

Creative Practices and Policies for Better Inclusion of Migrant Workers:

The Experience of Aajeevika Bureau

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Internal migration for livelihood, a widespread phenomenon across developing economies, has started to receive attention only recently. There are limited examples of practice or policy interventions that help vulnerable rural migrant workers cope with hardships of footloose movement, vagaries of informal labor market, and increasing alienation from urban spaces. Lately, civil society organisations in India have been at the forefront of initiatives bringing visibility to the phenomenon and made innovative strides in designing and delivering solutions. This paper reviews the experiences and impact of the work done by Aajeevika Bureau, a public service organisation in western India, which has initiated an informed discourse on migration by way of demonstrating scalable models.

1. Migration and Development

Migration has become one of the most defining issues for development; more so now than ever before. In the last few decades, labor mobility has increased despite regulations, violence against migrants and scepticism about its impact on wage differentials and development [IOM, n.d.; SSRC, 2008]. As per the Population Division of the UN, the world has a total of 214 million international migrants. This community contributes to the *destination* economies, through cheap labour and to the *source* economies through transfer of remittances and skills. Notably, most of this number comprises of low skilled, semi-skilled migrants who work at the bottom ends of the global economy under highly risky and abusive work conditions. Stories abound on the plight of international migrants moving from Africa to EU, India to UAE, Bangladesh to India, Mexico to US and such. Lately, there is a growing interest in better governance of labour mobility and attempts are being made to bring in better legal protection for migrant workers. Given the size of their contribution to the economy of their home countries, calls are also being made for better management of remittances and migration notably has come to be termed as “Millennium Development Goal Plan B” (Lant Pritchett cited in Howley, 2008).

One important stream that has been missed in this discourse is the large number of migrants moving within the boundaries of a nation-state – the internal migrants who move seasonally in search of livelihood. In most developing and transition economies, there is a large flux between rural to urban areas. High economic disparity between regions and limited opportunities in rural areas has been driving labour increasingly to the urban areas, which are the primary epicenters of growth. For instance, in India, the number of internal seasonal migrants is estimated to be more than 100 million (Deshingkar and Akter, 2009). Preferred for their cheap labor, most of these migrants work in the

informal sector devoid of social security and legal protection. Lack of portability of entitlements across state borders makes them lead a sub-human existence, devoid of access to basic services (such as shelter, health and education), and labor rights. Despite the magnitude of the problem, the policy attention to the phenomenon is abysmally low and there is a serious lack of development initiatives focused on migration.

In the past few years, there have been certain dedicated attempts to design solutions and services for migrants in India; focused interventions that would make migration a more secure and dignified experience. These interventions, notably, have been led by civil society organisations working on the issue of increasing casualisation and informalization of labour. This paper focuses on one such initiative by Aajeevika Bureau, a public service organisation in western India and shares its experiences in implementing targeted services and solutions for migrant workers. To set the broader context, the first few sections provide an overview of internal migration in India – its incidence, patterns and the nature of social exclusion faced by migrant communities. Chapter 5 and 6 discuss solutions that have been successful on ground. In the end, the paper highlights the constraints that come in way of scaling up of these creative practices on migration.

2. Internal migration in India

Migration in search of livelihood is a pervasive reality in India today. The bleak livelihood scenario in rain-fed, flood/drought-affected, high density or conflict ridden areas has led to the emergence of migration as a survival strategy for a large number of poor people in the country. More than 100 million people (Deshingkar and Akter, 2009), almost one-tenth of India's population are known to derive their livelihood out of seasonal migration. Overtime, this movement has become more long distance with an increase in inter-state mobility. Analysis using Census data shows that inter-state migration has grown from 12.02 per cent in 1981 to 13.31 per cent in 2001 (Srivastava, 2011a). NSS data, specifically in the rural-urban stream also shows that the percentage of inter-state migrants has gone up from 19.6 per cent in 1999-00 to 25.2 in 2007-08 (*ibid*). States such as UP, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Rajasthan, Odisha, West Bengal, Jharkhand, with laggard economies and a surplus of labor, are the primary suppliers of labour. On the other end, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab and Tamil Nadu, known for their robust and flourishing local economies attract large number of workers. Maharashtra, for example, shows a high correlation (0.77) between net in-migration rate and per capita NSDP (*ibid*).

