

DECEMBER 2020

The Perils of being Poor in the age of COVID19

Assessing the
situation of
migrant
returnees from
South Rajasthan
after the
lockdowns



The Perils of being poor in the age of COVID19 ; A
report on the situation of South Rajasthan Migrant
workers after the lockdown

December 2020

Author

Vikas Kumar

Conceptualization

Santosh Poonia & Rajiv Khandelwal

Edited by

Anhad Imaan

Study Inputs

Nivedita Jayaram, Divya Varma, Anhad Imaan

Data collection team

Rupal Kulkarni, Saloni Mudra, Jibitesh SahooPreema, Parasram,
Dharamraj, Sadhana Kunwar, Rekha Joshi, Menka Vimla Panda,
Ashok Dindor, Teena Garasiya, Rajendra Singh, Mahendra Meena
Bhagwati, Farukh , Kalpana, Manju, Mohan , Bhagwanti, Sawaram
and Praveen

Report Design

Anhad Imaan



39, Krishna Colony, Near Khan Complex, Bedla Road, Udaipur,
Rajasthan 313001 +91 294-245-1062, +91 294-245-0682
info@aajeevika.org

Preface

The COVID-19 lockdown compelled migrant workers to face multiple challenges, including hunger and cashlessness. Without any government intervention, especially during the initial months, their primary objective was to reach home from cities and their workplaces as soon as possible. Most workers reached their hometowns through their own coping mechanisms, relying on informal channels, social networks, and their own will power. A large number of them returned empty-handed. Some permanently lost their already precarious jobs. Simultaneously, the lockdown highlighted to the country this invisible section of the workforce that has continued to remain on the margins of society. Despite the multiple and layered crises, there was some hope and relief as citizens and civil society groups came together to provide food and cash relief to workers in cities and to those walking to their homes on highways.

As more and more workers reached their villages, however, their stories—and the structural inequalities underpinning the crisis—slipped away from public discourse. Despite the reopening of the economy, a lack of work and a sluggish market has resulted in heavy cuts to the income of working families, forcing them to deal with another crisis. Even though the danger of COVID-19 persists in cities, workers are compelled to return to their workplaces. In fact, those who have returned are not getting consistent waged work and are being paid diminished wages.

Those who have not returned are now looking for employment options in the villages and towns around their homes. The lockdown presented an opportunity to the government—and hope to citizens—for the enactment of policies for the long term welfare and protection of migrant workers. But the vulnerable workforce has had to face yet another blow from the central government: the recently passed Labour Codes have not only dismissed the struggles of migrant workers, but have in fact further weakened labour protections. In light of the above, Aajeevika Bureau's report highlights the economic conditions of migrant families during and after the lockdown, and discusses their coping mechanisms to deal with the multiple crises they were compelled to confront.

Introduction

The humanitarian crisis that hit India after the COVID 19 lock downs; one which severely affected India's internal migrant workforce, has been unprecedented in our history. More than anything, the lock downs only amplified the predicaments of migrant workers that have persisted for far too long. This is a population that has been perpetually excluded from the agenda of development, and the logic of urban governance and expansion. The lock downs did not cause this humanitarian crisis, they only compounded realities that have otherwise been tolerated and normalized in

India. The horrors of the lock downs have almost entirely withered away from the media and subsequently, from public discourse and memory. The corresponding impact of the lockdown on the lives of migrant workers, however, has not. The lockdowns were an opportune moment for us to collectively change the way we treat some of our most vulnerable citizens. Notwithstanding the time that has passed since the lockdowns, this opportunity has not yet slipped. This report is part of larger concerted effort to revive discussions around migrant workers in the public domain, but also to help re imagine India must help address their plight. India's migrant workers are a large workforce.

The estimated number of migrant workers in the country is about 100 million (Deshingkar and Akter, 2009.) Other sources estimate this number to be close to 140 million. This workforce is largely socially backward and hence vulnerable. Migrant workers are predominantly absorbed in construction work, textile industry, domestic work, home-based work, and the hotel & restaurant industry. Migrant workers are almost entirely employed informally, and so constitute a large segment of the informal workforce. Informal workers make up 93%(Labour Bureau Govt of India 2013-14) of the total workforce in the country. About two-thirds of the total informal workers do not receive minimum wages and this is the case especially with the interstate migrant workers (Economic and Political Weekly 2020) in the country.

Migrant workers have considerably poor access to public housing, civic amenities (Desai 2020) and food security in cities. It has been more than eight months of the lockdown and the govt has estimated that about 67 lac migrant workers have returned home by June

While the government has announced relief packages for the population, access to food and relief has been a constant problem. According to a recent estimate by the Stranded Workers Action Network (SWAN), 82% of migrant workers have not received any govt ration 70% have not received any cooked meals. The estimation of SWAN was based on a survey of more than 5000 migrant workers across the country (SWAN 2020). This study attempts to map the situation of migrant workers affected by COVID19; how have they coped in these extremely difficult times and how are they planning their life ahead. The study is based on telephonic surveys of 426 migrant workers from the five districts, Sirohi, Udaipur, Dungarpur, Pratapgarh and Rajasamand in the state of Rajasthan. This study confirms notwithstanding the threat of COVID, that most migrants returned to cities. On the other hand workers continue to get dependent on the borrowings and loans, thus the unavailability of regular work in the city will further push them into a chronic poverty as repayment of borrowed money won't be possible in the given situation. However even the return of the worker to the city is not helping to reduce the distress conditions that lockdown has brought for the workers.

