

Inclusion of Migrant Workers in India: What Works at the Grassroots?



Inclusion of Migrant Workers in India: What Works at the Grassroots?

Benoy Peter* and Liby Johnson**

Socially and economically disadvantaged communities from rural India constitute the majority of the migrant workers who make temporary or circular moves in India to eke out a living. The national lockdown in the country in 2020 exposed the plight of the migrant workers and their families both at the source and destination regions. It also exposed the poor preparedness of all stakeholders towards the challenges faced by the migrants. In this paper, the authors synthesise the programme experience and lessons learned by the Centre for Migration and Inclusive Development and Gram Vikas, two non-profits that are engaged in a source-destination intervention promoting safe migration in Odisha–Kerala corridor. The paper summarises some of the high-impact strategies that could promote the inclusion of migrant workers at the grassroots.

Keywords: *Labour Migration, India, Inclusion, CMID, Gram Vikas*

1. Introduction

Migration for work has been a major coping strategy for millions in India. Socially and economically disadvantaged communities from rural India constitute the majority of the migrant workers who make temporary or circular moves in India to eke out a living (Keshri and Bhagat, 2013: 87). The national lockdown in India in 2020 exposed the plight of migrant workers and their families both at the destination areas as well as in source regions. Recent trends in long-distance migration reveal that the direction of migration in India is now towards the southern states given the state of demographic transition in the region (GOI, 2017: 277). Centre for Migration and Inclusive Development (CMID) is a registered non-profit based in Kerala with a focus on migrant inclusive development. Kerala currently offers the best wage rates in India for migrant workers in the informal sector (Peter and Others, 2020). Gram Vikas is a community development organization that works in Odisha and Jharkhand. Gram Vikas works with rural poor and tribal communities to help them lead a dignified life, by building

* Dr. Benoy Peter, Executive Director, Centre for Migration and Inclusive Development (CMID), Email: benoy@cmid.org.in

** Dr. Liby Johnson, Executive Director, Gram Vikas, Email: liby@gramvikas.org

Acknowledgements: The authors thankfully acknowledge the support of Dr. Baishali Goswami, Co-founder, Centre for Migration and Inclusive Development (CMID) in the estimation of remittances to select districts in Odisha.

The source-destination safe migration interventions (2019-2021) in the Odisha-Kerala corridor by CMID and Gram Vikas have been funded by Arghyam, ESAF Small Finance Bank through Prachodan Development Society (PDS), Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Government of United Kingdom through UNDP and by Gram Vikas.

capacities, strengthening community institutions, and mobilising resources. CMID and Gram Vikas, individually and together, have been engaged in several programmes for the welfare of migrant workers, including a safe migration programme along the Odisha-Kerala corridor. A series of empirical studies on migration were also conducted as part of this during 2019-2021. In this paper, the authors synthesise the programme experience and lessons learned by both the organisations in working with migrant communities at the grassroots for the past several years and summarises some of the high-impact strategies that could promote inclusion of migrants at the grassroots level. The paper primarily focuses on the inter-state migration of informal workers.

2. Labour Migration in India

Internal labour migration in India ranges from intra-state movements within or beyond the home district to interstate movements that are even over 2000 km. The movements also vary from season to season. In Andhra Pradesh, every year from March to May, workers from Srikakulam, Guntur, Prakasam, and Khammam come to Krishna district to pluck and process mangoes and from June to November, families from Prakasam and Krishna Districts come to Guntur to work in the Chilli sector. Bengaluru is a major destination for migrant labourers from rural Karnataka. Mumbai serves as a destination for labourers from rural Maharashtra. Migrants from tribal communities of rural areas of Gujarat move to Ahmedabad for work. There have been established labour migration corridors within the country connecting different states. Every year, from November to March, couples from the Beed district of Maharashtra move to Belgaum and Bagalkot districts of Karnataka to harvest sugarcane. The industrial town of Surat in Gujarat has been a major destination for labourers from the Ganjam district in Odisha. Migrants from Bihar constitute a large share of Rickshaw pullers in Delhi. Workers from the Dumka district of Jharkhand migrate to take up construction work in Ladakh. Traditional fishers from Sundarbans in West Bengal move to Kerala to work in the marine fishing sector. Workers from Murshidabad district of West Bengal and Nagaon district of Assam constitute the majority of workers in Ernakulam district of Kerala.

The profile of the migrant labourers varies by nature of the job, sector of employment, destination, distance from the native place, type of engagement of labour, and a host of other determinants. For example, the Brick Kilns and plantations all over India engage migrant families. Migrant women, particularly young girls are preferred for work in the fish processing industry. Artisans from Saharanpur are engaged in the furniture industry. Women and girls are preferred as live-in domestic workers. Sugarcane harvesting engages migrant couples, and the apparel industry engages predominantly young single men and women. Work arrangements of migrant labourers range from footloose labourers without a regular employer to confined labourers where mobility of the worker is at the

mercy of the employer/contractor. Although the labour migration in India is driven by a nexus of intermediaries traditionally, increasingly, the social network has emerged as a major driver of labour migration. Almost all the inter-state workers in Ernakulam district, the commercial capital of Kerala, in 2019, reported that they leveraged their informal ties with significant others from their native place, who were already employed in the district (Caritas India, Welfare Services and CMID, 2020:18).

