a possibility real. Further, in terms of credit that they can run up at a local grocer's shop, it was not likely to extend for too long, whereas the government was extending the lockdown continuously. This then was the primary focus of the AP civil society helpline. At the time of registration itself, each caller was asked if they had cooking facilities or not – it was seen that most callers did have their own kitchens and cooking facilities, including agricultural workers who were living outside villages in farms, or people on river banks, railway stations etc. Dry rations provision was therefore the largest intervention organised in the helpline.

In a few cases, local organisations provided cooked meals regularly in addition to government relief centres or company canteens getting activated.

- **Housing** – Housing for many migrant workers is in rented premises. In the case of agricultural and construction workers, as well as factory labourers, it was in their places of work mostly in the form of small tarpaulin covered hutments, or tin sheds. There is nothing much to speak about in terms of housing rights for these migrants. When the lockdown was getting extended in phase after phase, house owners who are also dependent on the rent income, started putting pressure on these workers to pay up rent or be evicted. In some cases, the caller registered himself in the helpline seeking mainly this help, in restraining the house owner from evicting them. The helpline volunteers would use the Government of India's MHA orders and speak with the houseowner to find a reasonable solution. In one case, the phone payments team pooled small sums of money and paid the house owner who was harassing a migrant family.

- **Employment – terms and conditions** – The employment and work conditions were tenuous and the migrants were not in a position to assert their rights and entitlements in several cases this helpline encountered. Wages were not paid (not just during the lockdown period but in some cases from February 2020 onwards), food rations were not provided, departure registrations were not done and in some cases, the employer was not permitting them to board trains. In a couple of extreme cases, we heard about violence being inflicted on the workers by the employer(s). In some cases, after our intervention either directly by us or by the government's labour department getting active, some wages were paid, but after cutting money for rations that the company gave to the workers, or only rations were given (without pending wages paid). It was clear that this was an important category of intervention that the helpline had to carry out, to secure workers' rights. A large group of migrant workers who were nano-entrepreneurs did not even have the entitlements that this group of workers associated directly or indirectly with some companies had. The helpline compiled all the cases that were on its radar where employers had to be made liable for providing workers with their entitlements, and this was then taken to the Labour Commissioner. We know of some cases where the labour commissioner/department picked up the cases and got pending wages paid.

- **Social support** – The social kinship networks that these migrants enjoy in their native places are not present in the migrated location and this becomes apparent in numerous ways for some groups (this is not true for all cases encountered and we came across several cases where shopkeepers, neighbors and even complete strangers were willing to help). On an already weak social kinship base, the general fear of corona virus added one more layer of vulnerability for migrants. One extreme case was when a group of 7 men from UP and Bihar, who were already starving for food for more than a day by then (after being brought back by AP police and dumped at the Tamil Nadu border making their walking effort for many hours futile), were taken to a NGO office in Tada in Nellore, how the neighbours forced them to go back onto the main road due to fear of the virus. They were not allowed to have lunch, and till they reached a relief centre in Guntur district, they had to forego 3 more meals. Language and communication were serious barriers with outsiders not willing to come onto the phone for virtual volunteers to be able to help them. The local grocers were willing to extend credit only to a certain extent that too in some cases.

There is a serious socio-cultural distance and alienation that migrant workers experience in their places of migration – a critical factor is language barrier. In terms of food habits too, it appears that the administration is not sensitive to their food preferences.

- **Police behaviour** – One of the biggest problems encountered by the migrants (which might have been encountered by the locals too) was the rude and even violent behaviour of police, when they went out to buy something, or were trying to address a medical issue, or even to make enquiries about some government procedures for departures etc. Police behaved badly in relief centres too. When they say desperate migrant workers trudging hundreds and thousands of kilometers, inexplicably, their reaction was violence yet again in several cases. There was a lathicharge in Kovvur when workers in sand ramps came onto the streets demanding arrangements by the administration for their return home. This violent behaviour by the police however is not the general rule, and once telugu-speaking volunteers came into the picture, even the relief centre police constables and others were cooperative, which makes us think about how important language becomes, to communicate the real issues. There were also groups in our helpline which received regular rations support from the police department in one or two location. ***What is clear overall is that the police especially on the frontline looked at the covid lockdown situation as a law and order issue rather than a disaster management issue which then would have forced them to assume a sensitive and facilitative role of supporting every individual and saving every life.***

- **Small cash needs and access to micro-credit** – Due to the long period of lockdown, there was no cash with most of the migrant families and getting credit locally was quite difficult for most of them. They had no cash to buy food rations, no cash for gas refills and no cash for even medicines. In several cases, we found that families were relying on agricultural income back home for little cash inflows to reach them. We needed to intervene for gas refills other than buying food rations. The need for cash manifested itself in several groups trying to manipulate our phone payments system by either exaggerating the number of people, or posing as shopkeepers themselves etc.

- **Access to healthcare**: It was seen that migrant workers were not always able to access public healthcare services on par with locals, in a situation where locals themselves have numerous grievances about how the public health systems work. Some of the helpline cases were related to this.

- **Transportation assistance**: One of the points of anxiety for migrant workers, as the second phase of lockdown was ending, was around how they will be able to pay for train and bus fares and whether such transportation facilities will be available at all or not. In the end, it so happened that the government arranged for free transportation for them both trains and buses. In a few cases however, given the delays in arranging trains and the sheer magnitude of logistics involved, members of this helpline like People Combine Foundation arranged for buses for taking migrant workers and their families back to Odisha, to north coastal Andhra, to Madhya Pradesh, to Maharashtra and so on.

- **Administration's non-adherence to rules, or Malpractices or Uninformed practices**: There were a couple of instances where rules were being broken by local officials collecting money for train fares from migrant workers and not even returning the change back, in West Godavari district. There was another unverified instance reported from Kurnool that some police harassed two West Bengal migrant workers and got one thousand rupees out of them. There would be instances

when complaints of bad quality food in relief centres would come to the helpline. Or that only one meal was being provided each day. There were at least two trains from where there were complaints about lack of food and water in a gruelling 40-hour trip through the summer heat. These were dealt with case by case and in some cases, explicit orders were re-issued for clarity.

- **Stunning lack of debate on and enforcement of Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act 1979:** Those in Indian civil society who have engaged with migrant workers' issues are familiar with this Act that has been enacted by the Indian Parliament to protect the rights of workers whose services are requisitioned outside their native states in India. The unconscionable state of work conditions and terms for tens of thousands of brick kiln workers from the state of Odisha in other states like Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu is well documented, for instance and large networks of civil society organisations had sought to make use of this particular piece of legislation to get some basic entitlements for migrant workers/families. This Act has entitlements around wages, allowances, housing, medical care etc., for migrant workers, especially on-site workers. Responsibilities of contractors and principal employers have been specified under this Act. Similarly, the role of state governments and the institutional framework that is required to be deployed, and the procedures to be adopted to protect the interests of workers have been spelt out in this statute. Starting from the failure to register migrant workers, this Act has witnessed a massive failure in its implementation. It appears that if this statute was being implemented to any extent at all, governments would not have groped to this extent in the current crisis – the massive failure to stem the crisis of migrants is in a way a reflection of the failure of this legislation to come to the aid of such workers.

On another front, one striking aspect of the migrant communities in general is the use of mobile phones by everyone. Most had smart phones and WhatsApp, and several also had phone payment apps. In fact, people were maintaining two mobiles in several cases – one for talking, and another for WhatsApp! All in all, it was the mobile phone reach with many groups that helped this helpline take up its activities to a significant extent. There would be times when the volunteers would quickly teach a caller how to send a WhatsApp location and based on that, proceed with the intervention.

Agriculture comes to the rescue of workers in other sectors of our economy!

From many migrant workers, the helpline volunteers got to hear that they are managing the household's food needs by small amounts of money that the farming family back home was able to send after the sale of rabi crops like wheat.

Desperate workers also saw great hope in going back and living off farming, in an uncertain world created by the covid-19 pandemic. "If we go home, we are at least assured of eating all meals and stomachful at that; our farms will give us food to eat. It is better to be there than starve here" was a refrain from several callers. Incidentally, one of the first groups supported by the helpline was through a group of farmers in Guntur district (Capital Region Farmers' Federation) who donated food grains from their own harvest to a group of construction workers from Jharkhand. And calls to some migrants who went back home indicate that they are preparing themselves for the farming season ahead…..

ANDHRA PRADESH GOVERNMENT'S POLICY APPROACH

The helpline maintained a constant contact with top bureaucrats in charge of migrants and relief work in the state of Andhra Pradesh. In fact, we initiated a phone line-based helpline only after we confirmed and were confident of government support for any cases that would find resolution only with such cooperation.

Initially, it was not clear if inter-district migrants will be considered as 'migrants' in the government interventions being planned. However, as the lockdown extended, the government started making references to inter-district migrants and inter-state migrants, bringing intra-state migrants into the ambit of interventions.

AP government had a designated nodal officer, a senior bureaucrat at the state level, as the person in charge of migrant workers' relief by the 27th of March 2020, as per our information. Many senior bureaucrats were asked to move to specified districts against their names, and be present there as Special Officers, as part of the government response.

The government also issued a ***GO on 29th March 2020***, referring to the "biological disaster COVID-19" and specifying some relief measures using SDRF norms (State Disaster Relief Fund) for temporary accommodation, food, shelter, clothing and medicalcare to homeless people, including migrant labourers stranded due to lockdown measures and shelters in relief camps etc. This was GO. MS No.4 from the Revenue Department (DM I) on 29/03/2020. Through these orders, District Collectors were ordered to make arrangements for commencement of relief measures. They were asked to take the help of Municipal/Panchayat Raj/Women Development and Child Welfare/Senior Citizens/Labour and Home Departments for identification of homeless people including migrant labourers.

On the 4th of April 2020, Government of Andhra Pradesh issued another ***GO (GO RT No. 230 dated 04.04.2020)*** that was also about arrangements for shelter and food requirements of migrant labour from other states who are stranded in AP. It refers to GO MS No.224, dated 31st March 2020 about Special Shelter Centres to be established and that Social Welfare Department functionaries should take up this exclusive activity. It also asks for employers of labourers to take care of food requirements of the labourers. There is reference made to inter-district migrants within the state of AP, and entitlement to PDS rations arranged through portability in e-PDS. For those not having ration cards, one-time measure of giving ration as per scale given to BPL families was instituted, upon a specified verification process to be adopted. Counsellors from NGOs are to be identified not only to calm down those who are in a state of panic, but also to supervise the welfare activities of migrants as per Supreme Court Orders in WP Civil 468/2020, this Order states. "No person belonging to other state stranded in AP should complain about non-availability of food and other basic amenities", states the GO. The GO, signed off by the Chief Secretary to the Government, further asks for details of relief counters to be updated daily in the proforma without fail.

GO RT No.258, issued on 1st May 2020 was about guidelines on intra-state and inter-state movement of migrants. Registration through toll free phone line and government's Spandana portal were announced herein. Tahsildar was made the main point for registration and further consolidation at district and state levels from there on.

On the ***6th of May 2020, there was GO RT No.266*** issued, which was about inter-state movement of migrant workers, with references to Government of India's orders on 29th April 2020 and 3rd May 2020. This clarified that facilitation of inter-state movement of migrant workers will only for those who are "stranded". The government announced that the cost of railway ticket will be borne by the state government as a goodwill gesture, in this GO. Provision of food will also be taken care of, as per this GO. If lesser number of workers are present in a relief centre, where requisitioning of trains is not viable, permissions may be accorded for bus and other vehicles to move the migrants, but with the cost to be borne by the migrant workers. No persons who have not been authorised by the district administration can board the trains. A State Control Room/District Control Room is authorised to give No Objection Certificate for the movement of stranded persons.

All in all, ***the Government's approach never included migrants who might be staying at their own places in terms of food rations or cash distribution, unlike in other states like Telangana.***

Feeding cooked meals was the main approach and this did not always work for the hungry migrants for numerous reasons – including the fact that such relief centres were somewhat inaccessible and that the cuisine was not to their liking.

However, when it came to setting up relief centres both in the initial phase of the lockdown as well as in the phase when desperate migrants started walking home all over the country, AP government was prompt in its interventions. The government also quickly compiled the information on relief centres and passed it along to our helpline. Despite a few reminders, it appears that such information was not put in the public domain however.

The AP government's approach towards sending back migrants to their native places was systematic and sensitive in terms of its Orders on paper, but this approach did not visualise the entire reality of migrants, including the ones who had a roof on their head, or the ones who were desperate to reach home in the fastest mode possible.

Grama Sachivalayam/Village Secretariats enrolled migrants in addition to migrants going to MRO offices and registering themselves in most cases. The online registration portal had many technical problems but generally functioned well enough for registrations to take place of tens of thousands of people. Vehicles would be sent to people's villages and localities to pick them up in time for train departures.

However, not enough trains seem to have been arranged, as is the case all over the country. The helpline has had desperate calls from people who had registered themselves with the government but were not receiving calls about an actual train departure.

Relief Centres had several issues with the way they were being run – to begin with, not enough number of centres were started by the government; two, there would be no proactive information shared with migrants about where these were; three, entry into the relief centres was not easy and they were mainly meant for groups that the police were picking up on the highway (the police would do this for only some cases and not for all); four, food was not culturally appropriate; five, to facilitate the planning of trains and buses by the government, relief centres would be places which did not allow a flux in the inflow and outflow of people and therefore, were kept locked up – these were like prisons for desperate migrants who had set out to reach home as soon as possible; six, language was a serious barrier and no proactive communication was attempted with the migrants; seven, transportation arrangements were grossly inadequate.

Andhra Pradesh, being an in-transit state for all those workers from Kerala, Karnataka, Telangana, parts of Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu towards eastern India, had to bear the additional burden of those state governments failing to take care of their migrant workers.