The workers therefore have considered their social capital in the village an important agency to seek the support from to cope up with the current distress condition, however this measure is only for the immediate survival and can't be useful in long term when workers return to the city. Migrants who are scheduled tribes, who have historically and perpetually lived on the margins have been the worst affected. Provided that borrowing money is not sustainable in the long term, however most such workers are in desperate need of concrete support. The findings of this study have been put together in this report with the hope that it both leverages response from, and provides adequate information to the government to be able to find viable, permanent solutions to the situation of migrant workers; most of all those from the tribal community.

Indicators of vulnerability for migrant workers

Migrant workers are vulnerable in many ways. That most of them are the sole breadwinners in large size families with irregular income is one indicator of their vulnerability. The study found 83% of the respondents to have between 4-8 family members. 54 % of the total respondents are daily wagers while the remaining receive payments monthly. 74% have only one earning member while 75% had zero income, i.e., not a single earning member in their families during the lockdown.

Impact of the lockdown on workers:

The findings of this study only reiterate the lack of access to work during the lockdown. Respondents were without work for a period ranging anywhere between 1 day to over 100 days. 82% of the total workers surveyed claim to have no access to the regular work for about 29-56 days. The lockdown has left the migrant workers cashless -5% of the total workers turned in completely cashless after the lockdown. 54% had just 100-3000 rupees left with them. After the second lockdown phase in April, about 57% reported that they had no money left at all and 22% of the reports to have just rupees 100-500 left. Migrant workers have lost payments due to the lockdown- In the current survey, about 30% of the workers have claimed they did not receive payments from employees. The wage due amount ranged from 500 to above 50k for both daily wagers and monthly earners. 36% of those whose wages are still pending have between 1100-3000 rupees left while 27% had between 9000-30000. The severity of the situation and inadequate support from the government- About 10% of workers, in spite reporting to the government received no support in return. Only 19% for instance, were able to receive treatment from hospitals. In the absence of regular work and adequate support, workers were compelled to cut down their daily expenses on foods and essentials.

92% of the workers had to cut down their household expenditure to adjust to the loss. About 55% had to cut expenses on food & vegetables, 21% cut expenses on ration & essential items, and 9% reduced the number of meals a day to 1. Workers had no sufficient ration to survive during the lockdown- In the survey, 33% of workers reported that they did not have PDS ration accessible during the lockdown.

Support available during the lockdowns

Workers were denied adequate financial support during the lockdown- About 38 % claimed to have received no food and ration support from the government, 44% claimed to receive no financial help, while those who did received meagre amounts entirely insufficient for their essential needs. About 34% of workers have received about 500 rupees 19% received 1000 rupees and 12% received 1500 rupees. 91% of the workers have reported receiving no help from either the government or anyone else. The lockdown forced the migrant workers to borrow for the essentials needs -48% had borrowed in cash or kind to survive; of which over 59% have borrowed between 600 to 3000 rupees, 9% between 4000-5000 rupees, and 6%, more than 90000 rupees.

Workers's strategy to cope up with the challenges of the lockdowns

In the absence of regular work and adequate support in rural areas, most migrant workers gradually began to return to cities. At the time this survey was conducted, 69% respondents had claimed to want to return. 52% said they would seek employment nearby before returning to the city, while 16% claimed they needed to return immediately. When asked about the kind of work they would seek; 38% said they would look for work locally .

The other 20% of the total workers sided with NREGA, while 17% of them wanted the work in their nearby village. When asked about the wage rate expected to work locally 37% of the total workers expected a wage between 300-400 rupees and the 31% expected an amount between 200-300 rupees.

Workers' demands for the financial support and skill-based training to fight the current crisis- 28% of them asked for the new skill-based training, 9% wanted financial help to start their own businesses, and 5% wanted financial and capital support for agriculture. Of the remaining 37%, about 33% claimed they were entirely helpless and needed immediate financial support.

Methodology

To conduct the present study there were primarily three tools employed to collect evidence. The first was a telephonic survey of 426 migrant workers; used to collect primary data from five different districts in south Rajasthan. The second, was in depth field based ethnographic case studies with selected workers from the sample; all of whom were migrant returnees after the lockdown. Third, secondary literature on the same subject such as news report, articles and academic texts were examined. The sample of 426 migrant workers has been selected at random; and is inclusive of categories such as gender and caste. A random sample was chosen based on the limitations imposed by the lockdown. The survey for this study was conducted in the month of April during the second phase of lockdown and the evidence for the findings is framed accordingly

Sample Profile

The primary data for the present study were collected from the state of Rajasthan where Aajeevika Bureau has been facilitating the workers for many years. The five districts are Sirohi, Udaipur, Pratapgarh, Banswara. Table 1. below shows the district wise distribution of the sample. Table 2. Shows the unit size of the worker's family. Evidence from this report will show that family size is a crucial determinant of the economic well being of workers.

District wise distribution of samples		
Districts	Total Respondent	Percentile
Banswara	94	22
Dungarpur	51	12
Pratapgarh	9	2
Sirohi	58	14
Udaipur	214	50
Total	426	100

Table 1 District wise distribution of the sample

Family size of the samples

The total numbers of members in the family	Total Respondents	Percentile
1 to 3	35	9
4 to 8	312	83
9 to 15	29	8
Total	376	100

Table 2 Family Size of Sample

Table 3. Shows the occupational distribution of the sample. The (proportionately) large number of people absorbed in masonry is reminiscent of larger trends; of migrant workers being absorbed in construction. The table also indicates the skill profile of the sample. The skill profiles are not bifurcated based on skilled and unskilled work but multiple combinations of the two.

