

Relief Activities in Ballikurava mandal of Prakasam district against the backdrop of COVID-19

A brief Note by MV Foundation, April 2020

MV Foundation has been working in the catchment area of stone quarries of Ballikurava mandal, Prakasam district, Andhra Pradesh, for nearly two years with the primary objective of creating a Child Labour Free Zone there, together with Dutch natural stone processing company Arte and Arisa Foundation. This initiative mainly targets children of workers employed in more than 26 stone quarries of the mandal. Migrants from Bihar and Orissa accounted for a majority of these workers.

The enforcement of a nationwide lockdown in the last week of March 2020 against the backdrop of COVID-19 caused untold inconvenience to these migrants and their families. The wages that they received were very modest and did not permit them to save much. Restrictions on economic activity in the quarries also meant that they had no work and no incomes, consequentially. They shared this information with the Mobilisers, who remain in regular touch with them despite the limited mobility of the latter.

Though they could not implement the proposed project activities in the field, they prioritised the needs of the families and met them in order to keep track of their situation. The workers not only lacked the transport facilities needed to return home but also had no money with them to meet the expenses of their travel. They had approached the labour contractors and had sought release of wages for May. The contractors had expressed their helplessness in this regard and had directed them to the owners. The owners had refused to pay them wages because there had been no production for the whole month. They offered, instead, to provide food and accommodation. They had, in accordance with their promise, established and maintained village level common kitchens for migrant workers' in the Mallayapalem village.

The mobilisers met the Mandal Revenue Officer and discussed steps to strengthen the quarry owners' initiative. The official constituted village level monitoring committees to oversee the functioning of the Common Kitchens. These Committees would function under the supervision of the government and would include the Panchayat Secretary, government volunteers and the local MVF mobiliser. Another objective of the Committee was to extend all necessary support to the workers.

At the beginning of the intervention, the officials requested the MVF team to supply the required vegetables for common kitchens on a regular basis through the project. The team informed them that this would be difficult in

view of the donor's prior commitments. MVF provided the necessary supplies for a period of 10 days, after which the quarry owners took over this responsibility. The project team, in the meanwhile, focused on streamlining the provision of subsidised food grains and pulses and supply of sanitary kits and masks to the workers' families, in coordination with the officials and the Committees.

The mobilisers also regularly gathered feedback from the migrants' workers in the context of service delivery and educated them on the precautions that they were expected to take in order to minimise spread of COVID-19. They also communicated issues of concern to the officials. District level police officials and the quarry owners association visited the villages and distributed the provisions and supplies to the families.

MVF mobilisers are identifying families who are in need of rice and other provisions. Some families have excluded from the government support because of not having the subsidy rice cards or not stayed in the village when the food is distributed etc. etc. We may support such families if we have additional funds. We will get back to you with the requirements once our mobilisers come up with requirements.