Empowering migrant labourers through GKRA

The district administration of Supaul in Bihar is constructing a community sanitary complex in a Mahadalit Tola whose residents are predominantly from the SC/ST communities. The move is not only a step towards ensuring better community sanitation practices but also an assurance of employment to many ‘returned’ migrants.

According to Mr. Rajesh Chandra, Consultant-IEC and CB (State Project Management Unit, Bihar), a total of 24 labourers have been engaged in the construction of this Community Sanitary Complex at Ward no. 8 of Tulapatti Gram Panchayat in Kishanpur Block of Supaul District.

Out of these, 16 individuals are migrant labourers who had returned from states such as Punjab, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Kashmir, and Delhi in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Here are some reactions from migrant workers employed as masons to construct community sanitary complexes, as a part of the Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan (GKRA). The campaign is currently underway in States that saw the largest number of migrant labourers returning to their homes.

Umesh Kumar Sharma (34) who was employed as a mason in Mumbai until March 2020 recounts his experiences. “After the lockdown, life was increasingly difficult as construction work had come to a halt. Without work, my meagre savings were draining fast. I had reached a point when it was difficult to make ends meet. With no hope of the situation improving, I somehow managed to return to my village. One afternoon in August, I was informed by the local Block office that I could work with a team to construct a Community Sanitary Complex in the vicinity under the Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan.”
Wasim Zafar (22) had returned to his roots, all the way from Delhi. Before Covid-19, he was engaged as a labourer in a garment factory. However, he is delighted to have found work in his own village. “All thanks to the Government for providing me with gainful employment in my neighbourhood. How else could I have managed in these turbulent times,” he said.

Similar sentiments were echoed by other labourers.

Meanwhile, migrant labourer Shrawan Kumar (40) talked about the many challenges he faced after returning from Tamil Nadu. “I frantically searched for employment in my local area but to no avail. Opportunity knocked on my door in the form of Garib Kalyan Rozgar Abhiyaan. I will not go back to Tamil Nadu if I keep getting work in my home State.”

The beaming faces of these migrant workers testify to the fact that other than providing employment opportunities, Garib Kalyan Rozgar Abhiyaan has instilled in them a sense of confidence.