The income profile of the sample (daily wages)

SN	Daily wage	Respondents	percentile
	1200-300	71	31
	2301-400	85	37
	3401-500	47	20
	4501-600	21	9
	5601-700	6	3
	6701-800	1	0

Table 4 income profile (daily wages)

Table 4 Showcases the income profile of respondents who earn daily wages. As has been said earlier, most of the respondents are daily wagers. The rest, in spite earning on a monthly basis are not necessarily formally employed.

Occupational distribution of the sample					
SN	Occupation	Respondent	SN	Occupation	Respondent
1	Multipurpose work	1	19	Lift Repair	1
2	Farming	8	20	Machine Operations	2
3	Auto repair	1	21	Marble fitting	4
4	Catering	1	22	Marble polish	3
5	Centing	7	23	Masonry	68
6	Street cooking	2	24	Material packing	2
7	Comp work	1	25	Mining Work	3
8	Daily Wage work	65	26	Mobile repairing	1
9	Diamond polishing	3	27	Office Work	1
10	Domestic work	3	28	Kitchen based work	37
11	Driving	6	29	Sales work	4
12	Embroidery/Saree Cutting	1	30	Saree Cutting	15
13	Factory Work	9	31	Shop work	2
14	Electronic Wiring/ Repair	1	32	Tailoring	1
15	Handpump	1	33	Tile Fitting	2
16	Head Loading	12	34	Two Wheeler Repair Work	1
17	Help	24	35	Hotel Service work	3
18	Hotel cook	11	36	Labour	119
S Total					
157			269		
Total					426

Table 3 Occupational Distribution of the Sample

Indicators of migrant worker's vulnerability

The impact of lockdown on India's migrant workers has been multifaceted. Never in India's independent history has the struggle for survival in cities been as apparent and sudden. With everything shut, and no work available workers witnessed a steep decline in their incomes, eventually borrowing cash, sometimes at exorbitant interest rates to survive. The government has claimed to provide support with cash-transfer and PDS to the workers but the findings of the current study indicate that such support on the ground was grossly inadequate. However in the end the workers had no option left but to heavily cut down their total day to today expenses of the household to adjust to the conditions.

Worker were rendered jobless

All respondents in this survey have lost employment in this lockdown. The number of employment days lost ranges from 1 to more than 99. 82% of workers lost between 29-56 days of work. About 42% have returned to their hometown for the celebration of the Holi festival or other various reasons before the lockdown was imposed, however, the work loss for these workers is way more than the workers who returned after the lockdown. The workers who have returned to their hometown before the lockdown were sitting without work for a number of days than the workers who returned in the aftermath of lockdown. others. The figures of the work loss are especially important to foresee the possible changes in the life cycle of migrant workers.

The unavailability of work for long periods reduces resources available to workers, which invariably affects their bargaining power and mobility. In the absence of resources, workers are likely to take loans at exorbitant interest rates, which they are eventually not going to be able to pay. This also will also highly impact the bargaining power of the workers who agree to work on lower wages.

Migrant workers turned in completely cashless

Workers employed informally earn irregularly; for their earnings are dependent entirely on the amount of work available to them. In the second phase of the lockdown, most of the workers have turned in cashless as work opportunities have frozen completely. The present study finds that at the beginning of the lockdown about 5% of workers were completely cashless while 54% of them had a cash of rupees 100-3000 only. Further, as the second lockdown phase ended, about 57% had no cash at all while 22% had rupees 100-500 only. Given how fractured the economy is at the moment, this situation is only likely to worsen moving ahead.

Non-Payment of due wages to the workers

Informal workers especially the daily wagers are dependent directly on day today earning, if not survival becomes exceedingly difficult. In the present study, we have found that about 30% of the total workers have their payments pending/ stuck with their employers/contractors.

