Kusum (name changed) started her journey from Tamil Nadu, walking her way to West Bengal with her family. Among the primary concerns of the long walk, which included hunger and lack of any transportation facilities, she was also worried about another major issue. The worry was about contracting possible infections due to the use of a dirty cloth with the lack of availability of sanitary napkins. Kusum is one of the thousands of women who are walking thousands of kilometers across the country, going back to their native hometowns from the metropolitan cities sharing similar kinds of risks. Already burdened with economic and physical woes, these women have no other option than to neglect their menstrual hygiene amidst their arduous journey. It is a lot for women to think about menstrual hygiene at a time when they don’t even have sufficient money for food. The onerous struggles of the journey combined with an already existing taboo in our society to discuss menstruation have led to a situation where the women are forced to suffer by themselves.
Youth for Social Development (YSD) decided to step in to provide necessary relief in whatever way possible. Many women and adolescent girls walking homeward on National Highway 16 at the Odisha-Andhra Pradesh border at Ganjam district were provided sanitary napkins along with food and other relief material. Over the past three weeks, hundreds of migrants, including women, children, and expectant mothers have been walking from Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka to their homes in Odisha, West Bengal, Jharkhand and other states north of Odisha. The migrants enter Odisha through the inter-state check gate of Girisola in Ganjam district, where YSD has stationed itself for provision of relief.

The idea of distributing sanitary napkins was given by a group of adolescent girls living in slums across Berhampur after having read about the plight of the migrants. These girls are a part of YSD’s ‘Kishori Shakti Project,’ which is a youth empowerment program for young women living in slums at Brahmapur city. Along with the distribution of sanitary napkins, the girls are also involved in the preparation of dry food and other relief materials for the returning migrant workers. YSD has associated itself with the Ganjam District Rural Development Agency’s (DRDA) ‘Operation Sugam’ in which the migrants are provided bus transport for 100 kilometers from the Andhra Pradesh Border to the Ganjam-Khurda district border in Odisha.

By Namesh Kilemsetty and Bibhu Prasad Sahu
Youth for Social Development