

Written Evidence for the UK All Party Parliamentary Group (on Population,
Development and Reproductive Health) on
Population Growth: Impact on the Millennium Development Goals

**Seasonal migration of tribal populations in Gujarat and the impacts of the Migrant
Labour Support Programme**

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About WIRFP, GVT, MLSP and ODI

The Western India Rainfed Farming Project (WIRFP)

The Western India Rainfed Farming Project (WIRFP) is a DFID funded participatory rural development project which aims to improve in a sustainable manner the livelihoods of 800,000 poor tribal people and to evolve approaches that can be replicated in the region. It is being implemented in three states: Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

The Gramin Vikas Trust (GVT)

Since 2003 the management and implementation of the project has been done by the Gramin Vikas Trust (GVT) which is an independent legal entity established by Krishak Bharati Cooperative Limited - Department of Fertilizers, Government of India. GVT is also managing the DFID funded Eastern India Rainfed Farming Project.

The Migrant Labour Support Programme (MLSP)

The Migrant Labour Support Programme (MLSP) was established as a component of the Western India Rainfed Farming Programme (WIRFP),¹ in the districts of Ratlam, Jhabua, Dhar (MP); Banswara and Dungarpur (Rajasthan); and Dahod and Panchmahals (Gujarat).

Overseas Development Institute (ODI)

ODI is Britain's leading independent think-tank on international development and humanitarian issues. Its mission is to inspire and inform policy and practice which lead to the reduction of poverty, the alleviation of suffering and the achievement of sustainable livelihoods in developing countries. This is done by locking together high-quality applied research, practical policy advice, and policy-focused dissemination and debate. ODI works with partners in the public and private sectors, in both developing and developed countries.

ODI's *Rural Policy and Governance Group* (RPGG) has prioritised the disaggregated analysis of pro-poor growth and livelihood security, the better engagement of the productive sectors in policy processes, including Poverty Reduction Strategies, and the local, national and international governance and implementation structures to make a reality of environmentally and socially sound policies.

About the authors

Amar Prasad, is the Chief Executive Officer of the GVT and joined the organisation after a successful career in the Indian Forest Services (IFS). He has taken a keen interest in work on migration under the WIRFP and has been a key figure in ensuring the successful launching and function of the Migrant Labour Support Programme.

Priya Deshingkar is a Research Fellow of RPGG at ODI. She directed the Andhra Pradesh studies for the LOP. She has a PhD from the Institute of Development Studies, UK, and was formerly on the staff of the Stockholm Environment Institute. She has worked and published extensively on poverty, migration, environment and livelihoods.

Introduction

Nearly two thirds of India is semi-arid and there are large tracts where rainfed agriculture is no longer able to sustain growing populations. Seasonal migration has emerged as an important livelihood strategy for at least 20 million people in India living in areas where there is a lack of local opportunities to diversify out of agriculture. When the WIRFP started in the early 1990s, the project team described its clients as ‘farmers who migrate; it now views them more as ‘migrants who farm’. Migration is now at least as important as farming in the livelihood strategies of the poor (Jones and De Souza 2004).

Despite substantial investments by the Government of India and the WIRFP in watershed and rural development, over 65% of households (mainly Bhil tribals) in the project area were migrating seasonally. For an estimated 40% of the households, money earned from migration is more important to their overall livelihoods than farming. For nearly all of them migration is the main source of *cash* income.

The migration season is usually between October-November and the beginning of the monsoon rains in June-July. Migrants are typically away for periods of one to six months. Migration is mainly rural-urban to cities such as Vadodara, Surat and Ahmedabad in the State of Gujarat; Indore in Madhya Pradesh and Kota in Rajasthan. There is also rural-rural migration to high productivity agricultural districts within and beyond the project area.

Most of the farmers in this region practice rain fed agriculture, much of it on marginal and degraded land. There is little scope for irrigation. Infrastructure and service provision is poor and alternative livelihood opportunities extremely limited. Most of these areas have only limited roads and are weakly integrated with markets. During the dry season (November to June), when there is little or no work available in agriculture, large numbers of people are forced to migrate. Most migrants are single men or couples, often with young children. In drought years, entire households migrate.

Bhil tribal migrants are the main source of labour in trench digging (e.g., for telecommunications cables), road making and construction industries. Migrants often travel with their families (typically husband, wife and young children) and leave elders and older children behind. They suffer harassment during the journey and also at the destination especially in urban locations. Sexual harassment of Bhil women is common.

Migration in two tribal villages of Gujarat

As an example, data from two villages in Gujarat, Jadha and Kamboj are presented in the table below to show migration patterns. Roughly 70% of the households have at least one person migrating. On average half the household members and nearly 80% of working persons were migrating.

Nearly 37% of the migrants were women. An overwhelming majority of the migrants were unskilled workers. Skilled workers accounted for 5% or less of the migrants. A majority of migrants were short duration migrants who were away for 5-7 months. The proportion of short duration migration was higher in Kamboj. The average number of days without work was roughly 15%. The main destination was the commercial capital of Ahmedabad but a large proportion of migrants from Jadha also went to Mehsana district headquarters and other major cities of Vadodara and Surat also within the State. In the case of Kamboj, Ahmedabad was the major destination but Vadodara was more important than Mehsana because of distances.