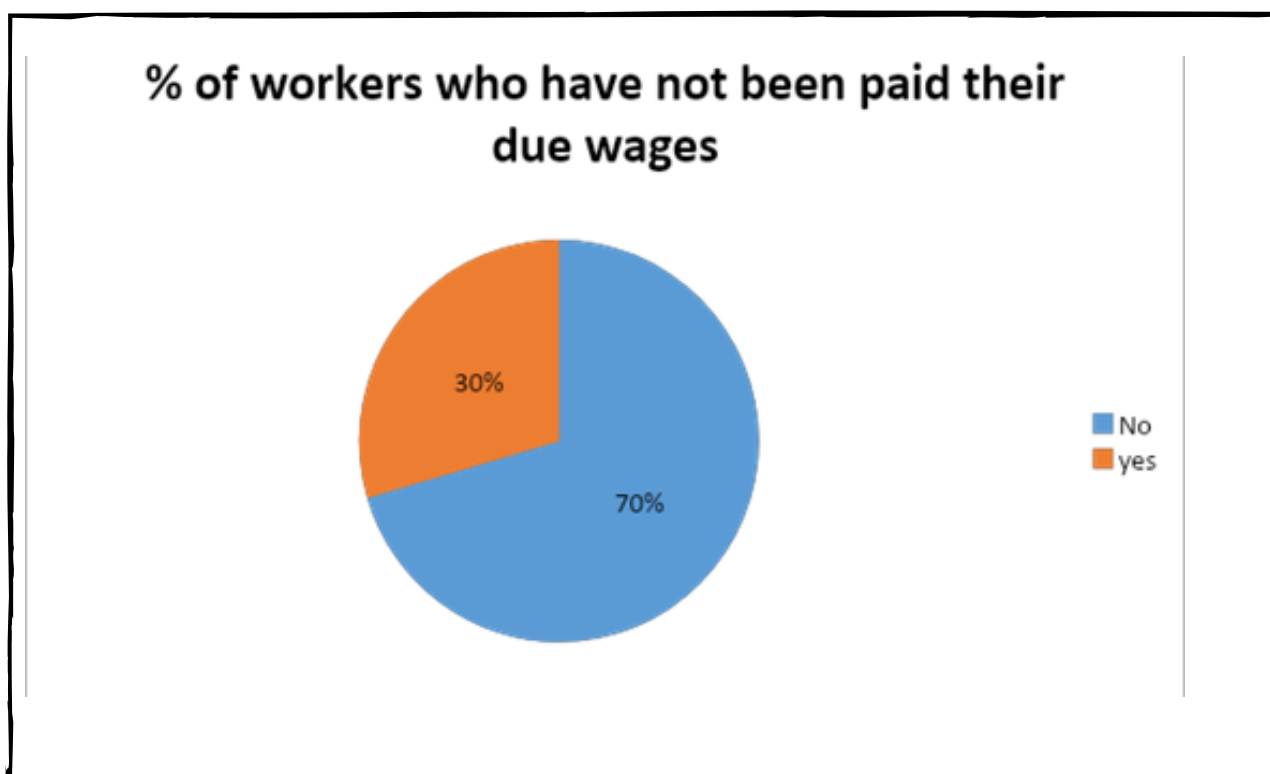


Figure 1 % of Workers who have not been paid their due wages

The due wage amount varies between rupees 500 to more than 50k for both daily wagers and those paid monthly. Furthermore, it was found that about 36% of the total workers had pending payments between 1100 and 3000 rupees, while 22% of workers claim an amount between rupees 9000-30000. 19% of the total due wages are owed to daily wagers, and 42% to those who earn monthly. About 18% said they wanted legal assistance in getting their money back. Quantitatively, the wages that are either due or lost, are significant. As the work opportunities remain inadequate or frozen, paying due amounts to workers can immensely help workers survive this period.

Reduction in the household expenditure to adjust the loss

As a result of losing the regular work, the resources for the migrant workers have been reduced so much that they were left with no option but to cut down their expenditure on their daily essential requirements, including their nutritional intake, number of meals and other basic necessities. The figure below shows that 92% of the respondents have had to cut down their daily household expenditure.

Of the total cut down, about 55% of workers have reported cutting the expenditure in the household category of nutritional food intakes and food & vegetable per day, 21% in ration and essential items, and 9% in the number of meals consumed/ day. On investigating this further it was found that about 83% of the total expenditure cut has taken place in the worker's family whose family size is between 4-8 members in the household. Therefore, it means the bigger the size of the family is, the higher is the cut down in the daily expenses to adjust the loss that occurred due to lockdown.

One of the essential prerequisites during COVID is to have healthy immune systems. These reductions indicate a per capita reduction nutritional intake which can, if carried on for long, result in malnutrition and chronic illnesses such as tuberculosis. In a country where both malnutrition and tuberculosis are perpetual and endemic, it is imperative that the purchasing power of workers, at the very least, allow them to expense bare necessities required to survive. The findings of this study only confirm the significance that these unpaid, lost wages to the well being of workers.

The incidents of emergency in the lives of worker

In times of restrictions over movement, healthcare emergencies are much harder to resolve. About 10% of the total workers reported having an emergency occurred in their family during the lockdown, between the first and the second lockdown phases. Of these about 19% refused treatment in government hospitals. The remaining respondents, either took loans to seek treatment in private hospitals or relied entirely on first aid. About 28% of those who had a medical emergency, claimed to receive no help from the government.

The non-availability of adequate ration for migrant workers

About 33% of workers reported to having no ration through PDS during the lockdown, while those who did, had been able to avail only rice and wheat. As a result, about 44% of those who had PDS access ended up borrowing money for other essential items. This confirms that access to PDS by itself cannot ensure wellness; the kind of food/ration that is available to workers is far more important. Other essentials such as spices, cooking oils, vegetables, lentil, all of which constitute the basic minimum for any household, have not been made available. That workers had to borrow money for these items; some of which are considerably more expensive than wheat and rice, also raises questions on what items as a priority must be provided at subsidized rates or for free over others. That workers have had to borrow money to buy oil indicates that PDS has fundamentally failed to deliver.

Of the 67% who have had no access to PDS ration, 56% of the respondents claimed to have borrowed money to buy essential items. The other, 44% were a segment who neither had access to PDS nor any means to borrow money to expense their basic requirements. This was the most severely affected group.

Lack of adequate financial support

In the survey, it was reported that about 38% of the total workers have received no help in terms of food and ration. Further, 44% of the total workers have not received any financial support, whereas those who did, received too insufficient an amount for them to expense theirs and their family's most basic needs; 34% received Rs.500, 19% Rs. 1000 and 12% Rs.1500 only. 5% of workers, claimed they have not checked, or do not know how to confirm whether they have received any financial assistance from the government..

