

INTERNAL MIGRATION IN INDIA:

DISTRESS AND OPPORTUNITIES

A Study of Internal Migrants

To Vulnerable Occupations in Delhi

By Harsh Mander and Gayatri Sahgal

Millions of footloose and impoverished men, women and children in India, migrate from the countryside each year to cities – in crowded trains, buses, trucks and sometimes on foot – their modest belongings bundled over their heads, in search of the opportunities and means to survive. Some arrive alone; some are accompanied by family or friends. Some stay for a season, some several years, some permanently. Many tend to drift quickly to low-end, low paid, vulnerable occupations – picking waste, pulling rickshaws, constructing buildings and roads, or working in people’s homes. They service a city which does not welcome them. Forever treated as intruders and somehow illegitimate citizens, they live in under-served makeshift shanties, under plastic sheets, or on streets and in night shelters. Police and municipal authorities notoriously harass and drive them away. Laws protect them in theory, but rarely in practice. Their wage rates tend to be exploitative, illegal and uncertain, works hours long, and conditions of employment unhealthy and unsafe. They are often unable to easily access even elementary citizenship rights in the city, like the right to vote, a ration card, supplementary feeding for their children, and school admissions. Their numbers are substantial; their economic contributions enormous; yet internal migrants tend to remain in the periphery of public policy.

Centre for Equity Studies undertook a study¹ to investigate the lived experiences of internal migrants to vulnerable occupations to Delhi, one of the most powerful magnets for such

¹ This study was undertaken with support from Dan Church India over the year 2010. The entire field research was led and personally supervised by Gayatri Sahgal. She was assisted by Asghar Sharif, Anita Arora and Esha Ghosh.

migration in the country. The study enquires who these people are, what factors propel them to the metropolis, how do they organise their movement to the city, and for what periods do they stay in the city? What is the nature and frequency of their interactions with their families in the village they have left behind? What are their experiences of living and work in the city? What are their conditions of work: wages, work hours, security, safety and dignity? What is the extent they are able to access legal protections, and food, social security and livelihood schemes to which they are entitled as citizens?

The study aims also to identify distress, if any, which motivates such internal migration for villages to vulnerable occupations in cities. For this study, we define vulnerable occupations as those occupations which are located in the informal sector², are unorganised and unprotected, offer little or no social security benefits to their employees, and are associated with working conditions which are exploitative, unsafe and often strip workers of their very dignity. In the words of Zhu, such occupations can be best described as those which are 'dirty, dangerous and demanding'³. The occupations we chose for inclusion in the study are waste picking, rickshaw pulling, domestic work, construction labour and other casual labour.

Migrants are those who move away for short or long periods from their usual place of residence. We define 'distress migration' as such movement from one's usual place of residence which is undertaken in conditions where the individual and/or the family perceive that there are no options open to them to survive with dignity, except to migrate. Such distress is usually associated with extreme paucity of alternate economic options, and natural calamities such as floods and drought. But there may also be acute forms of social distress which also spur migration, such as fear of violence and discrimination which is embedded in patriarchy, caste discrimination, and ethnic and religious communal violence. In other words, migration is distress if it is motivated by extreme economic deprivation, natural and environmental disasters, or forms of gender and social oppression which are perceived to be intolerable.

We received valuable advice from SR Sankaran, Jan Breman, Amitabh Kundu, Arjan de Haan, Nina Ellinger and Dipa Sinha

² 'all those unincorporated private enterprises owned by individual or households engaged in sale and production of goods and services operated on a proprietary or partnership basis and with less than ten workers' (NCEUS, 2007)

³ Quoted from a presentation made by Dr Zhu, Centre for Population and Development Research Fujian University, China, presented at the Social Protection in Asia Annual Conference, 2009, Hanoi.

We heed de Haan's caution against viewing migration as a phenomenon predicated on a 'sedentaristic assumption' (de Haan, 1999:3) that populations were historically immobile; and migration was not a free choice for poor people, but always an option of the last resort; a response to economic and environmental forces. By contrast, we also recognise that migration is a 'fundamental component of human freedom' and a key feature of human history, which has the potential to improve other dimensions of human development (UNDP, 2009:15).

We also recognise internal migration to be a dominant, often life-enabling coping strategy of rural poor people in India. Studies estimate that Bihari migrants remitted 4.5 billion rupees in 2006 through post office transfers, in addition to an equal or higher amount through post office savings (Deshingkar et al, 2008). Our study will confirm that post office transfers are a small, and often less preferred form of remittances by migrants to families, so the amounts transferred by migrants are likely to be much higher. Similarly it was found that Oriya migrants remitted an estimated 20 billion rupees in 2007 (ibid.).