3. Challenges Faced by Households with Migrants

Independent studies conducted in Kalahandi, Ganjam, Gajapati, and Kandhamal districts of Odisha by CMID and Gram Vikas revealed that, if migrants get a regular monthly income of rupees 10000 to rupees 12000 from work at their native places, most of them prefer not to migrate (Gram Vikas and CMID, 2020:72; Gram Vikas and CMID, 2021a:83; Gram Vikas and CMID, 2021b:86). However, a regular income at such a level does not appear to be feasible in the immediate future in rural India. Besides, emerging challenges such as climate change, are likely to push more people to seek a livelihood elsewhere outside their native places (Singh and Others, 2020:4). While migrants form the backbone of the bustling Indian cities, and migration helps workers from rural India tide over their immediate crises, it comes at a cost to the migrants and their households. The subsequent sections summarise the key challenges faced by those who migrate and those who stay behind at source areas.

3.1. Source

Challenges at the source areas drive people to other places for work. Most important such challenges include low wages and lack of employment. In many areas in Odisha, agriculture has been fading as a major means of livelihood and a majority of the households depended on non-agricultural daily wage labour as a primary means of income (Gram Vikas and CMID, 2020:25; Gram Vikas and CMID, 2021c:25). In long-distance migration, typically, single men move out for work while the spouse, children, and parents stay back. Migrants also move with the family. Single women also move to work in garment factories or fish processing units. A lot of them are also taken as domestic workers. The older persons who stay back at their native place find it difficult to access healthcare. Fetching firewood also was another challenge faced by the parents who stayed back in rural areas. The women, particularly the spouses who stayed behind also found it difficult to access healthcare in the absence of men. They also find it difficult to take care of the requirements of the children in the absence of their spouses (Gram Vikas and CMID, 2019:03). In the absence of connectivity, in many rural areas, the family members find it difficult to communicate with the workers who are away. Receiving remittances was another challenge faced by those who stayed behind as they had to travel to the bank which is generally far away. The children who stayed back were deprived of parental love and affection.

3.2. Destination

A recent policy paper by ILO identifies six broad challenges faced by migrant workers at the destination. They are invisibility, fragmentation, and informality; occupational safety and health risks; limited social protection; forced labour conditions; intergenerational transfer of poverty and labour burden on women (ILO, 2021). These challenges result in multi-layered vulnerabilities for workers by their age, agency, gender, sector, region of employment and a host of other reasons. Migrant workers are employed primarily because the jobs for which they are engaged generally do not have takers from the receiving society given the precarious nature, long durations of work, and abysmal wages. At the destinations, most workers do not enjoy the ESI and PF benefits (Gram Vikas and CMID, 2020:61). Workers who are enrolled under these schemes also seldom benefit from these either due to lack of awareness or because of the seasonal/circular nature of their work. Migrant workers are rarely made members of local trade unions. As a result, they are deprived of the opportunity for collective bargaining. These are also key reasons why employers prefer migrant workers. At the destinations, non-payment of wages and irregular payments are major challenges faced by the migrants (Gram Vikas and CMID, 2019). Migrant workers are generally engaged through verbal agreements without any evidence of employment. Payments are also by and large made in cash. In Ernakulam district of Kerala, during 2019-20, 93 per cent of all migrant workers received their wages in cash (Caritas India, Welfare Services and CMID, 2020:18). Finding out an employer who does not exploit them was another major challenge workers faced (Gram Vikas and CMID, 2019). Their accommodation arrangements tend to be crowded and congested. Employers generally house workers within or nearby the factory premises and many a time this is a strategy to curtail their freedom and access to the outside world. This cripples the migrants' access to potential social support systems. This primarily is the case of the garment and apparel industry and fish processing units where young girls are mostly recruited through a chain of intermediaries. When they find housing on their own, workers end up occupying vacant land, empty spaces such as space under flyovers and bridges, dilapidated buildings, or housing facilities that they can afford to. Such housing makes them vulnerable to several threats. Their access to water, sanitation, and hygiene also are generally poor.