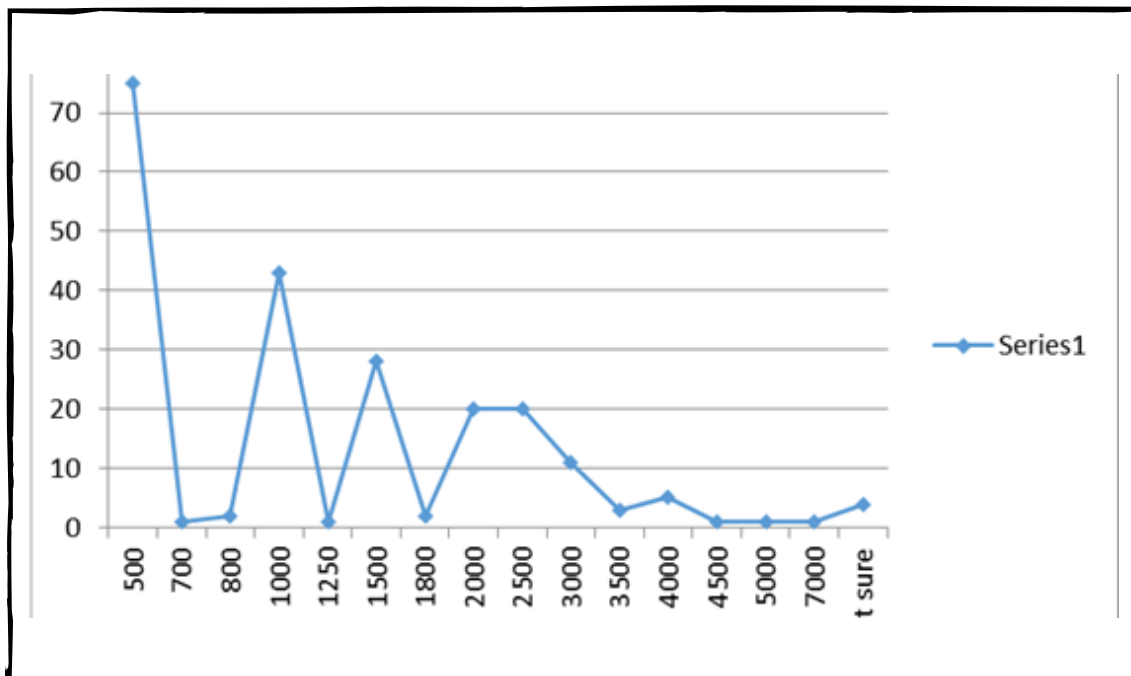


Figure 2: Financial help in rupees received by the workers from govt during the lockdown (April 2020) (X- The amount received by the workers Y- total number of workers)

Other than this about 91% of the total workers claimed to have received no help from any organization or individual whatsoever as of the end of the second lockdown phase. These figures clearly state the distress situation of migrant workers who are completely left on the mercy of others to sustain.

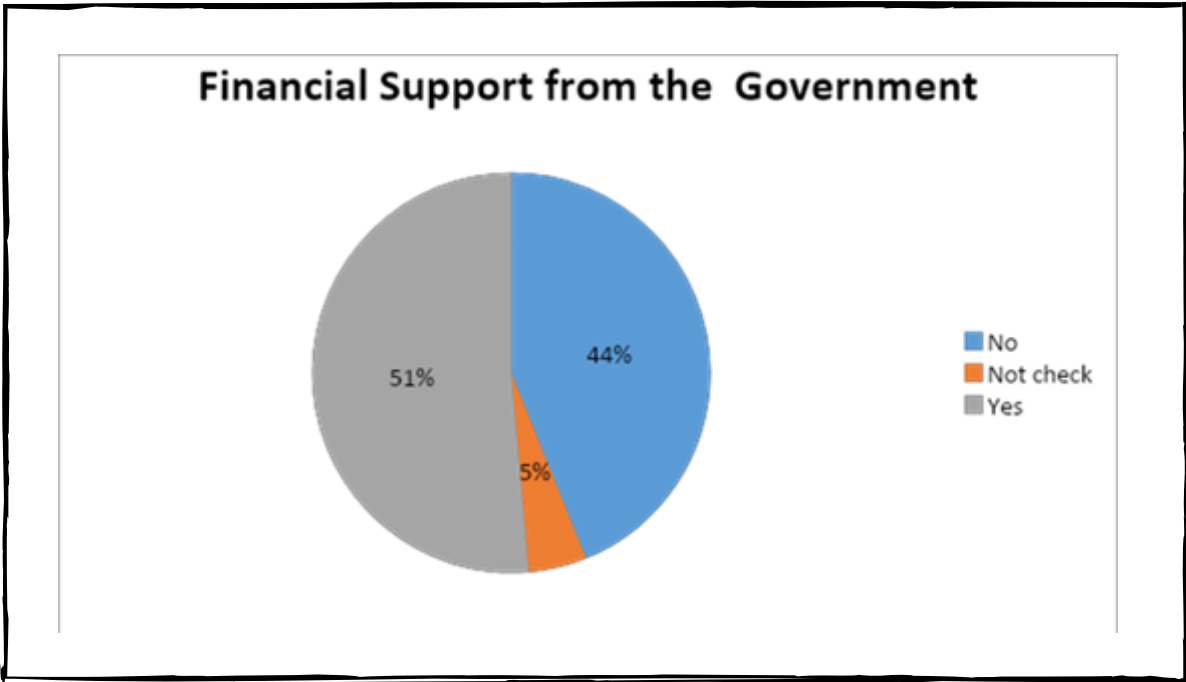


Figure 3 Financial Support from the Government

Borrowings for essentials needs

48% of the total workers have borrowed for their needs during the second phase of lockdown. Of these, 59% have borrowed a sum in the range of Rs. 600-3000, 9% between 4000-5000 and 6% have borrowed more than Rs. 9000. The lockdown has not just shut livelihood opportunities for these workers, but also enhanced the burden of debt for them.

