

## Savera Foundation supporting tribal hamlets in northern Jharkhand to mitigate COVID 19 impact.



*Tribes in northern Jharkhand follow social distancing with relief packages from team of Savera Foundation*

Dated - 27 April 2020 - Fear and anxiety has been a constant companion of huge group of primitive tribal migrant workers, as they were compelled by the nationwide lockdown to return from big cities to their native land, located in remote forest covered pockets in Jharkhand. After the announcement of lockdown by Government of India, since last 2 months to fight against the Corona virus catastrophe, millions of poor migrant workers were forced to trek home to their villages, as they had little money and no food, small children were hungry, walking and compelled to leave their schools. Though the informal workers are the backbone of India's big city economies, yet they are the worst affected. Hats off to some of the barefoot warriors like Savera Foundation, who came with initiatives to support starving migrant population living in northern Jharkhand area with humanitarian assistance with food, ration, medical support etc.

Savera Foundation since year 2006 has been working towards empowerment of Adivasi communities with household food security, enhancing livelihood opportunities for overall improvement of life quality of tribal and Dalit population living in remote villages of Jharkhand. Mr Ashok Kumar, the Secretary of the organization says, “We have a long way to go, as the community is needy and there are immense challenges in this tribal belt. Our team have always stood with community members for promoting development projects on health & Sanitation, strengthening community organization, carrying skill development program for supporting livelihood enhancement, building knowledge on best farm practices for farmers, promoting gender equality and working to eradicate various form of alleged caste-based discrimination against Dalits in Jharkhand”.

The world and India is struggling way hard to mitigate the impact made by Corona Virus disease 2019 (COVID – 2019). The team of Savera Foundation at front line recognized these hardships imposed on the returning tribal daily wage earner families and developed plans for helping the most vulnerable population in districts of Giridih and Koderma, located in North Jharkhand. The health care project lead with front line workers identified such vulnerable location in the community and prepared a list of worst affected families at Tisri Block of Giridih District and Domchanch Block of Koderma district. Till now, the health team provided dry ration and safety kit to 650 people. However, the aspiration is to reach 1000 vulnerable tribal population to battle with hunger and joblessness.

The health worker’s team went to the local administration and discussed their plan and the list of worst affected families. Mr Sunil Prakash, the Block Development Officer (BDO) addressed the ask to support migrant tribal workers with food and medicine. Following this, department issued 5 pass to the workers and volunteers of Savera to continue supporting the identified community members. As the organisation has very good rapport with Government department, the Ministry of Women and child development also issued pass to women workers for helping children in distress in the area. It is worthy of sharing over here, that the team of workers were equally greeted and supported by community leaders, members from Panchayat Raj Institution and Zila Parishad with kind cooperation during relief work. Historically Adivasi communities living in this belt are very reluctant to socialize, they are not much aware of the symptoms and precautionary measures against the COVID 19 and at the same time, due to ignorance, they were very much threatened with the fear of being infected by Corona virus, which is reported to spread across the nation.

It was an inspiring sight to see the volunteers and workers of Savera Foundation conquer their own fear and anxiety about Corona virus and engage whole heartedly to prepare ration kits, that contained rice, pulses, potatoes, soya bean, mustard oil, spices & salt, masks, soap, etc, which would last for a duration of 15 days. About 20,000 face masks were prepared by Skill net Groups, an initiative of skilling people for livelihood generation. The workers followed the Government health norms and guidelines for designing safe and hygienic face mask, which would prevent the spread of the disease by protecting the person wearing it. The health workers visited individual homes and informed families about general precautions against the disease and the spread, about hygiene, wearing face mask and reusing them after washing, following social distancing, washing hands etc.

The Community members living in forest belt shared that relief packages and awareness by the workers to families and children is very much relevant as the community members are now aware about the protective measures, Government initiatives, help line to be contacted, phone numbers of workers of Savera Foundation and contacts of Government hospitals for any health-related support for addressing the deadly Corona virus or any other disease.

The team of Savera Foundation wishes to tackle the challenges posed by COVID 19 situation and consequent socio-economic impact on weaker sections. The organisation plans to work closely with Government authorities and like-minded Funding partners and reach out the most neglected tribal workers and connect them with Government Welfare programs like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment ( mgnrega). The migrant workers at the outbreak of COVID 19 were forced to flee from mega cities due to multiple fear and primarily by the fear of starvation. All this chaos and hunger led to several hardships for hundreds and lakhs of daily wage workers, people with disabilities, old and orphan etc. These reverse migrants do not want to go back to the cities shortly in coming 2 to 3 years. Chinmay Tumbe, the author of India moving says, “the history of migration offers economic security to the poor migrant, but their social security lies in their villages, where they have assured food and accommodation. With work coming to a halt and jobs gone, the migrant workers were looking towards returning to villages for social security”. The irony is that there has been dearth of employment for tribes of Jharkhand, people over the years used to collect mica scraps and sell it to local market and some used to sell non-timber forest produce and earn livelihood from it and some were forced to migrate to survive. Hence, the focus of the organisation will be to strengthen skill development opportunities for the tribes, seek Government support for initiating rural enterprises that strengthens the value chain assessment for agriculture and non-timber forest produce for livelihood generation.

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