Most importantly, AP government like all other governments failed in communicating effectively to the migrant workers that it cares about them and failed to let them know what measures it has put in place for them. It also did not pro-actively engage with civil society groups in resolving emerging issues, though cooperation was present when civil society reached out to bureaucrats. In some districts, NGOs were drawn into relief work.

Food rations and cash distribution to migrant workers would have helped reduce the panic and anxiety of migrants within the state, and greater number of relief centres and better coordination with Odisha/Chattisgarh etc., would have helped in easier transportation of at least some of the migrant

groups. Most importantly, more trains and buses being organised would have helped faster repatriation of those who were desperate to return home.

MULTIPLE CHANNELS OF FUNDS SUPPORT FOR THE HELPLINE

This helpline used multiple sources of financial resources for its work, as described below:

- WASSAN, which was supported by Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiatives (APPI): 53.5 lakh rupees
- Accion Fraterna, supported by Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiatives (APPI): 6.2 lakh rupees
- Gramya Resource Centre for Women, funded by individual funders who paid through a Give India Fundraiser appeal and by people at FES donating one lakh rupees: 4.6 lakh rupees
- Chetna Organic: 1 lakh rupees

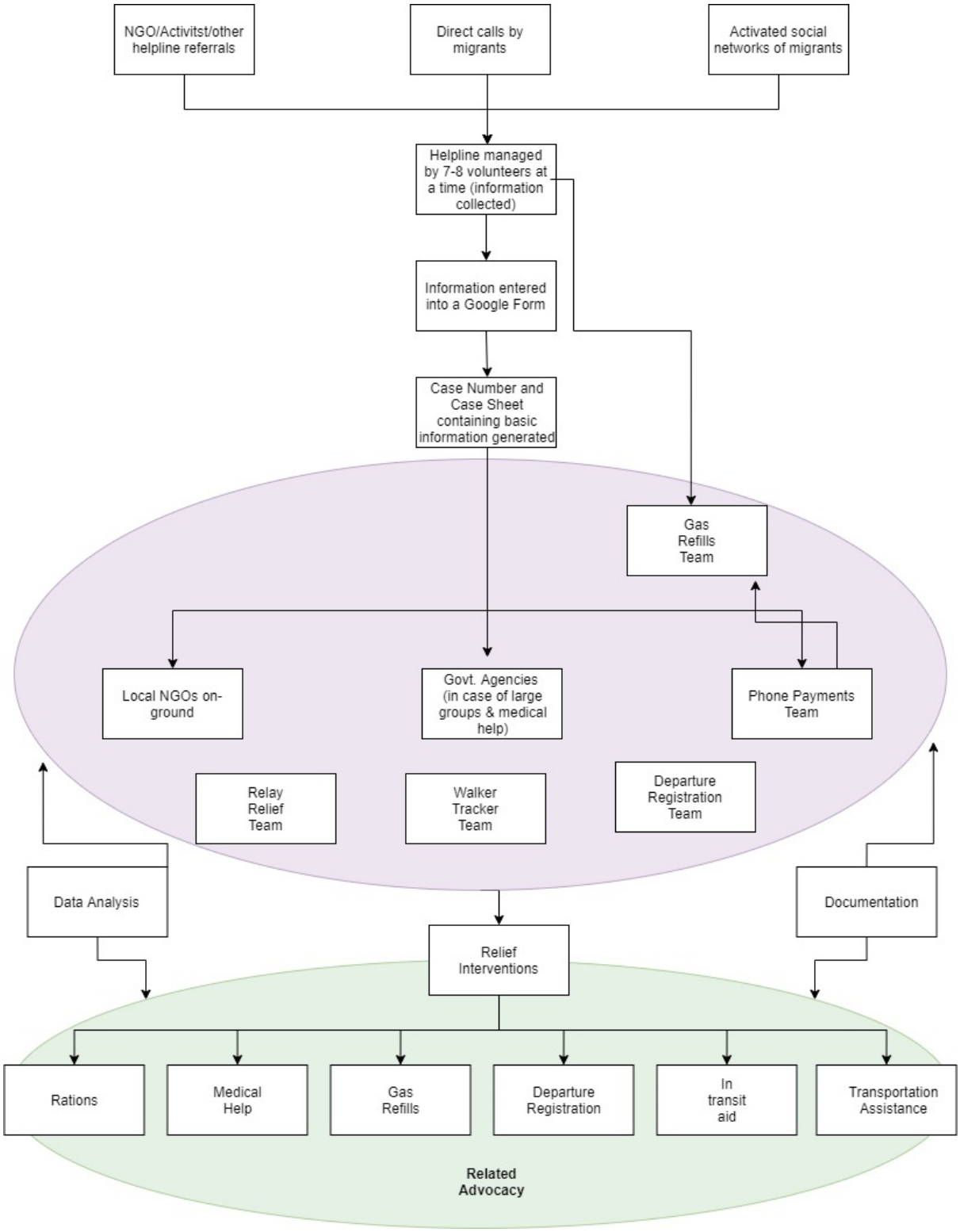
The Helpline also fell back on the support of People Combine Foundation (mainly for transportation support) upto 12 lakh rupees and Mitra Technology Foundation for train tickets booking for dispersed small groups of migrant workers who could not get into Shramik Special trains.

In all, at the time of reporting, more than 61 lakh rupees have been spent, without counting the expenditure of People Combine Foundation and Mitra Technology Foundation.

While this is the cost of direct interventions by the core team of the helpline, on-ground volunteers and NGOs including several volunteers of the phone “call centre”, their families and acquaintances also pitched in. It is estimated that together, they would have spent around 6 to 8 lakh rupees, if not more. Leading amongst them are Seetha Murthy (Principal of Silver Oaks International School) and her network in districts like Visakhapatnam and East Godavari, Dalit Bahujan Resource Centre in Krishna and Guntur districts, Krishna Kumari and many chartered accountants associated with her in places like Rajahmundry, Kalam Trust in Tirupati area of Chittoor district, Seva in West Godavari, Chakri and Samalochana Trust in Visakhapatnam, Surendra and friends in Visakhapatnam, No Food Waste in Chittoor, Capital Region Farmers’ Federation of Seshagiri Rao and associated farmers in Guntur etc. Further, rations were provided by some corporations and local sponsors in some cases.

PART II

MODUS OPERANDI OF THE RELIEF WORK UNDERTAKEN BY THE HELPLINE



There were "cases" (groups and instances) of distress brought to our attention in 3 different ways:

- Activists and NGOs within and outside Andhra Pradesh, using WhatsApp and phone calls;

- Through the helpline phone number;
- Through volunteers in various teams getting direct phone calls requesting help once the migrants' social networks got activated.

Till April 1st, a manually-managed spreadsheet was used to enter and track groups of migrants reaching out to us. However, from the 1st of April, a google form was put into place through which a spreadsheet got generated, with case numbers assigned to each case with a small code written onto the form. It was this "main helpline spreadsheet" which was the main tool to register, support and track all cases and bring them to a closure. Towards the end, however, starting from May 14th 2020 or so, responses to various cases became ad-hoc again since we stopped "registering" new cases in the helpline.

While our attention was drawn to newer groups needing support through the above 3 methods, each "case" was addressed in the following manner:

- Any group in distress would receive a call from, or would call up our helpline number, and a case registered by our team of phone counsellors/volunteers by filling out a google form that collected basic details about each group in distress. All the groups' information was getting automatically populated in a backend spreadsheet through this manner.
- A "case sheet" would be prepared for every case, in an 'actionable' format keeping in mind where the message would be sent for action (NGO groups, government nodal officers, phone payments team for rations purchases etc. etc.). Case sheets were prepared real time by a dedicated team of volunteers whose only job was to do this and they put in nearly 12-15 hours of work on several days. This group of volunteers included Sravan Reddy, Nikita Naidu, Nishitha and Srusti. The case sheet had details of the migrant group, the main issue to be addressed (rations, or medical help or transportation registration etc.) and also the number of a helpline coordinator for any further queries.
- The case sheet would be sent to 5 WhatsApp groups of NGO representatives, activists and individuals who could potentially intervene. These 5 WhatsApp groups were created early on, based on district groupings. (i) North Andhra group consisting of persons drawn from Srikakulam, Vizianagaram and Visakhapatnam. (ii) The two Godavari districts were grouped into one WhatsApp group. (iii) Krishna, Guntur and Prakasam were made into a third group. (iv) 3 Rayalaseema districts of Kadapa, Chittoor and Nellore were clubbed into a fourth group. (v) Anantapur and Kurnool were kept as one group. These were termed as ***"on-ground" groups***. As the helpline work unfolded, more and more groups/individuals got added to these groups. More about the on-ground intervention channel is available in another part of this report.
- Case sheets which represented large groups and issues beyond ration support would be sent for government intervention. Government intervention was also sought at two levels, depending on each case's requirements – from the district nodal officer as well as the state level officials with whom we established a contact for the purpose of this helpline. Where required, interactions with Mandal Revenue Officials, local police as well as Village Revenue Officer would also be made. The ***government interface and intervention team*** was kept small, with just two members – Divya Veluguri and Kavitha Kuruganti. At a later stage in the helpline's work, Ajay Etikala started interacting with two state level bureaucrats about the issue of online registration of migrants who wanted to return home to native places.
- A third channel of intervention was in the virtual volunteers team which made phone payments for rations purchases. This was generally referred to as the "paytm team" though

the paytm app was not actually the main phone payment app used! A separate section discusses about how this channel of intervention operated. ***(phone payments team)***

For the longest period in the helpline work, these were the teams at work and a later part of this report explains how each intervention channel worked.

A fourth channel of intervention consisted of ***cooking gas refills*** which in some cases also included support for kerosene and even diesel purchase. This channel was initiated on the 20th of April.

In the last three weeks, starting from 2nd May 2020, a ***Departure Registration channel of intervention*** was created. This team had a MIS team which received requests, both through the helpline phone number of 9985833725 and outside of it, and gave their own case numbers and addressed the issue of online registration of migrants keen on going back home.

A separate, small team started tracking migrants who were taking the difficult route home (by walk, or cycle or hitch-hiking) on the 13th of May 2020. This consisted of Vineetha Sreepada and Kavitha Srinivasan, along with Srinivas Alavilli who was taking up cash transfers through a group of friends and well-wishers as and when the need arose ***(Walkers Trackers group)***.

From 18th May 2020, a more coordinated effort at a "relay" effort of supporting "unpermitted, difficult migrant travel" began with a team worked out for the entire highway from Nellore to Odisha border and help planned in a 'relay' manner, and this team worked in coordination with Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Odisha networks. This included several on-ground people and also Asha Kranthi of People Combine Foundation, in addition to Odisha and West Bengal activists (***Relay Relief Team***).

Towards the end, there was also a team created to book tickets on limited commercial special trains that the Indian railways began running from June 1st 2020. (***IRCTC train booking team***).

Apart from the above mechanisms, there was a WhatsApp group for the entire state which was called AP Covid Action Group where a few more people were part of the group – these new people did not take up interventions in AP but would keep bringing up information on groups that needed our support. This group was also used for general discussions related to government policies and interventions.

There was also a small team of 6 volunteers led by a Mumbai based young volunteer, that was carefully sorting and storing visual evidence of support being lent by on-ground organisations being posted into various WhatsApp groups and individuals (more than 10 such groups) and uploading them systematically for our records. This team consisted of Riya Behl, Pourvaja Ganesh, Divyansh Sachan, Devashree Somani, Manisha Koppala and Abhinaya Murthy ***(Documentation team)***.

Data analysis was done by a wife and husband team in Bangalore. Their names are Arundhati Muthu and Shishir ***(Data analysis team).***

INITIAL REGISTRATION OF CASES, AND THE PHONE COUNSELLORS' TEAM

The first interface that most migrant groups had with our helpline is with the phone counsellors' team or the "phone volunteers' team". After the helpline phone number was flashed in social media for wide dissemination, calls started to come in and from the front-end exotel landline number, calls would be sent randomly by the system to seven volunteers' personal phones. These volunteers would then receive the call, speak to the caller, try and understand the issues being raised, and then fill out a google form. This initial interaction would form the basis for building a relationship with the migrant group, so that they draw hope and relief from the helpline.

When a caller appears to be calling up for the first time, the volunteer is supposed to “register” the group by filling the google form. The exotel system was set up to have a “sticky agent” option so that when a repeat call from the same caller came in a second time, the first option was to send the call to the same volunteer who dealt with the group the first time around. However, if that volunteer’s phone was busy, the call would get diverted to another free volunteer’s number. Volunteers were expected to first check on the google spreadsheet of existing cases, by searching on the phone number of the caller, name and location on whether the group has already been registered. If they cannot locate the same, they were encouraged to assume that this is a ‘new case’ and then register the same through the google form.

The spreadsheet was programmed to detect duplicate registrations if the caller number was the same. It was only much later in the helpline’s life that the google sheet was further programmed to catch a duplicate registration when even the alternate number within a caller group was re-appearing as another new ‘case’. It was only during the course of on-ground distribution of rations or phone payments channel of purchase of rations that the volunteers would sometimes discover that the same group is being addressed as different cases, and that is when it would be marked as a ‘duplicate’ in our sheet.

The volunteers were oriented to raise issues about any group that was registered, only by referring to it with a case number. The case number thus became the common reference point throughout the helpline whenever issues of a group had to be raised and addressed, whatever channel of intervention there was.

This group of phone volunteers were grouped into two WhatsApp groups – one which was meant for phone volunteers to raise issues being reported by callers and another, which was to announce new developments and systems for the helpline’s operations by the core team of the helpline.

The case sheet preparer was also encouraged to summarise all repeat calls at regular intervals so that the concerned team could take a decision about each such call.

