



BRICK-BY-BRICK

A study on situation of Migrant Brick Kiln Workers from Kotra

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Migration has emerged as a major livelihood strategy in Southern Rajasthan over the past two decades. Aajeevika Bureau's initial work in the area gave us the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of issues related to migration. This not only helped us answer important questions like, 'what is migration' but also led to a collection of rich data on the destinations for migration, major trades where migrant labour works as well problems and other issues of migration.

Understanding the conditions of specific migrant groups is the starting point for developing strategies and sets of services tailored to their needs. This study brick kiln workers from Kotra Block in Udaipur District is one of a series of occupational profiles that serve this purpose and encompass the following topics:

- Characteristics of Migrant Groups and Migration patterns
- Support systems at the destination
- The recruitment system
- Owner/contractor/labor relationships
- Migrant incomes, expenditures, savings, and investments
- Work and living conditions at the destination
- Communications between the destination and the source/the migrant and those left behind
- The potential for skill up-gradation, self-improvement and career and livelihood diversification

2. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The concept of migration is as old as the history of humankind. The causes of migration have been traditionally been divided into 'pull' and 'push', but in fact these distinctions are rarely illuminating: the reality is, that like the blades of a pair of scissors, both "push" and "pull" factors do the cutting. The initial studies of Aajeevika Bureau indicate that migration is a key livelihood strategy. The context and conditions in which the cash-starved and livelihood-deprived tribals began migrating out for short durations from Kotra to brick kilns in far off areas hint at the inevitability of this flow of humans and their services and a need to understand in depth the typology of these migrants and their work, and their living and working conditions in alien destinations. Such an exploration has to be made with a view to identify opportunities for intervention to make the livelihoods of migrating brick kiln workers from Kotra, less risky and more sustainable. It is with this intention that the present study was carried out.

The **objectives** of this study are:

1. Understand the nature of work being carried out by the migrant brick kiln workers from Kotra;
2. Understand the issues associated with their present pattern of livelihoods;
3. Analyze the financial dimensions of brick kiln operations, and the labourers' earnings;
4. Understand working and living conditions of migrant labourers in the destination areas; and
5. Identify opportunities for strengthening the livelihoods of this category of migrant labour and the possible roles for Aajeevika Bureau.

The **methodology** used for the study included interviews, group discussions and observation. The study was carried out in the three panchayats where the incidence of migration is the highest.

The **sample** was drawn from Kotra Block which are major sources of migrants to the brick kiln areas. The Mandwa area is the main source of migrant labour for the brick kilns of Gujarat as well as for those in the

neighbouring Districts of Pali and Sirohi in Rajasthan. An estimated, 2000-2500 workers and 100-150 mates migrate to work in brick kilns every year. Three Panchayats (ten villages) from this region viz. Mandwa, Jhed and Kukawas were purposively selected for the study as around 500 to 600 persons migrate every year to brick kilns from these Panchayats. A stratified random sample of 60 migrants based on source and destination place and age was taken from these ten villages.

The **tools** used for data collection for this study included checklist-based interviews of sample migrant brick kiln workers and Focused Group Discussion (FGD).

The **primary data** was collected by the following methods:

- Interviews – a six-part questionnaire was administered to the brick kiln workers.
- Focus Group Discussions – FGDs were held separately with 25 male and 25 female labourers, and 20 mates/supervisors of brick kilns. To understand working conditions, working groups and roles and responsibilities of different kinds of workers.

The sources of **secondary data** were research papers, government data and maps.