Construction sector is known to be the largest employer of migrant workers with 40 million migrants (Deshingkar and Akter, 2009). This is followed by domestic work (20 million), textile (11 million), brick kilns (10 million), transportation, mines & quarries and agriculture (*ibid*). Within these sectors, seasonal migrants are mostly employed to fulfill the bottom-end tasks which entail back-breaking labor and high risk; tasks which the local labor would not be willing to undertake. Managed by private labor contractors and social kinship networks there are clear trends in labor movement across regions – people from a region move to work at a certain specific destination; the choice being determined by a range of factors – a leading one being social contacts/networks (Breman, 1996, De Haan and Rogaly, 2002). While providing safety net and access to job opportunities, these

informal networks, however, tend to perpetuate caste and gender relations and often limit the mobility of workers up the value chain. Gupta and Mitra (2002) also observe that in the informal labor markets which is the primary destination for workers, jobs are highly segmented across the lines of caste, religion and kinship.

Not all migrants, however, face the same set of vulnerabilities. As per Srivastava (2011b) semi-permanent or long term circular migrants and seasonal or short term migrants need to be looked at in distinction from the rest. They are engaged as casual labor and face difficulties both in establishing and claiming their entitlements. Seasonal/short duration migrants are known to be more footloose and more vulnerable, coming from the scheduled castes/Tribes with lower level of education, skills and asset ownership (*ibid*). NSS statistics show that 54 % of short term migrants fall in the bottom two MPCE quintiles (Srivastava, 2011a). Notably, incidence of temporary, circular movement is found to be more dominant among women migrant workers. Using NSS data from 2007-08, Agnihotri et al (2011) report that short term migrants account for 52 per cent of women migrating for employment, a figure higher than that for men (28 per cent). Child migrants, though undercounted, form a significant part of seasonal migrants either migrating alone or with parents. A study by Human Rights Watch (1996, cited by Srivastava, 2011a) finds that brick-kilns, stone quarries, carpet weaving, beedi rolling and several such sectors make use of bonded child labour in large numbers. It is this seasonal/circulatory migrant labor groups that the paper focuses on.

3. In a State of Drift - Migrant Workers and Social Exclusion

Despite the compelling numbers that underlie this phenomenon, the policies of the Indian state have failed in providing any form of legal or social protection to this vulnerable population. In a continuous state of drift migrants are left out of the scope of state provisions at both ends – the *source* and the *destination*. Further, the urban labor markets treat them with opportunistic indifference extracting hard labor but denying basic entitlements such as decent shelter, ration, subsidized health and education (Mosse et al, 2005). This section of the paper characterizes the problem of social exclusion, as experienced by migrant communities. At the root of this exclusion lies the way in which economic relations are increasingly structured in the larger economy – relations that incentivize informalization and casualization of labor. This section primarily draws from micro-studies done by Aajeevika in southern Rajasthan and Gujarat – one of the larger labor corridors in India.

3.1 Short Economic Life Cycle of Migrants

The entry of migrant workers into the urban labor market, as seen in case of Southern Rajasthan, is marked with endemic disadvantages. Most workers join the market at an age as young as 13-14. Drop outs from school, migrant youth lack both education and skills and are forced to undertake manual labor at whatever meager wages it is offered. A number of occupational studies, undertaken by Aajeevika show that unskilled migrant workers are paid less than the official minimum wage and made to work long hours without suitable compensation (Dwivedi and Sharma, 2007, Rao and

Varma, 2010). Lack of skills exacerbates their vulnerabilities, as they are highly replaceable and are found to be frequently rotated across work sites and sectors.

An analysis of the economic life cycle [Fig 1] of migrants working as head-loaders or unskilled casual labor reveals that at the age of 27-30, when skilled workers reach their prime, unskilled migrants start their exit from the labour market. Long working hours, hard manual labour, and exposure to several occupational health hazards, takes a toll on their physical health. A survey done in 2008 by Jatan and Aajeevika in Rajsamand, showed that 46 % of rural youth interviewed were returnees. This early return is characterized by an emaciated body, limited or no savings and a slide back into poverty. At the age of 40, their earning capacity is significantly lowered for an inability to take up hard manual labour and they are out of the labor market. By this time another group of youth is set to enter the labour market, ready to fill the gap created by their exit and the cycle goes on.

Figure 1: Economic Life Cycle of a Migrant



3.2 Problem in establishing identity

An early departure from the village also means that migrant youth lack all verifiable proof of their identity. The database of 60,000 plus migrants registered with Aajeevika shows that 34 % of workers do not even own a voter ID. An inability to establish one's identity becomes a cause of frequent harassment by civic authorities and police in the cities. Migrants become easy suspects in case of theft or other crime. Lately, a growing regionalism has made their survival in cities more difficult, as they fall victims to identity politics. The killing and marauding of migrant workers in Assam and Maharashtra is a case in point (Talukdar, 2007, Mid-day 2011).

