

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

The impact of the COVID 19 lockdown on migrants and daily wage labourers was very harsh in India and around the world. The ILO estimates that 1.6 billion workers (76 % of the informal economy worldwide) are significantly impacted. Women form 42% of this sector. Staying home for these workers means loss of jobs and no food. The ILO calls for urgent and significant policy response to this reality.

The Migrant Help Desks in Kerala operated through the KISMAT programme have demonstrated that our interventions make concrete impact on the welfare of migrant workers, especially during emergencies. The close collaboration with the government of Kerala helped thousands of workers access food, help, information, services, healthcare and transport. I appreciate the hard work and contribution of the KISMAT state team and the individual MHDs during this pandemic. Building further on these experiences will help us to hopefully advocate better policy responses to migrants' dire conditions.

With best wishes,

Fr. Joy Nedumparambil SDB
Executive Director
BREADS Bangalore



KISMAT'S VITAL CONTRIBUTION

In Safeguarding Migrant Labourers from
COVID 19 in Kerala



Kerala was the first state in India with active cases of COVID 19. The abrupt national lockdown had massive consequences on most people, especially the estimated 2.5 million migrant labour population in Kerala. These are largely construction and hotel workers, and casual labourers. They were severely impacted by the loss of livelihood and income, which resulted in widespread panic and the impulse to return home, becoming a huge cause of concern in terms of survival, health, and law enforcement.

The Kerala Interstate Migrants Alliance for Transformation (KISMAT), a project of BREADS Bangalore, played a key facilitative role in ensuring the wellbeing of vulnerable migrants in collaboration with the state government, which brought together various agencies in society to address the pandemic successfully. It is no small achievement that KISMAT could ensure that migrants were protected and cared for until they could safely rejoin their families back home.





Initially, not realising the seriousness of the infection, the migrants went about their lives as usual. KISMAT took up the mundane yet crucial task of educating them about the dos and don'ts of a pandemic to protect this vulnerable community from infection. KISMAT created various information materials about COVID 19, its prevention and symptoms, in Bengali, Assamese, Oriya and Hindi using audio clips and informative videos. Pamphlets in various languages with information and migrant helpline numbers in Kerala, were created and distributed. All the information focussed on stringent precautionary measures to be

adopted if infection occurred. Together with the Police and Labour department, KISMAT staff conducted around **240** awareness programmes, educating around **3000** people at the panchayat level in all the districts of Kerala. Consequently, aware migrants began to keep themselves updated through daily calls and WhatsApp messages to KISMAT. The MHDs set up and answered toll-free calls to clarify enquiries from migrant labourers, directing them to appropriate sources for information and services.

FREE MEDICAL CAMPS

The Migrant Help Desks (MHD) assisted the Health and Police departments in conducting medical camps in association with the Suraksha project of KSACS. The camps facilitated free health checkups, conducting tests for filariasis, malaria, medicine distribution and counselling support for labourers to equip them for the COVID 19 lockdown. The MHDs went all out to make the camps and the COVID 19 preventive messaging attractive by inviting local film actors to interact with the migrants and spread the message. KISMAT assisted in **11** medical camps across Thrissur, Thiruvananthapuram, Kozhikode and Wayanad districts.



SUSTAINING MIGRANT LABOURERS DURING THE LOCKDOWN



Without any savings or employment, the most pressing issue for people in these situations was hunger. Besides protecting them from COVID 19, it was crucial to help the labourers and their families stay alive. MHDs distributed food kits and cooked food in many locations, literally rescuing people from starvation. In Thiruvananthapuram, the MHDs provided food provisions for starving migrants at Thiruvallam. The situation of the migrants and KISMAT's immediate response caught the attention of the media which highlighted the plight of migrants to raise awareness in the administration and public. In some places, MHDs organised clothes for the migrants as well.

The MHDs also addressed the emotional and psychological wellbeing of the migrants. Understanding the impact of being forced into lockdown away from their families and homes, the anxiety of lost jobs and livelihoods and the resulting emotional instability of the migrants, the MHDs extended their outreach to include recreational activities and informal entertainment under the supervision of the police with strict protocols and physical distancing.

IS A GROCERY KIT ENOUGH?

Raju and Sushmita, a couple from Bihar, have 3 daughters, the youngest being a baby. They live with 9 other adults in 2 tiny rooms in Mannuthy, Thrissur. Raju, his brothers, and brothers-in-law work in construction while Sushmita manages the home and the children. With the national lockdown in response to COVID 19, they have no jobs and no income. Earlier, Raju used to give Sushmita money to manage food but now, without an income, things were different. There was not enough food and they didn't have a solution. The strain of living in forced confinement with so many people and the uncertainty and fear of the future made life very difficult for all of them. All latent family issues came to the fore. After a quarrel with Raju about not eating, Sushmita decided to take her children and go away. Her brothers made her leave the older children behind and so, she left with the baby.