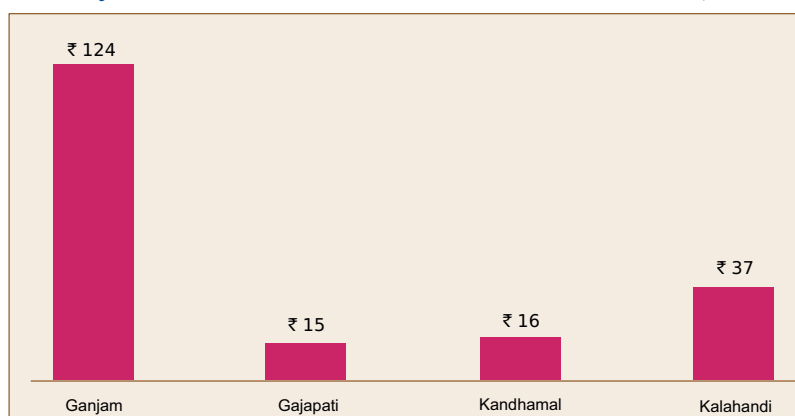
Migrants who move as families with children have additional challenges. The safety of children during work hours is a major issue. In Kerala, several cases of child abuse have been reported in the case of migrant households and many such incidents occurred in the absence of parents who were out for work. Access to education is another major issue faced by migrant families with children. Despite policy measures such as right to education act, there is a reluctance to admit children of migrant workers in schools or in age-appropriate classes. Many times, such admissions also require a bridging process which is generally absent in the destination states. Movements across states with linguistic barriers further

complicate the process as it cripples the ability of the children to catch up with the lessons. Discrimination at the schools also is evident in the case of migrant children. In many schools in Kerala, teachers refer to the children of migrant workers as *Bhaikkutty*, a discriminatory term in the local language, used to denote children of workers from outside southern India (Peter and Narendran, 2017:82). The COVID pandemic has further crippled the access to education for children of migrant workers. Due to economic constraints, many children from migrant families have joined the labour force (Gram Vikas and CMID, 2021b:44). Women workers have additional vulnerabilities given their gender roles in the Indian context and exploitations faced by them.

4. Impact of Labour Migration

With the largest diaspora in the world and being the largest recipient of international remittances, the social and economic impact of migration in India is significant (IOM, 2021:41). Being many folds compared to international migration for work, the impact of internal migration for work is much more significant. Remittances contribute significantly to the resilience of rural India as it not only benefits the households to which the remittances are made but to the entire village economy. The monthly remittances received by households in select districts in Odisha prior to the national lockdown were estimated by the authors based on four independent empirical studies conducted by Gram Vikas and CMID in the respective districts. As the estimates reveal (Figure 1), prior to national lockdown in 2020, households in the Ganjam district of Odisha received rupees 124 crores every month as remittances. For households in Gajapati and Kandhamal districts, it was rupees 15 crores and 16 crores respectively. Households in the Kalahandi district received a monthly remittance of rupees 37 crores before national lockdown in 2020.

Figure 1
Estimated Monthly Remittance Received Prior to National Lockdown in 2020 by Households in Select Districts, Odisha (Crores)



Source: Estimated by the authors based on empirical data from four independent studies by Gram Vikas and CMID (Gram Vikas and CMID, 2020; 2021a; 2021b and 2021c).

5. What Works at the Grassroots?

While government policies provide an enabling environment, most such policies have not made a substantial difference in the lived experience of migrants. For example, the Interstate Migrant Workmen Regulation Act 1979 has by and large been of little use to migrant workers. Engaged as informal employees, these workers do not benefit from the ESI, PF facilities also. One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) scheme, while ensuring portability, has not yet substantially helped workers obtain food grains outside the state. In this section, based on the experience of CMID and Gram Vikas, practical strategies that have worked well in promoting the inclusion of migrants, are detailed. Crosscutting strategies are elaborated first, followed by strategies that have worked in the unique context of source or destination.

5.1. Crosscutting Strategies

There are several strategies that are equally applicable for the source and destinations interventions to improve the state of inclusion of migrant workers. Evidence-informed source-destination interventions; public private partnerships; deploying mobile services; establishing helplines; ensuring gender sensitivities; etc. are some of them. Such strategies are detailed in this sub-section.

5.1.1. Evidence-Informed Programmes

Evidence-informed interventions can substantially improve the programme response by better target efficiency and impact. In source areas, understanding the level of migration, differential migration rates by ethnicity and expectations of the workers, can help plan interventions. For example, research by Gram Vikas and CMID revealed that while the majority of workers from Kalahandi and Kandhamal move to Kerala, the workers from Ganjam primarily moved to Surat (Gram Vikas and CMID, 2020:55; Gram Vikas and CMID, 2021a:65; Gram Vikas and CMID, 2021b:66). Such information can help organisations in source areas to explore collaborations at respective destinations for the welfare of the workers who move from these areas. At the destinations, being informed about the profile of the migrant workers helps design effective strategies to reach out to them. For example, demand creation materials in print media are not effective in the case of illiterate workers. However, voice messages in their mother tongue can better reach such target groups. In Ernakulam district of Kerala, workers from West Bengal constitute 40 per cent of all migrant workers and another 20 per cent hail from Assam. Workers from Tamil Nadu constitute another 20 per cent and about 12 per cent of the workers belonged to Odisha (Caritas India, Welfare Services and CMID, 2020:7). Such information is pivotal while choosing the language for communication or recruiting the outreach workers so that communication is effective. Hence, both at source as well as at destinations, a profiling of the migrants/ households with migrants/potential migrants at the beginning of the

programme can help evolve a robust programme that is responsive to the needs of the target populations.