There were several volunteers in this team who worked throughout the two months, and many of them put in very long hours of work. On some days, the call volume would be so high that the number of missed calls would run into dozens of calls. A team leader in this team would create rotas or schedules for those volunteers who could work for only short stints of 4 hours each. The volunteers had the option of keeping their exotel connection on or off depending on when they were able to pitch in.

Volunteers in this group were the most stressed-out and anxious as could be seen from the messages that they would post in the WhatsApp group. This was understandable since this is a team which was only receiving the distress messages of the callers, but could not see the follow up action by other different teams. There was no system built unfortunately, for such updates to be provided to this team by one person taking on the role.

Several volunteers actually took to picking up some cases and announcing that they will intervene since they have their family or friends who are willing to help a particular migrant group in the location where the call has come from.

For a certain phase of the helpline’s work, the quality of work of volunteers taking the calls was poor and errors started creeping in into the recording of details of each caller group. However, when a school’s principal and her team of teachers (Seetha Murthy and colleagues) entered as a team into the phone volunteers’ group, things improved once again.

Some constraints faced:

- Exotel system and the google form spreadsheet were not linked up to ensure that the callers' phone number was recorded correctly. Human error crept in multiple times on this front.
- The google form was designed in a hurry initially and too many fields were left open-ended. This brought in wide variation in data recording and did not facilitate data analysis or sharing with government functionaries.
- Several volunteers got inducted without proper orientation and work intensity did not allow for such orientation to be organised by the key functionaries of the helpline.
- The backend spreadsheet was not programmed early on to detect and highlight some aspects that were outside the purview of the helpline – like cases from other states, or callers being locals of AP etc. This was done only towards the fag end of the helpline's work.
- The same number, and the same group of phone volunteers had to double up for both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana migrants and they had to work intensely as per the different information requirements of two distinctly different teams downstream. This was quite challenging and may be there could have been two distinct helplines set up rather than one.

Team members of the phone volunteers' team: There were 71 volunteers who worked in this team in all, while some of these volunteers contributed more time throughout the life of the helpline - Abhijit Biswas, Abhilash, Anjali K, Apoorva Nalam, Avanthi G, Chitra Maudgil, Dasari Swarnalatha, Dharmesh Patel, Dilip Allamsetty, Divya Billa, GVRS Kumar, Gayatri, Jaya Lakshmi Gummadi, Karunashree Narla, Kavitha Srinivasan, Krishna Koundinya, Krupa, Lakshmi Bhavani, Lakshmi Krupa, Laxmi Shobha, Madhuri Challagolla, Mahadev, Mahesh, Manga, Manisha Madapathi, Manju Bhargavi, Manvi Reddy Karuka, Nagamani, Namrata, Nandita Tanneru, Neelima, Neeradi Dinesh, Nishitha, Nivedita, Padmavathi, Poornima Pallepogu, Prashant Kiran Sistla, Prasuna Reddy, Preetham R, Rachna Sharma, Ragni, Rajeev, Rishi Tej, Rupa G, S Bhanu Prakash, Sakthi Raju, Sangeeta Pratti, Satyanarayana, Seema, Seetha Murthy, Shankar Raju, Shanker Singh, Shashi M, Shruti Tharayil, Sireesha G, Sowmya, Sowjanya, Sreelatha, Sudeep Talapaneni, Sunchit George, Sundara Rao P, Surendra, Syed Nabi, Sylvia F Rao, Trupti, Uma Shankari, Usha Kankipati, Varun Vaishnav, Vijaya Lakshmi, Vijaya T, Vineetha Sreepada.

ON-GROUND TEAM AND INTERVENTIONS

The ground team comprised of NGOs and individuals who came forward to support the stranded migrant workers in the districts of Andhra Pradesh. The Ground team members were formed into five WhatsApp groups, where in the cases received by the helpine were assigned to the NGOs/individuals in the groups. It is to be noted that the ground team members were those associated with Rythu Swarajya Vedika earlier, but also new groups and individuals who came forward to support the cause. The on-ground teams not only provided the migrants with dry rations (and in some rarer cases with cooked meals) but also linked the groups to the government and local leaders for further support. They took up assessment of the actual situation of workers and convergence with the officials for their relief. There are several NGOs and Individuals who supported the migrant workers with their own resources. They also adopted a variable norm for what their rations kit consisted of (items and quantities), while one organisation adopted a cash transfer system. All those organisations which helped with dry rations with the resources of the helpline were encouraged to adopted a uniform norm for a 3-members' kit for 5-7 days.

The on-ground team played an active role in servicing the labourers with full commitment and attended to all the cases which were allotted to them and accepted by them. The cases which were not reachable by the NGOs and individuals were processed through RSV direct Intervention channel

(phone payments or large groups serviced through a local activist but funded by the helpline). In this relief work, friends, community/neighbors, shopkeepers, political leaders etc. also supported the ground team in rendering the service. The stranded migrant workers were provided with rounds of rations in 40% of cases. Large group interventions were also taken up by both NGOs and Individuals.

The NGOs who got involved in COVID relief wok are – Dalit Bahujan Resource Centre (DBRC) in Prakasam, Krishna and Guntur districts, REDS, RDT and Accion Fraterna in Anantapur district, No Food Waste Management in Chittoor, WASSAN through its partners RHGBMSS & B2C Foundation, Kalam Trust in Chittoor, V3Foundation in Kurnool & Anantapur districts, Gramodaya and SEVA in West Godavari, Timbaktu Collective in Anantapur, RRDS in Nellore, CHAND, ARTIC, ARTS and BREDS in Srikakulam, HRF in Krishna, Capital Region Farmers' Federation (CRFF) in Guntur, Samalochana in Vishakapatnam, Samata in North Coastal Andhra and WINGS in Chittoor. Major part of the support and relief activities were undertaken by Dalit Bahujan Resource Centre also given the fact that most calls to the helpline were from Guntur and Krishna district. For transportation support, People Combine Foundation stepped forward in the later stages of the work.

There were also individuals who took up the relief works and voluntarily provided dry ration with their own resources. This set of people included Krishna Kumari Vissa & Team of Chartered Accountants in Rajahmundry, Seetha Murthy and Friends in Visakhapatnam and East Godavari Districts, J. Babuji Rao & Team in West Godavari, Surendra & Friends in Visakapatnam, Vikas, a Jharkhandi journalist in Visakhapatnam, Gourav Meka in East Godavari, Dileep Shaik and Bhupesh in Nellore, and Chandru and friends in Kakinada. Seema, Sravan, Bhavani Raparla were volunteers of the phone line who got involved in helping out cases directly. Several direct intervention cases were handled through RSV Volunteers - Narasimha Sikha in Guntur, Balu Gadi in Vishakapatnam, Kadimpalli Mohan and Sekhar Pothula in Kurnool, and Vamsi Krishna in Krishna. The overall coordination of this aspect of the helpline's work was done by Subhashini of WASSAN.

HELPLINE CASES COVERED BY NGOs & INDIVIDUALS[2]

Supporter	Total cases	Total Families	Total Members	Total Woman	Total Children	Total Men
NGO	241	417	1668	207	251	1243
Individuals	135	293	1173	142	146	909
Total Covered	376	710	2841	349	347	2152

These are the cases which were directly dealt by the ground team apart from the large cases assigned to them. After receiving the cases from the Helpline, the team would call the group one day before and find out the exact location and number of members in the group etc. Apart from providing dry ration, Milk to babies, children and cooked food was also provided. The groups which needed medical assistance were linked to the Government for relief. Each NGO /Individual has their own set of items in the Kits but they have taken care that the essential items were all included. Some NGOs like DBRC also gave out rations for some groups from a fixed location (NGO office).

Physical distribution of dry ration:

The required dry rations are procured and placed at one place/Home/Shop/open area etc. The kit is prepared with the support of the staff, Local people, Friends etc. The group waiting for the ration is called one day before and informed about the date of getting the ration. The location of the groups is properly ascertained through maps/Over Phone etc and provided with kits at their home or sometimes, at the NGO office, or a designated point of collection on the main road. The member who

[2] These numbers may not be accurate and are based on reported numbers at the time of initial registration in helpline

received the call would collect the Ration and photo is taken. A physical assessment of the group was also done by the ground team before issue of the ration. There are some bottlenecks in this process. Groups living in red zone areas were unable to go outside and shopkeepers did not always have Google/phone Pay facility. These kinds of groups were addressed through linking up with the Government relief centres or any relative or friends living in that area to support them. For giving rations to bigger groups of migrants, the local administration had to be alerted first, and distribution done in their presence.

Some of the challenges faced in physical distribution

- The Ground team had to travel 40-50 Kms to reach the group in some cases.
- Language barrier to some Ground teams and also the groups in some cases.
- Transportation problem.
- Groups not available when visited and had to visit again.
- Proper location is not shared, Location received in Helpline is different from the location shared by few groups.
- Lack of space for storing the purchased ration.
- Some groups had to walk to collect ration.
- Groups were stopped by the police after they collected the ration.
- Police 'harassment' by the ground team while travelling for distribution.
- Lack of human resources in packing the kits.
- Time constraint for purchase of material and delivery on time.
- Groups living in Red Zone areas were the worst affected, as they cannot go to any shop or receive the ration on time. The teams would with much difficulty reach a closeby location, and would ask the group to collect the rations.

Some of the Observations of the Ground Team:

- Some groups were really in need of ration.
- There were groups, having bikes, settled in AP from 7-10 years who would also come to collect ration.
- Contractors were taking care of the groups but they also sought to access rations provided by our Helpine in a few cases.
- Local Contractors came to collect ration - instead of they providing the groups they took ration from ground team. The groups who called the Helpine were afraid that the Contractor will harass them if he come to know that the groups approached Helpline. In some cases, Contractor forced groups to tell that ration is provided to them.
- Groups who availed dry ration from the government were declined ration.
- Groups who received ration from Ground team would in some cases call up the helpline and pretend that they have not received ration.
- Few cases declined to collect cooked food as they wanted dry ration only.
- Groups demanded various items they wanted than what was in the kit.
- Groups who availed ration had called up again for 2nd refill.
- Some groups have even asked saying the ration provided is not sufficient as they have shared the ration with their relatives.
- Some groups were rude to the teams as why they have provided ration to limited members and all required items were not given.
- Other members in the families from same house would demand ration for them, if not provided they used to argue with the ground team members.
- There were cases of duplication – other members from the same group called and registered as fresh cases.

- Local people also came to collect the ration.

Response from the stranded Migrant group after receiving dry ration.

- Happiness in receiving the dry ration by the Volunteers and expressed gratitude for rendering support by RSV, where Government failed to reach them.
- Some groups felt hesitant to receive ration but they did not have any option. They had to call a Helpine to support them, and this was undignifying for them.
- The groups who received rations shared the Helpine Details with their other families/Relatives residing in other areas.

DIRECT INTERVENTION BY VIRTUAL "PHONE PAYMENTS" TEAM

This team consisted of 35 volunteers who worked together to purchase rations for the cases that were directed to this team. This was the largest intervention undertaken by the helpline. The team was carefully recruited from across India of telugu/hindi/English speaking volunteers and further recruitment of new volunteers was always through an existing volunteer given that this intervention required financial transactions that had to adhere to norms and systems. Aishwarya Rebelly, Ajay Etikala, Ananthoo, Ananya Ambatipudi, Arun Sagar, Abhijit Sreepada, Kannan/Banu Sethuraman, Chandrakala KS, Divya Veluguri, Fathaah Ansar, Gandhi Puttu, Jahnavi Poola, Karishma Gunda, Kavitha Kuruganti, Kavya Sindhuja Thatavarthy, Madhuri Beluguppa, Mounika Kuraparthy, Mrunal Lahankar, Naveena Ambatipudi, Nitesh Reddy, Haripriya Gali, Shanmugapriya Vasudevan, Rajendra Patnaik, Ratikanta Nayak, Sharath Chandra, Sravani Reddy Pailla, Srujana Chowdhary, Subha Bharadwaj, Sumedha Kuraparthy, Tejaswini, Vaishali Rebelly, Vaishnavi Kattukolu, Vamshi Boorgu, Vinati Ramdhenu and Vineetha Sreepada were the volunteers in this team. Team members were drawn from Hyderabad, Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi, Chittoor and so on.

The "protocol" followed by the team was like this:

1. Cases that required rations purchase, especially those not picked up by any ground level NGOs/individuals were sent for processing by this team. All cases for a given day would be listed together and put into the team;
2. One volunteer would then assign the cases to different volunteers after first ascertaining who was available for the next morning (Mounika Kuraparthy); this would be done on an online sheet that was specially designed by one of the volunteers who was an expert in writing code on online google sheets (Kavya Sindhuja);
3. Volunteer would then call up the group representative, either by fetching information from the main helpline spreadsheet or by using a case sheet. Group would be asked if they have received rations from the government or others, if there is access to cooked meals and for how many days will existing rations last and decide on whether we need to help;
4. The volunteer, if s/he decides to proceed with rations support would ask the group to give a list of people written on any piece of paper that they have, in any language that the group prefers, as a picture. Serial number, name and phone number if any along with address (not all transactions got all the details but names and phone numbers were obtained;
5. The next step would be to collect a group photograph as a selfie, or with the help of neighbors and others, or with one person (photographer) less in the frame;
6. Based on number of people, there would be an upper limit fixed on how much support will we provide. 3-4 people will usually get Rs. 1000/- worth of rations which was estimated to last for

one week; All the above steps would happen one evening before the actual purchases were made and would often go late into the night;

7. The group representative would then be encouraged to go and locate a shop where the shopkeeper will take payment over phone. This would often require a volunteer to first speak to the shopkeeper in telugu and then convince them. Once the practice was implemented, for the subsequent rounds of support for the same group, it was easier. The migrant group and the shopkeeper would both be told that the purchases can only be of cooking rations;
8. The shopkeeper's phone pe or google pay or paytm number will be obtained and a test payment of one rupee or five rupees would be made and confirmation of transfer obtained;
9. Shopkeepers would only give handwritten bills on any scrap of paper and as systems evolved within the team, we started asking for a signature, date and phone number also to be mentioned on the bill, in addition to description of items is available;
10. Once the bill is received by the volunteer as a photo, payment is made and confirmed;
11. As a closure to the transaction, the migrant group , is asked to send the volunteer 2-3 photos with the ration and the group members together in the frame, at the shop and at home.
12. All details would then be uploaded by the volunteer by at least 4pm into an online google folder, sorted district-wise. These folders are available here: https://drive.google.com/open?id=1pXd-Ujv6bZwiVMLVcCW6KvE9wYYB1t4j . The same folder also has other visual evidence of rations being supplied by on-ground teams, organised in the correct district folder, after being fetched from on-ground WhatsApp groups.
13. A volunteer would then compile that day's expenditure volunteer-wise and pass on the information to the team leader by 10pm every night (Ratikanta Nayak and Ananthoo) and Kavitha Kuruganti would reimburse all volunteers as per this summary. Mounika Kuraparthy and Sravani Pailla also worked with advances taken from organisations and expenditure statements submitted by them directly.

