

## **IMPACT OF MIGRANT WORKERS IN INDIA - PRESENT POSITION AND FUTURE STRATEGY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper focussed on Impact of Migration workers in India Present and future Position. Migration is an important feature of human civilization. It reflects, human endeavour to survive in the most testing conditions both natural and man-made. Migration in India has existed historically, but, in the context of globalization and opening up of the world economy it has assumed special significance for the country and the society. As a consequence of historical and economic factors, there are serious income disparities, agrarian distress, inadequate employment generation, vast growth of informal economy and the resultant migration from rural areas to urban, urban to urban and backward to comparatively advanced regions in the most appalling conditions.

### **Impact of Migration in India**

Migration in India is mostly influenced by social structures and patterns of development. The development policies by all the governments since Independence have accelerated the process of migration. Uneven development is the main cause of migration. Added to it, are the disparities, inter regional and amongst different socio-economic classes. The landless poor who mostly belong to lower castes, indigenous communities and economically backward regions constitute the major portion of migrants. In the very large tribal regions of India intrusion of outsiders, settlements by the outsiders displacing the local tribal people and deforestation also played a major role in migration. According to a study 77% of the population i.e. nearly 840 million Indians live on less than Rs.20 (40 cents) a day. Indian agriculture became non remunerative, taking the lives of 100,000 peasants during the period from 1996 to 2003, i.e. a suicide of an Indian peasant every 45 minutes.

Hence, the rural people from the downtrodden and backward communities and backward regions such as Bihar, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh travel far afield seeking employment at the lowest rungs in construction of roads, irrigation projects, commercial and residential complexes, in short, building the “shining” India. The pull factors of higher wages caused external migration to the Middle-East countries by skilled and semiskilled workers. Migration of professionals such as engineers, medical practitioners, teachers, managers etc. to developed countries constitutes another dimension of migration which we call “brain-drain”.

### **Economic impact of labour migration**

At the aggregate level, labour emigration affects the sending country ’ s economy through its impact on the labour market, on macro-economic variables (savings, balance of payments and so on), and social relations. These impacts are summarised below. the labour market effects of migration are reported to be significant in relation to major sending regions within the country. Research studies on international migration in 1970s and 80s have shown that migration acted as a safety valve in countering growing unemployment in states like Kerala and in districts like Ratnagiri in Maharashtra.

### **Profile of migrant workers**

Migration encompasses enormous economic and social diversity. Migrants are concentrated in different types of work in rural and urban areas. In the rural areas, self-employment is the predominant activity for both male and female migrant workers followed by casual work which, according to the NSS 55th round findings, engaged 33.4% of male migrant workers and 44.2% of female migrant workers in 1999 – 00.

In urban areas, regular employment engaged 55.6% of the male workers while self-employment and casual work engaged 31.1 and 13.3% of male migrant workers respectively. In the case of females, the highest percentage were self-employed (39.7) followed by regular employment (35.1%) and casual work (25.2%) This naturally implies that there is considerable economic differentiation among migrant households.

### **Causes of Migration**

Most migration literature makes a distinction between ‘pull ’ and ‘push’ factors, which, however, do not operate in isolation of one another. Mobility occurs when workers in source areas lack suitable options for employment/livelihood, and there is some expectation of improvement in circumstances through migration. The improvement sought may be better employment or higher

wages/incomes, but also maximisation of family employment or smoothing of employment/income/consumption over the year.

### **Magnitude of Migration**

Migration in India is predominantly short distance with around 60% of migrants changing their residences within their district of birth and 20% within their State (province), while the rest move across the state boundaries. The total migrants as per the census of 1971 are 167 million persons, 1981 census 213 million, 1991 census 232 million and 2001 census 315 million. As per the census of the year 1991, nearly 20 million people migrated to other states seeking livelihood. Within a decade, the number of interstate migrants doubled to 41,166,265 persons as per the census figures of 2001. It is estimated that there are at present around 80 million migrants of which, 40 million are in the construction industry, 20 million are domestic workers, 2 million are sex workers, 5 million are call girls and somewhere from half a million to 12 million work in illegal mines otherwise called “small scale mines”. It is estimated that at present around five and a half million Indians are working in the oil exporting countries of the Middle-East and another 2 million are working in the developed world.

### **Women Workers**

92% of the domestic workers are women, girls and children and 20% of these females are under 14 years of age, as per a study conducted by the organization “Social Alert”. There is a perceptible phenomenon in this migration, that is, the tremendous increase of women workers migrating either individually or in groups to find work. They are travelling very long distances even for short-term employment, in the absence of any prospect or promise of employment, still they are migrating. This is a disturbing trend, as in the event of not getting employment, they end up as victims of sexual abuse. Even if they get employment, they have to work under inhuman conditions.

### **The migrant labour market**

Migrants at the lower end of the market comprise mostly unskilled casual labourers or those who own or hire small means of livelihood such as carts or rickshaws and are self-employed. We focus in this section primarily on migrants who work as casual labourers, although several of the conditions discussed below are also common to other categories of migrants.