5.1.2. Ecosystem Approach

Inclusive interventions call for an ecosystem approach that considers the numerous challenges faced by households with migrants instead of just one thematic area. Such interventions not only focus on the migrants but those who stay behind also. Besides, issues of not just the worker but the whole household at the source/destination, are addressed. Three complementary strategies: creation of demand; provision of quality services and facilitation of an enabling environment, play a key role in this. While there may be services/social security schemes for different beneficiaries, it is not necessary that the beneficiaries are aware of the existence of the services and also about the procedure to enrol and avail of such services. Hence, consumer-sensitive demand creation can inform workers about the various programmes/services. It is also important to make sure that services for which demand is created, are provided with an emphasis on quality. In order to ensure the efficient implementation of both the demand creation as well as provision of quality services, it is pivotal to facilitate an enabling environment working with all key stakeholders. At the source, the stakeholders include the Local Self Governments (LSGs), various government departments, and services providers. At the destination, employers, industry associations, trade unions, LSGs, government departments, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and service providers are some of the key stakeholders with whom the advocacy is needed to facilitate an enabling environment.

5.1.3. Source-destination Interventions

In order to ensure a continuum of services, interventions that cover both source and destination regions, have a larger impact compared to interventions that cover only any of these. Such programmes facilitate inter-state coordination and facilitate seamless access to services for the workers and their family members. This works well when an organisation has a presence at both the source and destination regions or through collaborations of organisations at source and destination areas. For example, Aajeevika Bureau, an NGO which works in Rajasthan, Surat, Ahmedabad, and Mumbai is able to cater to workers who move from rural Rajasthan to destinations such as Udaipur within the state or to Ahmedabad, Surat, or Mumbai. Gram Vikas and CMID have been working together on such a source-destination safe migration programme. When workers from the Kalahandi district of Odisha were unable to return to Kerala for work, Gram Vikas was able to bring all such workers from various villages together, managed to get travel insurance done for each worker, and informed CMID about the requirement. CMID organised a vehicle for their interstate travel to Ernakulam district in Kerala and identified potential formal employment opportunities for the workers who were arriving. Their COVID tests at the destination were also

facilitated by CMID. CMID helped the workers who required support in opening bank accounts and as and when there was a grievance, it was addressed through synergistic efforts.

5.1.4. Public Private Partnerships

Partnerships, particularly, public private partnerships (PPPs) leverage the unique strengths of each stakeholder to maximise the impact of the interventions. While this is universally applicable, in the case of migrant workers, PPPs can be of immense help. The outpatient services of public health institutions in India, generally function during the time when the migrants are at work. Hence, the workers, who cannot afford to lose the day's wage, resort to obtaining medicines over the counter from pharmacies after their work hours. Pharmacies provide medicine to such migrants without a diagnosis. Thus, a worker with Tuberculosis ends up receiving a cough syrup instead of a referral for a sputum test that can lead to a TB diagnosis and appropriate treatment. While CMID as a non-profit has expertise in public health and is flexible to work at a time convenient to migrant workers, it did not have the financial resources to operate a mobile clinic. Responsible private sector entities have resources that they are willing to offer to NGOs for social development initiatives. While the players mentioned above, individually were not able to resolve the challenges faced by the migrant workers in accessing quality primary healthcare, they could collectively resolve it through a PPP. Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Limited (MRPL) which is a public sector enterprise offered CMID the funds to procure and customise a vehicle to be operated as a mobile clinic. Wipro Limited, under its CSR initiative, supported the operation related expenditure that CMID incurred. This included human resource costs, fuel for the vehicle, and required medicines and consumables. The National Health Mission (NHM), provided technical oversight in the implementation, provided available medicines and consumables, and facilitated linkages with public health institutions across Ernakulam district so that migrants who required referral services/follow-up, are taken care of by the public health system. CMID implements the programme by operating the mobile clinic providing free primary health care to workers in the evening when it is convenient for the migrants. Thus, a collaboration of NHM, MRPL, Wipro, and CMID as a PPP is able to collectively resolve a major challenge faced by migrant workers. The LSGs, particularly in India's urban centres can substantially benefit from such PPPs.