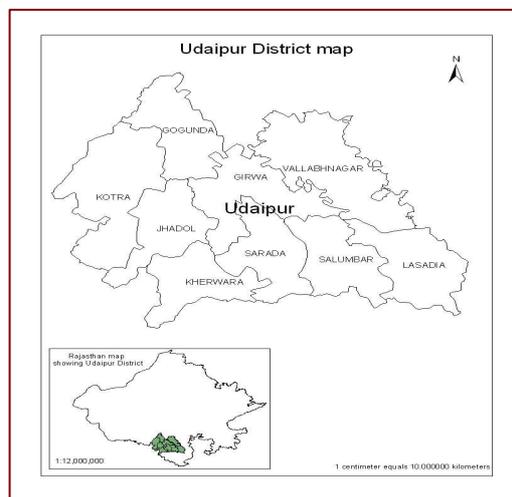
3. BACKGROUND ON SOURCE AREA AND MIGRATION PATTERNS

3.1 Kotra Block: Kotra block is one of the 11 blocks in Udaipur district. It is a predominantly tribal block with 89 per cent of total population being tribal. The block has 36 Gram Panchayats (local governing bodies) and 304 Revenue Villages. The region is semi-arid with the presence of large tracts of dry deciduous forest and other wastelands. The climate of the block shows extremes of temperature ranging from 42^o C to 4^o C with an average rainfall of around 650 mm per annum. Though agriculture is the primary occupation of most of the households in the block, meagre landholding, low production and the rainfed nature of the agriculture makes it a low return occupation and a declining share of income for the households. Similarly, forest produce on which the tribal community in Kotra used to depend, are scarce due to severe degradation of natural resources in the region. Frequent droughts over the past decade have adversely affected both agricultural productivity and forest-based production in the Block, thus aggravating poverty in the area and triggering regular out-migration.

Adversity, which triggered out-migration from Kotra, could have been a boon for these tribals, but this was not to be. Low literacy levels and lack of vocational/ job skills pushed the migrating tribals towards unskilled, and thus, low paying and hazardous occupations, like working in the brick kilns. Within Kotra, the tribals migrating from western part of the Block are most commonly found engaged in this occupation. Agriculture, construction, stone quarries, charcoal making, factories and mines are other sectors where tribals from Kotra are employed as unskilled workers.

Seasonality is distinctly evident in all kinds of migratory labour from Kotra, viz., the agricultural labour migrates from July to March, other wage labour from October to June, and brick kiln labour from November to May every year. During other times of the year, these people till their own farms or labour locally. Migration is also location specific and depends on the geographic location of the migrant.

Table 1: Demography and Land use in Kotra Block		
Households	31449	
Population	183504	
Sex Ratio	979	
SC Population	1 %	
ST Population	89 %	
Population Density	151	
Total Area (Ha)	121094	
Agriculture Land (Ha)	19842	16.4 %
Irrigated (Ha)	2638	13 %
Forest Area (Ha)	44179	36.5 %
Common Land (Ha)	57088	47 %



For example people from north-east Kotra migrate to nearby centers in Rajasthan and Gujarat to find employment in stone quarries and factories or doing casual labour. People from western Kotra migrate to work in brick kilns of nearby towns within or outside the state.

The share of income from migration in the livelihoods of the community in Kotra is significant but this was not always so. Only a decade ago, working in the brick kilns was only an alternative livelihood option. A combination of diminishing livelihood options locally (e.g. reduced production of the agriculture and forest resource caused in part by recurring droughts and land scarcity) and increasing demand of labour in the expanding brick kiln industry induced many families to take up brick kiln work as an integral part of their livelihood profiles.

Every year, from November to May, when the large majority of farmers are engaged in planting, tending and harvesting the Rabi crop, the migrants from Kotra Block of Udaipur District in Rajasthan, are in fields of a different kind. These are across the State boundary in Gujarat, which, with its different language and traditions, is to many is like a different country. When the farmers in other parts of the country work on their rabi crops, these migrant labourers toil in the brick kilns in Deesa and Tharra regions of Gujarat, returning home just before the advent of rains every year. This cycle is a quarter of a century old, when a group of labourers first went from Kotra to Gujarat, where they found work in the brick-kilns. Migration, which began as a distress response about 25 years ago,

gradually became an integral part of the life and a key source of livelihood for the poor tribals of Kotra.

3.2 Origin of Brick Kiln Migration from Kotra: Migration from Mandwa area to brick kilns in Gujarat and other districts of Rajasthan is about 25 years old, even though the practice of migrating to Gujarat in search of work is much older. Bhera Sahvaan, son of Bhoma from Mandwa area was the first individual to migrate to work as brick kiln worker in Gujarat, about 25 years ago. When he returned for Diwali, after one work-season, to his native village in Kotra, he informed his friends and other people in the village about this work opportunity. When he returned to Gujarat after Diwali, he took along about a dozen people from his village to work in the brick kilns of Danta. Once there, the first-time migrants realized that the kilns of Gujarat needed still more workers, and thus started the regular outflow of brick kiln labourers, that included entire families, from Kotra.