What was striking was that in most cases, the calls for support for a next round of ration purchases would come only after 10-12 days, while in some cases, especially around the time when the helpline began putting out recorded messages saying that it was closing, people started calling up within 4-5 days of the last purchase, may be out of a sense of anxiety and panic.

Overall picture of support by the phone payments team:

The team supported 1223 cases registered in the helpline with rations support at least once and ***this covered about 8026 persons***. ***This constitutes 67% of the cases that the helpline dealt with.*** Several of these cases received support more than once – there were 408 such groups which received support more than once. ***In all, 12243 person-weeks of rations support was lent by this team through 1848 transactions.***

Advantages with this system:

- No frontline relief workers were being put to the risk of exposure to covid-19;
- Migrant groups got to choose any shop that cooperated with them and therefore, their own choice came into play unlike in the case of rations supplied by the government where they complained about the quality of atta provided etc. etc.;
- Migrant workers get to choose the food rations that they want to buy in quantities that suit their needs – it was seen that some of them who received only rice had to supplement other foods through our support, for example;
- System was set up to collect proof and evidence on everything starting from number of persons, visit to the shop, actual purchase of rations and rations being brought back home.

Video calls were used wherever necessary. Photoshopped pictures were caught out immediately. Verification of the knowledge of the migrant group representative of the members of the group was done by randomly and so on.

Disadvantages with this system:

- Not all migrant groups had smart phones and WhatsApp for this system to work. In those cases, help of neighbors, house owners and even shopkeepers had to be taken to use this system for rations support; in about 6 cases in all, direct transfer to the beneficiary was done, but after the bills and other supporting evidence produced;
- Some groups were hesitant to share photos especially with women in the frame – for such cases, we had to abandon any support unfortunately;
- Shops were open in Andhra Pradesh throughout the lockdown period only between 6am and 9am. It was a very short time window for multiple 'cases' to be processed. In some locations, the shops were in fact open only between 5am to 6am, and the volunteer had to get down to work very early in the morning;
- We mostly depended on volunteers who could manage cash flows from their accounts, until the team leader paid them back in 24-hour cycles;
- Given the large number of small scale transactions involving fund transfer data had to be collated almost real-time and unless volunteers cooperate fully, this is not likely to happen, and would lead to accounting problems.
- The groups which were trying to somehow get some cash into their hands due to their desperate conditions tried to rig the system by making more people pose, or even pose as shopkeepers themselves etc. Such cases had to be blacklisted and support cut off to them;
- Shopkeepers were initially reluctant to engage with these transactions since they were extremely busy with other clients and this was seen as an extra task by them, to adhere to our requirements. They would also not come forward to speak into the phones of migrants, both because they were too busy and also because of fear of corona virus.
- Many of our volunteers in this team were young women still in their colleges – some of them had to deal with all-male youngsters' groups which began e-stalking them and harassing them. This required intervention from the team leader, strict warnings of police complaint and action and blacklisting of such cases too.
- The shopkeepers were willing to give only kaccha bills and the transaction system had to depend on this.

This channel of intervention required intense work with a team that got caught up in the actual transaction as well as the data management system created to adhere to good accounting norms. The team had to be large enough to deal with around 50 transactions per day on an average. In fact, it was much bigger than this average on most days starting from 14th of April till 14th of May 2020.

DIRECT INTERVENTION FOR LARGE GROUPS

There were several groups in the helpline which could not have been readily supported by either the on-ground NGOs or through the phone payments option because they were large in number. These were groups which would have had more than 50 people per group. In the on-ground NGOs which ran out of resources, these groups would have been a challenge to address. The helpline functionaries' first reaction to such large groups was to alert the nodal officer at the district level so that the government can intervene. However, this did not always result in rations being provided. It was such cases, including of inter-district agricultural workers, groups neglected by their employers including big, well-known companies like Apollo Tyres, Pepsi, Siemens Gamesa etc., or public sector

undertakings like Food Corporation of India, or the chilli market yard in Guntur town or workers in sand ramps on River Godavari bank, or railway construction companies in Vadlamannadu, or construction workers or workers in spinning mills etc., who were addressed through this channel of direct intervention but by on-ground individuals or groups. For this, an organisation or individual closest to the migrant group would arrange with a grocer's to prepare kits which are 'family kits' equal to 3-4 persons per kit, and one of the support organisations or Kavitha Kuruganti who would have taken an advance from a support organisation would pay the shopkeeper directly. There were some instances when the on-ground activist would have received an advance, and they would have purchased everything and settled the account later on. Here, the on-ground persons usually had to use their own vehicles, or hired vehicles to deliver the ration, and such hired transportation and incidental expenses would be an additional cost borne by the helpline.

In this effort, Rythu Swarajya Vedika volunteers like Narasimha Sikha, Sekhar Pothula, Balu (Sreenu) Gadi, Mohan Kadimpalli and others were in the forefront, other than new acquaintances made for this purpose like Vamsi Krishna and Prabhu Yalamanchili in Krishna District, and Dileep Shaik in Nellore. Organisations like Dalit Bahujan Resource Centre (DBRC), Human Rights Forum (HRF), Gramodaya, RRDS, Kalam Trust etc., were also involved in such large group direct intervention.

The largest group supported was of around ***750 railway construction workers*** in Vadlamannadu (150 persons), Nujella (150 persons), Kowthalam (220 persons), Pedana (50 persons) and Machilipatnam (70 persons) in Krishna district. Mr. Amareswar Rao (Amar), senior Advocate and district president of Human Rights Forum was the local contact in Machilipatnam who implemented the relief at Vadlamannadu railway station for 150 persons during the initial days of the helpline. Upon an assessment towards the end of April, it was found that there were clusters of migrant workers from Bihar, Jharkhand and Chattisgarh working on the railway line from Gudivada and Machilipatnam which was being expanded. A lot of workers were brought in by private contractors to do this work.

Similarly, we gave support to Apollo Tyre workers in Chinapandur area in Chittoor district when they registered as different groups and at least 375 persons were covered in this area, that too in two rounds of rations support. In this case, we depended on a shopkeeper whose number was found on a desperate google search when no on-ground person could be located. The shopkeeper turned out to be a meticulous, helpful person who went out of his way to arrange transportation and also obtain acquittances from the migrant groups receiving support. APH001, APH1283, APH255 and APH054 received support in this manner.

Another large group which primarily was managed by a shop keeper, was the case of APH628 of a large number of sand ramp workers in Kovvur of West Godavari, on the banks of river Godavari. The shopkeeper's number was located through a google search after complications arose around managing purchase and distribution from Eluru. We could not help another group which was registered as APH582 unfortunately. In the case of APH628, 272 persons were covered by us in one round of ration distribution.

There was a group of 70 Bihar workers in an FCI godown (APH980) who received one round of rations from us. They were a very disillusioned and angry group by the time we made contact with them.

There were groups of agricultural workers in Addada in Krishna district, Atchampeta and Mangalagiri area in Guntur district who received our support. Together, they would constitute around 750 persons.

160 workers from Bihar of the chilli market yard in Guntur and 125 workers from Odisha of various spinning mills in Ganapavaram also received support from us in this channel. In the latter case, it was

health department official called Shaik Baji who became our point person for delivering the rations to the needy migrants after enumeration and purchase.

A group of Yanadi families in Prakasam district from Nellore and Telangana were also assisted as part of this channel of intervention. These are families who come to create tree-coal from acacia trees.

An exception was made in our helpline about helping a local group which cannot be termed as a migrant group, when it came to fisher families in Muthyalammapalem Beach in Visakhapatnam. Here, 70 families and around 315 persons were helped with rations support that too with a slightly higher budget per kit than normal. This was done twice in fact.

Similarly, several groups of workers in Nellore district working for Siemens Gamesa company were supported by this helpline. These included APH1519, APH1742, APH1987, APH2341 and APH2441 in addition to smaller cases processed by phone payments team. Around 350 persons would have been served with the help of Dileep Shaik in this mode of on-ground direct intervention.

In all, more than 2850 persons were supported in the on-ground direct intervention channel of the helpline, with more than 30 cases classified as "on-ground direct intervention".

GOVERNMENT INTERFACE AND INTERVENTION

Government intervention was initially envisioned as the primary *modus operandi* with civil society also pitching in, since every disaster requires both to work together. The Government of AP provided a publicly available list of 'nodal officers' with one officer from each district of the state. These officers were often either at the Joint Collector level, Project Directors of the district Mission for Elimination of Poverty in Municipal Areas (MEPMA), or senior officers of the Social Welfare Department. All nodal officers received a message on WhatsApp and/or a call from a helpline volunteer to introduce themselves and the work of the helpline and to inform them that the helpline would direct cases to their numbers from the respective districts as and when the need arose.

In the ten days after establishing the helpline, all cases were directed to the concerned nodal officers, with mixed response. It quickly became clear that while the officers could intervene and provide some support where cases registered a large group of callers, i.e., large group of migrants congregated in one place, they were largely ineffective in reaching individual families and smaller groups, especially those in immediate need. The helpline segregated cases by number of people in the caller's group and provided support through direct intervention for smaller groups but continued to engage the government for large groups. Large groups, usually defined as 20 members or more, accounted for approximately 8.5% (~ 200) of our calls by May 10th.

Case sheets with relevant information were sent to the respective nodal officers, who then forwarded them to the responsible local officers. Different types of relief efforts were managed by different government agencies. Ration distribution for migrants happened primarily through the revenue departments, coordinated by Village or Mandal Revenue Officers (VROs or MROs). MEPMA and Social Welfare departments were the primary agencies engaged in the establishment and operation of relief centres throughout the lockdown. These relief centres ran during the lockdown period in a variable fashion, with the opening and shutting of such centres being dependent on the number of migrant workers in a given area etc.

It was observed by this helpline that different districts did not have the same strategy or approach toward migrant workers. Within districts too, the approach of officials varied block by block. Migrants in urban areas like Guntur, Vijayawada, Tirupati, and Visakhapatnam, were provided with cooked meals. In a majority of cases where government provided dry rations, they were only given once.

Government agencies initially planned for providing staples to last for the first lockdown period, till April 14th, but provisions were not replenished once the lockdown was extended.

In Guntur district, a nodal officer from the Social Welfare department coordinated relief efforts. Revenue officers in the district provided dry rations to some migrants, including some of our callers. Revenue officers made lists of migrants in their blocks and provided rations by cluster. However, many individuals were not recorded during such exercises. An example of this is in Achampet, where officers informed us that all migrants would be provided with rations, partly with the support of Dr. Reddy's Foundation, but some callers had not received the distributed ration kits.

In Chittoor district, no dry rations were provided, and all callers were directed to relief centres or distribution spots where cooked meals were being provided. However, officials worked with companies employing migrant workers to ensure provisions were made to some extent. It was our communication to the Prakasam district administration that created a canteen for workers in Maddipadu, for instance. While this helped in some cases, for example brick kiln workers, it was not possible to support self-employed migrants or floating wage workers.

In other districts, like Krishna, dry rations were provided to some individuals based on their ration cards from other states. In Vijayawada town, most migrants were supported only through cooked meals. In Nellore we were informed by the nodal officer that support activities were limited to relief centres and we were unable to find support for any callers from that district through the government. Prakasam district officials provided support through both dry rations and relief centres, coordinated by the revenue department. While we received few calls from the district, 8 cases were sent to the nodal officer and all callers were contacted by relevant officials. In one case, it was ensured that Intra-state migrants received the 1000/- cash transfer provided by the state, and in three other cases inter-state migrants were provided with ration kits. One group of migrants travelling by road were also directed to the officials and were provided with shelter and food. One medical emergency was addressed but they were unable to provide transportation related help intra-state migrants.

The most liberal approach was adopted by Kadapa, where ration kits were provided based on Adhaar card information, regardless of BPL status or state of origin. Within Kadapa however, relief 'kits' also differed block to block, based on the direction of the Mandal Revenue Officer. In one block we found that 20 different items were provided in the ration kits, including soaps, detergent, and spices, while others provided rice, daal, and oil. Here too, dry rations were not replenished, and helpline provided direct support to some callers after the lockdown was extended.

In a district like Anantapur, orders would be issued on paper from the Collector's office promptly whenever the problems of some migrant group or the other were brought to their notice. But in the end, actual intervention would not be forthcoming or inadequate. Rations had to be provided by this helpline and other NGOs like RDT to a large number of people. When a medical emergency required an ambulance to be provided, the government did not act fast enough, and this helpline had to spend resources for a private ambulance to be provided. When a large group of migrant agricultural workers from Maharashtra could not go home in the last week of May 2020 due to a train cancellation, it was this helpline which organised three buses for them to take them home.