But researchers describe two broad types of migration streams - one kind undertaken by the poorest strata, least educated and most disadvantaged social groups (mainly Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Muslims) (Bird and Deshingkar, 2009). Breman's research (1996) in western India located the over representation of lower castes particularly SC's in circular migration (de Haan, 1999). On account of their lack of assets, skills and capabilities, these strata of migrants are primarily absorbed in the informal sector of the urban economy, as casual labourers, construction workers, rickshaw pullers, waste pickers, etc (Deshingkar et al, 2008). The high representation of SCs, STs and Muslims in migrants to vulnerable occupations in Delhi is also confirmed in our study.

Working conditions within such sectors tend to be exploitative and hazardous, with limits on personal freedom, underpayment of wages, long working hours, debt bondage and unhygienic working environments (Deshingkar et al, 2008; Srivastava and Sasikumar, 2003). Despite such degrading conditions migrants are often willing to engage in such work because the rate of wages is often higher than what they would otherwise earn in the source area (Bird and Deshingkar, 2009). This kind of migration pattern thereby is tantamount to a coping strategy that enables migrants and their families to maintain their current quality of life, which implies surviving on or close to the poverty line (Deshingkar et al, 2008 and Waddington, 2003).

Contrasting is the migration pattern undertaken by slightly better off groups who are generally equipped with higher levels of education, skill, assets and a higher social standing. Other Backward Castes (OBCs) tend to predominate in this kind of migration typically small industrial units, security services, plumbing, carpentry etc (Deshingkar et al, 2008). Although many of these jobs are located in the informal sector, such migration patterns allow for significant accumulative strategies and opportunities which can enable households to lift themselves significantly above the poverty line (Deshingkar et al, 2008; Waddington and Sabates-Wheeler , 2003).

Overview of Methodology

This study chose to focus on internal migration to one of these most popular destinations: India's capital city Delhi. This study of internal migrants in vulnerable occupations in Delhi was based firstly on detailed interviews with 500 randomly selected migrants in the metropolis conducted over a period of six months in 2009-10. This sample was equally distributed across the five selected vulnerable occupations: waste picking, rickshaw pulling, domestic work, construction labour and other casual labour. 420 interviews were organised in 10 randomly selected slum settlements, which had a good representation of all selected occupations. 30 interviews were conducted in construction camps, and 50 (of other casual labour) were held in homeless night shelters. These other settlements were selected so that the study did not lose sight of the most vulnerable among these workers, who did not live in their own homes, or were homeless. These interviews were supplemented by 10 focus-group discussions in the slum settlements, construction worker camps and night shelters. In addition, the researchers visited two villages in Bihar from where several of the interviewees had migrated: Kusiari, and Nimla Gaon. The researchers spent a total of five days in each village, and organised a total of 10 more focus-group discussions, with members of families of migrants.

Profile of Migrants

Of the 500 migrant workers covered by this research, 64.8 percent were men and 35.2 percent women. Women were largely concentrated in domestic work (96 percent of total domestic workers in our sample were women), while only men were rickshaw pullers. 33 percent waste pickers were women, although men tended to dominate this sector. In construction work as well, 21 percent of the workers were women.

74 percent workers were below the age of 40 years. The most youthful profession was waste picking, in which around half were below 30 years, including many below the age of 20. 65 percent of the migrants had never been to school. The highest ratios of non-literacy was found in domestic work (dominated, as we have seen, by women); and in construction labour. More rickshaw pullers and other casual workers were found to have studied at least in primary school. Only 8 percent had completed class 12, and a negligible 0.4 percent beyond that. The study confirmed that migrants to vulnerable populations tend to be disproportionately from disadvantaged social groups. Muslims constitute 12 percent (Sachar Committee Report, 2006:6) of rural populations in India, but they were a dominant 38.6 percent of our sample. Migrants of Muslim religious persuasion tended to dominate domestic work and rickshaw pulling, followed by waste picking. Likewise, SCs constitute 16.2 percent of the rural population (Census, 2001), but 47 percent of our sample. They tended to be most in rickshaw pulling and domestic work. By contrast, upper castes form 20.6 percent (Census 2001) of the rural population, but only 13 percent of our sample (mainly in 'other casual work'). These findings give further credence to the findings (Srivastava and Sasikumar (2003), Breman (1996) and Rogaly (1999) that migration to vulnerable occupations is dominated by economically and socially most disadvantaged groups.

Another striking finding was that as many as 94 percent of our respondents were landless. The ownership of agricultural land most often offers options other than migration to families in times of economic distress. Villagers we spoke to in Kusiari village said, 'Those who are landless tend to migrate more than those who have land. If you have land, you have the option to stay back and look after your land'.