## **Conditions of Migrant Labour**

There are 20 million domestic workers mostly migrants from rural India. Regular streams of new migrants leave behind scorched fields and emaciated families in the tribal belts of Bihar, Orissa, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Assam, and Mizoram for Mumbai, Delhi and other Metros. They are desperate to join the army of domestic workers. They are willing to work for much less than those who are already working. They are victims of constant verbal and sexual abuse and work without any grievance mechanisms. Their situation is made worse by local governments' brutal eviction drives – dislocating and destabilizing the lives of the very people without whom the cities would come to a crippling halt. Further, they have to live in make-shift tents with plastic covers. They are forced to bathe and defecate out in the open. As they are migrant workers, they do not possess Public Distribution System (PDS) Cards and hence are forced to buy food grains and kerosene at higher than market prices. The ruling elite which consider child labour a menace little realize that it is a natural consequence of migrations.

## **Impact of Employment**

In terms of employment, construction is the largest employment sector in India after agriculture. Most of the employees in construction are migrants. The working hours are from sunrise to sunset. The working day for women often stretches from 14 to 16 hours, combining house work and work on site where women are paid Rs. 60-70 a day while men are paid Rs.100-175. Masons earn up to Rs.175-250 a day. Work places are unsafe. Workers have no social security, compensation for injuries, access to drinking water and health care. India has the world's highest accident rate among construction workers. A recent study by the International Labour Organization shows that 165 out of every 1,000 workers are injured on the job.

## **The impact of migration**

On migrants and their families Poorer migrant workers, crowded into the lower ends of the labour market, have few entitlements vis a vis their employers or the public authorities in the destination areas. They have meagre personal assets and suffer a range of deprivations in the destination areas. In the source areas, migration has both negative and positive consequences for migrants and their families.

## **Gender discrimination**

Women form more than half of the interstate migrant workforce. As stated above, 92% of the 20 million domestic workers are women and children and 20% of these females are under 14

years of age. Women constitute more than one third in the construction industry. Yet the division of labour is gendered. Masonry is a male-dominated skill as are carpentry and other skilled jobs. Women carry head-loads of brick, sand, stone, cement and water to the masons. Their wages are less than those paid to men. In the mining sector women do unskilled jobs above ground. They lose wages and also may lose employment for taking leave. They are subjected to sexual harassment. By conservative estimates only 15% of the cases of sexual assault are reported. Women are not provided with any extra facilities to take care of their children while they are working. Notwithstanding, women migration is the highest in the period from 1991 to 2000 due to the agrarian crisis. 73% of these migrant women workers are from rural areas.

### **Living conditions:**

Migrant labourers, whether agricultural or non-agricultural, live in deplorable conditions. Apart from seasonal workers, workers who migrate to the cities for job live in parks and pavements. Slum dwellers, who are mostly migrants, stay in deplorable conditions, with inadequate water and bad drainage. Food costs more for migrant workers who are not able to obtain temporary ration cards

### **Legal Provisions**

One noteworthy enactment to address seasonal migration is the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), which guarantees 100 days of employment in a year. The rate of daily wages is, as per the minimum wage applicable to that territory. It is implemented successfully only in a very few places which is a miniscule response. In most cases the funds are channelled to vested interests.

### **Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service**

The migrant labourers face additional problems and constraints as they are both labourers and migrants. Hence, there is no improvement in the working and living conditions for migrant workers. There are no structures to adequately address the basic issues concerning migrant labour relations, leave aside, addressing the whole gamut of labour relations. The reasons are obvious. The Indian Judiciary occasionally comes to the rescue of migrant labour and makes pronouncements and observations to fill the gap in the justice delivery system. It seems regulatory mechanisms are over stretched, inadequately structured, manpower deficient and resource crunched.

## **Health and Education:**

Labourers working in harsh circumstances and living in unhygienic conditions suffer from serious occupational health problems and are vulnerable to disease. Those working in quarries, construction sites and mines suffer from various health hazards, mostly lung diseases. As the employer does not follow safety measures, accidents are quite frequent. Migrants cannot access various health and family care programmes due to their temporary status. Free public health care facilities and programmes are not accessible to them. For women workers, there is no provision of maternity leave, forcing them to resume work almost immediately after childbirth.

### **First step on a long journey**

Some trade unions and non-governmental organizations though very small in number make sincere efforts to alleviate the problems of migrant workers. IMF initiated an effort to organize the migrant workers at the ship-breaking yard at Mumbai and Alang through Steel, Metal & Engineering Workers' Federation of India (SMEFI). These migrant workers were organized in the existing union Mumbai, Port Trust, Dock and General Employees' Union (MPTDGEU) by amending the constitution and reducing the rates of subscription. Non-economic demands like civic amenities, occupational health and safety (OHS) and social problems were taken up. The beginning was to provide safe drinking water at the workplace. As a next step, first aid boxes were provided and blood donation camps were organised with the help of St. Johns Ambulance. Identity badges/membership cards were issued. Mohalla Committees (neighbourhood committees) were set up to integrate these migrant workers to bridge the language and cultural gaps. NGO's were involved and collaboration with them really helped to organise the workers.

