

Challenges and Strategies for Sustained Livelihood Development of Migrant Workers in Uttar Pradesh

Dr. Archana Tripathi

ABSTRACT

The paper deals with new challenges and circumstances faced during the time of pandemic by the unorganized and organized worker of Uttar Pradesh. The unexpected magnitude of reverse migration of the workers induced by the pandemic has challenged the government think tank to revise the strategies and management policies for both organized and unorganized sectors. The challenge among central, state and local bodies is to ensure livelihood without stalking on health front. Deep down the remote areas, majority of unorganized labour population is facing a twin problem related to livelihood and health risk. The sudden gush of prodigal labour in the state of Uttar Pradesh has raised a pertinent question of the well-being and employment opportunities in the state amid lockdown. The present paper aims to deal with problems and challenges of such a frail system which hinders the government and lives of millions of people.

Introduction

Every nation of the globe has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Even if the economic effect is disruptive, the human impact is even more severe. Migrant workers are the most vulnerable, and this has become a national issue. Since many labourers are engaged in the informal sector, they are frequently denied sufficient healthcare, nutrition, housing, and sanitation even when they are at work. Workers who come from rural regions and work as day labourers on construction sites or in manufacturing plants are referred to as migrant workers. It's not uncommon for them to live in dorms at construction or industry sites since they can't afford to save any money. During the pandemic, building and manufacturing activities were halted by most of the big enterprises, leaving migrants without jobs and afraid of their future. As a result, many of them decided to return to their own states rather than starve to death in the city due to lack of jobs.

Exodus of Migrant Workers:

The term "migration" refers to the movement of people from one location to

1. Associate Professor, Department of Economics , Acharya Narendra Dev Nagar Nigam Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh

another, either within the same country or across international boundaries. As of 2011, India had 45.6 million migrants, or 38 percent of the population, compared to 31.5 million migrants in 2001, according to the 2011 Census data (31 percent of the population). While the population rose by 18% between 2001 and 2011, the number of migrants increased by 450 percent. One percent of overall migration in 2011 consisted of foreign migrants (immigrants from other countries). Internal migration is a major source of population growth in India. In addition to a lack of residency rights, migrants face a wide swath of issues including a lack of political representation; inadequate housing; low-paying and insecure or hazardous work; a high risk of trafficking and sex exploitation; exclusion from state-provided services like health and education; and discrimination based on ethnicity or religion. The majority of internal migrants are denied fundamental civil liberties. Because of a lack of understanding about the scope, nature and volume of internal migration, the government prioritizes it little in policy and practice (UNESCO, 2013). About 30 percent of India's internal migrants are between the ages of 15 and 29 (Rajan, 2013). There are an estimated 15 million child migrants in the world (Daniel, 2011; Smita, 2011). Due to economic difficulties, political unrest, and climate change, migration is predicted to become more intense in the future (Deshingkar and Sandi, 2012). As a result of environmental causes such as sea level rise, floods, more severe droughts, and other climate-driven changes, an estimated 200 million people may be permanently displaced by 2050 (Myers, 2002). Migration is a reasonable and controllable option to deal with environmental, socioeconomic, and political stressors in this case (UNESCO, 2011; Foresight, 2011). It is common for employees at a brick-kiln to be tethered to their employer via an advance payment that is based on their income and living expenses (PCLRA, 2012; Joshi and Khandelwal, 2009). In certain cases, employees and their families may be able to leave the brick-kiln site temporarily during production season (Guerin et al., 2007), while in other cases, workers and their families may be unable to leave the brick-kiln site permanently (Guerin et al., 2007), (Majumder, 2015; John, 2014). There is a serious problem with migrant health care and treatment services (MoHUPA, 2017). Early marriages, early pregnancies, giving birth without a trained birth attendant, frequent childbirth, poor health after successive childbirths with little spacing, no exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months, and no complementary feeding thereafter can all contribute to poor maternal and child health in migrants (Borhade, 2012).

