

To,  
Hon'ble Justice Biswanath Somadder,  
Chief Justice  
High Court of Meghalaya  
Shillong

Dated: 14/06/2021

Subject : Urgent Request For Your **Lordship's** Intervention To Ensure Government Income And Food Security Of The Working People Of Meghalaya who have lost their livelihoods due to CoViD19 induced lockdown.

Lordship,

I am Angela Rangad, R/o of Lumpynggad, Motinagar, Shillong. I have been involved for the last twenty years, with the various issues concerning the rights of the marginalised citizens of Meghalaya such as women, children, marginal farmers, street vendors, contractual workers etc. In the last one year I have been part of various efforts including relief and support for the citizens whose livelihoods have been inordinately affected by the CoViD19 pandemic. It is in this regard that I would like to bring to the notice of your Lordship, a serious denial of rights of the marginalised in Meghalaya during these very trying times of a pandemic, and request for an urgent intervention. We have already submitted multiple complaints to the government seeking redressal of our grievances without any concrete response from them. Most of the aggrieved persons are scattered across the state and are striving for a survival during these difficult pandemic lockdowns and are unable to approach your Lordship individually.

This letter requesting your valued and urgent intervention is about the non-release and partial release of income support promised by the state Govt. last year.

On 28<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the Labour Department, Government of Meghalaya published the notification regarding financial assistance to the marginal sections of the society who were deprived of their daily wages during the lockdown period. Chief Ministers Relief Against Wage Loss (CRAWL) was meant to assist citizens who had lost their livelihood by transferring Rs. 700 per week to their bank accounts. Those citizens who were registered with BOCW and MGNREGA were not entitled for CRAWL support as they were to receive support from these entitlements. Under BOCW registered construction labourers were to receive Rs. 5000. Muster Roll or Casual workers in Govt. depts. were also not entitled.

We had submitted a memorandum to the government making suggestions about income support at the start of the pandemic in 2020, and we welcomed this decision of the government and worked at publicising this call so that all deserving beneficiaries could register for this programme. Daily wagers could register via whatsapp or phone calls on a number provided by the Govt., or at the District Labour office or with the help of the locality dorbars who collected names and information at the locality level and then submitted this to the Govt.

In the absence of any social audit as mandated by the governments own Social Audit law, where the government should have suo-moto released the names of beneficiaries so that the citizens could have checked the status of their applications

and audited the implementation of the scheme, we accessed the information through the Right To Information Act 2005.

The RTI reply we received, carried the names and phone numbers, amount supposedly released to their bank accounts and the period when the release was done. The documents furnished by the department showed that there were 135241 beneficiaries under Chief Minister's Relief Against Wage Loss Scheme who supposedly received Rs. 2100 Between 5th May 2020 and 13th October 2020 and 25684 beneficiaries who received Rs. 5000 from the Meghalaya Building And Other Construction Workers Welfare Board between 27th March and 29th October,2020.

To verify the list of the beneficiaries as listed by the document furnished by the Labour department, we put out the document in the public domain for people to check out the claims of the government. We received and made phone calls and received and sent messages, and based on this conducted statistically informed random surveys as well as analysed the data base furnished by the government. Based on this the findings were shocking.

Our Findings:

#### THROUGH SURVEY

According to the government's claim, the benefit of Rs. 2100 for all beneficiaries under the CRAWL scheme had been released between 5th May 2020 and 13th October 2020. For those who got Rs 5000 from Meghalaya Building And Other Construction Workers Welfare Board had their support released between 27th March and 29th October 2020. But our various sample surveys amongst the hawkers and street vendors and domestic workers, taxi driver association and shnongs reveal the following:-

1. Many who had registered for the support did not get the support.
2. Most of those who got the support did not get the complete amount of either Rs. 2100 or Rs. 5000. Many either got Rs. 700 or Rs. 1400 even though in the list it showed that Rs. 2100 had been booked against their names. Many against whom Rs. 5000 was booked received less or nothing at all.

Face to face survey carried out amongst 735 Hawkers and Street Vendors of Shillong

Out of 735 street vendors

No. who registered and sent in their names: 278

From those who registered, the vendors who got:

Rs.2100 – 38 nos. (13.67%)

Rs.1400 – 44 nos. (15.83%)

Rs.700 – 23 nos. (8.27%)

Those who got nothing – 158 (56.8%)

Other Amounts (Other Schemes) – 15 (5.4%)

Random sample survey carried out over phone amongst the names submitted by the Meghalaya Domestic Workers Movement.