3.3. Vagaries of Informal Labor Market

Scattered, ill-informed and uneducated migrants also become victim of poor labour practices, unfair wage deduction and fraudulence. As per a study done by Sharma et al (2008) more than 65 % of migrant workers from Udaipur reported experiencing labor disputes at work, most of them related to payment of wages. Caught in a chain of contractors and middlemen they have little recourse to legal action or redress. None of these disputes ever make their way to the labor court or the labor department.

3.4 Poor Portability of Entitlements

Due to the highly mobile nature of their employment, migrant workers get excluded from the scope of both urban and rural policy design. This has a significant impact on their access to public amenities and welfare schemes. Sainath (2004, 2011) in his writings has repeatedly brought out how migrants from Odisha fail to get captured in Census, also leading to under-reporting of total population in some cases. A recent study (Sharma et al, 2010, unpublished) revealed that a large number of migrants are unable to cast their vote and participate in elections because of high mobility. Serious citizenship issues arise as the state machinery does not allow a portability of basic entitlements.

At the destination end, migrants do not have access to reasonably priced, good quality public facilities for food, health, transportation and financial services. They are also known for paying much more than the local population for basic services (Breman, 1996). As found in an Aajeevika study in Ahmedabad, for lack of access to subsidized ration, expenses on food account for majority of the living costs (~ 40%) for migrants in cities (Ali, 2008). In such a scenario, migrants often resort to eating less, thereby affecting his/her ability to work and earn a livelihood in a sustainable manner (*ibid*). Among the various services that migrants lose their access to, the case of formal financial institutions is most illustrative. For lack of valid identity and residence proof, migrants are unable to open bank accounts at the destination. Thorat and Jones (2011) in a study of Rajasthan-Gujarat corridor report that 86 percent of the respondents do not own bank accounts.

Women and child migrants form an ever more vulnerable a group within this community facing serious issues of security at the destination. Women in particular face high risks of trafficking, and various forms of exploitation, including forced prostitution (personal communication with Arif Kapadia, Saathi, Mumbai, 13th May, 2011). Given the real estate prices in the cities and low disposable incomes, migrants are compelled to live in subhuman conditions on work sites, shop pavements, filthy and congested slums or squat in open spaces. This gives rise to issues such as harassment and abuse by the police and local land mafia, increased vulnerability of women and children and risks to health and well-being. For households that migrate with children, access to good quality education also becomes a significant challenge. In India, the estimated number of children out of school due to seasonal migration is 6 million, which is 60 per cent of the total number of children out of school (MHRD, 2003 cited in Smita 2007).

4. Migration Policy and Practice – Missing Links

“In general, the policy environment for migrants is hostile: city master plans aim to keep migrants out; rural development and agriculture policies aim to control out-migration; and migration is viewed as a socially and politically destabilising process. The result is that the costs of migration are borne mainly by the migrant and governments escape the responsibility of providing them with the basic needs.”

- Deshingkar, 2004, p.2

4.1 Inadequate State and Civil Society Response

Migrant workers are largely out of the bounds of any form of governance or civil society initiatives. The existing legislations are heavily biased towards the formal and organised sector (Mosse et al, 2005). There is one legislation known as Inter-State Migrant Workers Act, 1979 which aims to safeguard migrants, however, it is largely obsolete and is hardly enforced anywhere. There is no state machinery for ensuring the operationalisation of the basic provisions in the act which pertains to the registration of the migrants by the contractor who is hiring them for work at an outside-state destination. There is also a need to make the provisions of the Act more conversant with the realities of today's labor market. Among recent policies, MNREGA is said to be the most popular response to migration; however, it is also geared towards containing migration by providing local employment, an endeavor which has been largely ineffective as reported by several studies (see Sharma and Poonia, 2010, Samarthan, 2011).

Another government strategy, the creation of Counter Magnet Areas (CMAs) (Roy, 2010) was designed with an aim to reduce burden on cities; primarily reflecting the concerns of the cities. In the last five years, certain welfare boards and legislations have come into existence for informal sector workers, which hold potential to address the risks faced by migrants, such as the Social Security Act 2008. There are, however, issues related to lack of clarity on implementation mechanism and required resources.