Labourers, migrant workers, and underprivileged population have been adversely affected by the government's decision to implement a total lockdown across the nation. It was declared at midnight on March 24, 2020, that the whole country will be put under lockdown in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This triggered a fresh crisis, while the lockdown had a significant impact on the economy and business. They began to leave the metropolis

for their families as food and safety became a media sensation. The poor, marginalized, and migratory workers were given housing, food, and other necessities by civil society groups in conjunction with corporations, private businesses, and municipal governments. Migrant workers and employees in the informal sector are projected to be particularly hard impacted by the economic downturn (ILO, 2020). Mass media attention and a flood of reactions from the State were generated by the migration of workers fleeing the cities for their families, food, and safety (Indo Global Services Society, 2020). With migrants from various parts of India trekking back home in the scorching heat, questions were raised as to whether this ordeal might have been avoided if enough precautions had been taken to prevent the spread of the corona virus (Samaddar, 2020). Fear of losing their livelihoods triggered a lengthy “barefoot” trip back to the locations where they came from (Bindra and Sharma, 2020). Over 350 government decrees outlining relief efforts have been issued by the federal and provincial governments since the lockdown was declared. Shelters and hot meals at feeding centres have been announced by many state governments to help migrant workers. But they were only meant to last for 21 days at a time. Millions of stranded migrants, even those who have been promised help through the cess collected by Labour Welfare Boards, have nothing to gain from this. Hundreds of thousands of migrant labourers (estimated at 2 million) have returned to their homelands after three months of hardship. Several states (Punjab, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Gujarat in particular) have been appealing for their return with promises of increased pay and better facilities as lockdown is progressively lifted. So it is critical for governments where migrant workers are “sourced” to urgently implement suitable regulatory frameworks to ensure that these men and women have adequate and safe living and working circumstances. The stranded migrant workers were left at the border for an extended period of time because many states failed to provide assistance to them and because of political differences between the ruling and opposition parties, as well as a lack of coordination among the stakeholders, they were stuck for an extended period of time. More than 200 migrant labourers died in road accidents, dehydration and exhaustion. To help those in need, the Supreme Court of the United States issued an order after receiving a Public Interest Litigation (PIL). Additionally, at the Supreme Court, migrant workers’ rights groups and labour unions argued that the state should use the \$45,000-a-year in unspent cess funds for transportation, food, housing, and other necessities for migrant workers in distress. According to a research, 65 million migrants have returned to their home states, with Uttar Pradesh and Bihar seeing the most returnees, followed by Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Jharkhand. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), this pandemic might leave 400 million employees in poverty. It’s difficult to provide help to migrants since there is no central

register of migrant workers, even though the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979, was passed. Now, in order to prevent such incidents in the future, State Governments must be aware of the situation and build a dynamic system for registering migrants in their state (every movement, background, and education and employment details being captured and updated every six months. While relief initiatives such as the Ministry of Rural Development's Gareeb Kalyan Yojana, a proposal to spend Rs. 50000 crores in 116 districts in six states receiving 25,000 or more immigrant labourers. State governments are also playing a key role in implementing the Honorable Prime Minister's aim to make India a self-reliant country.

The reverse migration of workers to their home states in backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic is a new struggle to deal with both for the migrants and the government. The unexpected surge of returnees to densely populated states, such as Uttar Pradesh, has raised a pertinent question. Uttar Pradesh is the most populous and fourth largest area wise state of the country seeing most diaspora of migrant body of workers. It is combating with two important challenges providing livelihood to the migrants and dealing with a surprising spurt in instances positive to the novel corona virus. The fear of uncertainty and lockdown across states is looming large. Fears of lockdown, livelihood, unpredictability and community spread of virus create ground for mass reverse migration in Uttar Pradesh. The obvious reason for return migration is lack of earnings and inadequate savings to come over the lockdown period. They became victims of starvation and homelessness. So negative were their circumstances that they had been compelled to stroll their ways to their hometown placed several hundred kilometers away. Despite the fact that the migrant workers are strong pillars of urban economy, the overlook towards their welfare has been aptly shown during the pandemic.

Migrant workers in Uttar Pradesh are receiving Rs. 1000 as immediate assistance along with 30 kg of food as part of the government's stimulus package for migrant employees. The MGNREGA also aims to employ 50 lakh people each day, resulting in more than 9.56 crore man-days of labour and Rs.1, 850 crore in wage payments in the previous two months. Another step performed by the Department for Rural Development, Uttar Pradesh is to build an inventory of migrants' skills, conduct a gap analysis and aggregate demand and supply in order to provide job prospects for the people who have relocated there. According to their eligibility, returning migrants may be eligible for a wide range of benefits that we will strive to highlight in our reports.