5.1.5. Delivering Services through Mobile Units

Geographic access is a key challenge for marginalised populations in availing services. This is not only applicable for high outmigration areas which are generally remote rural areas but also for destinations where migrants have constraints in reaching out to a facility after their work hours. Services can be provided through

mobile units that reach out to the migrant communities at their convenience. The challenges faced by those who stay behind in accessing healthcare or migrant workers at the destinations can also be addressed by operating mobile medical units. CMID's *Bandhu Clinic*, every month, regularly reaches out to over 40000 migrants across several brick kilns, fishing harbours, plywood factories, fish processing units, industrial clusters, residential areas of footloose labour and marketplaces in Ernakulam district of Kerala, providing healthcare services. CMID also vaccinated over 56000 migrant workers against COVID-19 through its mobile vaccination units under NHM. Mobile toilets can be of immense utility to migrant workers where wash facilities are minimal. Mobile ration shops can deliver ration under ONORC to migrants. Mobile cash deposit machines/ATMs can help workers remit/receive money at ease. Even services such as enrolment of informal workers in the e-Shram portal can be conducted through mobile worker facilitation centres.

5.1.6. Setting up Resource Centres for Migrants

Resource Centres for Migrants (RCM) are of immense utility at the source as well as destination areas. In source areas, RCMs can help potential migrants in the migration decision-making process and facilitate their access to decent jobs by providing information about job opportunities and requirements. RCMs at source areas can help workers plan their travel, help them book tickets and obtain necessary documents such as a COVID vaccination certificate. RCMs can also help with opening bank accounts and coordinating with local administration availing social security measures. The presence of RCMs in source areas can help reduce the dependence of migrants on intermediaries who exploit them. Gram Vikas operates a Shramik Bandhu Seva Kendra (RCM) near Berhampur Railway Station, in Ganjam district, from where a significant number of workers travel to various destinations within and beyond India. The centre provides facilities for the migrants to take rest and refresh themselves while they go to their workplaces or return home. In the Thuamul Rampur block of Kalahandi district and Daringbadi block of Kandhamal district, a network of such centres ensures that workers from remote villages have access to information and documentation services. RCMs at source areas can also help the family members in tracing a person who has gone missing, releasing workers forcefully detained by employers at the destination, or bringing home the bodies of workers who die at the destinations. At the destinations, the RCMs can help workers enrol in various social security schemes of the receiving state. RCMs can also help in documenting and filing grievances of the workers with the government departments and also follow up for resolutions. Opening bank accounts, facilitation of admission of children in Anganwadi and schools, enrolling workers for vaccinations, helping workers find a job or access legal aid, etc. are some other services migrants can avail of from the RCMs at the destinations.

5.1.7. Enhancing Access to Financial Products and Services

Economic shocks are some of the major precipitating factors for migration. These include catastrophic health expenditure due to disease/death in the family, crop failures, and disasters impacting livelihoods. Repayment of loans from private money lenders, raising funds for marriage in the family or construction of a house, buying assets, etc. are some other reasons. Access to formal financial instruments at the source areas can significantly reduce economic distress and improve financial resilience. It reduces dependence on private money lenders and the resultant distress migration. Financial inclusion at source areas can also reduce dependence on intermediaries for receiving remittances and thus promotes savings. It is easier for migrants to open bank accounts at their native places compared to destinations. At the destinations, helping workers open bank accounts can improve their savings and reduce expenses on remittance. Channelling wages through bank accounts also help establish employee-employer relationships in the case of a wage dispute. Access to insurance products can substantially reduce out-of-pocket expenditure on health and in the case of death of a worker, the family gets some relief through the insurance.

5.1.8. Reaching Out to the Invisible through Helplines

At the destinations, the employers who exploit migrant workers generally prevent the NGOs from physically reaching out to migrant workers. Besides, the migrants are engaged in work in hard-to-reach locations pausing constraints on outreach. Certain categories of migrant workers, such as live-in domestic workers, have mobility constraints to reach out for help. However, helplines for migrant workers can resolve these challenges by being in touch with the workers over the phone and providing them guidance on resolving their challenges. Helplines established for migrants should be engaged not only in receiving inbound calls but also in making outbound calls to keep the workers informed on various issues. For example, many people are not aware of the first dose of the COVID vaccine they have been given and after what interval, the second dose needs to be taken. Helplines can remind and guide them to the nearest vaccination centre. Helplines are particularly handy when workers are detained by the employer or when they are in distress. The *Bandhu Helpline* operated during the first national lockdown by a consortium of organisations including CMID and Gram Vikas helped connect workers with food, Shramik trains, and legal aid. However, helplines also need good demand creation so that the workers are aware that such a helpline exists. When over 30 migrants from the Dumka district of Jharkhand were stranded in a plantation in the Idukki district of Kerala, the helpline of the Government of Jharkhand reached out to CMID which works in Kerala. The workers could be quickly freed and repatriated to Jharkhand by being constantly in touch with them on the helpline and coordinating with various government departments.

