

To,

Shri Anupam Anand

(IAS)

Secretary,

Tribal Development Department,

Gujarat

**Sub: Comprehensive Recommendations For Alleviation of Hardships
During Lockdown and Collaboration with NGOs**

Dear Sir,

Greetings from Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.net/>

During these trying times, the efforts taken by the State of Gujarat are truly commendable. From the implementation of the food basket and the Ann Brahma Yojana to implementing the lockdown measures to prevent the further spread of the pandemic. Despite these great steps, the huge diversity in population and demographics of the state, gives rise to certain problems which remain unaddressed and certain issues which crop up which the policy-maker at the state level would not be privy to. For this reason, we believe it would be in the interest of the State, as well as the affected vulnerable groups, that collaboration with NGOs who have a solid understanding of field realities and have presence on the ground is necessary for effective policy-making as well as implementation of existing schemes.

Centre for Social Justice has 25 years of experience in working in tribal areas. Currently we are actively working in the districts of Dang, Dahod, Narmada and Mahisagar. Through our volunteers on the field we have identified certain problems, which are specific to tribal areas, which are necessary to be addressed as tribals are the most affected during this lockdown period. Hence, keeping in mind

1. The season for collection of Minor Forest Produce in tribal areas has started. 15% of Gujarat's population constitutes of tribals and the tribal population in the southern and the eastern belts depend on the MFPs in summer for their additional income and sustenance. In consonance with the letter written by the Hon'ble Tribal Affairs Minister, Mr. Arjun Munda, wherein he stated that MFPs should be acquired at the Minimum Support Prices, it is recommended that volunteer bases from various NGOs working in tribal areas be used as a link in times of these lockdown for acquisition of MFPs at the Minimum Support Price.
2. The Forest Departments would not be aware of such a letter being written. Hence, a letter should be issued to all the Forest Divisions to not impede the process of collection of Minor Forest Produce in these trying times, as additional income during this lockdown for tribals is a must.

3. Furthermore, this letter also states that under the PM Van Dhan Vikas Yojana, TRIFED, in collaboration with UNICEF is set to orient Van Dhan Self Help Groups to be the messengers in their community on awareness around Covid-19 and social distancing. This is again a great opportunity for collaboration with NGOs as the volunteers of NGOs are already well trained and outsourcing this training to NGOs will save precious time of the State which can be utilized in other areas.
4. The Police in Ahwa Taluka of Dang district burnt eight huts as well as their fields which they were preparing for the sowing season and gave them eviction notices. Although, a letter has been written to the collector and other relevant authorities, this phenomenon is going to be prevalent throughout in the tribal areas. It is recommended that a Government Resolution or Circular be issued wherein there is a moratorium on any kind of eviction notices being issued by the any Department of the State is issued so that there is clarity on this issue.
5. The time period for and between appeals be extended indefinitely under the Forest Rights Act as it is impossible for the claimants to file appeals during this lockdown. If a circular to this extent is issued then it will prevent appeals from being rejected post the lockdown period. Even the Supreme Court has issued a notification keeping on hold the limitation period during this lockdown period.
6. Due to the remoteness of various tribal villages, taking their produce to the *mandis* is cumbersome due to the lockdown period as well as uncertain as there is no surety of takers in the *mandi* even if they travel there. We recommend issuance of a letter to the collectors of tribal districts asking them to organize transportation to these *mandis* or grant the Panchayat the authority to buy the produce out of the Panchayat Funds so that there is additional income for them.
7. The Group Gram Panchayat system makes access of ration and other important material difficult in areas of Dang district wherein there are at least four villages extending till six or seven which are at a distance from each other, in remote areas in a Group Gram Panchayat. Hence, it is requested that ration be provided on the basis of the remoteness of the villages and their closeness to each other rather than the main Panchayat. If this is difficult to implement, certain transportation measures must be provided wherein villages in the remotest parts of the district get access to ration and other essential materials.
8. There is a lack of supply of essential items in the villages. To expect them to survive only on ration provided is inhuman and in violation of Right to Life under Article 21. Hence, it is recommended that two or three individuals be assigned in each village to buy supplies from the talukas for their respective villages. Passes may be granted for the same to them by the relevant authorities so that the supply of other essentials is streamlined and the villagers get access to these essential items.