Migrants should be protected by redefining labour rules to guarantee that they aren't exploited, since it's likely that they'll sacrifice food and shelter in order to make ends meet, and employers may try to pay as little as possible because they have so many desperate workers. This may be achieved by

establishing a standard for pay across various industries. “Atma Nirbhar Uttar Pradesh Rojgar Abhiyan” aims to bring together the projects of the Indian government and the state government, as well as other organizations, into one unique effort. The goal of this Abhiyan is to give employment, develop local entrepreneurship, and form partnerships with industrial groups and other organizations in order to provide job possibilities. Honorable Prime Minister and Chief Minister inaugurated the initiative on June 26, 2020. The state government has chosen 34 jobs from 14 departments, including the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojna, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna, and the Community Sanity Complex, to help migrants in 75 districts of the state in finding work. Migrants who are eligible might be connected to a variety of state development projects.

A Challenge Ahead:

Uttar Pradesh constitutes a major portion of total out migration in the country so as the reverse migration is also maximum in the state. Uttar Pradesh has seen return of approximately 37.9 lakh migrants. The government is confronting with rehabilitation of these migrants in terms of food and other forms of support and livelihoods. The level of monetary and human development in this state has hardly been in a position to accommodate the critical needs and aspirations of their rising population. According to the periodic labour force survey for 2017-18 the unemployment rate in Uttar Pradesh stands at 6.4 percent, greater than the National average of 6.1 percent. These figures imply that the massive population strain and the lack of urbanization is accountable for lack of employment opportunities compelling out migration from the state. Landlessness, seasonal nature of agriculture practices, disguised employment, and low wages are huge factors of out migration. The characteristic of upward rising economy is to adjust and float with the all of sudden shocks and COVID -19 pandemic is such a shock. It propelled the migrants into the vicious causation of poverty due to the fact that they did not have ample buffer sources to retain during lockdown, no social safety measures to guide them in the worst of financial adversity, relief measures for migrants had been very poorly targeted to some centralized area. The advantage of centrally or state sponsored relief amidst COVID -19 must have to decentralize itself onto the lowest level of society. Workers at the grass root tiers are equally essential for the growth engine from the centuries who work enormously for the spurt economic development. Still they are susceptible and have no access to social security. This urgency of reverse migration will lead to significant impact on the health of society, demography and economy of rural India.

Not only this, the reverse migration of labourers will also create excess pressure on rural economy and agriculture sector which clutches the majority

of population in a trap of poverty. The demand supply gap, business barriers and labour immobility cause maximum shatter to the mass of rural livelihood sources. Covid-19 exposed the stringy situation of our health services rendered to the vast of population for Covid-19 patients, we require able healthcare facilities to save lives of millions. Hence it is important to access and verify where we stand in terms of health infrastructure. Despite high population density, mass poverty and terrible health infrastructure, per million instances pronounced in state are much lower than the nation's average. It is witnessed that the rural people still believe in superstitious sorts for recovering from the pandemic. This attitude widens the gap between government measures and them.

Impact of Reverse Migration:

The mass exodus of workers to villages has influence the livelihoods of both migrants and their families in number of ways. Many of them found themselves in a state of perplexity. They are challenged by no work, no food in a do or die situation. Approximately 77.73 percent of total population of Uttar Pradesh lives in villages of rural areas out of which 53.72 percent engage in clubs of metropolitan. The reverse gear of 53.72 percent of population not only finds itself jobless but also vulnerable to gain social security, health care facility, economic access and employment status (i.e. informal workers, day-labourers, self employed). However due to seasonal and structural livelihood, they already experience low earnings and emergence of the virus outbreak has damaged the rural economy.

Barriers of Self Employment:

The poor credit accessibility and high rate of returns on credit hurdle the way of self employment in village of Uttar Pradesh. Still non – institutional financiers, mostly professional money lenders, accounted for about 37.2 percent in Uttar Pradesh. The means to money is not the only problem but lack of managerial expertise and vocational training also affects their capacity to respond to the crisis. Some returned migrant workers are either landless or own only small land holdings, hampering their options to build agricultural livelihood in their area of origin.