5.1.9. Ensuring Initiatives are Gender Sensitive

In the absence of gender-sensitive interventions, men and boys benefit more compared to women and girls. This is true in the case of COVID vaccination to enrolment in the e-Shram portal. Hence, it is always important to have a gender lens in all interventions. Focus on improving the welfare of women have a larger impact on the welfare of migrant households. Programmes should consider the convenience, privacy, and reach of women. From planning, implementation to evaluations, ensure that gender sensitivities are taken care of. A gender audit of the work plan undertaken at the beginning of the intervention will be helpful. Train the staff on gender sensitivities and track progress evaluating gender disaggregated data. Gathering and analysing such data and necessary course corrections will ensure that women and girls are not left behind. Specific efforts should be made to gather strategic information about women and girls among the migrant workers. Wherever possible, attempts should be made to ensure gender balance in the deployment of human resources under various programmes.

5.2. Strategies Specific to Source Areas

In this section, certain strategies that are specific to source areas are summarised. Some of such interventions include investing in the education of children in high outmigration areas, expanding livelihood opportunities to reduce distress migration, and promoting the social security and emotional wellbeing of those who stay behind.

5.2.1. Investing in Education of Children

Investing in the education of children in high outmigration areas is a strategy that has a long-term impact. Interventions to improve enrolment, retention and learning outcomes can help people leverage migration as an opportunity than getting exploited by the intermediaries or employers. Education equips people with better skills and enables them in better migration decision-making, opt for better paid jobs, helps in improved negotiations, and even reduces the need for migration. However, such interventions need to take into consideration the challenges faced by migrant families in educating their children. Hence, in addition to regular schools, schools with residential facilities can be of their help. Gram Vikas runs two residential schools where children can continue their studies in their mother tongue. Currently, in most destination states, such opportunity is limited.

5.2.2. Expanding Livelihood Opportunities

Studies by Gram Vikas and CMID reveal that if workers have a regular monthly income of around rupees 10000, they prefer to stay back and work at their native places. This calls for interventions beyond strengthening NREGS to expand livelihood opportunities of households in high outmigration areas. One of the key

reasons why migrants who returned during the national lockdown were not able to benefit from NREGS was the low wages and delay in payments. While the current level of NREGS wages helps some of the most marginalised in the rural areas have a means of income, delayed payments need to be addressed. Facilitating income diversification of migrant households can not only make them resilient but help create livelihood opportunities for others. For example, a migrant worker from Kalahandi, set up a petty shop near his house with the income earned from work at the destination, and the shop provided a dignified employment opportunity for his spouse who stayed behind at the native place. Similarly, several workers purchased autorickshaws while they continued to work at the destinations and this not only improved local public transport but also provided an opportunity for employment of others at the native place as drivers (Gram Vikas and CMID, 2019). Promoting the entrepreneurial skills of return migrants can help them leverage the experience and knowledge they have gained through migration.

5.2.3. Promoting Social Security and Emotional Well-being

Access to social protection schemes is a key aspect of ensuring livelihood security of the rural poor. In the absence of the migrant members in the family, the older and other vulnerable members find it difficult to reach out to government agencies from where these schemes are administered. This is also true in the case of accessing medical care. Village level institutions such as women's self-help groups (SHGs) and youth clubs are important resources to bridge these gaps. Strengthening local governance to enhance citizens' access to social protection schemes and enabling doorstep delivery of such services are important interventions. In many remote rural locations, the absence of telephone or internet connectivity hampers the families' ability to be in touch with their members who have migrated for work. This leads to immense emotional distress. Mobilising service providers to enhance network connectivity, promoting the use of smartphones and overall improvement in digital literacy can help address this. Self-help groups provide a platform for women to come together and provide mutual social and emotional support.

5.3. Strategies for Destinations

Inclusive governance plays a key role in ensuring the welfare of migrant workers at the destinations. Services should focus on residential areas of the most vulnerable migrant workers with a focus on prevention and preparedness. This section, details key strategies that are applicable to destination areas.

5.3.1. Inclusive Local Governance

Migrant workers are many a time discriminated as 'stress to the city' while they fuel the economy of the receiving areas as an indispensable workforce. They also spent a considerable amount of their earnings at the destinations as consumers. In 2017, the estimated annual expenditure of interstate migrant workers in Kerala was

around 100 billion rupees (Rajan and others, 2018:4). However, given the political exclusion of migrant workers at the destinations, the LSGs have not yet optimally demonstrated their accountability to migrant workers. As a result, areas where migrants reside generally lack sufficient WASH amenities such as drinking water, waste management facilities and shared toilets. Such areas also lack facilities such as crèche, Anganwadi, or primary healthcare centres. Frontline workers also often miss providing them with relevant services. Migrants are also yet to optimally benefit from schemes such as ONORC at destinations outside their native states. Obtaining a residence certificate, consideration in social security schemes such as housing for the poor, etc. are also challenges. Evictions of migrants by the LSGs are also frequent in India's urban centres. It is important that the LSGs appreciate the valuable contributions of migrants and recognise them as an integral part of the society. Inclusive governance ensures that the LSG representatives are not only accountable for the welfare of their voters, but to the entire population in the respective divisions/wards. The decentralised planning and governance of LSGs can ensure that not a single migrant is left behind.