### **Public Interest Litigation (PIL)**

The union encountered stiff resistance from employers, money lenders and local mafias. The Supreme Court of India appointed a Monitoring Committee, while disposing a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the famous Clemenceau case. The Migrant Workers Union submitted a memorandum on socio-economic conditions of the migrant workers and it is considered by the Apex Court as a source of reference. This effort spread to Alang which is the largest shipbreaking yard in the state of Gujarat. The Alang shipbreaking workers came into the fold of this initiative and registered the first ever union of shipbreaking workers in India. To date union membership stands at 5,705. As part of this initiative, training programmes and workshops were conducted

exclusively for migrant workers. It is an amazing experience that the migrant workers spoke for themselves in their language and took active part in decision making effort for redressal of their grievances.

### **Issues of Migrant Workers**

There are some efforts like these, but they are not strong enough to build pressure in the corridor of powers to represent the legitimate and genuine issues of migrant labour. Some voluntary groups and non-governmental organizations also have taken up the issues of migrant workers.

The Employees State Insurance Act, 1948 and the Employees Provident Fund Miscellaneous Provision Act, 1952 can be considered as landmark legislations. Such enactments have targeted the fundamental problems of labour including migrant labour by such provisions which take care of the workers in the exigencies of sickness, ill-health and other contingencies of life including old age.

### **The road ahead**

The problem of migrant labour is huge and requires cooperation and coordination between the government and other social actors including the trade unions. NGO's having skilled manpower and resources can provide research and background. Trade unions with their organizational structures, organizing skills can take on the employers, policy makers and governments for a better deal for migrant workers and contribute for social harmony and sustainable growth.

### **Other areas of government intervention and policy**

This is particularly true in cases where entire families migrate out. Schooling of children is a major problem for migrants and, not surprisingly, several studies find that the hard-core of educationally under-privileged children belong to migrant families. Even in cases where men alone migrate, women in poor households are unable to take appropriate schooling decisions and supervise school-going children.

### **Suggestions and key next steps**

Synergising migration and development. A major policy focus has to be on a more vigorous pro-poor development strategy in the backward areas. This should address the needs of these regions, and simultaneously improve the access of the poor to land, CPRs, financial resources and

governance institutions. Depending upon the availability of financial resources, the provision of an employment safety net can be dovetailed with the development programmes. Evolving suitable development policies in order to maximise the positive impact of inward remittances and to reduce its negative impact remains a priority even with external migration.

### **Improving labour market outcomes**

Thus in all cases, the synergy between migration and development requires to be strengthened. The main problem is that poor migrants lack bargaining strength. Hence steps taken to organize them, improve their negotiating strength and level of awareness are necessary. At the workplace, stricter enforcement of labour legislations is a prerequisite for improved outcomes. Panchayats could emerge as the pivotal institution in the resource pool for migrant workers residing in their area. They could maintain a register of migrant workers and issue identity cards and pass books to them. Further, it should be mandatory for recruiters to deposit with the panchayats, a list of the labourers recruited by them along with other employment details.

### **Labour Market & NGO:**

NGOs and panchayats could cooperate in building up an information base to cut down transaction costs for both employers and labourers. They could also assist in upgrading the skills of migrant workers. An improved information base, orientation and skills are also important requirement in the case of international migration. Labour markets of the major labour importing countries need to be closely monitored. This could be done through the establishment of a labour market monitoring authority which could also carry out negotiations on various labour contracts and also study the nature of emerging skill requirements.

Ensure basic entitlements to migrants and their families A focused approach is required to ensure that the basic entitlements of the poor to food, elementary education, basic health are fulfilled, as also their entitlement to other government programmes and subsidies. The proposed Bill for unorganised workers includes many provisions which are potentially beneficial to migrant workers.

## **Improvement in the economic, social and political environment in favour of migration**

There is, thus a role for advocacy to remove stereotypes and misapprehensions and for a campaign to buttress the voices of poor migrants. In the case of Indian emigrants and people of Indian origin, it is critical to address how they can participate in selected but specific developmental activities. Another significant issue is the identification of possible ways in which human capital can return to India and, having returned, can contribute to the development process.

## **Policy issues and recommendations**

The nature of labour migration in India is linked, on the one hand, to the pattern of (uneven) development accentuated by several dimensions of policy, and, on the other, to a pattern of capitalist growth, which has implied continued and growing informalisation of the rural and urban economy.

## **Conclusion**

This paper that this pattern of development, apart from being inimical to the poor regions, is consistent with a ‘ low road ’ to capitalist development, constraining the possibility of more rapid growth and technical change. In the light of this, as was rightly observed by the National Commission on Rural Labour (1991), migration policy has to be concerned not only with supporting migrants, but also with the mutual links between migration and development.

Apart from labour laws, a whole gamut of governmental interventions and policies in favour of the poor also impinge upon migrant workers. However migrants often fail to benefit. Participatory poverty assessments in Madhya Pradesh show that migrant labourers are not able to participate in the gram sabha meetings which identify beneficiaries for government programmes.

The latest initiative of ESI Scheme 'Any Time Any Where' services through proposed IT Roll Out should go a long way in making available both medical and cash benefit related facilities to migrant workers.

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