Even in the civil society sphere, migration has been largely viewed as an undesirable phenomenon. In the past, civil society organizations have focused on checking migration through watershed programmes and alternate income generating activities at the village level, arguing in part that these will at least slow migration (see Mosse et al, 2005). Further, most of the development organizations have their own territorial mandates (specifically urban or rural) which are not inclusive of such a population. For instance, the urban development discourse on shelter does not have a grounded perspective on seasonal migration. The perspective, if at all, is heavily inclined towards slum development, while most of the seasonal migrants are outside the slum population and hence invisible.

One of the serious constraints in framing an effective policy response to internal migration is lack of credible and robust data on incidence of seasonal migration. Census and NSS which have a significant impact on policy making are unable to capture seasonal and circular migration. Research that is informed by macro estimates also tends to differ from the discourse emerging from micro studies (see Kundu, 2009), which give a radically different picture of ever increasing labor mobility. The large variances and contradictions between what macro data and data from micro studies say has created serious hurdles in emergence of effective policy and practice.

4.2 Need for an Institutional Response

While debates abound on the impact migration has in bringing people out of poverty and decreasing inequality (see Mendola, 2006, Taylor 2006, Breman 1996), the centrality of its contribution to a household's income basket is undeniable. Analysis of NSS data reveals that 41 per cent of income for migrant households comes from migration (Tumbe, 2010). The scholarship has time and again pointed at the sedentary bias of development policies in India (see De Haan, 2000) and stressed upon the need for an institutionalized response to migration. For instance, in a longitudinal analysis of the impact of migration on rural labor market and rural society, Rodgers et al (2001, p.1983) point out - *“The potential for sustained growth (through migration) is certainly present. But the existing institutions, both state and social institutions in the village are clearly inadequate. It is necessary to think how the state could take advantage of this opportunity for growth by providing incentives, the institutions and the public investment in infrastructure which can convert this potential to reality.”* There is an imminent need to come up with solutions that can possibly transform them into a more lucrative means of livelihood.

In the recent past some focused interventions have come up which address certain specific vulnerabilities faced by migrants. NACO with a focus on sexual health and in particular HIV/AIDS prevention, for example, is the earliest known example of an initiative which has worked with migrant communities in a service delivery mode. Certain NGOs in Odisha, Maharashtra and Gujarat have worked on integrating children from migrant households who are school dropouts back into the formal schooling system. Labornet in Bangalore has made attempts to establish a credible interface between informal sector workers and employers addressing problems of information asymmetry in informal labor markets. These specialised migrant support programme have been categorized by Deshingkar et al (2006) into four broad categories – social protection model, market led approach, unionization model and the rehabilitation model. Aajeevika Bureau is an example of a social protection model which strives to work with migrant communities at both ends – at the source and at the destination, and address the specific vulnerabilities that both these ends pose.

5. Targeted Services for Migrant Workers – An Emergent Model

With the mandate of improving livelihoods and social security for migrant workers, Aajeevika Bureau, works in a pocket of high out-migration in Rajasthan in the western part of India. The initiative includes a comprehensive set of services aimed at reducing hardships, enabling access and facilitating better returns for vulnerable migrant groups. Unlike earlier development interventions which tried addressing rural deprivation and urban exclusion in isolation, this initiative treats mobility as a given and works with the migrant groups at both ends. This section gives an overview of the core migration services piloted at Aajeevika, and dwells on the operational model adopted for their delivery while also discussing their impact.

5.1 Creating Migrant Facilitation Centers

The initiative is anchored by a network of **walk-in resource centers** for migrant workers namely *Shramik Sahayata evam Sandarbha Kendras*. These centers work as the operational nodes of the model offering pre-departure counseling, access to information and targeted services to workers. They are functional **at both the ends of the migration corridor – the source and the destination**. At the source, the centers are based at the block level, while at the destination they are either set up close to the work sites or residence of the targeted migrant community. One of the defining features of the centers is its accessibility to the community – efforts are made to keep them within the reach of migrants, adapt its functioning as per their migration and work cycle and provide a safe, enabling environment to workers.

5.2 Addressing Concerns related to Identity and Establishing Numbers

As a response to lack of documentation and valid identity proof, the centers carry out the process of registration and issuing of Photo IDs to workers. With the help of a simple registration form, important demographic, migration and work related information is collected. Verification is done with the help of the head of the Panchayat and an identity card is issued to him/her. The photo IDs are recognized by Rajasthan Labor Department through a government order. This simple yet powerful innovation has resulted in securing the identities of a mobile and vulnerable population. It has gone beyond a mere proof of introduction and is serving as a gateway to banking services, and in getting a SIM card and gas connections at the destination. There are several instances where it has helped workers avoid harassment from police and civic authorities. The card has also been used by workers left out of voter ID registration process at the source, to cast vote in elections. The most important contribution is the visibility that the card has brought to seasonal migrants who otherwise remain invisible in the urban space.