37 percent of the migrants we spoke to reported being engaged primarily in agriculture before they migrated, as farm workers, tenants or self-employed cultivators. The rest reported being casually employed in other sectors, and even government works like MG NREGA, or being home-makers. In the village, 16.5 percent reported earning less than 20 rupees a day; and 27 percent 21 to 40 rupees. They also reported high levels of debt. 52 percent of our sample was currently repaying a loan. The loan amounts were high: 43 percent were repaying paying loans above 15,000 rupees. The rates of interest were usurious, with 78 percent reporting interest rates of 5 to 10 percent *per month*.

31.4 percent of the respondents reported migrating from Bihar. Approximately 30 percent of the respondents migrated from Uttar Pradesh. 24.4 percent were from West Bengal. Migrants from Bihar were in large numbers in rickshaw pulling and construction work; from Uttar Pradesh in other casual work; and West Bengal in domestic work and waste picking.

Process and Causes of Migration

Most migrants we interviewed in our sample reported to have first migrated to Delhi many years earlier. 10 percent were in Delhi for more than 28 years; many of these oldest migrants were waste pickers. 22 percent reported migrating for periods ranging from 19 to 27 years. A quarter of these were domestic workers. 30 percent of the respondents, most of all rickshaw pullers, said they had migrated to Delhi in the last 10 to 18 years. Another 30 percent described their average length of stay as ranging from 1 to 9 years, most of all other casual workers. For almost all, Delhi was their first and only destination.

The low numbers of recent migrants may possibly be understood in part by the observations of Kundu (2009), that there has been a deceleration of migration to cities, because of the impact of policies of urbanisation and globalisation, which have made cities unaffordable to the poor; combined with further aggravation of public policy and social perspectives of 'otherness' towards the urban poor migrant.

More than half the migrants in our sample reported that they spent less than a year in Delhi in their first visit, but continued to return. A quarter did not return home for up to 5 years, and 10 percent for more than 5 years.

An overwhelming 75 percent of the workers in our sample testified that they were forced to migrate because of the absence of 'bare means of survival'. The figure was slightly higher for men (78 percent). In the words of a casual labourer we spoke to in a homeless shelter, 'We migrate to earn money, there is no farming in the village, there is nothing, so in order to be able to raise our children, we have to migrate'. In addition, 15 percent, of which women represented a significant 30 percent, migrated because a parent or spouse had chosen to move.

It may be recalled that we demarcated migration to be distress, when people resorted to it because they had no chances for dignified survival. The findings support the hypothesis that much of internal migration to vulnerable occupations in cities is motivated by lack of other

options to survive with dignity where they originally live. 94 percent people we interviewed testified to have resorted to no other option than migration. One of them put it baldly: 'There is no work in the village, so what other option do we have apart from migration?' The few other failed options that some people did report, were trying to start small businesses, sell their assets, press the moneylender for a loan, or try for a government job. But the tiny enterprises failed, moneylenders turned them away or were too usurious, and government jobs were not possible because they could not pay the required bribes.

Many men (64 percent) asserted that they had taken the decision to migrate individually, without consulting their family. As one male casual worker explained, 'When responsibility fell on our shoulders, we took the decision ourselves'. For 17 percent, the decision to migrate was taken by the head of the household, who in most cases was male. Only 8 percent reported that the decision to migrate had been taken by the family as a whole. In comparison, for a substantial percentage of the female respondents (34.7 percent) the decision to migrate had been taken by the spouse. For 34 percent, the head of the household who was not their spouse had taken the decision. Only 14 percent of the women themselves took the decision to migrate.

The migrants may have been poor, but their wealth was their networks. These social networks - of kinship, caste and geography - were found to be critical in facilitating and enabling the process of migration. As many as 96 percent of our respondents reported receiving some kind of assistance when they first migrated. Shelter was the biggest assistance, as 48 percent reported that on their first visit to the city they had some kind of place to stay. For 45 percent, the critical initial assistance they received was of food. 38 percent spoke of loans, of which a third were from caste networks. An equal number received assistance in the form of employment, with caste networks coming in the same ratio. 'Work contacts' were reported by 28 percent respondents. Only 5 percent reported initial assistance from their contractors or employers.

Despite such assistance, the transition to life in the city was far from smooth. Many recounted tales of struggle during their initial days in the city. Asra Begum was vocal about the kinds of hardships that she and her husband had encountered, 'We came to Delhi with nothing. We did not even have any utensils, neither did we have a house...we had to borrow utensils from others to cook. Then we borrowed some rations and were able to finally able to feed ourselves... After that my husband signed up for construction work... and after a week we were able to

afford our own utensils... in this way slowly we managed to accumulate some money to ease a little our suffering'.