In the initial few years, all migrants work as labourers in the kilns. Gradually, sensing an opportunity in brick kiln labour sourcing and contracting, some of the more enterprising labourers transformed themselves into labour contractors or mates, after seeking permission from the kiln owners. This served to further institutionalize migration of labourers from Kotra to the brick kilns of Gujarat. Brick kiln mates / contractors belong to this Panchayat and they prefer to take workers from their own area; it is only when there is a shortage of labour in a particular season that the mates scout for labour in their neighbouring Panchayats. The brick kiln work is usually contracted out, and so is the process of hiring migrant labourers, willing to stay in or near the kilns for extended durations till the contracted lot of bricks is ready. The process of labour scouting and hiring begins in the source villages about 15-20 days before the brick-making season begins.

3.3. Migration Cycle: Migration season for brick kiln workers is from November to May. Brick manufacturing usually begins every year after Deepwali, in the month of November-December, and continues till before the onset of the monsoon in June. Each brick preparation cycle usually takes around 16-30 days. During this season of around six months, migrant labour from Kotra usually stays on when the kiln fields are located in Gujarat; they spend between 45-60 days at a stretch. However, in the

case of the kilns established within Rajasthan, labourers return home for a fortnight or more for rest and recuperation. Labourers, who leave for longer periods, try to establish contact with the family members in various ways, depending on the distance between their source village and the destination.

Mandwa *tehsil* is the key source of brick kiln labour from Kotra, to Paalanpur, Tharra, Deesa, and Daanta areas of Gujarat, and Pali and Sirohi districts in Rajasthan. A majority of labour comes from Kukawaas Panchayat in Mandwa tehsil.

At the start of the migration season, brick kiln workers in groups migrate to nearby districts of Pali and Sirohi in Rajasthan and to Banaskantha district of North Gujarat, which borders the western part of the Kotra. Migrants work on a few brick kilns, coming back home after work is over at one brick kiln, staying for sometime at home and then again move to another brick kiln.

When the labourers return home, in between the brick production cycles or after “retiring”, they either till their lands or take up other short-term wage employment locally or migrate for short duration to Sirohi and Paalanpur. Most of the brick kiln labourer own around one to two acres of agricultural land, which is devoted to kharif (rainfed) cropping in the absence of irrigation facilities in the area. Only a few households have access to private wells that enable them to take two-three crops a year. When men migrate to Pali, Sirohi, or to distant Gujarat, women and other members of the household shoulder the responsibility of managing agricultural operations on their small and marginal lands.

4.0 BRICK KILN OPERATIONS

4.1. Categories (?): There are two distinct categories of work in the process of brick preparation:

(i) *Patla* Work:

Patla refers to the systematic arrangement of ready-to-be-fired bricks in a brick field. Each such arrangement usually has lakhs¹ of bricks. First, a

¹ 1 lakh = 100,000

brick mixture is prepared by using soil from the carefully chosen brick field and mixing with water from the nearest water source. Unbaked bricks are then prepared by *patla* workers using moulds. Usually, *patla* workers belong to one family, sometimes also including children; alternatively, five to seven close friends or relatives form a group to accomplish the task of brick making. The wage rate for *patla* work is between Rs 180-200 per thousand unbaked bricks.

There are two kinds of bricks that are manufactured during *patla* work:

- *Patla* table, and
- *Kantari*

The *patla* table is a superior kind of brick, which is larger in size than the latter, and is flat and heavy (weighing between 2.5 to 3.0 kg a brick), and also more expensive than the *Kantari*. *Patla* table bricks are quite popular in the construction sites of Gujarat.

Kantari, on the other hand, is of an average size and quality, weighing between 1.5 to 2.0 kg a piece, is cheaper and more popular than *Patla* table, in Rajasthan.

(ii) *Khadkan* Work:

Khadkan is that stage in the production process of bricks during which unbaked bricks from the *patla* arrangement, i.e., the previous stage, are arranged along with coal, fuel wood and other fuel to form a kiln and smoked till baked into finished bricks. *Khadkan* work is considered to be skilled work and is primarily done by experienced workers.