Till date, the Bureau has registered more than 60,000 migrant workers. This initiative has also helped the larger goal of creating a database of migrants at the block level. Details provided by migrants is digitized with help of registration software and shared with Rajasthan Labor Department on a quarterly basis thus building strong evidence on inter-state labor mobility from southern Rajasthan and impacting the policy agenda of the state.

5.3 Impacting Skills, Incomes and Employment

Organising vocational skill training and placement services is aimed at helping rural youth upgrade their skill-set and enter the labor markets with greater competitive advantage. Given that the target group is already in the labor market, focused short term training courses have been designed that provide rigorous inputs on both theoretical and practical aspects of the trade. There is an emphasis on hands-on training where trainees spend close to 60 per cent of the training time on work sites. Imparting specialized inputs in life-skills is a vital component of this programme. Sessions are

conducted on improving communication, self-confidence, and interaction with customers with the intent of improving employability and retention of the youth in the labour market. Inputs are provided on time and stress management, legal and financial literacy and managing both occupational and health risks. In addition to direct training, the centers offer job counseling, short-term preparatory trainings, life skills training and linkages to placement opportunities. Elaborate tools for testing person-job fit, systematic evaluation and periodic follow-up mechanisms help ensure quality and test the final impact of the training. Till December 2011, Aajeevika has trained 1822 youth and provided job placement to 3026 youth.

The initiative to help youth upgrade their skill-sets and diversify to organised work settings, however, has been fraught with challenges. In particular, taking this intervention to scale has been a test for the Bureau. The manner in which present day labor markets are structured entry level wages in the organised settings is lower when compared to casual daily wage work. This serves as a serious deterrent in encouraging rural youth to diversify to organised sector jobs. A bigger problem is that of resources for skill development, especially for sectors such as construction. While the state programmes focus on skills on the higher end of the spectrum such as computer training and retail, the corporate sector absolves itself of all responsibility – it needs skilled labor but is not ready to make required investments in skill building.

5.4 Legal Protection for Workers and Providing Platforms for Asserting Collective Strength

To address the widespread disconnect between the formal legal machinery and informal sector workers, the walk-in resource centers offer legal counseling, arbitration services and legal literacy to workers. In case of a dispute, workers can approach the centers to register their case and seek counsel/aid. This process of intermediation is institutionalized through regular legal clinic days. **Legal clinic days** are adaptations of the formal court mechanism, wherein disputing parties are given an objective hearing and advice by a trained lawyer. The centre plays the role of an objective arbiter between the complainant and the offenders. There is an emphasis on resolving disputes through intermediation and negotiation, rather than litigation, which can be expensive and hugely time consuming for workers to pursue. Only the more complex cases that are not amenable to arbitration strategy are taken to the labour court. So far, Aajeevika has resolved 550 disputes and facilitated compensation worth Rs. 52 lakhs.

Box 1: Labor Line

Aajeevika launched a **phone based help line for workers** in Udaipur in August 2011. The Helpline involves a dedicated phone line answered by a trained counselor. It allows workers to reach out for counsel in case of any problem related to wages, retrenchment or abuse. The Labor Line is supported by the network of walk-in resource centers at the source and destination. Effort is being made to create a wider support network which can respond in case of emergencies. In a period of less than 6 months Labor Line has received more than 600 calls, 350 of them being from a small destination city of Udaipur.

The overwhelming numbers of cases that reach the center, however, pertain to wage payments and are limited mostly to male workers. Instances of disputes being reported by women are less and the

initiative is still to reach out to female workers. Further, while elaborate mechanisms have been developed for settling disputes in cases of short distance movement, there is a need to develop response mechanisms for long distance migration. Nevertheless, the success of the legal aid service offered by the Bureau so far and the high rate of calls to Labor Line demonstrates that there is a great need to provide fast track dispute redressal forums to workers in the unorganized sector.