Overall, government response to callers was varied and government officers cited a lack of funds on multiple occasions. In some locations with larger groups of migrants, officials fundraised from private agencies that employed the workers, either on a floating or permanent basis, to provide meals or dry rations. Response rate was generally low, and where we had a response, generally slow, which made it difficult to request support for callers with urgent needs. While cases were generally sent by nodal

officers to local officials, many times local officials replied with various reasons for not providing help. Language was also a major problem, where local officials called migrants but could not communicate, requiring helpline volunteers to step in as translators. Before May 4th, many cases were also written off as 'requiring transportation' without providing food assistance.

When it came to relief centres, we found that most would not admit needy persons, either because they were over-flowing already, or because they just did not imbibe the spirit of why such relief centres were being run. This would come only if the political and bureaucratic establishment sets up the right culture towards this. Further, people managing such relief centres were not provided with flexibility required for dealing with floating groups walking in and out, and were found to be flummoxed by the logistical challenges that this flux poses. Relief centres would also be locked up and turned out to be virtual prisons for migrant workers who were in a desperate hurry to reach home. From inside relief centres, there would be calls to the helpline and in some cases like Panchalingala in Kurnool, we had to provide food and soaps to the inmates. In some relief centres, there was rebellion from inmates when they went on a protest and stopped eating the food being provided, until they were boarded into trains. The option of arranging bus transport was not explored often enough by the government, in its effort to arrange trains. This required collecting adequate numbers of migrants before a train could be moved, inter-district and inter-state coordination etc.

About transportation arrangements to send back migrants – the lack of adequate transport arrangements was the biggest bottleneck. With great difficulty, government would be able to move just one or two trains per day in some of locations where migrants were concentrated (Chittoor, Nellore, Vijayawada, Guntur etc.). Not enough buses were arranged, even though civil society was able to move some groups by this method. Importantly, the secrecy around train scheduling meant that many could not join. Train re-scheduling would not always be accompanied by information to the earlier set of migrants and many would therefore miss boarding the train.

A very striking incident around train ticket charges indicated either corruption of a brazen kind, or a simple shocking lack of coordination and passing down of instructions from the state level to the frontline functionaries who were in charge of transportation arrangements. In three instances so far, the helpline came across complaints of ticket charges being collected by VROs on instructions of MROs who in turn put the blame on Joint Collectors. In one case, very quick messages up and down from the helpline to the state level bureaucrat to the district joint collector and down to the MRO ensured that the collected money was returned. But in the case of two other trains, such money was not returned and this would have been a great burden on the migrant workers who had no cash flows to speak of. The AP CMO has been alerted about these instances and it is hoped that the fares collected would be returned back to the migrants.

The helpline attempted to run a bus commuting service in a relay manner across districts, by using buses provided by schools and others in a pro bono fashion, but could not secure timely permission from either state level officials or district level officials, unfortunately.

On the online portal registration of those migrants who were keen on traveling back, we received cooperation from the concerned officials, and it was also seen that the initial database that we provided of migrants registered with the helpline was used by the local mandal level officials for their own enumeration.

Little instances of workers seeking to be included on train lists or being relieved by the employers from their work found support from the labour department in some instances. In two districts, Joint Collector and PD-MEPMA were very cooperative when it came to walking migrants and their

transportation needs. On the other hand, one district collector who was irritated by the helpline raising issues from the ground with top officials got very nasty with one of the main functionaries of the helpline in a personal message to her.

We gave our suggestions regularly from the helpline about the policy approaches that the Government of Andhra Pradesh should take, apart from interacting with government officials on a case by case basis. On some suggestions given and ideas articulated, there was positive response and adoption by the government. On some others, there would be no response at all.

All in all, it was a variable, unpredictable, mixed response that was encountered from the government functionaries at various levels on different issues.

GAS REFILLS SUPPORT

This channel of intervention the helpline started on 28th April 2020, once APPI committed to more funds support to WASSAN for this. Gas refill requests came from the main helpline as well as through other channels that were having a direct interface with the migrant groups – rations team, departure registration team etc.

It was recognised how expensive it is for the people who are living with limited resources and who do not have a proper gas connection – this intervention was really important for all such groups. Several groups did not have a regular gas connection and were also using small gas cylinders (5kg ones). In many cases, it found that they had to buy gas in the range of Rs 120-160 per kilo (1-2 cases also reported Rs 180/kg also). Due to the lockdown, it became more expensive as compared to prices at other times (normal range was Rs 90-130 per kg during the pre-lockdown time). The 14-kilo gas cylinders costed around Rs. 900 to Rs. 1000/- in the black market.

The protocol adopted for cases that needed support for cooking gas refill is the following:

- Volunteer assigned a case called up people who requested gas on the helpline and tried to understand how have they managed to take care of it till now (as most of the cases requested us gas support 10-15 days). We also supported people who brought the gas during the lockdown period, since some of them had earlier called us on the helpline and requested before – however, since at that time there were no resources for this, the helpline did not support gas refills. The volunteer asked them how they buy gas usually- are they registered and is it through a proper gas agency or from the black market or from the nearest shopkeeper or some other means.
- The helpline set its budget per family to Rs 1000 - for example, if the gas is costing them 1200, we told them we can only support them if they are willing to put in remaining Rs 200.
- Our payment will be in the following order of preference:
    a. The first preference we gave was to reimbursing against a proper bill that is dated from any time of gas refill during the lockdown from the time they contacted the helpline.
    b. The second preference, in case the first was not available, was to pay the vendor, who will have to produce at least a kaccha handwritten bill which should have shopkeeper name and shop address, phone number, signature and date in addition to description (for eg- 14-kilo gas cylinder for Rs 1000 or for 5-kilo gas refill 120*5 kilo = Rs 600 etc.)
- Since the bill was kaccha handwritten bill and in some cases, we paid directly to the beneficiary's account, in addition to the bill, we sent them a self-declaration form (written in hindi) and requested them to write it down on a piece of paper, fill their details and sign it, take a photo and send it back to us on WhatsApp;
- As a closure to the case, the volunteer would ask the group person to send 1-2 photos with the gas cylinder and them together in the frame back at home.

The team faced a challenge with getting the self-declaration form as many of them could not read and write. Therefore, the volunteers had had to take support from the neighbours who could help them in writing and sending the self-declaration form.

Many of the migrant groups had only one cylinder (no spare cylinder) and hence they were only able to refill it once it was exhausted fully. The team had to wait for a few days (some 3-4 days) for the existing cylinder gas to get over completely, to process the gas refill requests.

Support for Diesel: The team came across an unexpected reality. In some cases, support was provided for diesel (as availability of kerosene was difficult in the migrants' local areas). Some groups were using diesel instead of kerosene in a kerosene stove. As diesel is quite risky, we limited this to purchases of only 3-4 litres of diesel at a single time. The migrant group would be told that once the stock finishes, the helpline might provide them with a second or third round support, until their upper limit of Rs 1000 is reached. Safety was a top priority here.

In terms of actual support lent, the following is the picture:

- 251 requests came to this team from various channels.
- Gas refill support was extended to 145 groups, covering 1016 persons.
- The expenditure incurred was a total of Rs 121843/-.

For 9 of the requests, the callers' numbers were unreachable. The team tried both the primary phone number and alternate phone number at least three times, before marking the case as Closed.

51 cases said they were not in need, since by the time this channel could be operationalised, several of them had decided to travel back to their native places, or had indeed set off. Some of them were using fuel wood, and said that since they will leave soon to their villages, see no point in getting a gas cylinder refill. In some cases, their contractor/employer provided them with gas and rations - while in some cases it was free, in some cases it was on an adjustable basis against their future salary.

46 cases were in "other reasons" category at the time of closing this channel of support. Here, most cases were asking for rations support rather than gas refill, even though they had put in a request for gas initially. This was because they felt that rations were more critical as the lockdown was getting extended phase after phase, while cooking fuel could be managed somehow.

Volunteers in the gas refills team included: Rahul Aggarwal, Ridhi Aggarwal, Rahul Deshmukh, Shubhangi Gupta, Divya Dubey, Vivek Pandey, Gagandeep Singh, Gunjan Rana, Sunil Jayant, Kanishka Gupta, Akshay Wadhwa, Satish Kumar and Mayank Pandey, and was led by Ajay Etikala.

DEPARTURE REGISTRATION

Migrant groups, by the time the month of May 2020 arrived, were at the end of their tether – there was no money apart from what farming families were able to send, no more loans to be borrowed, and no food to eat, and families back home were putting tremendous pressure on the migrants to come back home. Several callers in our helpline, about 40 at least, had in fact called for help to go back home and not for rations or other support.

As soon as the government announced that migrants will be facilitated to return home, one of the first things that the helpline workers did was to create district-wise databases of migrant groups registered with us and give it to the state level authorities as well as district level authorities, asking them to make use of the same for planning for the departure of the migrants.

Within a day or two of the Government of India and Government of Andhra Pradesh coming out with their orders, we created a departure registration team. The aim of this team was to register as many people as possible on the government portal. In the initial days, one team worked in this channel of intervention. Later, this was split into two teams. We also sent an SMS blast to the entire database explaining to migrant groups about the three modalities of registration set up by the GoAP.

The departure registration team consisted of 40 volunteers who worked together for doing the migrants departure registration on the online government portal of "Spandana". All the volunteers were divided into 2 teams.

Team 1 was the primary interface with the migrant groups and this team would use a google form to collect details of each migrant group using the same template as the spandana portal. Team 2 would then use the outputs of Team 1 to actually register the groups online. This work flow was designed so that even if the official portal does not work well enough to register all the requests for help that we were getting, we would have a database to provide to the government along the same lines that they want, and are seeking information on, on the spandana portal. Apart from registering groups on the official portal, we shared the database collected by Team 1 with the state level officials in charge of migrant movement.

1. Calls received from the migrant groups for back-to-home registrations were mainly from the same list of ration helpline data.
2. Such requests would flow into the Departure Registration MIS group in the first instance. Requests would come in from all those groups which had an interface with the volunteers of the helpline either during rations purchases, or through a call to the phone team, or through the gas refills team etc. Soon, the number of the volunteers were shared in the social networks of migrants who received help with registration and newer groups would call up. At this point, it was decided that such requests need not be channelised through the phone volunteers team which was already looking into various issues of migrants, raised in different calls. Therefore, a new series of case numbers were initiated with NHL (non helpline) being the code for the same.
3. One volunteer in the MIS group would then take up these cases and enter into the main online google sheet which consisted of all the departure registration data.
4. Next step would be to pick up a case with its basic details i.e., case number, name and phone number from the sheet and then assign it to Team 1 volunteers individually.
5. Team 1 volunteers would then make calls to the group representative of each case assigned to them and gather all the required information for departure registration for them and enter the collected details into google form 1 which used a template similar to Spandana.
6. In the backend, another volunteer would filter the cases as per registrations completed and new registrations.
7. Now from the filtered ones, completed cases would then be assigned to Team 2 volunteers who are meant to do the registration on the spandana portal as per the data available in the Form 1 backend sheet. This sheet was made accessible in a viewing format for Team 2 volunteers.
8. After registering a group on the official portal, the Team 2 volunteer would then fill Google Form 2 for our records, to monitor progress.

Constraints faced:

1. Not all migrant groups had smart phones and WhatsApp to share their details and family members' details for registrations. This would become a bigger problem when it came to registration of large groups of migrants.
2. Some groups had dearth of information that was being sought from them – for instance, they could not give accurate details of their current location. In such cases, help of neighbours, house owners, and local people had to be taken to get the information.
3. Few people did not receive the confirmation messages after successful registration; in their case, it was never clear whether registration was successful or not.
4. Spandana portal had certain website issues during registration – large groups could not be registered at once and lack of alternative phone numbers in a group was a big problem to register.

Overall achievement by the departure registration team:

The team supported 180 "non-helpline" cases (those that were not registered by the phone volunteers team) for online registration and this covered approximately 780 persons, in addition to 175 "APH" cases that covered more than 1100 persons.

Volunteers, totalling 51, included the following:

TEAM 1- Aarthi Kanan, Alzany Osman, Basanti, Bharti Udeshi, Heena Pujari, Jagan Maddi, Kailash Chandra, Madhura Banerjee, Nihira, N Sparty, Shalini, Shraddha Charan, Sulekha Dagli, Suneetha Katari, Surbhi Rani, Vishakha Khanolkar, Vineetha Sreepada.

TEAM 2- Abhiram Bharatam, Ambika, Aniridha, Apurupa Gorthi, Aryan Gala, Bhavya Burra, Dheeksha, Divya Shree, Dinesh, Kameshwari, Naresh Ganta, Naveen, Pragnya, Rahul Aggarwal, Ravi Babu, Ravi Badri, Ritika, Rusham, Sai Bhanu, Sameer, Sasmitha Patnaik, Shreya, Shri D N, Tejasvi, Trupti, Uma, Varsha, Vikram Bathini

Common volunteers who coordinated - Ajay Etikala, Amrutha Varshini, Kavitha Srinivasan, Subha Bharadwaj and Vaishali Rebelly

Bridge volunteers to bring information on groups that want to be registered: Joshna and Sravan

TRACKING THE WALKERS WHO WENT BACK HOME

By around the 12th of May 2020, we started calling up all the groups that we had information for, who are supposed to have set off on foot or cycles or bikes, to their native places. It was clear that they were desperate to get back somehow, because they could not afford house rents anymore and house owners were not willing to forego rents any more either, food rations had run out, they were not comfortable asking the helpline repeatedly for support, they did not have faith in the government that it will actually transport them back, and families back home were putting tremendous pressure on them to come back home.