4.2 Processes: There are four major processes in brick making. They are making bricks, transporting bricks, arranging them for firing and coal work.

- **Making bricks:** The task of making bricks is a distinct task and is given to a separate group. As mentioned earlier, this group comprises members of the same family or close friends/relatives. The group organises the work in such a manner that a sub-group prepares the raw material for making bricks and the rest make them. The first step is digging the soil and mixing it with water. This is a crucial step and the quality of bricks depends on this. This 'dough' is then formed into balls

or lumps of clay. The chief of the team then forms the lumps of clay into bricks using a mould. A team of 4-5 people can make 2000- 3000 bricks per day. The wage rate is Rs 150-200 per thousand bricks.

- **Transporting bricks:** This stage involves transporting formed bricks from the *patla* to the *khadkan*. The distance between the two is 25-30 metres. A worker carries 9 bricks from the *patla* to the *khadkan* gets one rupee for four rounds. If the distance between the two is more than 30 metres, then the worker gets one rupee for 3 such rounds. The wage rate for this work is Rs 100-120 per thousand bricks. Workers walk fast during this stage as the wage is related to the number of bricks transported.

Apart from women, children are also involved in both the stages, wherein they work as headloaders, carrying from five to seven bricks between *patla* and *khadkan* arrangements in the kiln fields. Since both male and female members of the migrating families can engage in the brick manufacturing process, it is common for them to bring their children along to the destination.

- **Arranging bricks:** This is considered to be a skilled task. Experienced male workers are usually employed for this task. Workers take the bricks from the head-loaders and arrange them in an organised manner. After they are arranged they are covered and fired. The wage rate is Rs 60-70 per 2000 bricks.
- **Coal work:** Here, the workers break the coal into smaller pieces. These pieces are mixed with cow dung manure and fuel wood. The wage rate here is on a daily basis. Each workers gets between Rs 50-60 per day.

5.0 CHARACTERISTICS OF BRICK KILN WORKERS

5.1 Age group of brick kiln workers: More than three quarters of workers interviewed were under 30 years of age. The entry age for brick kiln labourers is 17 years. They are able to work till the time they are 40-45 years old. Since entire families also migrate, it is possible to see children involved in both the major stages of brick making.

5.2 Gender: Both men and women work as labourers in the brick kilns. Working in a brick kiln is considered difficult work and the majority of

workers are men. Men and women labourers are engaged in the brick making occupation in the ratio of 5:1.

There is a division of labour between them. Women headload the bricks within the kiln field, breaking coal into smaller pieces for use as fuel, and cooking food for the assigned groups of labourers at the work site. Men, on the other hand, make bricks, arrange them into stacks, prepare and smoke the kiln, headload finished bricks and also engage in breaking coal.

The major reason of taking women workers along during the migration is the need to cook. This is especially true for women who live in joint families. The number of women is also fewer as in the absence of men they along with the parents-in-law tend to the fields and other family matters.

5.3 Land owning pattern: Most of the people who work in brick kilns belong to families owning 2-3 beeghas of land in their village. Recurring droughts and absence of irrigation facilities means that only a single crop is possible. The families who have wells manage 2-3 crops a year.

5.4 Reasons for working in brick kilns: An inquiry into the reasons behind youth of Kotra taking to brick kiln labour as a vocation in large numbers revealed that 60% of the contacted labourers have been motivated by the lack of employment opportunities in Kotra. Approximately 20% had followed their relatives and acquaintances into the kiln fields, while 15 per cent had followed the advice of mates or contractors. Less than 1% of respondents took

Migration in the absence of options

Dasi bai is from Kukavaas panchayat. She never went to school as it was too far from her house. She grew up grazing animals and helping in household chores.

Her family is large and the harvest not enough to support the entire family. She tried to look for employment options in the area but she could not find anything.

She decided to migrate to the brick kilns in Gujarat with the others from her village. Today, the money she earns from the brick kilns contributes significantly to the family income.

to this work as an alternative to formal education after dropping out from schools. Working in brick kilns has become a trend in the area and youth first consider working in that sector.