The Thrissur Migrant Help Desk (MHD) accompanied by the police met this family during a house visit to enquire about their wellbeing and needs. Finding the woman of the house missing and suspecting the answers of the men, the staff pressed for information and the story came out. They set off in search of the lady and finally located her around 8 kms away. During counselling, Sushmita spoke about the lack of food and money, her fears for her daughters' futures without dowries in a male-dominated society, and the general helplessness of their lives, especially as females. She agreed to come back to the house, the MHD staff counselled the family and provided them with groceries to ease the current situation. This incident highlighted the layered vulnerabilities that make up a migrant's world and the fact that they have no safeguards against the trials of life, especially during something as challenging as a pandemic.

KISMAT- Migrant Help Desks Outreach

S. No	Location	Food Kits Distributed	Beneficiaries of Food Kits
1	Trivandrum	142	1135
2	Kollam	57	832
3	Kottayam	40	134
4	Ernakulam	1154	4555
5	Angamaly	373	613
6	Thrissur	14	186
7	Palakkad	30	210
8	Kozhikode	101	522
9	Wayanad	6	38
10	Kannur	2	56
TOTAL		1919	8281



COLLABORATION WITH THE LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

◀ KISMAT played a huge role in addressing the panic among migrants. The local administration and police depended on KISMAT's interventions to maintain calm and order in various locations and labour camps. Migrant Help Desks were on call for various emergencies, including deaths; assisting the labour and police departments on the field, at work and camp sites. They made house visits to collect data of migrant workers in each panchayat to create district-level databases. In a unique venture, to facilitate people in the lockup help others in lockdown, KISMAT organised motorised sewing machines for jail inmates to make face masks in Kannur and Thrissur districts.

When the state governments finally organised interstate trains, the MHDs were fully involved in systematically organising batches of migrants according to their destinations and safely transporting them to the train stations so that they could finally go back home.

KISMAT also collaborated with various administrative agencies during its outreach: Gram panchayats, Police, District Labour Offices (DLO), Health department, CHILDLINE, District Legal Services and political parties.

In Ernakulam, KISMAT volunteered with the Green Cochin Mission of Ernakulam, consisting of the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), Motor Vehicles Dept., Indian Medical Association, Justice Brigade, and CHILDLINE to reach out to the migrants.

SUPPORT SERVICES BY MHDs IN THEIR RESPECTIVE DISTRICTS



S. No	SERVICES	MIGRANT HELP DESK
1	House visits to check availability of food	Trivandrum, Kollam
2	Medical camps for COVID 19 screening among the interstate migrants, health checks	Trivandrum, Kottayam, Thrissur
3	Distribution of groceries and food	Trivandrum, Angamaly, Wayanad, Thrissur, Ernakulam, Kollam, Kannur
4	Visits to homes/labour sites to identify migrants and collect data	Angamaly, Thrissur, Kottayam
5	Verification of enquiries and complaints from interstate migrants, facilitation of services	Angamaly, Kozhikode, Palakkad, Kannur
6	Data collection and entry about interstate migrants (ISM)	Wayanad, Kottayam
7	Awareness generation and the distribution of masks among the ISMs	Wayanad
8	Management of 24*7 phone helplines	Kottayam, Kozhikode, Palakkad
9	Provision of counselling services and psychological support	Kottayam, Thrissur, Kozhikode, Ernakulam, Kollam
10	Translation of information and awareness generation	Thrissur
11	Facilitation of recreational activities for ISMs in their houses	Thrissur
12	Assisting police to organise and transport ISMs back to their native places	Thrissur
13	Collaboration for community kitchen	Ernakulam

BREADS COVID 19 - EMERGENCY RESPONSE

AS ON 11 MAY 2020

SN	ACTIVITY	KERALA	KARNATAKA	MIGRANTS (KERALA)	TOTAL
1	Don Bosco partners engaged in COVID relief work	19	19	0	38
2	Face masks produced from all Don Bosco centres	54300	179570	0	233870
3	Grocery kits distributed	3246	12512	1919	17677
4	Beneficiaries of grocery kits	16368	51244	8281	75893
5	Beneficiaries of cooked meals	940	49016	59400	109356
Total beneficiaries of cooked meals/ grocery kits		17308	100260	67681	185249