5.3.2. Targeting Residential Areas of Migrants

Instead of expecting the migrants to reach out for services located elsewhere, bringing them closer to migrants through various strategies substantially enhance enrolment and utilisation. A key strategy is to place/offer the services at residential clusters of the most vulnerable migrant workers. This makes it convenient for them to effortlessly reach out and avail services. For example, CMID operates two Resource Centres for Migrants (RCM) in the Ernakulam district of Kerala. One such centre functions at the Bengali market, Perumbavoor which is one of the largest residential clusters of footloose labour from West Bengal. The other RCM is set up at Vathuruthy in Willingdon Island which is the largest residential cluster of footloose labour from Tamil Nadu in Kochi city in Kerala. Locating the RCMs at such locations helps the workers, particularly women and older persons to reach out and avail services that otherwise they would not be able to avail. Conducting COVID vaccination or health clinics at such locations during the evening or on Sundays, helps workers avail these services without being absent from their work.

5.3.3. Focus on Prevention and Preparedness

The national lockdown and the resulted plight of migrant workers exposed the lack of preparedness of all stakeholders towards the challenges faced by migrants. Better preparedness by all stakeholders can substantially reduce the vulnerabilities of the migrants. One of the focus areas should be interventions that reduce the vulnerabilities of migrants so that these vulnerabilities lead to an adverse event. Empowering the workers with information and resources can help prevent a lot of atrocities they face. In public health, it ranges from COVID vaccinations to antenatal care for women. In occupational safety, it ranges from the use of preventive gear

to disaster preparedness. However, such efforts call for a detailed understanding of the challenges faced by migrant workers. Hence, it is important to map areas where migrants reside/work, gather insights about their challenges and design an evidence-informed response with thrust upon prevention and preparedness.

5.3.4. Providing Services at a Location and Time Convenient to Migrants

The timings of public services in India generally conflict with the work timings of migrant workers. Hence, to go to the banks, hospitals, offices of the Department of Labour or any other government office, the workers will have to let go of at least a day's work. As a result, majority of workers are unable to avail of these services. For example, since the worker is unable to go to the bank, they resort to sending money through informal channels which are relatively expensive. Enrolments under welfare schemes for migrant workers are poor because, even if workers are aware of such schemes, the offices are closed when they can go. Offering services at a time and location convenient to migrants is a sensitive way to resolve such challenges. CMID's RCMs operate from Sunday to Friday from 1.30 pm to 9.30 pm. Besides, they are located in major residential areas of migrant workers. These enable workers to visit the resource centres on Sundays. Besides, they can walk in to the centres in the evening after their work since RCMs function up to 9.30 pm. Based on requests, on an ad hoc basis, the Department of Labour and Skills also deploys staff during evenings or Sundays to the RCMs of CMID enabling registration of workers under various schemes such as the Interstate Migrant Workers Welfare Scheme. Such arrangements or providing accreditations to CSOs to undertake such enrolments make the location and timings convenient for migrants and the uptake of services improves.

5.3.5. Ensuring 24 hours' Response

Regular office hours such as 9.30 am to 5.30 pm do not help migrant workers in distress. Hence, inclusive interventions should be able to cater to the requirements of the workers on a 24 hours' basis. For example, when a footloose labourer dies at the destination and the body needs to be sent to the native place, the fellow workers need immediate support in completing the procedures and getting the paperwork done. When a migrant is diagnosed with COVID, he/she needs to be immediately admitted to an isolation facility. When the police need interpretation support when a migrant child is sexually abused, action cannot be delayed. Hence, though resource intensive, destination interventions such as helplines may need to function round the clock and a rapid response system may be put in place to respond to emergencies.

5.3.6. Focus on Receiving Society

While most of the migrant interventions at the destinations target migrants, the challenges faced by migrant workers are primarily a culmination of the way they

are being treated by the receiving societies. This includes employers of migrants who exploit them; the trade unions who do not proactively take them in their fold; the market which overcharges from migrants; the government systems and officials who are insensitive to their challenges; the politicians who do not find themselves accountable for migrants who do not form the vote bank and the local residents perceiving migrants as a 'nuisance'. This calls for focussed interventions to sensitise each of these key stakeholders so that the receiving societies recognise migrants as an integral part of the society and appreciate their contributions. Behaviour change of these stakeholders can significantly transform the lived experience of the migrants at the destination.

