



May 4, 2021

## Appeal to the Prime Minister of India

### Ensuring Social Protection to the 93% of the Informal Sector and Migrant Workers hailing from the Marginalised Communities in the COVID-19 Pandemic

India is reporting a record surge in COVID-19 cases, ranking second only after the US! The Union Health Ministry confirmed two new strains of SARS-CoV-2, the virus causing Covid-19, in India, on February 23, 2021. Over the weeks, the new strain spread vociferously across the states, with a higher volume of confirmed cases across the country. The second wave of COVID-19 is spreading faster both in the urban and rural areas. The situation has been alarming with unrelenting rise in caseloads and death. With the states like Maharashtra, Delhi, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Bihar and Odisha imposing and extending lockdowns and night-curfews, high distress and unemployment are being anticipated. With only essential service sectors functioning, the survival of unorganised sector and migrant daily wage workers is clouded with uncertainty.

A majority of unorganised sector and migrant workforce hail from Dalit, Adivasi, OBC communities. The informal sector comprises about 93% of the total work force in the country (RSBY website), with a substantial proportion of women workers. The condition of single women, (including the widows), aged, orphans and the people with disability is likely to be compounded in the crisis, and deepen the pre-existing inequalities and restricted access to essential services by these communities. During the first wave of COVID-19 the government had announced the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY), a stimulus package, which alleviated the suffering of the poor and marginalized communities to a certain extent. Significant sections were left out as revealed by the inclusion assessment of the PMGKY, titled, "*Delayed and Denied: Injustice in COVID19 Relief*", August 2020, NCDHR<sup>1</sup>. The manner in which the pandemic is spreading during the second (ongoing) wave, even in the rural areas, we anticipate a much larger crisis that the poor and marginalized communities would be faced with. Moreover, with the monsoon around, may witness natural disasters, viz., floods and cyclones too, and complicating lives further.

It would be of paramount importance for the government and civil society to be prepared to minimize loss of lives and livelihood; and ensure the availability, accessibility and affordability to COVID-19 testing and treatment, along with medical assistance for pre-existing chronic illnesses. Under high duress, the children from these sections are at a greater risk of falling into the hands of anti-social elements. Hence it is important that the government formulate and announce a minimum assistance package for the marginalized communities, especially the SCs, the STs, and the

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.ncdhr.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/10-NCDHR-national-factsheet\\_weclaim\\_April-May-2020.pdf](http://www.ncdhr.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/10-NCDHR-national-factsheet_weclaim_April-May-2020.pdf)

most vulnerable among the OBCs so that they could tide over the crisis. It is against this background that the following recommendations are being made.

### **Immediate Relief Assistance**

1. Provide immediate provision of subsidized foodgrains, healthcare and income assistance regardless of entitlement documents and status of enrolment until they've been covered under all relevant schemes
2. Immediately restart community kitchens in rural areas, especially in remote locations.
3. Provision the supply of potable drinking water and WASH essentials to the drought-affected areas to prevent crowding at common water points.

### **Immediate Universal Social Protection Coverage**

1. Declaring it a national/state emergency so the provisions of NDRF / SDRF for immediate relief can be enforced
2. Announce economic stimulus package (like PMGKY) for the informal sector and migrant workers for at least 3 to 6 months to help them survive with dignity in the absence of stable income, based on the state wage rate for skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled work.
3. Introduce mechanisms of cash assistance to those with inoperative bank accounts
4. Provide the ex-gratia assistance to unorganised workers under Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan Yojana
5. Ensure financial inclusion by opening and reactivating Jan Dhan accounts for the informal sector and migrant workers, SCs, STs and women
6. Provide health insurance coverage to the informal sector and migrant workers, making outpatient treatment a permanent provision through new/amended scheme and policy on public health
7. Immediately operationalize the One Nation One Ration Card scheme with zero administrative hassles and simplified procedures reducing pitfalls, and maintain a disaggregated opensource database along the lines of MGNREGA
8. Ensure that the rights to fair wages, working conditions and grievance redressal are protected in view of the suspension of labour laws by several states earlier in May 2020 for a minimum of 3 year
9. Activate and monitor the functioning of the Child Protection Committees in villages, block, district and state levels through the National /State Commission for Protection of Child Rights.
10. Creating awareness through audio and visual media on Childline 1098 for children in need of care of protection, especially when separated from parents/guardian upon testing COVID-19 positive
11. Introduce universal social security policy measures for all marginalized sections prioritizing the socially and economically poorer sections from Socio-Economic Caste Census
12. Incentivize the increased work-hours and work-load and mentally taxing services of the workers engaged in burial/cremation owing to spike in deaths as they are generally poorly paid, ensuring dignity to the dead during public health crisis/epidemics and pandemic

13. Government health insurance cover for all contractual sanitation workers specifically women, in-healthcare institutions or outside, performing critical hygiene functions during epidemics and pandemic
14. Open dedicated helplines and on-ground facility for psychosocial care and medical support for marginalised women, children and people with disabilities whose families have been affected by COVID-19
15. Operate dedicated helplines for frontline workers, health workers, and those involved in burial and cremation services

### **Policy Measures for Resilience and Recovery in Public Health Emergencies /COVID-19**

1. Introduce policy measures on protecting/compensating/insuring the livelihood losses and incomes of informal and migrant workers on account of public health emergencies and natural disaster for resilience and faster recovery.

Towards complementing the public efforts in these difficult times, and enabling the Government to reach out to marginalized sections, we will be glad to offer our assistance in the manner possible.

Thank you,



**Beena Pallical**

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(for) National Coalition on SCSP/TSP Legislation



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***The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR)***, a coalition of Dalit and Adivasi human rights activists and academics, founded in 1998, is dedicated promoting social equity and inclusion, particularly focused on enabling the Scheduled Castes and the Schedule Tribes to access their Constitutional rights, justice system, and development and humanitarian entitlements. This is driven by research and fact findings-based policy and legislative advocacy, campaigns, facilitating access to social protection and development schemes, alliance building and supporting Dalit and Adivasi human rights defenders.

***Dalit Human Rights Defenders Network (DHRDNet)*** is a coalition of over 1000 Dalit human rights defenders from different states of India. However, DHRDNet mostly concentrates its work in five states – Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Karnataka. It works towards enhancing the skills and structural capacity of Dalit Human Rights Defenders through capacity building programmes, developing legal assistance and monitoring programme; expanding dialogue with the general public and cooperation with government authorities for improvements in enforcement procedures/ responses to human rights violations against Dalits.

***National Coalition on SCSP/TSP Legislation (NACSTL)***- The National Coalition comprises of many SC/ST organizations and civil society partners from across the country. The coalition has been working towards strengthening the Economic rights of the Scheduled castes and Scheduled tribes by advocating legislation of policy measures Scheduled Caste Sub-Plan and Tribal Sub-Plan.