5.5 Enabling financial inclusion and linkages with Social Security Schemes

The Bureau has promoted a specialized agency called Rajasthan Shram Sarathi Association, a Section 25 Company which offers targeted financial services to migrant workers moving from Southern Rajasthan. The initiative has been quite successful in linking the migrant workers to a diverse range of financial products such as micro-credit, insurance and pension. Micro-loans offered by RSSA help migrants prevent abrupt breaks in the migration cycle and informal savings instrument for women at the source helps them manage volatility in cash flows. It is a decentralized model that has the ability to cater to the various life-cycle needs of the clients. Under its financial inclusion programme, migrant workers are linked to bank accounts at both source and destination – the major objectives being promotion of savings and facilitating remittances. This service is in much demand, especially at the destination, where the banks have started accepting the ID cards issued by the Bureau, as a valid document to satisfy their Know Your Customer (KYC) requirements. It deserves mention, however, that this acceptance is limited to some banks and often depends on the sensitivity levels of branch managers. Migrant workers are also linked to different social security provisions of the State and insurance products available in the market. Lately, workers are being linked to the Construction Welfare Board in both Rajasthan and in Gujarat.

Formal insurance claim settlement mechanisms, however, have documentation requirements which migrant workers find difficult to fulfill. Getting a copy of FIR and medical reports in case of an unnatural death is often too arduous a task, especially in case of long distance inter-state movement. In several cases, workers also fail to avail benefits on account of poor awareness levels. The Bureau runs dedicated financial literacy programs to educate workers on social security schemes and their documentary requirements.

5.6 Access to Essential Services at the Destination

In addition to the services mentioned above, the facilitation centers at the destination help migrants link up with health and banking services. To cut down expenses on food, **community kitchens** have been promoted in Ahmedabad in partnership with HPCL where workers can access subsidized LPG at the rate of Rs. 6 per hour. Regular advocacy events are organised and effort is made to create a healthy interface between civic authorities, police and migrant worker communities. An important strategy in service delivery in the cities is formation of **trade-based collectives**. At the destination, migrant workers live in groups that are dispersed through the expanse of the city. This greatly constrains their chances of coming together or exercising a collective bargaining power. The trade-based collectives, promoted by the Bureau serve as unique platforms for the workers to come

together, find solutions to their common problems and advocate with the government for their rights. Regular inputs on leadership building and technical skills are imparted to the collective members. Many collectives have organised public hearings to protest against atrocities committed against them and to have access to amenities at labor congregation points. These collectives also serve as anchors and vehicles for service delivery on food, health and banking.

5.7 Strengthening Support Systems for Migrant Families at Source

A range of family support and empowerment programmes are carried out in the source areas. These programs while addressing specific vulnerabilities faced by migrant households play a crucial role in helping migrants complete their migration cycle successfully. There are special initiatives for enabling the access of women to public welfare schemes, promoting food security and agricultural outcomes, and linking families to specialized healthcare services. Under the leadership of change agents from the community, women from migrant households are mobilized into common-interest groups that serve as platforms to facilitate negotiation in the public space and enable mutual support. Through these programmes families have also come to benefit from better access to work entitlements and social security schemes. A strong emphasis on individual and group education directly empowers women to thrive equally under the benefits as well as challenges of male migration. The family support programs are carried out in close partnership with the Panchayat representatives.

Table 1: Migration services – Outcomes and Impacts

Services	Outcomes and Impacts
Registration and Photo ID	Better ability to negotiate in urban spaces Reduction in police harassment in cities Access to basic services at the destination
Training and Placement	Better integration in urban labor markets Increased stability in income and employment cycles Improved confidence levels and bargaining power
Legal Aid	Access to fast legal recourse Awareness on labor rights and entitlements Increased visibility to labor disputes in informal sector
Financial Inclusion & Social Security	Linkage to formal financial system Access to specialized financial services Linkage to insurance, pension, labor welfare schemes
Destination Support	Access to subsidized food & good quality health care Improved interface with police and civic authorities Improved collective bargaining power with contractors, employers and government

Family Support Programme	Support	Improved social support systems for women of migrant households Increased access to work entitlements, specialized healthcare services, and public welfare schemes Improved food security and agricultural outcomes
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5.8 A Growing Recognition

Among the early impacts of these interventions includes the authorization of the photo ID issued by Aajeevika by the Rajasthan Labor Department. This was the first ever example of a state government acknowledging the high incidence of labor migration and taking a concrete step towards better documentation and management of the phenomenon. Advocacy efforts by the Bureau have also led to inclusion of Rajasthan migrants in the construction worker welfare board of Gujarat. In case of Rajasthan Construction Worker Welfare Board, the Bureau has been an active participant in design and delivery of welfare programs.