Table 2: Reasons for migrating

Sr No	Reason for migrating	Number	Percentage
1	Motivated by friends and relatives in the sector	13	21.6%
2	Dropped out of school	02	3.3%
3	No other livelihood option in the area	36	60%
4	Asked by the mate to work	09	15%
	Total	60	100%

6.0 RECRUITMENT AND CAREER PATH:

6.1 Recruitment process: Recruitment begins 15-20 days before the date of the migration – the mate informs potential workers about the date and venue. The mate usually prefers to employ people from his family/village. Discussions indicated that sometimes workers also chose which mate they wanted to migrate with. First time migrants are recruited for head-loading bricks and breaking coal and experienced workers are recruited for making and arranging bricks for firing.

6.2 Career Paths of Brick Kiln Labourers: The earliest job of each new recruit in a brick kiln involves loading-unloading of bricks and coal-breaking. Recruits gradually transition to more responsible and higher paying *khadkan* and *patla* work. Labourers from Kotra continue to toil in the brick kilns till the age of 40-45 years. Though the daily wage/ piece rate of *patla* work is higher than *khadkan*, more labourers are found engaged in the latter as compared to the former due to the skill and effort required for the *patia* work.

Some of the more enterprising labourers become labour contractors/mates after completing two or three migration cycles during which they acquire a better understanding of the intricacies of labour recruitment and retention process. When a labourer first becomes a mate, he does not immediately win the trust of the kiln owner/works contractor. Hence, he continues working under the able guidance of another, established contractor/mate who takes labour contracts on his behalf till the time the newcomer has established his reputation.

7.0 OTHER PLAYERS IN BRICK KILN OPERATION AND MANAGEMENT

The two other main players in brick kiln operation and management are the mate / contractor and the brick kiln owner.

7.1 Mate/Contractor: The 'mate' refers to the person who takes the brick making contract from the brick kiln owner. The mate/contractor usually belongs to the same village or Panchayat as the labourers he scouts and hires. He is the person contacted by a brick kiln owner for the execution of one or more brick production cycles. Once the initial understanding is reached, the mate visits the brick kiln field and arrives at the estimate of labour requirement for accomplishing the brick production task. Monetary, work schedule, and other aspects of the deal, are, then finalised and the mate takes some advance amount, ranging from Rs 1000-5000, from the kiln owner.

The labourer and the mate are usually from the same village. The mates are responsible for taking the workers to the destination. In the initial days, the mate helps labourers in case one of them falls ill or has any other problem. In case the labourer needs cash, the mate extends a loan which is later settled at payment time. As they are from the same village and/or community, the relationship between the two is usually good.

7.2 Brick Kiln Owner: Traditionally, members of the *kumhaar* (Traditional Potter) community have been engaged in the brick production process in Rajasthan, Gujarat, and elsewhere. However, given the impressive margins in this trade, people from other communities have also entered the business of brick production. However, the initial capital requirements of this occupation are high, as the kiln owner has to take brick kiln fields on rent, purchase water, fuelwood, and coal, and also advance some amount for labour scouting and hiring to the mate / contractor. When the bricks are ready, they are sold in the market at a rate of Rs 1500-1600 per thousand bricks. The major threat to this business comes from un-expected rainfall which renders all completed as well as in-process bricks useless. The kiln owner also has his share of

employee grievances as some labourers abandon work mid-way, hassled by the poor working conditions at the work sites or out of home-sickness.

8.0 WORKING ARRANGEMENTS/CONDITIONS

8.1 Living Conditions at the Destination: The contractor or mate is responsible for arranging lodging for the migrant labourers scouted and hired by him. These dwelling units are usually constructed in the kiln field itself, using bricks for walls and twigs and plastic sheets for a ceiling. Three to four labourers occupy each such dwelling, which is a low-height construction - usually around four-five feet high - in which the labourers find it difficult even to stand. Since the labourers spend the hottest and coldest months in a year working in the brick kiln fields, they find themselves inadequately sheltered from the vagaries of nature in their make-shift dwellings. Such tough living conditions at their destination often drive the new recruits back home mid-way through the brick-production cycle.

Migrating labourers carry their own stock of grains, purchasing the remaining rations at the destination. Fuel wood is collected from the nearby agriculture fields and sometimes are provided by the kiln owner. Food is usually cooked by women who accompany the male members of their households to the destination sites, using a temporary *chullha* constructed outside the dwelling unit. The main expenditure of migrant labourers - while at the brick kilns - is on purchasing rations, as they are made to pay a hefty price for food stuff purchased from opportunistic grocers in the destination. Being migrants from outside the State, these labourers do not have access to subsidised ration supplies under the Public Distribution System (PDS) in Gujarat, even when they are entitled to access PDS supplies in their source villages in Rajasthan.