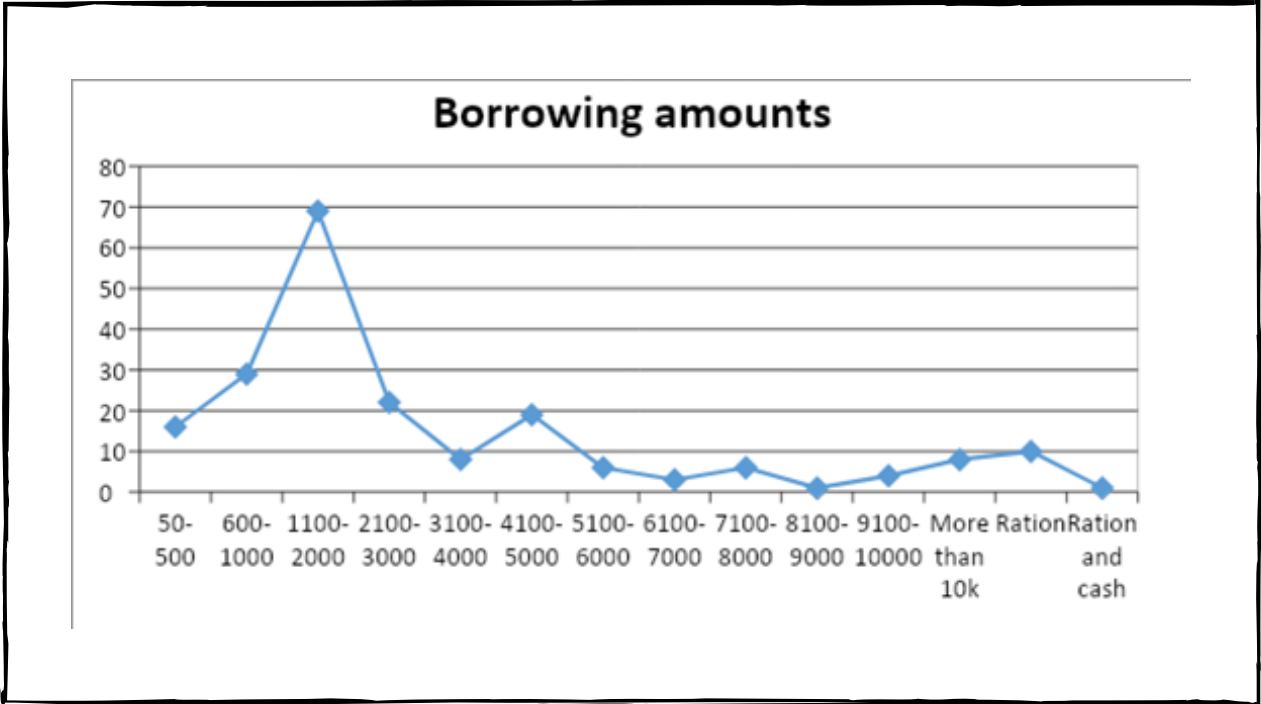


Figure 4 Borrowing by the workers in cash and kind (X-The borrowing in cash and items Y- Total number of workers)

Workers' strategies to survive the current crisis

Our findings suggest that while the lockdown has ended, its impact on the lives of migrant communities continues to persist months later. With regular employment still not entirely guaranteed or back to scale, these communities will have to continue to find stop gap measures to survive; such as borrowing money or finding menial and/or less paying work closer to home. For those surveyed in this report, this distress will escalate in the event they have no survival strategy simply because thus far none of them have received adequate support from the state. The following sections highlight these strategies adopted by workers in the current crisis.

69% of the respondents want to get back to the city to get their earlier work after the lockdown gets over or staying home for a while. Further, 83% workers who have a family size of 4-8 members per household are willing to return to the city. In fact, the study found a correlation that confirms reliance on work in cities; the larger the size of the family of the respondent, the higher was his/her willingness to return to the city regardless of the threat of COVID in that particular city.

The work opportunity was not available at home after the workers have returned, however it left them with no option but to return to the city for the work. This prompts them to risk their lives and go back to the city again to find the work. However in the present study about 37% of the total worker's demands for the safety kits like a mask, sanitizers, gloves, etc, for the safe return to the city. This figure also breaks the myth that workers from the rural areas stands backward when it come to the general awareness and literacy. The demands of safety kits from the workers here confirms the fact that workers from the rural areas are aware of the current health emergency situation and they do know that safety kit can help in preventing the spread of the virus. On the other hand 24% of the workers are in desperate need, that even if they are not provided the safety kit they can return to the city for work. However the present figures clearly states that if the govt do not provide the required safety kits, the workers are ready to risk their life. This figures captures the helplessness of the workers brought by the lockdown.

Survival options until they return to the city

When asked about their plans until they return to the city, about 52% workers said they wanted to seek employment opportunities closer to home, while 16% said they were entirely dependent on going back to cities for work; that they had no livelihood options close to home.