More than half the respondents reported funding their initial expenses on migration entirely from their own resources and savings. The remainder mainly fell back on loans, with interest rates again ranging between 5-10 percent per month. Some had to deposit jewellery and other assets with the moneylender. The Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979, mandates every contractor to pay displacement allowance equal to 50 percent of the monthly wages of the worker, and a non refundable journey allowance not less than the fare both for the outward and the return journeys. However, only 4 percent workers reported a displacement allowance, and 12 percent, a journey allowance. If contractors provide 'assistance', it is often with many strings attached, indeed forms of disguised debt bondage.

More than half the migrant workers we spoke to recalled difficulties during their first travel to the city. Most travelled by train without reservations, and were thereby relegated to the General Compartment in passenger trains. This was excessively congested, more so during migration seasons, and many complained of how they were unable get a seat and had to make do with standing for the whole journey, some times of many days. 39 percent of the respondents also complained of lack of basic facilities during the journey such as food, water and sanitation.

Remittances and Home Visits

Half the respondents reported sending remittances to their families from where they came to the city: prominent among them being rickshaw pullers. 15 percent - many of them domestic workers and waste pickers - complained that their earnings were too low and they could thereby not to afford send remittances. In the words of one domestic worker, 'There is not enough money to eat...all the money we earn is spent on our children...so how do we send money back?' 9 percent stated that they had previously sent remittances, but had discontinued thereafter. However, 22 percent were categorical that they did not send remittances and had no intention to send any money in the future. A major reason quoted was that they did not have any immediate family members left in the village. A quarter of these were waste pickers.

The amount of remittances sent was in a significant number of cases estimated by them to be below 24 percent of their yearly earnings. 15 percent of the respondents however reported

sending remittances ranging from 49-25 percent of their yearly salary, whereas 10 percent reported sending remittances between 75-50 percent of their yearly income. According to most respondents, the remittances sent were usually spent by their families in the village on daily consumption.

15 percent people reported sending remittances home with friends. An equal proportion carried the remittances in cash themselves, whenever they visited their village. Only 12 percent relied on money orders to send remittances. In an interesting trend, 6 percent of the respondents also reported sending remittances by depositing money in the bank accounts of people from the village, who then charged them 5 percent interest rate to transfer the cash to their families.

A significant 29.8 percent of respondents visited their village between every 2 to 5 years. Domestic workers were the most prominent group within this category, accounting for a third of the cases. 28 percent reported visiting home on an annual basis – many of these waste pickers - while 16 percent of said their visits were in 2 to 4 months, several of these being other casual workers. Another 16 percent reported visiting their villages at least once every six months. Only 2 percent visited home every month. Visits to the village for a substantial section of the population were primarily for social and kinship reasons: motivated with the desire to visit friends and family and to participate in family functions such as marriage and festivals. Only 7 percent of the respondents reported visiting the source area for livelihoods, mainly related to agriculture. Thus most migrants did not migrate on a seasonal basis; in accordance with the agricultural cycle. This seems consistent with the fact that since a significant proportion of the respondents were landless agricultural labourers; they did not find it profitable to circulate between the host and the source area on a seasonal basis in order to engage in agricultural labour, which offered relatively low wages. Respondents in the source area asserted, 'We subsist on the remittances sent...we do not own any land, and the only asset we own is our house'.

Conditions of Employment

Only 1 percent of construction workers in our sample were regular salaried employees; the rest were casual workers. Of the waste pickers, only 2 percent were regular salaried employees; 50 percent were self-employed and 48 percent were casual workers. Self-employed waste pickers were largely involved in the business of picking up waste, such as scraps of papers, used bottles

and cans, thrown away in public places such as streets and parks, which was then sold to the waste dealers. Casual workers on the other hand collected waste for an employer, who then sold the waste to the waste dealer, and paid the workers their share on the basis of the quantity of waste collected. The rates offered by the employer were usually less than the market rates, though the employer usually compensated the workers by providing them with a place to stay. 3 percent of rickshaw pullers were regular salaried employees, and 2 percent casual employees. 95 percent were self-employed, pulling rented or self-owned rickshaws. Domestic workers were all salaried: 10 percent to one employee, and the rest to multiple part-time employees. 'Other casual workers', were of course, all casually employed.

Many migrant workers changed their occupation from what they first engaged in when they came to the city. A significant proportion of rickshaw pullers initially engaged in casual daily wage employment. Construction workers as well reported some other kind of casual work, prior to their employment in the construction sector. Domestic workers reported working as construction workers and waste pickers. For a significant proportion of other casual workers, construction was the occupation they initially engaged in after they first migrated. Construction also featured as the initial occupation for most waste pickers.