We tracked 360 people who set off to their native place on their own, without waiting for the government and its trains, even though they registered. Out of 360, 227 were from Uttar Pradesh, 67 from Jharkhand, 35 from Chattisgarh, 20 from West Bengal and the rest from Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra.

- 240 of them 'walked' home (they took lifts/hitchhiked wherever they could on trucks);

- 120 went on bikes and hired buses and shramik trains (57);

It took these groups anywhere between 2 to 8 days to reach home, with the average being 4 days. It costed them anywhere between 1000 rupees to 26000 rupees per person, with the latter being the cost of second hand bikes purchased just for this journey! For that 26000 rupees, two families had to mortgage their gold, and one person took it on loan. Most of them said that the AP Police were helpful at many places, gave them food and water and helped them get lifts. Two groups were however caught and quarantined in a school and were sent home by Shramik trains.

The most striking instance was that of a family choosing to drive all the way to Uttar Pradesh with a 15 day old baby. The baby was born during the lockdown period, and the helpline had extended rations support to the family. This family reached home safely after a 10-day trip with the infant!

Those who left by train said that they had a comfortable journey, were not charged for the tickets, were given food and water and masks to wear. Except for 2 of them (their house is in the middle of agricultural fields), all of them were quarantined upon reaching their village. Many of them said that they would like to go back to AP after the lockdown is lifted.

The AP Walkers' Trackers team also had to deal with in-transit migrants' groups walking through AP towards their destination from Karnataka, Telangana and Tamil Nadu. In several cases, small cash transfers were effected, to help the group meet its food needs at least. These cash transfers were also supported by Srinivas Alavilli, a civic rights activist in Bangalore, through his network of friends.

This team consisted of Vineetha Sreepada, Kavitha Srinivasan, Srinivas Alavilli, Kavitha Kuruganti and Ajay Etikala.

"RELAY RELIEF TEAM"

By May 17th 2020, more coordinated relief work for walking or cycling migrants was attempted across districts, by breaking up the work into geographical chunks of manageable distances between different organisations/volunteers and with a system of 'handing over' a batch of migrant workers from one team to the other. This helped in people feeling more empowered to deal with any group that they were encountering on the road, without being challenged by the enormity of the task. A separate WhatsApp group got created for this purpose on May 20th 2020. This included the support of People Combine Foundation, which was very successful in a ketto fundraiser in gathering more than 47 lakh rupees of donations including from famous personalities like Allu Arjun. The constraint imposed by some institutional donors in terms of utilisation of their funds only for rations or only through routes other than direct cash transfers was overcome in this channel of intervention, by falling back on People Combine Foundation, Chetna Organic and Gramya Resource Centre for Women. Even for transportation, it was apparent soon enough that the ones who have already set out by walk or cycling were not going to wait until organised transportation support was provided, because getting government permissions was taking more than two days to obtain even if vehicles were to be hired and paid for. During the two days of wait, these groups would have to go into relief centres, from where the government was not releasing them! Therefore, the relay relief team decided to adopt any means of transportation available to the walking and cycling migrants, who were in-transit migrants in Andhra Pradesh. A lot of effort was put in to obtain permission to use pro bono buses provided by some schools and individuals, but that did not materialise despite several bureaucrats promising their help. The relay relief team would take information being provided by Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Telangana teams and also locate groups on the roads in Medarametla, Vijayawada and Anakapalle, and cater to their needs in the following ways:

- Relief materials like ORS packets, towels, medicines, bandages, soaps, footwear etc., given;
- Meals and drinking water provided;
- Short distance transportation provided;
- Sending walkers to relief centres and ensuring that they are on government lists for trains;
- Arranging private buses for people in relief centres and walkers to reach their destination point or to some interim location;
- Providing information to the migrant groups and coordinators in other states.
- This phase brought us in contact with district administration in Guntur and Krishna districts from where some cooperation was occasionally available.

The work of Jones Manikonda of DBRC who spent long hours supporting migrant workers in Vijayawada, Danny of DBRC in Prakasam district, Balu Gadi in Visakhapatnam district and Asha Kranthi in Vijayawada need a special mention here.

"TRAIN TICKET BOOKING TEAM"

A team of volunteers in addition to a regular commercial travel agent worked to book online tickets for around 345 migrants to go back to their native places using the limited commercial special train services run by Indian Railways starting from June 1st 2020. The team consisted of Ajay Etikala, Alzany Osman, Amrutha Varshini, Anisha Gupta, Asha Kranti, Bharti Udeshi, Jones Manikonda, Kavitha Kuruganti, Kavitha Srinivasan, Mallika, Naveena Ambatipudi, Prakash, Ratikanta Nayak, Sandhya Etikala, Sulekha Dagli, Suraj, Srikanth, Trupti Nisar, and Vineetha Sreepada. The Child Helpline team in Vijayawada was really helpful in various ways.

ACCOUNTS TEAM:

The whole helpline effort was ably supported by (a) Ratikanta Nayak and Ananthasayanan in the phone payments team; (b) Sridevi, Sriram and Swapna in WASSAN; (c) Murali and Srinivas in Accion Fraterna; and (d) Indraneel Sajja in Gramya Resource Centre for Women.

BACKEND COORDINATION:

Kiran Vissa, Sreeharsha Thanneru, Meera Sanghamitra and Naveen Ramisetty, before they were sucked in fully into Telangana relief work, along with Dr Malla Reddy of AF and Ravindra Adusumilli of WASSAN. Suresh Ediga and Mallikarjun Polineni provided long-distance support wherever they could.

OVERALL COORDINATION OF THE HELPLINE WORK: Subhashini and Kavitha Kuruganti

VOICES OF THE MIGRANT WORKERS WHO CAME IN TOUCH WITH THE HELPLINE

1. **Gobinda Sahu, Ratnakar "Guru" Biswal and other Odia workers in a rice mill in Krishna district:**

Gobinda Sahu got a hurried call from home mid-April asking him to return immediately. Waiting for him at home in the village of Golara, Odisha were his two elder brothers and their wives, and their parents. The 31-year-old was stranded in Kanumolu village, Bapulapadu in Andhra Pradesh when he found out that interstate transport had closed because of the national lockdown to tackle the COVID19 pandemic.

Sahu had been working there in a rice mill owned by Suwera Agro Industries for the last eight or nine years. But since the national lockdown was announced in March, he found himself living in a tin-and-tarpaulin adjacent to the mill, unable to go to work because of the stay-at-home orders. "I knew it was very strict and that we were not allowed to leave our homes," he says, "but my seth (employer) told me that he would not pay me if I did not work." Sahu was owed Rs. 16,000 in back pay and he was not alone; a total of 30 workers from Odisha's Brahmagiri block that Sahu also belonged to were owed thousands in unpaid wages. With the little money they had, these migrant workers were trying to survive through a lockdown that seemed to have no end in sight.

When rations dwindled, someone from the group reached out to a Cuttack-based NGO, Sankalp, in Odisha. One of the NGO members called our Helpline, requesting an intervention. We registered this case as APH083 on 5th April 2020 and jumped into action, calling the employer and the MRO/tahsildar. Here, we negotiated for both unpaid salaries and rations. "They [helpline volunteers] asked that we send them our photos on WhatsApp and the next morning told us to go to the big ration shop in the village, where they spoke to the kirana wala to get us our food," Sahu recalled.

This group received three rounds of rations with our support. But more pressing was the concern of wages: "Without money for wood, what use is the rice?", Sahu asked us over the phone. Our volunteers negotiated with the employer to arrange for at least partial payment; the employer paid a sum of Rs. 60,000 of the Rs. 2,19,000 he owed these workers, promising to add the remaining sum in their bank accounts.

With some of the money they were owed in their bank accounts, they were able to take the necessary steps to head back home. Sahu knew that no traditional means of transport like trains and buses were available. He was, however, not willing to give up: "I would have gone home by any means necessary, even if I had to walk or cycle the distance." Luckily, it did not come to that. By speaking to various government officials like the state collectors of AP and Odisha and the district's MLA, the group managed to arrange the police pass that permitted interstate transport. For the sum of Rs. 99,000 the group of 30 arranged for a private bus to drive down from Odisha and take them all back.

The day-long route found its first stop in Bhubaneswar for COVID19 testing. After a negative result, Sahu was taken down to his panchayat, Kushoventi's quarantine block on 13 May. He will spend 21 days there, followed by 7 days of self-isolating at home. He has called home once since his arrival to let his family know that he is back in the state. While he is being well taken-care of in the quarantine, he is uncertain about his future. "Once I leave from here, I'll have to go sit at home since there is no work, what else," he says, grimly. When asked what he thought about the lockdown and his prospects, he says, "I don't know. Whenever this is over, I'll need to find work again." For now, he is just happy to be (almost) home.

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2. Jayprakash Singh and 270 others from Uttar Pradesh/Bihar, in Kovvur, on the Godavari bank:

On the 18th of April, Jayprakash Singh called us from Rajamundhry in Kovvur, Eluru mandal, East Godavari district. He was calling on behalf of a group of 230-250 mazdoor or daily wage workers who, like him, had migrated from parts of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar for seasonal work in Andhra Pradesh.

“We were living in zoppadpatis [make-shift houses] and had only received ration from the government once. With no wages and sporadic ration from our seth [employer] – I called the helpline”, he told us, recalling the first few days of lockdown. He continued, “More men had also joined us by then – we were almost 300”.

This was the helpline’s 628th case. Ration distribution arrangements were made with the help of Gramodaya Srinivasa Rao. We located a shopkeeper in Kovvur by doing a google search and sought his cooperation. There was no earlier contact with him, but that did not prove to be a constraint in any way. The help of a local judge and the DCP was also ensured. Ration distribution happened peacefully without anyone from the helpline being physically present, except for one volunteer of the NGO Gramodaya.



Shelters for this group of 300 along the banks of River Godavari.
Credits: Jayprakash Singh



On their way home. Credits: Jayprakash Singh

After this intervention, state officials collected each person's Aadhar card and necessary details to arrange transport back. Then, Singh said, "They just made us wait. We had no clear indication of when we would be allowed to return home. All 300 of us even peacefully blocked a road, demanding clarity". That is when they got the attention of the commissioner of Eluru, who told them they would return on the 2 trains that would leave from Kovvur for UP and Bihar on the 7th of May.

On the 9th of May, Jayprakash Singh called us from the train. He even sent us a video right after speaking with us, showing his saathis sleeping on the train, "Dekho sab aaram se soye hue hai [look they are all sleeping peacefully]". They had all reached their homes by the 10th of May.

3. Rajkumar Singh, Nandkishore and 750 others in Vadlamannadu, from Jharkhand/UP/ Bihar:

When the national lockdown was announced on 21 March, Rajkumar Singh realized he was far from home and without a source of income. Originally from the village of Utaki in Palamu, Jharkhand, he had spent the last few years of his life working in various districts of Andhra Pradesh as a labourer for a private railway construction contractor. He was part of a group of 90 migrant labourers--from Jharkhand and Bihar--stuck in the village of Vadlamannadu in Krishna, AP.

Despite being stuck in an unfamiliar state with limited resources, Singh followed social distancing guidelines dutifully. He stopped going to work when the lockdown was announced with the exception of working for a couple of days after the lockdown under his thekedar's [employer's] behest. He even enforced social distancing rules with the other migrant labourers he shared accommodation with.

Given that none of the workers had been paid since the lockdown started, ration among the men started to dwindle. "One day Nandkishore [another worker who first called the helpline] told us that he had heard of a helpline that could help us," he said, "so we decided to reach out." Calling on 2 April, this group's case was registered as APH018. By 8 April, our Helpline had not only brought their case to the notice of local government officials but also provided 50 ration kits. Later on, early in the month of May 2020, we expanded our help to 750 persons in 5 locations and this was the largest group that got supported for rations from the helpline. Ration distribution happened with the help of Amar, a lawyer of Human Rights Forum, based out of Machilipatnam.

But Singh is most grateful that he managed to get home. Like many of the migrants in this group, he was waiting for the means to go back home when the national lockdown resulted in the shutdown of all interstate travel. "Whatever might happen with coronavirus, whether I live or I die, I want to do it on my own land," he said emphatically, "I am an outsider in Andhra Pradesh, at least there is dignity in a death surrounded by family and kin." He spent his nights in a tin-covered makeshift room with 24 other men, and days marking time on the railway station. The group's size ballooned with time, with

workers from a neighbouring village also joining, bringing the number of stranded labourers up to 150 people.

Through the Helpline's intervention, his group was registered with the Mandal Revenue Officer on 23 April, and the bureaucratic clearances ball began rolling. As they waited for the train to come, our Helpline assisted them with another round of ration. Finally, after over a month of wait, the train to take them home pulled into Vadlamannadu Railway Station on 14 May.

Singh had an altruistic view of the pandemic: "Everyone in the world is suffering, as are we. How much can we really blame the government in this situation?" He added, "How can I blame the local officers in Vadlamannadu? They were following orders, so they gave us what they could." His perspective was reflected in how he viewed his employer as well. Having worked with him for a few months at a time in the last three years, Singh said that his employer was a "good man" who had always paid them regularly. "He has had Rs. 8-9 lakhs stuck with the government in pending payments, if they paid him I'm sure he would have paid us," he said about his lack of wages since the national lockdown was announced, adding, "In fact, if he could he would have even made sure we reached home".

Singh's respect for the government's work was immense. "Everything the government is doing, they are doing for us only," he said, "I am so grateful that the government gave us a free ride back home and is providing for our quarantine care, it is only because of them that we have not faced any troubles." He expressed respect for the police officers who, "with great care" ensured he was on the train, provided food, and continued to ensure his safety. Having reached the sub-district of Pathan on 15 May, he and 12 of his fellow travelers will be quarantined at Kasturba Gandhi school till 29 May.