About 45% of the workers have reported being dependent on their social networks such as family members, relatives, friends, etc. 26% and 7% respectively claimed to have put their faith in their gram panchayats to find a solution.

Req. To return to the city	Responses	Percentile
After COVID goes away entirely	45	11.7
Once better, high paying work is more readily available	2	0.5
Once the city is relatively safe from COVID	5	1.3
No Requirements	16	4.2
Upon the provision of safety kits masks etc.	143	37.2
On the condition that they travel by themselves	5	1.3
we will only ensure our safety by using mask , sanitizer, and maintaining social distance	23	6.0
Workers are in desperate need that even without safety kits if they are not provided they can return to city	94	24.5
Full social protection at worksites	6	1.6
Once markets reopen	10	2.6
Will look for the work elsewhere	1	0.3
Will not return to the city	9	2.3
Will wait for a while and then go	9	2.3
Others (Upon better transportation, upon receiving full and timely wages, Upon hearing that more workers have left for the city)	16	4.2
Total	384	100

Table 5 Workers responses for a safe return to the city

Support and assistance sought by the workers

Our findings have indicated that workers have not many options available left in their hometown and they want to get back to the city on the re-opening of the lockdown. In the meanwhile, time, they want to learn some new skills so they can have more options for livelihood and can face the distress situation better. In our findings it came out that about 28% of the total workers want to take different skills-based training, 9% wanted help in starting the self-employment, 5% sought support for farming, and rest others.

Workers' Strategy	Responses	Percentile
Will return to the city after COVID subsides	98	23.3
Will return to the city after markets open	85	20.2
Have not decided yet	28	6.7
Other	16	3.8
Will never return to the city for work	16	3.8
will stay home a little longer	108	25.7
Undecided	69	16.4
Total	420	100

Table 6 Workers Strategy post COVID

Case studies

The survey captures how the migrant workers have been impacted from the lockdown in terms of income loss, debt, cut down in the household expenditure etc. but the story will be incomplete without understanding their emotional toll, anxiety and physical torture when the worker walked back to their home town from the city on their foot. However the lockdown cannot be just seen in the view of economic crisis for the migrant workers but for also distilling a fear and furthering of alienation in the city. To be precise the fear and emotional trauma this lockdown has brought in for the workers is far reaching harmful than the economic crisis. Durga Bai a tribal women from Udaipur, Rajasthan recalling her horrendous times spent in Surat during the lockdown says, that she will never go back to the city again. She was stuck in Surat with her 4 month old son alone and after spending 40 days in anxiety and fear of the disease she somehow managed to reach back to her hometown in Udaipur". The experience of Durga Bai hints towards the extent of anxiety and fear that workers have to go through on the sudden imposition of the lockdown. The case studies of the workers below captures the dark side of the lockdown and provide another analytical framework to understand the impact of the lockdown for migrant workers.

Thavar Ram (22-year-old) and (Lokesh 20 years old)

Thavar Ram and Lokesh Ram, brothers and residents of Shiwadiya village, Dadiya Panchayat in the Gogunda block in Udaipur district had this to say;

'If we would have received our due wages, we would have been able to feed our family properly'

Prior to the lockdown, they both worked in the hotel/ restaurant industry in Morbi, Gujarat. For over 8 months Thavar Ram had been working on the monthly salary of Rs.6000, which he does not receive regularly or in full. His employer has not paid him a penny in this period; he is owed wages more than 40000. Lokesh worked in a hostel before lockdown. For over 7 months, he has worked in this hostel for 4000 rupees only a month which was also not given regularly. Due to wages for the work done is 25000. When they learnt about the lockdown, they returned home early, out of fear of being without work or income, but more importantly, about COVID itself. They returned after a few days on foot and then on buses. some wages.

They have 11 people in their family. Since no one except for the two brothers is an earning member, the family is largely dependent on the ration and food grain available through the PDS system. As a result, they have had to cut down on their daily food intake; the number of meals they eat in a day. The family has one job card, with discrepancies in the names and details of all members. Further, almost no families in their panchayats have access to work under NREGA. The soul earning for the family Thavra and Lokesh have registered their complaints at the labor line. They want support regarding their wages and if they can get any work to get

Kanna Ram (32 years old)

Kana ram is 32-year-old lives in Palasma, Sayar in Udaipur district. He works in Surat in Saree cutting unit in the city's textile sector and earns about 9,000 rupees a month which he received irregularly and often not in full. In Surat, he lives on rent along with a friend (who works in the same unit). Together they share expenses over rent and food. Not long ago, Kana Ram took an advance of Rs. 25000 from his contractor. As a result, he was not paid his full wages; for 3 to 4 months; He was just given 3000 rupees for the expenses. Hes still owes his contractor Rs.10000 When lockdown was announced he was in Surat. All the workers in his unit were asked to leave. He was frightened by COVID and was relieved to be going home. Notwithstanding the money he owed, his contractor gave him Rs.2000 to get home. Kana Ram left for his village on foot on the 25th of March. After walking almost 250 kilometres, he managed to get a lift, till he had to walk again. He eventually reached Udaipur.

From Udaipur, they walked another 100 km to reach their village on 27th March evening. On the way, they were able to get cooked food by some volunteer groups. Kana Ram's difficulties did not end with this. He was left with only 200 rupees when he reached home. He has a family of 4 people with 2 children. They do not have their ration included in the NFSA and have therefore been unable to receive food grain under PDS. They do not have a job card and cannot therefore, avail work under NREGA. He is not included in any of the relief measures (cash transfers) announced by the Government.