In addition to purchasing food supplies (often at inflated prices) at the destination, labourers commonly spend a part of their earnings on tobacco and other addictions. Women labourers, on the other hand, prefer to spend some of their earnings on purchasing dresses from Gujarat, before returning home.

8.2 Working Conditions of Brick Kiln Labourers:

Brick kiln workers work for 15-16 hours a day in the open without any shade or shelter. Depending on the work allotted to them, they spend the entire time either breaking coal, making bricks, transporting bricks on their heads, arranging them for firing. All the work is hard labour. Living in the

kiln fields, these labourers are like captive workers for their contractors and kiln owners. Long working hours, poor work conditions and an absence of basic facilities are all indicators of exploitation.

Given the nature of work, injuries to brick head loaders and to those involved in kiln firing are commonplace. However, even first aid facility is seldom available at the work sites. When paid a piece-rate, the labourers also try to load and carry as many bricks as possible at a time, increasing the probability of accidents. Any medical expenses or hospitalization charges incurred by injured labourers are initially paid for by the mate, but later on adjusted from their wages. Such unforeseen expenses can eat into 20 per cent of the season's earnings of a labourer, not including the number of work-days lost due to forced rest.

Apart from the accident prone nature of the work, there are several other occupational hazards such as:

- Smoke from the kilns is harmful and many workers who have been working for a long time in the kilns have an almost constant pain in their chest.
- Head-loaders often get dust in their mouths from the load of bricks on their head that can lead to stomach ailments.
- The *khadkan* worker takes the bricks from the *patla* workers head thousands of times a day which causes constant pain as his elbows rub his waist.

Paying the price

Champa from Jhajhar in Mandawa went to Danta to work in a brick kiln. One day some she hurt her feet when some bricks fell on her.

She went to a private clinic for treatment that cost her Rs 200. The mate paid for it which was later 'adjusted' (deducted) from her wages. She couldn't work for a week for which she wasn't paid. On the completion of the brick making cycle – she received Rs 550 for 10 days work.

- While women work alongside men at the work site or provide other home-making support to their male counterparts, children wander around, devoid of any schooling opportunity and maternal care.
- When in rains, in the absence of a proper shelter, they are forced to live in the water filled shacks.

Apart from all this, the workers have several other problems like being cut off from their families and very little knowledge of the destination leading to further exploitation.

9.0 FINANCIAL DIMENSIONS OF A BRICK PRODUCTION

9.1 Costs and Returns from Brick Production: According to estimates available from the field, in a normal sized kiln, a sum of Rs. 97,000 is spent in the manufacture of one lakh bricks (see table). This includes the wages paid to labourers (approximately 30 per cent of the total cost), cost of raw material (water, soil, coal, etc.), and rent of the field in which the kiln is made. The selling price of each brick is Rs. 1.50; thus, there is a net profit of around Rs. 53,000 / brick kiln to the kiln owner. However, there are losses in the brick kiln in the form of broken bricks due to improper firing or poor mixture preparation. When these losses are “manageable”, i.e., less than 0.1 per cent damaged bricks, the kiln owner/contractor bears them. But when losses mount, those are passed on to the labourers employed at the brick kiln.

Table 3: Costs for the manufacture of 100,000 bricks

Sr No	Description	Amount in Rs
	Costs	
1	Labour at <i>patla</i> @ Rs 200 per 1000 bricks	20,000
2	Labour at <i>khadkan</i> @ Rs 120 per 1000 bricks	12,000
3	Coal – including transportation from Barmer	40,000
4	Rent for field i.e. cost of soil, water	20,000
5	Fuel wood	5,000
	Total Expenses	97,000
	Earnings	
6	Selling price of bricks @ Rs 1.50 per brick	1,50,000
7	Net profit to brick kiln owner	53,000

9.2 Wage Rates and Earnings from Brick Production:

The wage estimates of brick kiln labour are arrived in two ways:

- Daily wage rate – for those workers who work in arranging bricks or breaking coal.
- Piece rate – for those workers who make and transport bricks. The unit of payment is per thousand bricks.