Ungrudging as he was, a quiet desperation slowly became visible. When talking about his quarantine experience, Singh mentioned that he had run out of money on his phone and could no longer use it. He had only had the opportunity to meet, from across the road, his family once the day he arrived in quarantine. Waiting for him at home were his wife, four sons and a daughter. His eldest son--a BA graduate--had to return home from Jammu where he had migrated in search of work. He knew there were no fresh sources of income in the near future. "What work will we do here? I suppose if someone here decides to plant maize or grains, we will go to tend their fields--but only if they ask," he said, "what else can we do?"

In the meantime, Singh planned to continue his dutiful diligence to governmental orders: "I will make a small jhonpdi (hut) away from the house and self-isolate there, even away from my family. I will wait for the government's clearance to leave, I will even spend months there if necessary, I don't mind." He remained optimistic, commenting with a wry chuckle: "I can't speak with certainty but I believe that slowly, over time, this corona problem will go away. Till then, I will do what I can do."

"Yes, there are difficulties and there is suffering, I can't lie, these are times of helplessness," he said. Far from resigned, he took this opportunity to add, "I am just thankful that I reached home safely, whatever happens from here onwards is God's wish."

4. Girish Chandra from Uttar Pradesh, with a medical emergency request

Girish Chandra's life took a downturn on 21 March, when PM Modi announced the lockdown. The UP-native was stuck in Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh, with his critically ill wife in the government hospital and no way back home. The 35-year-old had brought his wife, Amarvati Kushwaha, earlier in the month to get a heart operation done and had return tickets booked for 22 March. He was faced first with a medical complication--his wife had developed a brain clot in Anantapur that the hospital did not have the means to take on. She had previously had brain surgery in December 2019 in Lucknow,

and the doctors in Anantapur recommended that Chandra take his wife back to the same physicians. Unable to help her, the government hospital discharged her. Simultaneously, the lockdown was announced.

Chandra found himself in an unfamiliar state with no familiar faces, no place to stay, no way to leave, no food or water. He called the helpline on 5 April with the urgent need for cooked food. We registered their case as APH080. When he told us about his predicament, the helpline stepped in to try and support them further. We got in touch with the DMHO and MEMPA PD as well as the hospital doctors to find out what the next step should be. Relying on doctors' referrals and permission slips, we arranged for a private ambulance to take Chandra and Kushwaha to a hospital in Kurnool on April.

In the Kurnool Government Hospital, the neuro-surgeon managed to treat the blood clot with medication instead of surgical intervention. She was monitored for the next ten days to ensure that the medicines were working. However, Chandra was still far from home. He knew that his wife's discharge was looming and they had no place to go. Through a contact from the helpline, Mohan Kadimpalli had arranged for their stay in a shelter in Kurnool. But both him and his wife refused--they needed to return to their 7-year-old son.

Before they left for Anantapur, Chandra had dropped his son off with his nephew and other family members in Talegaon Vani, Maharashtra. Both parents were desperate to go to him. Chandra started hitting the pavement, knocking on the doors of the CMO and the Collector in Kurnool. While they were sympathetic and happy to give him interstate travel passes, they could not arrange for any vehicles for him. Finally, he chanced upon some volunteers who arranged a private ambulance for him; on 16 April, Kushwaha was discharged, Chandra bought a two-month stockpile of her medication and they were on their way.

Unfortunately, their challenges were only really beginning. "What do I even say, we've faced every kind of problem one could--food, stay, money, health, you name it," Chandra said. They covered the 800+ km distance between Kurnool and Talegaon Vani slowly, as his wife was still very weak and they had no provisions. When they reached on 17 April, they stayed in an now-overcrowded home with extended family, uncertain of their future. With extra members in the house and no incomes, all provisions including rations were tight.

The biggest strain for Chandra was financial: "I had left home for Anantapur with only Rs. 10,000 in my pocket because the treatment was free and my return tickets were already booked. But this lockdown changed everything." He suddenly had new expenses for the two ambulance rides and the Kurnool hospital visit. The two-way fare at Rs. 13 per km for the second ambulance was the biggest pinch and he estimated that "I spent at least Rs. 45,000 in this lockdown." This is additional to the "Rs. 2.5 lakhs I had previously spent on the brain surgeries in Lucknow in December 2019 and the check-up in January 2020." He had no money, so he relied entirely on loans: "I had to put together the money somehow, so I borrowed as much as I could from different family members. I still need to pay them back."

And yet, they were not home yet. "There was no way to go back to UP since the lockdown continued after the initial 21 days," he recalled. The family spent the second half of April on borrowed food, shelter and money: "I honestly didn't know if we would make it through this lockdown or die."

When the Special shramik trains were first announced on 1 May, Chandra finally found a way to take his family home; after all, he said, "Ghar ke siwaye aur kya hai? (What else is there but home?)". The process was hardly straightforward. "I registered us for the train, getting permission from the Collector and getting our documents verified," he said, "and then we just had to wait. Time went by, difficulties

deepened. Finally, Chandra got a call towards the end of the month that the family could catch a train in Amravati, Andhra Pradesh. With a 7-year-old and a weak wife, Chandra got the whole family onto a bus to Amravati, where they then went through thorough medical check-ups; upon procuring medical certificates, they boarded a shramik train to Kanpur on 20 May. When they de-boarded, they were tested again and then put on a bus to his district, Hardoi, where they were quarantined for a day. On 22 May, after one last bus ride, Chandra and his family reached home in the village of Puranpur.

Chandra has been a farmer ever since he finished his schooling. He relies on his land to help provide for his family. With a worsening agrarian crisis over the years, he is no stranger to hardship, but it was this experience during the lockdown that led to his lost faith in the government. “I have no hopes left from the government or politicians,” he said bluntly, “Neta toh apna pet hi bharte rehte hai, hume kya denge (Politicians keep filling their own pockets and there is nothing left over for people like us.” “Modi said that the Mahabharat war was won in 18 days and that we would vanquish corona in 21 days, but what happened?” he asked, “We kept waiting for the lockdown to get over, but it still hasn’t. What is a common man like me supposed to do?” Noting the fact that people told him to keep his faith, he scoffed, saying “there is a big difference between saying something and doing it, and I was living it.” He brought up the Rs. 20 lakh crores economic stimulus package announced by PM Modi on 12 May, commenting, “Has any of the money reached people like us? Thousands of people are struggling to survive right now, and even Rs. 1500 can help them. But instead, the government is worried about companies.” He added, scoffing, “how will companies run without the labourer?”

He may not have much faith in the government, but he is grateful for the community of everyday citizens that have come together to lend him a hand. He said about our Helpline, “I will be indebted to the helpline for as long as I live. They gave me Rs. 5000 when I had no money to get my wife to Kurnool through a private ambulance.” Apart from the helpline, he was grateful for other volunteers who helped him arrange an ambulance to get him till Maharashtra, and for family members who loaned him money when he found himself stranded. He thanked the driver of the ambulance for agreeing to pay for all the petrol with his own money until they reached Maharashtra, where he could be repaid. He wanted to stay in touch and hoped that NGOs and concerned citizens would continue to reach out to those in need even as the lockdown eased: “I would be great if you could help us in other ways, like telling us how to redeem welfare schemes. No problems if you can’t, because we will make do anyway.” If nothing else, he said that the lockdown did teach him the importance of atmanirbharta, although perhaps not in the way PM Modi intended: “What I’ve learned is that no matter how much the labourer or the farmer screams, no one is listening. If we have to keep on living, surviving, we have to do apne balbute par (on our own).” When considering what the future holds, he said, “Neither you nor I can see the future. Whatever happens, will happen, I will just keep doing what I can to survive.”

5. Vijayalakshmi and other agricultural workers from Srikakulam struck in Krishna district

After the country declared a lockdown because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Vijaya Lakshmi, an agricultural labourer, was stranded with many others in Addada village of Krishna District, Andhra Pradesh. She belongs to a family of agricultural labourers from Koncha village, Veeraghattam, Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh. They migrate to different districts for 20-25 days every year in search of work. After losing her father to cancer six years ago, the 23-year-old now supports herself and her mother. Her two elder sisters live with their husbands and children in different villages. “They are there for me and our mother as moral support. But I understand that everyone is struggling financially so I don’t expect them to provide for us,” she says. Just like previous years, this February, Vijaya gathered a group of over 100 people in and around her village to leave for Addada, about 500 km away from their village. “Our plan was to stay there for 20 days, earn some money, and come back.

We didn't imagine that we'd get stuck for 3 months," she says. A few of them were lucky enough to go back home just before the lockdown was declared, but the remaining 93 stayed, completely unaware of what was to come.

There were many others stranded there too, outside of Vijaya's group. "One of those people gave me the helpline number when they saw us running out of food," she recollects. "I called the helpline on 3rd April, told them our whereabouts and requested for ration. The team got it delivered to us the next day, and even called a few days later to check if we need anything else. I told them we had enough ration but needed some other things, and then they sent those too." Although there was food, none of them knew how much longer it would take to go home. They were living in a garden, with no shelter or work. All their hard-earned money was running out even before they could go home. Some suggested walking back. "It sounded like a ridiculous idea to me," Vijaya says. "How could we just walk back such a long distance?"

Thankfully, on 1st May, three buses were organized for them to go back home. "I still don't know who arranged it. Maybe it was the Government," Vijaya says, unsure. She kept repeating that they didn't charge them a fare for the travel, disbelief apparent in her voice. On reaching Srikakulam district, the evening of 2nd May, all 93 of them were quarantined in a school hostel for 20 days. The food there was substandard and it got better after multiple complaints to the MRO (Mandal Revenue Officer). Vijaya also shared that the bus drivers were treated badly and not given any food. "A few of us pooled in money to buy the drivers some biscuits and water," she says. After serving the required quarantine period, everyone was tested and allowed to go home since the results were negative.

She has been home for about a week now and has to complete another week of self-quarantine. One would think her struggles have finally come to an end, but reality is far from it. The money that she earned before the lockdown was all spent even before she got back home. The house currently runs on her mother's widow pension of Rs 2250 a month and a loan of Rs 10,000 that her mother took from a money lender for a huge interest. The expenses continue to outweigh the income: her mother has been diagnosed with kidney stones, there are bills to pay, and their monthly expenses come up to Rs 5000-Rs 6000. The home they live in is theirs, but they have no agricultural land or assets in their name. "This is our life now: we have to loan money to be able to feed ourselves, and then work hard to pay the loans. It goes on", she says matter-of-factly.

As for work opportunities, Vijaya is confident there won't be any until the rains come. "Even after that, people are now terrified to leave their homes after this experience. They'd much rather stay home and make ends meet," she adds. The only reason for most agricultural labourers to go to faraway districts is the prospect of better pay. Back home in Koncha, she makes somewhere between Rs 120-130 a day, whereas a man makes Rs 200-250 for the same effort. Travelling to Krishna district for work increases her income to Rs 450 per day, enough to save up for a few months after. When asked if she has any photos or videos from her time in Addada and the journey back, she lets out a sad laugh accompanied with these words: "That didn't occur to me until now. I was busy praying that all 93 of us get back home safely. Imagine feeling the weight of responsibility for so many people! I'm just grateful we're all alive and safe." This group was supported by the helpline with rations twice during their stay in the migrated location.

6. **Madhya Pradesh migrants reach home with the bus transport organised by helpline volunteer**

"One of our volunteers met twelve of them on the NH-16 (old number 5) road. They were walking from Jaggaiahpet in East Godavari District, towards their home in Madhya Pradesh", recalls Asha Kranthi, who is associated with People Combine Foundation (PCF) in Vijayawada. She got in touch with

the Helpline's walkers tracking group after ensuring these walkers were enrolled in the nearest Government Relief shelter.

This group comprised of a total of 36 iron sellers from Rewa, Mandla and Raisen districts in Madhya Pradesh. 12 of them had already been enrolled in the relief center and the remaining were transported by a bus organized by PCF to Vijaywada. "We are self-employed and had no employer's assistance to fall back on. The government of Andhra Pradesh, however, provided us with ration in Jaggaiapet as did the people from that area", Nannu Lohar recalling how they coped during the two months of national lockdown.

His nephew, Veeru Lohar added, "We just wanted to return home". With no clarity on their application status for the special Shramik trains operating to transport migrant workers back to their homes, a few men from their group began walking the long journey back home. "We usually go home during Holi [March]", Lohar continued, "Lockdown was announced just a few days before this, and we did not know how we would get back home".

Once they were all in the relief center, the government coordinator took charge of their case. "All I had to do was send an application requesting transport via Whatsapp and the officer took over from there", Kranthi from PCF said. She noted that government officials who she coordinated with were proactive when working with cases regarding migrant worker's return home.
"They arranged everything – the bus, our food. It took two days from Vijaywada to Nagpur and then to the border at Madhya Pradesh with all 55 people in the bus. From there we took respective buses to our own villages", Nannu Lohar said. By the 1st of May, they had all reached home.

7. Inter-district migration by agricultural workers, to work in tobacco farms

"You know, the police were at the field telling us about the virus and precautions even before the lockdown", recollects Durga Rao, an agricultural worker who worked on a contract-basis at a tobacco farm in Saripalli village, Pendhurti district, Vishakapatnam. He tells us over the phone that these announcements were made around 15th of March. "Our 14-day contract was ending soon, so we were glad to be returning home quickly", he recalled. When the nationwide lockdown was announced on the 22nd March 2020, Durgao Rao and the 25 others he migrated with from villages across East Godavari district found themselves stranded.