6. Conclusions

With the demographic transition in India, the direction of labour migration in the country is turning towards southern states, resulting in the emergence of newer labour migration corridors. Workers from eastern and north-eastern India are now making longer moves than ever, within the country given the high wage rates available down south. Unfortunately, development aid agencies treat southern Indian states as 'relatively developed' and are less open towards funding interventions to promote the welfare of migrant workers in the region while workers from their 'priority states' live and work precariously in these states. This paper, based on the experience and lessons learned from a source-destination safe migration initiative by CMID and Gram Vikas in the Odisha-Kerala labour migration corridor, synthesises strategies that can transform the grassroots experience of potential migrants, migrants, and those who stay behind during migration. Evidence-informed programmes; an ecosystem approach; source destination interventions; public private partnerships; delivering services through mobile units; setting up resource centres for migrants; enhancing access to financial products and services; reaching out to the invisible through helplines and ensuring initiatives are gender-sensitive are some of the strategies that work across both sources and destinations. Investing in the education of children; expanding livelihood opportunities and promoting the social security and emotional wellbeing of those who stay behind are source-specific strategies that are of immense utility. Inclusive local governance; targeting residential areas of migrant workers; focus on prevention and preparedness; providing services at a location and time convenient to migrants; ensuring 24 hours' response and targeting the receiving society are some of the strategies for promoting the inclusion of migrants at the destinations. The COVID pandemic has substantially restricted mobility in general and interstate travel in particular. The COVID vaccination certificate has almost become like a passport for interstate travel. The pandemic has also exposed the poor preparedness of all stakeholders towards the challenges faced by the migrant workers. It is hoped that the experience and the lessons learned by both CMID and Gram Vikas, synthesised in this paper, contribute to designing a better and inclusive response towards mainstreaming migrant workers in India.

References

- Caritas India, Welfare Services and CMID (2020), *State of Inclusion of Migrant Workers in Ernakulam District Kerala*, New Delhi: Caritas India, <https://cmid.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/State-of-Inclusion-of-Migrant-Workers-in-Ernakulam-District-Kerala-CMID-2020.pdf>
- Government of India (2017), *Economic Survey 2016-17*, New Delhi: Ministry of Finance, <https://www.indiabudget.gov.in/budget2017-2018/es2016-17/echapter.pdf>
- Gram Vikas and CMID (2019), *Challenges of Migrants and Families Left Behind: Insights from Thuamul Rampur, India*, Bhubaneswar: Gram Vikas, <https://cmid.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Challenges-of-Migrants-and-Families-Left-Behind-Insights-from-Kalahandi-2019-Gram-Vikas-CMID.pdf>
- Gram Vikas and CMID (2020), *Labour Migration from Remote Rural Odisha: Thuamul Rampur Block, Kalahandi*, Bhubaneswar: Gram Vikas, <https://cmid.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Migration-from-RemoteRuralOdisha-17-Nov-20-Gram-Vikas-CMID-Web.pdf>
- Gram Vikas and CMID (2021a), *Labour Migration from Rural Odisha: Baliguda Block, Kandhamal*, Bhubaneswar: Gram Vikas.
- Gram Vikas and CMID (2021b), *Labour Migration from Rural Odisha: Jagannathprasad Block, Ganjam*, Bhubaneswar: Gram Vikas.
- Gram Vikas and CMID (2021c), *Labour Migration from Rural Odisha: Rayagada Block, Gajapati*, Bhubaneswar: Gram Vikas.
- International Labour Organization (2021), *Road map for developing a policy framework for the inclusion of internal migrant workers in India*, New Delhi: ILO, <https://cmid.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Road-map-for-the-Inclusion-of-Internal-Migrant-Workers-in-India-ILO-AB-CMID-December-2020.pdf>
- International Organisation for Migration (2021), *World Migration Report 2022*, Geneva: IOM, <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/WMR-2022-EN.pdf>
- Keshri, Kunal and Bhagat, R.B. (2013), 'Temporary and Seasonal Migration: Regional Pattern, Characteristics and Associated Factors', *Economic & Political Weekly*, 47 (4): 81-88.
- Peter, B., Sanghvi, S. and Narendran, V. (2020), 'Inclusion of Interstate Migrant Workers in Kerala and Lessons for India'. *Ind. J. Labour Econ.* 63, 1065–1086, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41027-020-00292-9>
- Peter, Benoy and Narendran, V. (2017), *Gods Own Workforce: Unravelling Labour Migration to Kerala*, Perumbavoor: Centre for Migration and Inclusive Development, <http://cmid.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Gods-Own-Workforce-CMID-Web.pdf>
- Rajan, Irudaya, S., Peter, B., Mishra, U.S. and Narendran, V. (2018), *Impact of Mortality and Fertility Transitions in Kerala on Migration and Its Implication on the State's Economy*, Thiruvananthapuram: Centre for Development Studies, <https://cmid.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Impact-of-Mortality-and-Fertility-Transitions-in-Kerala-on-Migration-and-Its-Implications-for-the-States-Economy-Web.pdf>
- Singh, Harjeet., Faleiro, J., Anderson, T. and Vashist, S. (2020), *Cost of Climate Inaction: Displacement and Distress Migration*, Action Aid, https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/publications/ActionAid%20CANSAsouthAsiaClimate%20Migration%20report%20-%20Dec%202020_3.pdf