Table 4: Wages in a Brick Kiln

Task	Nature of Work	Daily Work Hours	Wage Rate (in Rs.)
Brick making	Skilled	13 -15	90 - 95
Head loading of bricks	Unskilled	09 - 10	50 - 60
Arrangement of bricks as <i>patla</i> or <i>khadkan</i>	Skilled	09 - 10	70 - 80
Coal and kiln firing work	Unskilled	09 - 10	60 - 70

The minimum estimated daily wages of brick kiln labour is Rs. 60, but the study found that this was not the case.

Table 5: Daily Wages of Brick Kiln Workers

Daily Wages	Number	Percentage
Less than Rs 60 per day	27	45%
Between Rs 60-80 per day	29	48.3%
More than Rs 80 per day	04	6.7%
Total	60	100

As we can see from the table above, 45 per cent of the contacted labourers were found earning less than this “minimum” amount. Differences in the physical capabilities of labourers and task profiles are as much responsible for these wage differentials as unaccounted for cuts in the wage payments to these informal sector workers. A worker who works on a *khadkan* earns Rs 50-60 per day while the worker at the *patla* can earn between Rs 60-70 per day. on an average, a worker who migrates for 15-20 days earns between Rs 600 – 1000.

The wage rates for different kinds of work are as follows:

Table 6: Wage rates for different kinds of work

Sr No	Task	Nature of Work	Hours per day	Wage in Rs/day
1	Making bricks	Skilled	13-15	90-95
2	Transporting bricks	Unskilled	9-10	50-60
3	Arranging bricks for firing	Skilled	9-10	70-80
4	Breaking coal	Unskilled	9-10	60-70

The average earnings of a brick kiln worker range from Rs. 50-60 per day for every working day of the season. Each brick preparation cycle usually takes around 16-30 days. Thus, from each brick preparation cycle, labourers manage to earn approximately Rs. 900-1800/person. Wages are paid either on the basis of numbers of bricks prepared or the number of days of labour, depending of the kind of task being performed. Hence, from a brick kiln where one lakh bricks have been prepared, the *patla* workers are altogether paid between Rs. 18,000 to Rs. 20,000, while the *khadkan* workers receive between 10,000 to Rs. 12,000.

The labourers are usually paid by their respective mates. The final wages are settled only after task completion, i.e., after the manufacture of bricks has been completed from the brick kiln to which a labourer has been assigned. In the absence of any written work agreement, the labourer-mate relationship determines to a great extent how much an individual worker profits from his/her engagement in the brick kiln sites. This payment is made either at source or destination. The mate or contractor usually takes some advance payment from the kiln owner, and uses part of it to extend advances to the migrant labourers. These advances are settled at the time of the final payment.

The brick kiln labourers of Kotra usually carry home their wages with themselves, when they return from long-distant migration after the end of their migration cycle. In each season, a worker usually goes and comes back from the brick kiln destination three to four times. As per requirement, however, they can also send money to their homes through their labour contractor/mate.

10. KEY ISSUES

The impacts of brick kiln work on the livelihoods of migrants from Kotra relates to the following issues:

1. Brick kiln work is an accident-prone work and there are other occupational hazards associated with the work. These arise from inhaling smoke from the firing of kilns, sand/dust entering the mouth and then the stomach from carrying bricks on the head for



- long hours are non-issues for brick kiln owners. There is always the risk of accidents on the work site and there are no health services that the workers can access. There are absolutely no safety measures that are in place. Insurance services have never been considered. The labourer working in brick kiln does not have easy access even to primary health care and has to spend a large amount out of his/her small earnings on health expenses.
2. Work in the brick kiln involves hard labour and this is the reason young people especially men are preferred. The working life of the labourer is not very long and it is rare to find anyone over the age of 40 years. The options for earning a livelihood in their villages after spending years at brick kilns are also limited.
 3. Living and working conditions of the brick kiln workers are very poor due to which they have to face extremes of weather and have to live in cramped settings which provide little protection from the weather. Providing quarters for the labour to live is not an issue for the brick kiln owners. The fact that they come back between migration cycles and rest at home also indicates that they have been working hard at the brick kiln.
 4. In some cases whole families, including children, migrate since there may be no one to look after the children at home. In such situations, the children are not only deprived of school education but actually work

along with their parents in some capacity or the other. It is fairly common to see little children transporting 5-7 bricks on their heads.