Earning close to Rs. 6000 rupees per barrel, Rao has been working on tobacco farms every season, each year, for the last 20 years. In the first ten days of the lockdown, farmers from Saripalli village fed and sheltered this group. The village's MLA contacted the Village Revenue Officer who on 3rd of April, then called our Helpline. We registered them as case APH034 and supported Durga Rao and his group of 12, with rations for the next 10 days. Soon after, they decided to walk home.

"We started walking one night, crossing the Godavari bridge, where we walked in pairs to practice social distancing", he told us over the phone, continuing to say, "It wasn't a big deal madam. Yes, we were on foot but that we did not have to walk very far."

Durga Rao reached his home village after one day of walking. He joined their family of 8: a wife, two daughters, a grandson, a mother, a sister, & a brother-in-law. During the lockdown period, the family has been provided government sanctioned ration – a regular supply of rice & pulses. "I am sustaining my family with the money I have, I will probably take a loan after we run out. I already took money from people and they laid me off for 2 months. But when lockdown gets lifted, they'll come back asking for money", Durga Rao says, his voice showing the first sign of worry. This debt, according to

Durga Rao, is the only worry that weighs heavy on him. But he laughed it out, saying everyone has money & job problems.

Rao made sure to mention during our phone calls with him that his family had masks, soap and water. “There is a dandora [announcement] in the evenings once in a while madam, educating people about the virus and its symptoms,” he said. When asked about his future, he shared a plight in his present landscape, of familiar faces missing from his village: “There are so many workers who migrated to big cities to find work and we have not heard from them at all. They are probably still stuck.”

VOICES OF VOLUNTEERS IN THE PHONE PAYMENTS TEAM[3]

Aishwarya Rebelly

Despite all the early mornings and the incessant calls all day, working with the helpline was a delightful experience. Being stuck at home in a privileged situation, while so many outside are struggling led me to this volunteer programme. To contribute whatever I can within my limited capacity. There was a lot to learn just by listening to the migrants, their struggles to make ends meet, to pay rent, taking care of their families and assuring those back home. It gives you a reality check. Everytime I've been able to support with rations, the gratitude I received was overwhelming. The fact that the migrants then called me for advice on going home or dealing with their owners felt surreal. I am grateful for this opportunity.

Gandhi Puttu

It is really a good initiative to help the migrant workers during this crisis time as they live olny with their salaries. The entire process is very clear and efficient, so no one will be able to commit a mistake. The organisers are available 24/7 and they are very cooperative.

I am satisfied with this initiative and hoping to participate in more events.

Fathaah Ansar

With the current pandemic wreaking havoc, especially in the daily wager's demography, everyone knows the scenario from the news. This was my stimulus to join the team, lending a little help in a large-scale effort by various charitable organization. In the duration of 2 weeks, solving around 40 group, I encountered several instances which reinforced my belief in humanity. I will enlist a few of those below:

1) APH1146 (April 25, 2020): A group of 6 members in Prakasam we're receiving help from a group of local policemen, with food and shelter being provided. When I contacted the point person in the group, he explained how he has received help and would want our help to go for someone more needy. With a system that has its flaws when it comes to verification, humanity comes to the rescue.

2) APH640 (May 2, 2020): A group of 21 men, located in 4 different rooms in a 2km radius, contacted me for a top-up. I overlooked the fact that they were already taken care of in the previous day by another volunteer, and went on to process the payment. When I went back to fill in the Daily update sheet, I realised that this case was already taken care of, and I've performed an extra top-up. When I contacted the point person regarding this, he confessed that he wasn't aware of such a top-up and will find out more. After he spoke with his group, he apologized for taking extra supplies and clarified that another person in the group received a call and went ahead to buy the supplies. He took total responsibility of the situation and made sure that the money was returned from the shopkeeper. I was surprised by how easily I could rectify a mistake I commited and realised how a few bad experiences made me cynical.

There were many more encounters that made a lasting impression. Though I've been a part of several NGO during my college days, I've stopped indulging in community service blaming lack of time. This experience made me realise that's not a valid excuse and I should put it more effort to give back to the community that has made me what I am today. The volunteering group was really amicable, helping

[3] Most of these volunteers were young, may be in their early twenties, still studying in under-graduate courses.

me along the way. This 2-week volunteering, lending help at a time of crisis, gave a great feeling that will always be close to my heart. I extend my gratitude to everyone in the group. Thank you!

Sumedha Kuraparthy

I decided to volunteer at the AP Civil Society Helpline after my sister (already a volunteer) pitched the idea as they needed more hands on deck. Following my brief stint as part of this inspiring team, I am left with a better awareness of the workings of our unjust and unequal world, as well as with a higher sensitivity towards all. The enthusiasm and zeal of each and every volunteer in the team has pushed me to manage work that could at times be exacting with a smile. The fact that it was being steered by the inimitable Kavitha ma'am was an added advantage. Also, this work has in its own way added to my sense of self-worth.

Upon interacting with many in the process, I was struck by the overwhelming feeling of gratitude of those hardest hit (economically) and the patience and sensitivity of the shopkeepers. Restoring faith in humanity in these uncertain times, one invoice at a time.

Chandrakala KS

I'm really glad that I got this opportunity. All the team members were incessantly supported and encouraged each other. Coming to calls, I felt some were easy to handle but some were not. When I processed my first case, I should say, I was delighted. It was satisfactory for me to help those migrant labourers in this time of pandemic. Initially it was time consuming to process a case. I had many doubts, I was scared that something might go wrong. Eventually it became piece of cake. Though I become little frustrated in the mornings, at the end of the day I and my cousins laugh remembering the conversations with the shopkeepers and the migrant labourers. It is really great experience and I grew more confident about myself in this process. When all this is will be over I really miss those morning calls, updating Daily- update sheet and checking twice or thrice whether I updated processed cases or not.

Vamsi Boorgu

Vote of Thanks : I (Boorgu Vamshi) take the privilege to thank and address the team (Andhra Pradesh Helpline team) for giving one of the beautiful opportunity to work as a volunteer for COVID-19 pandemic affected stranded labour in Andhra Pradesh. The last 17 days (17th April to 3rd May 2020) working with the team were one of my most productive and efficient days during the lockdown which gave me the lot of satisfaction serving the people at remote location staying home. This is one of the best team which I have ever worked with, where inputs (i.e. only time) as a volunteer to be given are less but resulting outcomes are enormous. All day efforts of few constant volunteers working tirelessly in the team, made the helpline structured and work elegant for the newly joined or short-term volunteers.

I as a volunteer working with the team received constant support, integrity, learnt patience to listen the worries of affected people and enough amount of confidence to handle the tough situations from the remaining members. I hereby thank each and every person in the team, also will be looking forward to provide enough amount of support in future under any emergencies.

" Hope pandemic comes to an end at the earliest" "Stay home, Stay Safe" "Jai Hind"

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Arun Sagar

Before joining the helpline, I spend most of my time on the internet. Since there is only much to do when you are in lockdown. When my friend reached out to me asking if I can dedicate a few hours to help the people who are stuck in A.P., struggling during this period, I said yes without a second thought.

The task was simple, we call up the people, who requested support from the helpline, get some details and brought them rations. We made sure there is no delay in providing support.

With so many people working tirelessly at the backend and frontend, my contribution felt small. But it was still better than doing nothing.

The smallest of things can make you smile. Like, when the other person is relieved that he is sorted for the next couple of days. And yes, a sense of satisfaction comes as a part of the deal.

Vineetha Sreepada

Corona and lockdown! I spent the first few days of the lockdown catching up on books, household maintenance, playing board games with my children etc. I was immensely happy for this extra time I got.

One day in March, I happen to see an FB post asking for donations for feeding migrant labour. I donated some money and was proud of myself for having done a 'good deed'. But somewhere I started feeling it wasn't enough or right to stop there. I asked my sister Kavitha Kuruganti (yes she's my younger sister and we are very proud of her!) if there's anything else I can do. Within two days I found myself answering phone calls on the helpline for migrants. I'm a professional social worker with an M. Phil in this field. But circumstances in life made me move away from this field. This helpline put me back in it.

Thousands of migrants, from states as far away as Assam and Nepal. What prompted them to come all the way here to eke a living. How complacently we walk up to roadside panipuri wallas and ice-cream vendors laughing and joking with our friends and then bargain with these vendors? It's an entirely different world that they live in, so far away from ours. Interacting with them through this helpline gave a small glimpse into their world. Many a time I have enlarged the photos they sent to us to see how they live.

Getting up early in the morning, sending the migrants to shops, paying the money electronically (oh yes frustrated many a time when the net didnt work or the payment failed) then chasing the migrants for pictures, feeling powerless, angry and insufficient for their suffering, following and tracking them on their journeys back to their native places, happy and surprised at the ingenuity, determination, enterprising nature and grit of some of them..... It has been a very eventful summer this year. Life will not be the same after this... Or will it be.... While we helped many people, there were several others that we couldn't reach out to... Karma of theirs and ours and those that we helped probably. I also came to know how much multi tasking the millennials are capable of! Thank you for reading my ramblings.

Haripriya Gali

During the initial stages of the lockdown I used to think that our situation of lockdown i.e staying at home all day long was unfortunate.

It wasn't until I starting volunteering to help the migrants that I undertsood the depth of the situation. Through this opportunity I got to converse with different kinds of people, bachelors and families under various circumstances having different opinions on the same. Despite the hurdles they face, most of

them have been very kind and patient. Surprisingly, none of them persisted on getting more that what was provided. They were grateful of what they received and expressed gratitude after the process as well. Some would engage in longer conversations, telling me about their lives, families and jobs. These conversations kept reminding me that there's more to the situation that just being locked in our homes. Talking to them personally, I understood how grateful I am of this opportunity and cannot praise enough the initiative and the other volunteers who've worked very hard to keep it going.

Vinati Ramadhenu

I volunteered for a month during Covid-19 pandemic induced lockdown time in the AP helpline which provides food rations to the migrant workers affected by the pandemic.

The objective of this assignment was to extend help to the worst affected of the lot from this pandemic - the migrant workers stranded without livelihood. A different arm of the NGO did the ground-level survey and identified the eligible workers who needed to be supported financially to ensure their families did not starve during this situation.

The work of my team starts at this point. Every day, each member of my team would be assigned few migrant workers that need to be supported on the next day. Our work consisted of establishing phone contact with the migrant worker and giving instructions to him on how he can go to the nearest public distribution service outlet and buy the food supplies that are needed. We also had to ensure that there is enough proof for validation of claim on the family members by getting photo of entire family. Once he goes to the PDS outlet, we had to coordinate with the owner of outlet and arrange to provide the necessary food items by transferring money to the PDS outlet and getting a copy of bill. We would then submit the necessary proof to the NGO and get the amount reimbursed.

I had been fortunate to be a part of this work. In reality, I gained more from this work than I gave. At the outset, it looks a simple exercise. But it taught me many things:

- It improved my communication skills. Though I was very good in communication with my peers and people in general, this assignment taught me that to deal with people on the ground level, we need to necessarily talk in the local language. Though I struggled in first couple of days to manage this, I became fluent in both Hindi and spoken Telugu by the end of this exercise.

- At times, we had to think on our feet and find solution for last minute hitches. For example, if Google Pay did not work due to some technical glitch, and the retailer is not willing to accept other modes of payment like PayTM, we needed to quickly think on our feet, coordinate with rest of team members and arrange to complete the transaction on the same day. Because delay on that could mean that the family may have to starve.

- This made me understand the ground reality of the poverty of people. It broke my heart when I learnt that the person assigned to me had already started on a walk-based journey to his home town in despair.

- I became more organized in terms of time to wake-up, having a tab on my expenses and reimbursements, etc. The window to complete purchase transaction was limited due to lockdown restrictions. This meant that I needed to be up and running by as early as 6 AM every day to support the people I am assigned to.

-This assignment taught me to count my blessings - the things that we take for granted otherwise (like comfort of home, being able to eat food on time, having friends around us to support us when needed, etc).As I got directly in touch with the people who we were extending help to it was very fulfilling to volunteer for the program. Overall, I am thankful for the opportunity to be part of this team.

Mounika Kuraparthy

Being a Teach for India Fellow, I work as a teacher in a government school in Hyderabad. As the schools shut down from 16th of March in Hyderabad, I was relieved. I was in dire need of proper sleep and rest. All this changed as the lockdown came into place. Listening to the plight of my students' families, mostly inter-district migrants themselves, I realised that this pandemic was effecting different economic strata of our society differently. I was left with a strong urge to help those who needed it most, crippled by lack of direction or resources. Therefore, when I saw an opportunity to sign up for the AP Covid helpline, I jumped at it.

It started slowly at first, with just talking to migrants about their situation to providing rations for them. In no time we were inundated with requests. I never would have imagined so many migrants living in Andhra Pradesh. Being involved in this has really opened my eyes to how unfair our society is. On one side of the phone was I, trying out the recipes I never had before and on the other side a family struggling to eat for sustenance. On one side was I, thinking how to spend this "leisure" time and on the other side a family with kids spending the same time walking thousands of kilometers to their home.

Many of the migrants we spoke to would be grateful when they get the rations, some of them would be rude throughout. Why should they be grateful or why shouldn't they be rude? Aren't they paying the cost of our privileges?

With the nature of my work, I am constantly in touch with ground reality, but working with the helpline I got to see it from an inter-state migrant's perspective. I am deeply grateful to have had this opportunity to contribute. I met great people with grit, kindness and empathy during the one month I spent here.

Madhuri Beluguppa

Thank you for the wonderful opportunity rendered by the helpline, specially Divya and Kavitha for giving chance to add value to the society and making our life more meaningful. The support, love of the group and the zeal to touch millions lives to make it a better place to live and the gratitude that we receive from them, is the best way of service and best source of self satisfaction! Thank you once again team! I look forward to associate with much more projects and possibly support as on field volunteer as well! Thank you!