Challenging the conventional approach to migration and development, the initiative has also received attention by several national and international donors. It has helped create an environment which questions the existing approach of strengthening rural livelihoods and reducing hardships for urban poor in isolation from each other. It has led to a greater appreciation of how millions of livelihoods are in a state of transition, that rural and urban are part of the same continuum and there is a need to treat this reality more effectively. These efforts have found acknowledgement and support from Sir Dorabji Tata Trust (SDTT), Sir Ratan Tata Trust, World Bank, supported India Development Marketplace, IFMR Trust and OXFAM. SDTT has particularly taken this forward as part of its urban poverty work. Migration services is now an important component of SDTT's funding portfolio wherein enabling systems are being created for civil society organisations to learn from each other's field experiences. It has triggered the creation of a large community of practice on migration, spreading across 9 states covering more than 40 districts and 16 towns/cities. This community has come together as a national coalition, namely National Coalition for Security of Migrant Workers (NAC-SOM) to ensure protection of various labor, livelihood, citizenship, constitutional and human rights of workers.

6. Other frontiers in migration practice and policy change – some examples

Other frontiers of creative experimentation and interventions with migrant communities involve work on education with children of migrant workers, on sexual health of migrant communities, unionization of workers and with child migrant workers. This chapter discusses some more examples in migration practice, which have come up as a response to the unique needs of their context, and attempted addressing certain specific issues in their work with migrant communities.

6.1 Enabling Access to education for children of migrant workers

Migration is a leading cause for high dropout rate among children from schools. Though there is a government order under *Sarva Siksha Abhiyan*¹, providing for special efforts for education of children of migrant workers, its implementation is highly deficient. NGOs in high migration areas have undertaken dedicated initiatives such as seasonal hostels/residential care centers to enable inclusion of children in school both at the source and at the destination. Notable examples include education initiatives run by **Lokadrushti in western Odisha** for children of brick kiln workers, **SETU in Gujarat for children of migrants working in salt pans**, **Janaarth in Maharashtra for children of sugarcane cutters**. **Aide et Action and America India Foundation**, are two leading resource agencies providing support to education initiatives for children affected by migration.

6.2 Social mobilization for advocacy on wages and legal entitlements

PRAYAS Center for Labor Research and Action has been a leading agency working through unionization of vulnerable migrant streams. It has a focus on specific migrant groups working in the cotton ginning, brick kiln and construction sectors. The model rests on extensive mobilization of workers to assert collective strength and promoting their unions as platforms to negotiate with employers, contractors and the government. There is an extensive use of media for creating public sensitivity around problems faced by highly vulnerable migrant populations. This initiative has met with radical success in the case of child labor trafficking to Bt cotton seed farms in northern Gujarat and collectivisation of intermediary labor agents through who an increase of 40-50 per cent in local wages was achieved. Similarly, efforts of a union promoted by PRAYAS in the brick kiln have led to substantial wage increase for workers. PRAYAS's work with child migrants has triggered a response both from the sending and receiving state governments from Rajasthan and Gujarat through creation of special task force and an increased fund allocation to education.

6.3 Creating an institutionalized access to jobs

As an effort to mainstream unorganized workers and link them gainfully with the urban labor market, organisations such as **Labornet, Bangalore**, have set up elaborate systems for member registration, certified training and placement. The registration process aims to formalize the identity of informal sector workers across trades and occupations. A social enterprise, Labornet has both a profit and non-profit component in their work as it actively provides an interface between workers and employers. This interface, a charged service for employers offers them a centralized and hassle free access to trusted, certified workers. To the workers, it offers regular access to jobs with social security safeguards and skill up-gradation opportunities through a mix of technology and apprenticeship system. The organisation has so far developed a database of 45000 workers, and offers wide ranging services on financial inclusion, linkage with social security products and welfare schemes to unorganized sector workers.

¹ It is a campaign launched by the Central Government to promote universal education for children in the age group of 6-14.

6.4 Enabling portability of entitlements

As a measure to address food security concerns, efforts have been made by civil society organisations to **help migrants access subsidized ration through temporary ration cards** in cities. There is a leading example of a Government resolution (GR) to ensure PDS portability passed by Maharashtra government on 9th November, 2000. The GR acknowledges vulnerabilities of migrant communities and the problems they face in obtaining and producing documentary proof of their identity and residence. Certain relaxations are proposed under the GR which enable migrants to access subsidized grain and fuel in the destination cities. **Ration Kruti Samiti**, a network of civil society organisations of Maharashtra, working with the urban poor was instrumental in passing of the GR. Though started with the intent to help the urban poor access PDS, the network has reached out to both inter and intra-state migrants, who constitute the majority of the urban poor population. **Disha, a pioneer organisation working on migration in Nashik**, utilized this GR to help seasonal migrants in Nashik access temporary PDS cards for a period of 4 months (extendable to 12 months) with relaxed documentary requirements. As per the existing practice, a migrant is required to cancel his card on departure so that his/her PDS at the origin can be renewed.