Food and Nutritional Security:

No jobs, irregular income, disturbance of supply chain and soaring prices of food create an imbalance in accessing nutritional security. In this context, the rural migrants of Uttar Pradesh find themselves in a position of combat with low earnings and inadequate food for additional family members. A report stated in IFPRI, pandemic cause disruptions to both the supply and demand

side. Many workers died of hunger on their way to get back to their home. The most vulnerable section in this row is women who suffered both physical and mental, although they have low access of availability of nutritional security.

All aspects of the economy, social fabric, and lives of the poor, migrants, and disadvantaged labour have been ravaged by COVID-19. After the COVID -19 pandemic, a huge number of migrants and their families returned to Uttar Pradesh. The state administration had a huge challenge: to alleviate the suffering of its citizens and handle the challenges that arose. Yogi Adityanath, India's Honorable Chief Minister, led the state government in setting up the Uttar Pradesh Migration Support Cell, which received funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, as well as technical help from Project Concerns International and E&Y. The state's assistance for migrant workers has been exceptional in evaluating migrants' talents, creating jobs, and providing benefits under different programmes and schemes. It is difficult to find jobs for migrant workers who have returned to their homes, since a substantial percentage of labourers and migratory employees are unemployed. As a result of an over-reliance on existing rural development and employment programmes as well as the government's desire to create an optimum business and policy environment for migrant workers, the MSME sector is increasingly being targeted by governments as a potential source of large-scale employment opportunities. In light of the growing number of job prospects available to them, it is imperative that they improve their skills. Multiple techniques and multi-pronged tactics are needed to ensure that migrant workers and their families are fully empowered. The execution of social security and social welfare programmes, as well as the enforcement of rules and regulations. For the extraordinary problems that we face to be overcome, we'll need even more extraordinary replies. Big people-centered relief and stimulus packages; public engagement and whole-government and society methods are needed to be successful.

Strategies:

There must be different dimensions and standards that should be embodied. The prior need of the Government is to rehabilitate its people through various strategies fulfilled with support, protection and empowerment. For a limited period of time, the workers need critical economical support and protection, but in the long run there must be suitable employment and empowerment strategies with the introduction of Atma Nirbhar Abhiyan Scheme. For those labour/workers who are neither beneficiaries under National Food security act nor under state ration card, a provision of 5 kg of grains and 1 kg of pulses per month will be provided. Also, the newly launched scheme "one nation one ration card" system granted migrants public distribution from any fair price shop in the country. Given the dual hazard of economic disruption in the state of Uttar Pradesh in the core of industrial sector due to surprising labour shortages, and the threat of covid-19 spreading fast in rural areas, financial aid

mechanism is the only way to subsidize mass reverse migration. The government is making efforts to check reverse migration this time. More strong action must be there to create job security and sustained living mode. Some of the policy measures are suggested below:

- Administration to convince manufacturing unit managers and labour organization to persuade migrant employees.
- Establishment of cooperative labour skill business to promote small business ideas.
- Flourishing growth oriented non-government organizations for smooth conduction of livelihood for targeted class.
- Providing special financial package to convince labour –worker to stay to work place.
- The IMF also suggested that an additional fiscal stimulus would be helpful in supporting economic recovery.
- Earning aids to prone migrant workers in the causal sector /informal sectors, who are terrified of loss of livelihood, should be promoted.
- Financial and non-financial incentives should be given to the vulnerable sections.
- We must have structural reform to overcome the unpredictable and unexpected situation.
- MNGREGA must include the introduction of health card schemes to retain labour/workers to work without compromising them with health issues.
- A rural committee or N.G.O. must be created to acknowledge rural economic zone for self help employment in remote areas, especially in the state.
- A task-force should be organized for under privileged worker woman and children of unorganized sector.
- There must be acuity of achieving financial assistance to the person for whom it is granted. Mediators should be abolished.
- The Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) must be envisaged for the revival of extreme classes. The safety net of free rations is perhaps the best way of immediate reaching out. This will only not provide minimum food but also provide the bandwidth to look for alternate livelihood options.

- A development paradigm which ensures additional and sustainable livelihood should be created in rural areas, especially in the reverse migration state of Uttar Pradesh.

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