Details of migration in two tribal villages of Gujarat

Sr. No.	Particulars	Jadha			Kamboi			Average		
		Total	2002-2003	2003-2004	Total	2002-2003	2003-2004	Average	2002-2003	2003-2004
1	No of Households	392			349			741		
2	% of households migrating		71%	71%		68%	68%	70%	70%	69%
3	% of household members migrating	52%			50%			51%		
4	% of working members migrating	78%			81%			80%		
5	% of female migrants							37%		
6	% of skilled labourers		2%	5%		3%	3%	3%	3%	4%
	% of unskilled labourers		98%	95%		97%	97%	97%	98%	96%
7	% of households migrating for more than 10 months		17%	16%		1%	1%	9%	9%	8%
8	% of households migrating for 8-10 months		22%	16%		17%	10%	16%	20%	13%
9	% of households migrating for 5-7 months		61%	68%		82%	89%	75%	71%	79%
10	% of days without work		15%	19%		12%	14%	15%	14%	17%
11	Destinations	Ahmedabad	33%	30%	Ahmedabad	46%	41%	Ahmedabad	40%	36%
		Vadodara	8%	9%	Vadodara	21%	29%	Vadodara	15%	19%
		Mahesana	18%	20%	Mahesana	2%	0	Mahesana	10%	10%
		Surat	5%	5%	Surat	7%	5%	Surat	6%	5%
							0		Others	30%

Migration is an expensive and risky process and this occurs mainly due to a combination of migrants being unaware of their rights; poor education and skills; a negative policy environment that aims to keep rural people in rural areas and actively discourages migration; monopsonistic behaviour among employers, contractors and labour market intermediaries whereby they play the labour market to their own advantage and discrimination based on caste and gender.

While away, migrants face many problems, including uncertainty in finding work and getting paid by contractors; insecurity, exploitation and harassment while traveling and in urban areas as well as difficulty in communicating with home areas and in remitting funds to their families. But probably the most serious problem encountered by migrants is a lack of access to basic services such as the public food distribution system which provides subsidized food; health and education. Children who accompany their parents for several months at a time are often not sent to school in the destination either because the schools there cannot accept them or because there is a language problem. Not having enough money to pay for school fees may also be a problem. This perpetuates the inter generational transmission of poverty: uneducated parents who have to depend on labouring cannot offer their children a better future. Given the enormous magnitude of migration, such deprivation faced by migrants seriously compromise the prospects of such regions and populations meeting the millennium development goals.

The Migrant Labour Support Programme

The objective of the MLSP is to support poor tribal migrants at both source and destination areas, through migrant support centres or Palayan Seva Kendras (PSK)² established by the programme. PSKs provide a variety of services including informal identity cards which help against official harassment, job information, telephone messaging services, awareness creation on rights and government welfare programmes, communication with families left behind and remittance services. The main objective of MLSP is to establish up a replicable and sustainable model for a migrant support programme for seasonal migrants in Western India.

The MLSP has been operational since 2002 and an impact study was conducted by GVT with support from external consultants in mid 2005.

The main objective of the study was to assess the impact of the MLSP on poor tribal communities and make recommendations for greater effectiveness of the programme. The study assessed the impact of the programme in terms of reduced costs of migration; increased economic and social returns to migration; increased awareness on migrants' rights by *mukkadams* (labour intermediaries who recruit labourers at the village on behalf of the contractor), contractors (these are commissioned by government or the private companies and individuals to undertake a specific job e.g. constructing a road or building), government officials and urban residents; providing assistance to migrants to access basic services; creating a supportive enabling environment; and the extent to which the programme can function as financially and socially independent.

Main impacts identified:

- MLSP has successfully increased the returns from migration. There are clear indications that migrants benefit from increased social and economic returns. Impacts on reducing the cost of migration are largely social and flow mainly from the benefits of services provided within the PSKs - such as information on work availability, negotiation of wages, resolution of unpaid wages and providing identity cards.
- Almost 65% of the migrants covered by the programme felt that access to the telephone messaging service provided by the PSKs has helped ease anxiety about family members left behind. Nearly 11% said that they had been able to obtain useful on employment at the PSKs which reduced idle waiting time at the destination and saved the cost of a trip back to the village to find employment. 28% of sampled HHs who had an Identity (ID) card mentioned respite from police harassment including the payment of a bribe to them; 49% of HHs which report having an ID card said that they provided a sense of security in the event of emergencies or natural disasters that their identity could be secured and their families would be contacted; 33% of the households covered by the project took out life insurance policies with the help of the MLSP.
- As a direct result of the work of MLSP in the project area, there has been an improvement in awareness among migrants about job opportunities and legal rights; access to basic services, MLSP has also helped to increase the returns from migration by training migrants and has helped them to send money home. There has also been an improvement in the recovery of unpaid wages :70% of unpaid wage cases have been resolved and 53% of the total value of unpaid wages amounting to Rs 82,200 have been recovered. The MLSP has also helped labourers to negotiate better wage rates.
- District Governments are beginning to recognize that migrants have specific needs that have to be addressed, and are willing to collaborate with GVT, who is seen as a credible partner. District Collectors in Jhabua, Ratlam and Banswara have supported a rapid expansion of some parts of the MLSP (e.g., the District Collector in Jhabua has issued over 30,000 ID Cards to seasonal migrants, through Panchayats³ in the last year.
- Good links with the Labour Commissioner in Vadodara have resulted in careful attention being paid to the issue of partial or non-payment of wages at construction sites.

Future work will concentrate on helping migrants to access government services, lobbying and advocacy by linking up with organisations in destination areas and scaling up the programme to cover more villages and towns.

It is hoped that the increased awareness created through the MLSP about migration patterns, their working conditions, the difficulties that they face and the role that civil society organisations can play in supporting them will work towards achieving the Millenium Development Goals for a large section of the population in India.

³ Elected village level governing body

References

Jones, S and K. De Souza (2004) Seasonal migration and poverty reduction in India: The Western India Migrant Labour Support Programme, DFID India.