Underlining that with all their distress, cities are the locus of opportunities, 61 percent respondents reported finding work at least 26-30 days in a month. Domestic workers and rickshaw pullers dominated this category, the former because they were regular monthly employees, and the latter as they were mainly self-employed. On the other hand, only 4 percent of the respondents on an average worked for less than ten days in a month. 'Other casual workers' dominated this category. The low rates of work availability amongst casual workers is primarily explained by the dependence of this class of labour on contractors who would hire them on an adhoc basis. Earnings however were found to be uniformly low. A majority (91 percent) were found to earn less than the minimum wage of Rs 203⁴ per day. 31 percent earned between Rs 50-100 per day, a third of whom were waste pickers. A similar 30 percent earned between Rs 100-150 per day. Construction workers and rickshaw pullers emerged as the most prominent groups within this category. 16 percent, two-thirds of whom were domestic workers, earned less than Rs 50 per day. 15 percent earned between Rs 150-200 per day, and only 9

⁴ Rs 203 was revised as the minimum wage for all categories of unskilled labourers in 2010

percent had an earning capacity which exceeded Rs 200 per day. The highest proportion within these categories were 'other casual workers', but they were employed only part of the month, and idle the rest of the time.

60 percent of the respondents were engaged in employment which was dominated by a single gender, as in the case of rickshaw pulling and domestic work. 40 percent of the respondents admitted that men and women did not receive equal remuneration. According to women construction workers, the reason why the rates of wages differed was primarily because of the difference in the nature of work that men and women performed; as one respondent described, 'women carry cement while men lift bricks and operate machines'. Additionally, 9 percent of the respondents, mostly domestic workers, claimed that women's wages ranged between 25-49 percent of the wages offered to men.

Facilities available at work place:

The majority of employed workers had access to drinking water free of charge. But a section of the construction workers reported that the contractors did not usually ensure the provision of such facilities at the worksite; consequently the only way they could access drinking water facilities was by borrowing from neighbouring houses. Rickshaw pullers, who lack any defined area of work, also had to pay for such services. Creche facilities were not found in any workplace. In the absence of such facilities, construction workers especially found it extremely difficult to cope- 'If we bring our children, we have to leave them lying on jute sacks'. Only 16 percent of the sample population, mostly construction workers had access to first aid facilities free of charge. Most construction workers, however, complained of the insufficient contents of the first aid boxes available at the worksite. Only 23 percent had free latrine facilities; 34 percent had to pay for these; and 36 percent had no access to latrines. Facilities for food at the worksite were available for only 10 percent. Protective clothing was given to 18 percent, mainly Metro construction workers. The waste pickers in particular faced great daily health hazards, with no protection whatsoever.

Against the legally mandated 8 hour day, 68 percent workers reported work of 8 to 12 hours, especially construction workers and rickshaw pullers. 15 percent worked beyond 12 hours, including other casual workers such as those who worked in eateries and wedding parties. Only 15 percent were paid the legally required double wage for overtime. Domestic workers,

waste pickers who were paid on piece rate, and self employed rickshaw pullers - in the nature of their vocations - were not paid overtime. Even among the categories of workers entitled to a paid weekly holiday and annual leave, as many as 97 percent were not receiving these entitlements. A similar 97 percent did not get maternity benefits as per law.

Both the Interstate Migrant Workmen Act, 1979 as well as the Contract Labour Act, 1970 prescribe stringent standards to be respected with regard to the registration of the principal employer and the possession of a recruitment license by a contractor. But 85 percent people were unaware of these provisions, and only 5.5 percent believed that their employers had registration licences. Only 12 percent claimed that their contractors had valid licences. The majority were not shown records of their work done or wages paid. Passbooks with identification and work details which are required to be given to all migrant workers covered by the Inter-State Migrant Workers' Act were found to be given to only 14 percent of the respondents. The same law mandates inspection by labour inspectors of all establishments that employ interstate migrants, but only 5.4 percent of the respondents recalled an instance when labour inspectors had ever inspected their place of work and evaluated the working and living conditions of the workers.

Access to welfare boards was similarly found to be restricted to 1.2 percent of the respondents; and even these were rickshaw pullers who were members of welfare boards run by NGOs rather than by the government. These provided rickshaw pullers with services such as accident insurance. Construction workers who under The Building and Other Construction Worker's Act, 1996 were required to be registered with welfare boards, formed a large section of those who were not registered with such Boards. This exclusion from membership to welfare boards denied them their rights to pension benefits, accident insurance, financial assistance in the form of loans and advances for funding the education of children or other such expenses.

Municipal laws require rickshaw pullers and waste pickers to be licensed, but only 12 percent of them reported that they held valid licences. Kishwar attributes this to the draconian laws of the MCD, specifically those relating to the unrealistic quotas for issuing of licenses (Urban Poverty Report, 2009). The number of licenses, for example in the case of rickshaw pullers, has not been revised since 1997 when it was raised to 99,000. This is despite the fact that there are more than five lakh rickshaws plying in the city (Menon 2000). Further licenses are not available on demand and are only issued twice a year, MCD officials usually take a bribe for issuing and

renewing licenses, which are valid for three years and are liable for renewal every year. Pullers and waste pickers usually cannot afford the time or the bribes needed to get a license or take the risk involved in owning a license, which may be confiscated at any point.