Amount Received	Beneficiary	Percentage
2100	10	18.18
1400	16	30
700	5	9
Nothing at all	20	36.36
Other schemes	4	7

#### SURVEY CARRIED OUT BY SANGSHONG VILLAGE, MAIRANG SUBDIVISION

Out of 53 names which appeared in the RTI list 20 did not get anything and 2 got Rs. 700

#### RESPONSES RECEIVED VIA MESSAGES, WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

1. We had put out the information received through our Right to Information request in the public domain and asked the citizens to verify their names and the benefits received. From the responses received, it is clear that there are many people who did not receive the complete amount, including many who did not receive anything even though their names appear in the list.
2. There were many who received partial benefit but their names or phone numbers did not appear in the beneficiary list
3. It is also clear that most people who applied for the support were not considered for the support, despite having provided all necessary documents and meeting the criteria.

#### CASE OF BENEFICIARIES UNDER MEGHALAYA BUILDING AND OTHER CONSTRUCTION WORKERS WELFARE BOARD

List Of Beneficiaries under Meghalaya Building And Other Construction Workers Welfare Board is the most problematic list. The list has many duplicate numbers. In a random survey carried out amongst some beneficiaries in Garo hills we found :

- a) Only 30% of the numbers worked. Out of those who we managed to talk only 20% of those we talked to got Rs. 5000, 80% not only did not receive the money but also did not know that their names appeared in the list.

#### GHOST PHONE NUMBERS

1. 24% of the Names appearing in the list furnished by the government have either no phone numbers or duplicate phone numbers or numbers which are not mobile phone numbers. Some of these phone numbers as listed are 1111111111, 1234567890 or 1212121212 or 9999999999 or 6000000000,

5555555555 or recombination of such digits or 0 or Not available. These are clearly names which cannot be verified leading to doubts about any direct benefit transfer.

2. There are in this 24% of the category repeated phone numbers such as 6009018351 or 6000052242, 6000120720 etc . Most of such repeated numbers either don't work or are deactivated.

With these findings, we submitted our complaint to the Chief Minister on 01/06/2021 via email (Copy Attached) raising our concerns and requesting the following urgent actions from the government as it was clear that lockdown without any proper governmental actions for support has created distress and misery around the state. Our requests were:

1. Immediate emergency independent and timebound enquiry into the implementation of the schemes.
2. Immediate release, within a week, of all pending dues in full to all beneficiaries which your office claims to have transferred.
3. Transfer of support to those who had registered and yet did not find their names on the list if they fulfil the criterion.
4. A dedicated helpline for people to lodge their complaint about non-receipt of funds.

In addition to these requests we also suggested immediate income support for the second wave of COVID 19 lockdowns, beginning End April 2021, for all daily wage earners including Taxi drivers, hawkers, domestic workers, small shop keepers and workers, labourers, farmers etc, to be carried out with utmost transparency and accountability by having an open public portal where people can immediately check the status of their applications and by having a dedicated helpline where applicants can make inquiries.

Beneficiaries kept sending messages of distress and denial of their benefits, and continue to do so, and we have submitted these additional complaints on 10/06/2021 (Copy Attached) reiterating our findings and request.

We expected that highlighting to the Govt. our findings and distress messages from the citizens would make the government sit up and take notice of this issue, but we were disappointed.

Your Lordship, the Governments silence about this shocking denial of emergency support to the most marginalised of the citizens of Meghalaya is sad and distressing and goes against the very basis of democratic governance in a welfare system.

Now with the second wave of Covid lockdowns the marginalised are in an even more precarious situation. We keep getting SOS messages about lack of rations and inability to access the PDS entitlements, inability to pay house rents, school fees and mounting debts. Savings have run out and daily wage earners such as hawkers are also worried about their inability to start their livelihood again as they no longer have the small capital required.

It is therefore imperative and urgent that the Govt. fulfils its commitment of providing the income support promised last year and also commit to an income support and ensuring rations for this year otherwise the situation will lead to malnutrition, school drop outs and gross suffering.

We have tried over and over to impress on the govt this dire situation but we are not being heard. We have exhausted all our options and remedies and have nowhere else to turn to but to seek your Lordship's intervention. We hope that your intervention will make the government be responsive to the plight of its citizens during this unprecedented pandemic and would lead to some immediate relief for the marginalised. We hope with your help the Meghalaya government will:

1. Immediately release all pending dues of the income support promised last year and
2. Announce an income support for this year too.
3. Ensure deliver of ration entitlements on an emergency basis.

We trust that your Lordship will ensure justice for those most in need.

In anticipation of your action,

Thanking You,

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ANNEXURES:

1. Complaint Letter to the Chief Minister, Govt of Meghalaya dated 01/06/2021 sent via email (We can provide the annexures to the complaint letter as a soft copy as it is voluminous and expensive to print)
2. Additional Complaint to the Chief Minister, Govt. of Meghalaya dated 11/06/2021 sent via email