He even checked his wife's bank account balance with the hope that they would have received some government support, but that was not the case either. As a last resort, he borrowed 3000-5000 from some friends and has also borrowed ration of 2000 from a number of PDS shop owners; for which he had to ash amount of the total bill which he arranges from his friends and family. He has borrowed about 20 kg wheat 3 ocassions from a family in the village.

He and his family is surviving on borrowed money and ration. Kana ram says he is ready to work whatever he will get in the village till the time he can go back. He said the contractor is calling him to come back. But he says he will only go if there is proper transportation, safety at the workplace because whenever he thinks about how he came back it frightens him a lot. He demands from the government to help him access ration from PDS which will support his family.

Durga Bai 28 year old

Durga Bai with her husband Hamera ram and 2 children one 4 months old and 4 years old lives in Surat. Her Husband works in Saree cutting trade for 7-8000 rupees a month. He is not paid regularly. They are from the village Semad, Sayara in Udaipur district. aware about the sudden lockdown, Hamera ram and his brother went back to the village during his uncle's death on 20th March thinking they would return In 2-3 days. Before leaving he gave his wife 3000 rupee. 4 days later, the lockdown was announced. Durga Bai with her 2 children were stuck in Surat alone. When asked about how she felt she said

“ Bohot dar lag Raha tha, kya bimari hai , inte chote bacche hai kya karungi akele.” (I was very scared of this illness, I was scared about how I would look after my children who are sill young, all by myself)

With some support from other workers from her village , she managed to get some ration and milk for the children and herself. After 5-6 days of lockdown, she decided to leave for her village with a group of other workers. After walking some 60 km the police forced them to return. Everyone was forced to return to Surat. After that incident, she got scared and did not want to walk back. She stayed in Surat for 40 days. She had spent all the 3000 rupees which she had earlier. Sh managed to borrow some money and ration from other families. On some days she did not eat and only were only able to feed her children. Most days she could manage to cook just one meal a day She had spent sleepless nights thinking about how will she manage to go, how she will look after for her children. She hardly got any help from the government. No ration, no cash transfers, no help. After 40 days, they found a way to travel home. Hopping onto a truck with a few other workers, she left for her village a much relieved woman.

Conclusion

The current crisis of migrant workers brings forth the existing architecture of our cities, promoted as the model of development and “an engine of growth”. This model of the city draws a clear line between the privileged and under-privileged, informal and formal workers, informal residents, and formal residents. However, under the current model, the city uses the labor of migrant workers and sheds it on the peripheries after its use. As the country is in the rapid transit mood of getting urbanized, the workers, especially the migrant workers on whose labor it sustains, are not rightfully included in its architecture. However, the foundation of our current cities is built on the faulty line which draws a deep line of inequality against the mandate of the worker's right and Indian constitution. This study produces the evidence for the underlined argument. It shows that the lack of employer and state support has left workers to rely on informal and social networks which has been inadequate and unreliable for them to meet basic needs. As work opportunities continue to remain sporadic or nonexistent even after the lockdown ended, workers continue to struggle to survive in cities. This study only echoes ongoing advocacy demands from different corners across the country; that the government focuses on making cities that are inclusive of and livable for migrants.

Governments must ensure social protection and basic public provisioning to workers, urban employment guarantee, social protection coverage that reduces distress migration in very terrible conditions as in the case of the 69 percent workers who reported that they want to return, and importantly, strengthening the implementation of labour protection standards to ensure adequate wages and safe and dignified work conditions rather than the suspension of labour laws. Issues of migrant workers have received unprecedented attention in the wake of the lockdowns. The time has not yet passed, for us to collectively take this opportunity and help change our cities for the better from being perpetually inequitable.

Taking the current migrant crisis as a learning point, the guiding principles of urban governance, and urban development therefore, must be re-conceptualized to bring forth the necessary changes such that a crisis of this magnitude does not occur in the future.

Bibliography

67 lakh migrants return to 116 dists in 6 states | India News, The Indian Express. (June 2020). Retrieved September 28, 2020, from <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/coronavirus-lockdown-67-lakh-migrants-return-to-116-dists-in-6-states-6453084/>

Covid-19 Crisis Exposes India's Neglect of Informal Workers. (2020, May 12). NewsClick. <https://www.newsclick.in/Covid-19-Crisis-Exposes-India-Neglect-Informal-Workers>

COVID-19 Lockdown: Protecting the Poor Means Keeping the Indian Economy Afloat | Economic and Political Weekly. (April 2020). Retrieved September 28, 2020, from <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/covid-19-lockdown-protecting-poor-means-keeping-indian-economy-afloat>

Desai, D. R. (May 2020). Living at Worksites: Policy and Governance for Migrant Worker Housing in Ahmedabad's Construction Sector. 157.

Deshingkar, P., & Akter, S. (2009). Migration and Human Development in India. 90.

Employment in informal sector and condition of informal employment. (2013-14). Retrieved September 28, 2020, from <https://labour.gov.in/sites/default/files/Report%20vol%204%20final.pdf>

Survival and Mobility in the Midst of a Pandemic. (April 2020). Economic and Political Weekly, 55(14), 7-8.

SWAN-To leave or not to leave? (June 2020). Retrieved September 28, 2020, from <http://strandedworkers.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/SWAN-Report05062020-1.pdf>