Apart from large-scale violations of labour regulations, 53 percent of the workers reported a range other of problems at their work place. Predominant was verbal and sometimes physical abuse, faced by 49 percent workers, especially from the police. Rickshaw pullers and waste pickers were particularly hard hit.

Workers spoke painfully of the sense of indignity with which they work. Waste pickers in particular spoke of the humiliation associated with their livelihood. As one waste picker eloquently noted, 'This profession is very dirty, and people consider it to be lowly. Because we do this work, we are also abhorred, and thought of as lowly, and people avoid us'. Domestic workers complained of how their employers would treat them like untouchables; and would not allow them to eat from the same utensils- 'They treat us like untouchables, irrespective of our caste'.

But despite these enormous problems at work, only 1.1 percent of the workers approached the concerned government authorities. 90 percent reported that they did not do anything to address such problems. They felt powerless in the context of their perceived illegitimate status as workers and residents of the city, combined with a corrupt and oppressive bureaucracy and police force, discouraged them completely from seeking redress for their problems.

Conditions of Shelter and Habitat

41 percent of our sample workers lived in what in officialise are called JJ structures: these are slums which are recognised and notified by government, but not legalised. Around 14 percent lived in slums which are not even notified. Housing stock and access to public facilities are poor in both, but worse in the latter. 17 percent lived in resettlement colonies, where government has shifted people from demolished slums. Rickshaw pullers were among those who paid rents between above 500 rupees, although sometimes 4 to 5 men shared one cramped room. 9 percent resided in temporary tenements provided by the contractor to construction workers. 9.4 percent reported night shelters as their place of stay, mainly other casual workers. 2 percent of our sample was homeless and slept on parks or pavements, mainly rickshaw pullers. However,

these percentages should not be generalised, because they reflected in part our choice of settlements like shelters and construction sites.

30 percent of the workers interviewed accessed community flush pay toilets (which were however free for women). Some run by NGO Sulabh Sauchalaya were relatively clean, but government's own survey rate the toilets as 'extremely unhygienic, dirty and ill-maintained' (Urban Poverty Report, 2009:184). Only 19 percent had access to individual flush toilets (and residents of this slum said this was financed not by the municipality, but by their own pooled resources). 19 percent had no access to any kind of toilets. 28 percent received piped water from stand-posts in slums, but supply was erratic and the lines long. 4 percent relied on water tankers, and in one JJ Colony, again residents pooled money for a private water stand-post. Most had electricity connections, but supply was often erratic, and the bills were prohibitively exorbitant for the poor migrants.

Expenditure on food constituted a significant proportion of the daily earnings of migrants. A third of the respondents spent between 50-74 percent of the daily earnings on food. Another quarter spent even higher ratios of expenditure on food between 79 percent-99 percent. Those who spent highest ratios on food were waste pickers and domestic workers. These are also groups with low incomes, and basic food demand was relatively inelastic; therefore it constituted high proportions of their incomes.

Poor Social Protection

Overall, the survey confirmed that not only was there little enforcement of their rights as workers; their coverage with social protection programmes of government mean for the poor, also left large gaps.

Only 29 percent of our sample had ration cards with a city address. Even among these, a third held APL cards, or cards for families deemed to be above the poverty line. The levels of subsidy were much lower for this category, and most reported not drawing their quota rations because the rates were not too different from market rates. Another fifth said their cards were not renewed for two years, therefore these did not give them any entitlements. The category who best succeeded in securing ration cards were domestic workers; whereas waste pickers and rickshaw pullers dominated those who were left out. As one waste picker reflected, 'Because we

don't have a permanent address, our ration card cannot be made'. The study also reflected other chronic problems faced by the few migrants who could draw their stocks of subsidised grain, sugar and kerosene. These included release of less quotas than their entitlement, at higher prices than what is prescribed. The shops were also opened irregularly.

The situation is only a little better with voter identity cards. The guidelines of the Election Commission of India are clear that if migrants reside at their new place of residence for a continuous period of six months, they should be considered to be ordinary residents of that place, and are entitled to register and vote from there. But we found that only 37 percent of our sample had voter cards with Delhi addresses, although 85 percent had lived in the city continuously for over a year. In this sense, the city had literally disenfranchised 63 percent of the migrants in vulnerable occupations.

86 percent in our sample did not send their children below six years to ICDS centres. More than half explained this because there were no ICDS centres located in their slums. Nearly a fifth said they were refused admission by the ICDS staff, possibly because the centre also serviced relatively better-off children. A similar number simply said they did not find it worthwhile to send the children, because the quality of food and services was very poor.