7. Challenges to up-scaling of creative practices on migration

With the increasing centrality of labor and migration to Indian livelihoods, work on migration in India is only expected to grow further. Lately, the phenomenon has started to receive attention both from the practice community and the academia. A good ground of work has also built up demonstrating the possible solutions to various risks that the community faces, solutions that are also replicable and can be taken to scale. There are, however, some serious impediments to scaling up of the solutions on migration. These bottlenecks need be cleared for framing of an effective response to the phenomenon –

- (i) **Establishing Numbers** - One of the biggest impediments to design and delivery of services for migrants is lack of robust estimates on the absolute quantum of internal migration. The current numbers range from 30 to 100 million, indicating lack of analytical refinement in the way migration is defined. One cannot deny the complexity involved in capturing movement of this nature. Nevertheless, for the government to be able to reach out to this population, the importance of establishing numbers cannot be overstated.
- (ii) **Ensuring Portability of entitlements** – After numbers are put in place, linkages need to be established between source and destination regions, which allow citizens to carry their basic entitlements as and when they move. The current barriers to access, such as producing proof of identity and residence every time a citizen needs to avail a basic public service, needs to be rethought and brought down considerably to allow uninterrupted access. Portability of entitlements, however, would require extensive inter-state coordination and cooperation, examples of which are not very common.
- (iii) **Lack of suitable social security mechanism** - There is a serious paucity of social security products that understand the vulnerabilities specific to migrant workers and provide suitable

protection. There aren't any pension products available in the market for unorganized sector workers. The ones that are do not reflect a good appreciation of the work life cycle of migrants, who retire much early than other workers. A contributory pension scheme launched by Rajasthan Government, guaranteed pension only after the age of 60, while research shows that most informal sector workers are found to retire at the age of 35-40 years. In case of insurance products, the delivery mechanisms are highly deficient when it comes to serving highly mobile and less-educated populations. Lately, some welfare boards have come to existence, such as the construction worker welfare board or social security board which guarantees benefits to unorganized sector labor. There is, however, no clarity on what welfare schemes would be delivered and how. Design of social security products for migrants is again an important area of work which requires attention both from the market and the state agencies.

- (iv) **Absence of Quick response legal redressal mechanisms** – A serious anomaly in the unorganized labor market is that most violations against labor are never identified let alone addressed. The existing legal machinery is not sensitive to the nature of legal disputes in the unorganized sector where labour has little documentary proof of his/her employment. It is seen that many informal sector disputes never make their way to the court or keep languishing for lack of proof. Both the police and the labor administration are difficult to reach out to for a common worker. This problem is compounded for workers who move in from some other part of the country, lack a local support system and face language, and documentation hassles. When it comes to application of important labor legislations such as the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 and Payment of Wages Act, 1936, the jurisdiction of the Labour Courts is limited within a state's physical boundary. This is a serious problem as lack of a proper avenue for dispute redressal tends to normalize unfair labor practices leading to severe distortions in the labor market.
- (v) **Urban development discourse heavily biased towards slum development** – This is another serious impediment in establishing migrant workers' rights at the destination. The existing schemes under the BSUP are primarily targeted to slum dwelling populations. Shelter solutions in particular show little appreciation of needs of seasonal workers who come to the cities for short periods of time.
- (vi) **Resource Scarcity faced by Labor Departments** – Much of the execution of existing provisions depends on the human resource capacity available with the labour departments and the total fund allocation made to them. A number of existing labor legislations remain poorly enforced for lack of a robust labor administration. The importance of a strong, robust labor administration in a growing economy cannot be understated and there is a need to take serious cognizance of the resource and capacity needs of state labour departments and address them firsthand.

The examples shared in this paper primarily draw from civil society experiences in addressing social exclusion of migrant workers. It requires admission that there is a limit to what these localized, NGO-led efforts can achieve while addressing an exclusion of such a large magnitude. Civil society can demonstrate workable models and solutions; it is on the state and government machinery to take the solutions to scale through concerted policy interventions. Further, in this case the industry has

and must play a bigger role. It is the primary beneficiary of cheap labor provided by the unorganized sector. It definitely needs to take greater ownership and make necessary contributions in making growth more humane.

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