

The Covid-19 lockdown period has on one hand caused misery to the people, especially restricting their livelihood opportunities, and on the other hand it has helped people in knowing their other constitutional and statutory rights (along with already known forest rights) when they had to access and demand for the relief measures declared by the union and state governments. Therefore, while keeping the basic thrust on capacity building of traditional forest dwellers and forest dependent communities for submitting and asserting their CFR rights and individual forest rights, the activities of providing handholding support to the local community for accessing relief measures started by the government amidst COVID-19 lockdown, were also carried out.

Institute for Ecology and Livelihood Action (IELA) and Badad Majdoor Kisan Sangathan (BMKS), a regional federation of tribal villages in Chittorgarh district) also took certain initiatives regarding public awareness on different rights including right for labour under MGNREGA, rights to access to minor forest produce, welfare schemes under scheduled tribal area etc.

Access to Government support schemes: Prior to conducting public meetings, IELA and BMKS jointly with the help of village volunteers conducted survey of the families in 19 villages of 5 village panchayat areas in Rawatbhata tehsil and listed out families that still do not have access to different household and livelihood schemes. The team identified more than 200 families that are eligible but do not have access to government schemes to avail benefits. Based on the survey results the families were categorized under four categories – **(1)** Below Poverty Line (BPL) families (families who are living below the poverty line specified by the state government); **(2)** Above Poverty Line (APL) families who live above nationally designated poverty threshold; **(3)** Deen Dayal Upadhyay Antyodaya scheme (a convergence and accountability framework aiming to bring optimum use and management of resources allocated by 27 Ministries/ Department of the Government of India under various programmes for the development of rural areas); and **(4)** Annapurna scheme (aims at providing food security to meet the requirement of those senior citizen who though eligible have remained uncovered under the National Old Age Pension Scheme). The survey data was communicated to the local MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly), Sub-District Magistrate (SDM) and the Sarpanch of respective panchayat with the request of enlisting the needy families under different schemes. After continuous pursuance of the matter by BMKS and IELA rural volunteers, the administration and panchayats were forced to take necessary measures swiftly.

Handholding support in registration for food security scheme: IELA and BMKS team also identified families that were facing food crisis amidst Covid-19 lockdown and helped them know about The National Food Security Act, 2013 (also 'Right to Food Act'), an Act of the Parliament which aims to provide subsidized food grains to approximately two thirds of India's 1.2 billion people. More than 100 families were facilitated to file online registration under food security scheme and now they are availing its benefits. A letter to the local MLA was also communicated in the month of October to arrange government's help for registering

families of Kushalgarh panchayat that belong to Above Poverty Line (APL) but facing food crisis due to Covid-19 lockdown and loss of livelihood.

Advocacy and technical support to MGNREGA job card holders (including FRA beneficiaries): To provide livelihood support to rural families under Covid-19 relief measures, the central as well as state governments started different work in various departments under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), but the benefit of government's relief measures was not reaching to the people. IELA and BMKS team conducted a sample survey in the month of July in one panchayat (Kushalgarh) to know that how many days' work a MGNREGA job card holder gets against the 100 days work assured under the Act. Overall 114 MGNREGA job card holders were surveyed and it was found that none of them had got more than 50 days work in the last financial year!! The MGNREGA Rojgar Sahayak Sachiv (Employment Assistance Secretary - EAS) whose job is to receive the job applications from the job card holders was unreasonably reluctant to receive the job applications and the panchayat officials as well as elected representatives were also ineffective to help the poor people and take action against the MGNREGA secretary.

IELA and BMKS team started handholding support to MGNREGA job card holders that were living in villages as well those who had migrated to other places due to unavailability of work and had to return back due to loss of livelihood amidst Covid-19 pandemic and were facing crisis of livelihood, in filling their job application forms and in approaching the higher administrative authorities so as to compel them to make necessary arrangements for receiving the job applications and release muster rolls of sanctioned work to provide work to the job card holders. As a part of peoples' mobilization for asserting their rights for getting work under MGNREGA act, BMKS along with local peoples groups sent two letters to the Prime minister of India in which they demanded extension of MGNREGA work assurance from 100 to 200 days, extra daily tool allowance, increase in daily wage etc. The advocacy for MGNREGA job card holders (including FRA beneficiaries) continued in the successive months and in this regard continuous pursuance with the SDM was done through reminder letters. As a result, from July 2020 to February 2021 in a span of eight months, total 870 job applications were filed by job card holders with the help of IELA and BMKS team. Muster rolls of works under MGNREGA are being released and people are getting livelihood support under MGNREGA through our team's assistance. The assisted beneficiaries belong to 07 villages (Ganeshpura, Manpura, Badla Ka Khera, Nali, Kanti Ramnagar, Arena Kalan and Kheda Viran) in Kushalgarh and Mandesra panchayat of Rawatbhata.