Only 68 percent of those with school-age children sent their children to school. Many cited economic constraints, including the need to send the children out to work. A small number also cited difficulties in formalities required, including address proof, when their housing was illegalised. At the same time, 43 percent were unable to bring their children with them to the city. Those whose children went to government schools complained about the poor quality of teaching. Some set aside precious money for private tuitions; and others opted for private schools. Most of those in government schools reported that their children received free school meals.

The public health sector also failed many migrants. 63 percent reported that they relied on private health care. Consultation fees charged by private doctors usually ranged from Rs 50-200; as one respondents explained, 'Sometimes he will charge 50... sometimes he will just take Rs 100 just to see and charge separately for medicines'. Many - like rickshaw pullers and casual workers - could not afford this, and simply consulted the pharmacist, and took the medicine he

advised. Only 21 percent went to government hospitals – mostly domestic workers - but 78 percent even of these had to spend their own money for medicines. 75 percent of women in their pregnancy reported that they did not receive their maternity grants.

Only 6 percent of our sample had family members in the city who were above the age of 60 years, and therefore eligible for old-age pensions. Of these, 37 percent reported that they received pensions: the rest were excluded. Those who got pensions complained that it was frequently delayed, usually by several months.

Migration, Distress and Opportunity: Drawing up a Balance-Sheet

The overall picture of internal migration to vulnerable occupations in Delhi that emerges from our study is firstly that it often originates in situations of great distress in the countryside. The experience of distress of internal migrants continues albeit in many transformed ways in the city, in the conditions of work and habitat that is available to them – and these are aggravated by a hostile state, and often the loneliness of uprootment. But their distress is illuminated, and mitigated, by the better opportunities for livelihoods, savings and remittances which they encounter in the city. It is this bitter-sweet experience of internal migration to vulnerable occupations which is revealed by our study. In their own balance sheet of benefits and disadvantages of migration, an overwhelming 92 per cent of our sample of migrants to vulnerable occupations in Delhi assessed that migration on balance had positive impacts on their lives.

We discover that the large majority of migrants in Delhi to vulnerable occupations are highly impoverished. An overwhelming 94 per cent of them are landless in the villages of their origin. A great part of them come from the socially most disadvantaged caste and religious groups, of Scheduled Castes and Muslims, and Scheduled Tribes; together they comprise 87 per cent of the migrants in our sample, as compared to 36 per cent in the general population. It may be noted that it is precisely these caste and religious groups - Scheduled Castes and Muslims, and Scheduled Tribes – who bear the highest burdens of socio-economic deprivation⁵.

⁵ For information on Scheduled Tribes see <http://ncst.nic.in/writereaddata/mainlinkFile/File415.pdf>,
For information on the status of Muslims see http://minorityaffairs.gov.in/newsite/sachar/sachar_comm.pdf
For information relating to status of scheduled tribes see <http://epw.in/epw/uploads/articles/11133.pdf>

But although they are poor in assets, economic resources and social standing, their wealth is in their capacity for labour; and their extraordinary social capital of networks. A remarkable 96 per cent of the migrants we spoke to confirmed that they received valuable assistance – of food, a roof above their heads, and assistance in finding initial employment – when they moved to the city the first time. This assistance is all the more remarkable because the migrant families in vulnerable occupations remain indigent in the city: they share generously from their poverty, in the way that they themselves received when they first came into the city. It is this dual wealth – the strength of their limbs and their resolve to undertake hard labour in the unfamiliar new city locations; and the enormous support extended to them by family, friends and just people they knew from their village, caste and community, that enables people to survive and modestly save and improve their economic conditions in the city.

Of the 92 per cent migrants who spoke of the positive effects of migration for them and their families, for nearly two-thirds the most important impact of migration was their ability to find a source of livelihood and the increase in family income. As many as 61 per cent migrants in our sample testified that they found work for more than 26 days a month. Only 4 per cent were employed for less than 10 days a month. The increase in income however, most respondents asserted, was not substantial; it merely allowed them to achieve and sustain a very modest and basic quality of life. In the words of one construction worker, ‘At least we are able to earn here (Delhi) and are able to feed ourselves and live. In the village there is nothing, at least here we can bring up our children properly’. Others said that in spite of their low earnings, the fairly regular nature of work guaranteed them a regular income, and was vastly better than having to scrounge around for irregular and scarce work in the village.

The assessment was similar in our discussions in the villages from where they migrated. 75 per cent of the migrant families regarded the rise in income of the family at the source area to be the most important positive impact of migration. Remunerations sent, according to respondents, contributed substantially to the income of the family in the source area. 9 per cent said that remittances had also allowed their families in the source area to expand their asset base and acquire additional assets such as land, machinery, and livestock. According to one – ‘It has been beneficial, we have been able to educate our sons, as well as send them for tuitions, our daughters have been married off, and we have also been able to invest in the development of

our house'. Others said that having a migrating member in the family had meant an increase in the social status of the family, who were able to boast about having social contacts and a steady supply of income.