5. Lack of alternative income generating avenues as well as the employable skills are the major issues in this region which force people to migrate to work in brick kilns.
6. The usual practice is for the mate to extend an advance to the worker before migration and during the migration cycle, which is to be settled at the end of the migration cycle. There is no written record of this contract or the financial agreement that they have entered into. This leads to a situation where the labourers get financially cheated by the employer or the mate. The other reason that migrant workers are exploited is because they have to purchase grocery and other daily use items and the local grocers usually charge exorbitant prices from them.
7. In case there are any delays or there are some other shortcomings/losses in brick production, the brick kiln owner displays reluctance in paying the mate or does not pay the mate the full amount and this loss is passed on to the labourers.
8. There are also cases of the labour being cheated – especially in the counting of bricks which means that the labourer ends up working more for lesser money. There are often conflicts regarding to the payment.

11. INTERVENTION POSSIBILITIES

Looking at the above issues, the following intervention possibilities emerge for Aajeevika Bureau:

- **Organising Labour to Increase Wages:** If we compare the labour involved in making bricks with the remuneration received, then it is obvious then the wages that they receive do not correspond to the effort and time put in. In these situation the following efforts can be made:
 - The employer should bear the travel costs of the workers. In short migration cycles, the cost of travelling reduces their earnings considerably.
 - The wage rate for *khadkan* work should be increased to Rs 160 per 1000 bricks.
 - There should be a formal contract between the labour and owner before beginning work that can be used to resolve conflicts.

Even though people have been migrating for almost a quarter of a century, their working and living conditions are of very poor quality. There is a need to organise them and form collectives in order to enhance their bargaining power for improved working and living conditions.

There is a need to lobby for government intervention to improve living and working condition in the sector.

- **Training and Placement:** In this sector, there are limited options for improving skills. The youth can be trained with alternative skills and provided placement support so that they can consider working in other sectors. This has the possibility of creating a



shortage of labour for brick kilns and forcing the owners to provide better wages as well as living and working conditions.

Brick kiln work has become an accepted route for earning a livelihood for youth in Kotra. They need to be presented with lower risk and higher return- yielding vocations through training options and placement support.

- **Registration and Identity Cards:** Registration services can be very

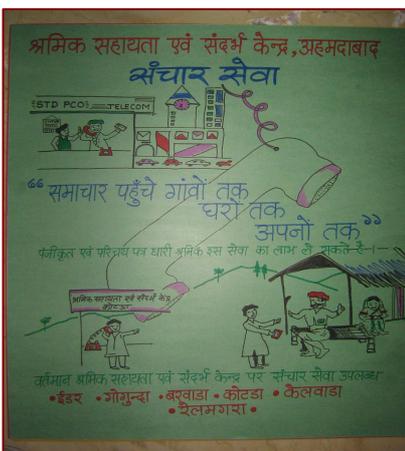


important as there is a large number of workers in this sector. This can provide valuable information on migration related facts. These details can also be used in case of conflicts and provide a

mechanism for other organisations to work with them.

- **Insurance Services:** The current practice for insurance is the 'vair practice' where the mate pays a sum between Rs 50,000 to Rs 100,000 in case a labourer dies while working in the brick kiln. A good insurance product can provide the worker with greater security in case of accidents and death.

- **Services:** There is a need to provide products and services for enhanced social security and health insurance. These can take the form of information before migration on what to do in case of ill health. The other services that the workers need when they are away from home include:



- Communication facilities – the migrant is usually cut off from his/her family while s/he is away. Better communication facilities will enable the worker to stay from home for a longer time and earn better.

○ Mobile Ration Card – the migrant needs to buy groceries even if s/he takes food grain from home. The local shopkeepers usually charge them a much higher rate. There is a need to advocate for a Public Distribution System for unorganised migrant workers.

- Protective Equipment – advocacy for protective gear like helmets, masks, shoes is also needed.

- Schooling for children - engaging school-going children at the brick kiln sites in educational activities also needs to be lobbied for.