But better economic prospects were not the only reason for the positive evaluation of migrants and members of their families of the experience of migration. Other migrants in the city spoke of significant psychological and social benefits as well. Nearly a quarter valued most their increased self confidence as an important consequence of migration. They spoke of their ability to move around freely and to negotiate the terms of their employment. Because of the high ratio of migrants from disadvantaged and stigmatised castes and religious communities, they probably feel freed from social and psychological constraints on freely choosing their livelihoods and employers in a village; likewise women felt they had greater freedom in the city. A few also were satisfied that migration had enabled their children to gain better access to educational facilities. Greater access to leisure was also reported by 4 per cent of the respondents, who claimed that in comparison to the hard and gruelling conditions of work in the village, work opportunities in the city allowed for more leisure time.

But despite their overall positive evaluation of life after they moved to work in the city, they spoke of many sources of distress in a city which typically never welcomed them – neither its middle class residents, nor the government. More than two-thirds of people we spoke to also complained of the negative impacts of migration. For 38 per cent, being forced to reside in dilapidated and congested living arrangements was the worst aspect of migrant life in the city. We have noted how they are typically forced to live in illegalised shanties, denied basic services as well as security, or to sleep in night shelters or the streets. For another 15 per cent, the alienating and deplorable conditions of work were the main negative features of migration. They drift into low-paid, unprotected, unorganised, unhygienic, often unsafe occupations, because these are the only livelihoods open to them. 'There are times when the contractor does not pay us money and we have to go hungry'.

But for a significant 24 per cent of the people we spoke to in the city, the worst aspect of migration was psychological, of negative feelings of loneliness and uprootment, which they experienced as a consequence of being torn from their family and friends. They assessed that this suffering was even greater for those in their families who were left behind in the village. 78

per cent assessed that their family members in the village experienced feelings of loneliness and separation. Such feelings were also reiterated by relatives of migrants: 'I feel sad, and am always very worried, afraid that something might happen to those who are in the city'. Additionally, male respondents in particular pointed out how their wives who remained in the village, previously had never picked up rations from the ration shop, but were compelled to do so in their absence. Children's education, in the case of some, was also affected as children often skipped school to attend to household chores.

Women in the village also revealed how their burden of work had increased as a consequence of migration of the male members of their family. According to one respondent, Priyabola, after the men had migrated to the city, the women who had earlier only attended to their own farms, had begun working as casual labourers. The remittances sent by the migrants were insufficient to support the family, and women had to resort to casual employment to supplement the family income. In the words of one: 'They (the male migrants) are able to send money only after 3-4 months, and even then they send Rs 500-1000-2000...and there are 5-6 mouths to feed...and inflation has increased, we are not able to feed our families with such little money, so we work, and we earn Rs 50 per day'.

In the absence of the male heads, women who were left behind in the village asserted that they came to assume the role of the primary decision maker. All decisions related to the functioning of the household were taken by women. But most women maintained that they only tended to exercise such power when their husbands were away. On their return, male migrants resumed the role of the primary decision maker, thereby leaving the structure of authority intact. In fact major decisions regarding the purchase of household items, cattle inputs or land, credit, expenditure on ceremonies, in some cases were postponed until the male migrants visited home.

Psychologically as well, relatives of migrants, especially their wives and mothers reported experiencing feelings of distress and insecurity in the absence of the male members of the family. One respondent Jyotsana Devi said, 'All the men have migrated, we live alone with our young children; only the old men are left in the village, who will not be able to help us in case of any problem'.

The overall picture of internal migration to vulnerable occupations in cities that emerges from our study is that migration especially to low-end occupations often originates in situations of great distress in the countryside. The experience of distress of internal migrants continues albeit in many transformed ways in the city, in the conditions of work and habitat that is available to them. It is evident from our study that there is a continuum of distress in the migration of impoverished and socially disadvantaged groups from poor rural regions to cities. The distress of the host area is of great state hostility, various forms of disenfranchisement, loneliness and degrading and oppressive conditions of life and work. But at the same time, this distress is 'transformed' and mitigated by better livelihood chances, and opportunities to save, accumulate and remit precious financial resources.

Battling loneliness and separation both in the city and the village, struggling with dehumanised habitats, low-end low-paid work, and hostile governments which consistently fail them and refuse to enforce laws for their protection and rights, India's poorest and socially ostracised men, women and children continue to flock to cities. They do so using the wealth of their ability to toil, and their extensive social networks. They do so because despite their unwelcome, cities still offer them far better chances to find work, unshackle them from the strangleholds of caste and patriarchy, and enable them to educate their children, in distant dream of a better future.

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