



The impact of Corona Virus (COVID-19) on displaced People in India

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ABSTRACT: Urbanization is strongly linked with economic growth. Urban areas provide opportunities for growing economy and wealth, and also most nations have seen both “sustained economic development and considerable urbanisation”. COVID-19 has placed metropolitan regions on the “frontlines of the pandemic” and the resulting livelihood crises. The corona virus disease pandemic has the potential to have a disastrous impact on global economies, including widespread unemployment and decreasing salaries. Brief looks at how forcibly displaced people are exposed to health risks and the pandemic’s socioeconomic repercussions, particularly in unstable settings. It also emphasizes critical protection precautions that should be included in efforts to improve health systems and societal resilience. Because of COVID-19, when most nations are experiencing the dual health crises as well as the accompanying economic slump, India has another threat: the huge displaced workers problem. A severe and protracted economic downturn on the economic front is unavoidable.

Keywords: India, COVID-19, Displacement, Displaced persons, urbanization.

I. INTRODUCTION

In late January 2020, India reported its first corona virus case. As per the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the number of reported cases has risen fast since then, reaching 3.17 million as of August 25th, with 58,390 deaths. On “March 24, 2020”, the GoI ordered a nationwide lockdown to control the spread of COVID-19 [4]. For 21 days, the lives of 1.3 billion people came to a halt. Companies, industries, institutions, as well as public transportation were all shut down, and nearly everybody was advised to remain at home. The blockade was one of the most severe in the world, and it was prolonged three times till May 31.

While the lockdown initially extended to everyone, a more targeted approach was used subsequently to allow some normal activities to resume. During the majority of the lockdown, most urban centres, particularly large cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, as well as Kolkata, became designated as red zones. Employment suffered a significant and direct impact as a result of this. Thousands of workers in metropolitan regions saw their jobs disappear overnight, leaving many people who had relocated to these areas without even an income source [2].

Covid-19 increased already present inequality in urban regions of India, with the poorest is bearing the brunt of the consequences. Workers in the lower half of “pre-Covid labour income” lost more money than those in the upper half. Informal labourers, particularly young informal workers from lower socioeconomic groups, were among those who lost the most jobs. As a consequence, those in the top quartile of “pre-Covid income” increased their share of overall income from 64 percent to 84 percent in just 3 months. Policy only made a minor difference in reversing the sharp growth in “labour income inequality”, lowering the proportion of the top quartile to 80%, or 16% greater than it was before.

The Indian labour market was already confronted with major problems due to rising urbanisation and also more quickly expanding youthful labour. The pandemic has worsened the issues that are expected to intensify as urban demography changes in the coming decades. The younger workers in cities were already far less likely to get a job, more likely to be informally employed and less valued [7]. The “lockdown generation” has experienced decreased employment rates as well as a legacy of persistent inequality as a result of the pandemic.

A. Displacement and Displaced persons Crisis

Displacement seems to be a phenomenon globally. According to the 2018 “Global Displacement Indicators”, 258 millions of displaced people worldwide make up 3.4 percent of the global population of 2017, 150.3 million of

which have been displaced but also 4.8 million are overseas students. The “Global International Displacement Committee” estimated that the overall number of displacements amounted to 32 million in 2005, up to 232 million in 2013 [9].

There has been a wide range of research on displacement as well as development. The “journal Space and Culture of India”, a newcomer to the academic scene, already has issued a series of studies on India's internally displaced people, outlining the various socioeconomic reasons but also patterns of displacement, the hurdles of daily life for their left-behind as well as followed families and children, as well as the restrictions at the destinations. The push factors of the origin states as well as the pull factors of the destination states regulate “interstate economic displacement”, according to a careful analysis of all these interstate/intrastate studies. There seems to be a growing body of knowledge on COVID-19, the large-scale evacuation of displaced people, as well as the emergency that erupted after India’s government announced a state-wide lockdown on March 24, 2020 [4]. These investigations show that the fear of COVID-19 is outweighed by the anxiety of fighting starvation, which has resulted in a lack of work and earnings.

B. The impact of Coronavirus on displaced people in India

The rapid outbreak of pandemic COVID-19 has exposed many flaws in the modern world, from completely paralysing the tourism industry to damaging the global market's supply chain as well as pushing us to reassess and reprioritise our security issues. Governments around the world have faced unprecedented economic challenges as a result of the pandemic, with some industries becoming increasingly vulnerable. The hardship of displaced workers in India during the lockdown exposed flaws not only in the economy but also in society. The slowing economic growth rate has an obvious impact on all aspects of their economy. The informal sector, on the other hand, was the first to be affected hard by the virus's tight lockdown as well as quarantine procedures.

India is already a developing country that relies heavily on displaced people for infrastructure and commercial jobs. The outbreak has exacerbated the plight of India's displaced population, as well as posed serious difficulties to poverty-eradication efforts but also farmer income growth. In India, a countrywide lockdown to prevent the spread of COVID-19 drove the displaced workers back to the regions, leaving them destitute, jobless, homeless, as well as hungry. Thousands of displaced workers wandering with their children on national highways across India revealed our society's flaws. In India, non-agricultural households are fully reliant on wages, most of which are paid on a daily basis.

The epidemic has highlighted the inadequacies of the Indian welfare programs, especially in metropolitan areas, that are frequently omitted from several rural development projects for poverty alleviation and also where workers are in the gaps of official results proposed. The “COVID-19 recovery package” from the Indian government raised the budgetary allocation for various government programmes that help informal labourers [6]. However, exclusion and failure to provide and the amount and character of the donations precluded broad alleviation and recuperation.

Inadequate employment safeguards and the pandemic's significant economic collapse have reignited the discussion regarding a job guarantee in India's cities. To mitigate the risk from turning into long-term unemployment, various Indian governments are creating urban job programmes, especially for young people. It is a start in the right direction since even more recent information shows that lockout relaxation has not completely reversed the trends of increasing unemployment as well as decreased incomes.

The epidemic has already cost these employees significant earnings losses as well as an inconsistent recovery will put them at risk of poverty in the future. Thus, immediate action is required to safeguard informal workers from a lasting worsening of their employment chances in the middle of the greatest livelihood crisis [10].

C. Covid-19 and Economy

As per the “Centre for Indian Economic Monitoring”, an approximated 122 million people were jobless in the first stage of their shutdown in India, of which 75 percent were everyday wage workers and small merchants. The latest CIME unemployment estimate is 8.2 percent as of 20 August 2020 (Urban: 9.5 percent, Rural: 7.6 percent).

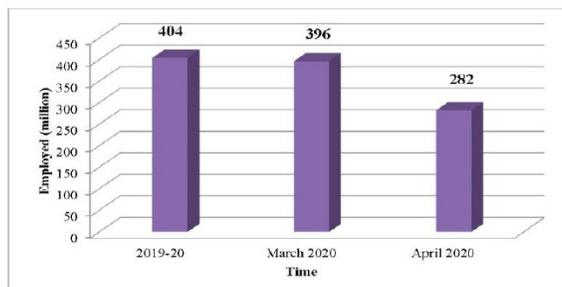


Fig. 1. Decline in Employment during the Lockdown.

This was predicted that perhaps the nation would suffer a loss of \$26 billion as well as a substantial decline in its GDP by the first quarter of June 2020. “World Economic Outlook Update of the International Monetary Fund”, June 2020, projected that the economic real GDP growth rate was shrinking to -4.5 percent that in 2021 is anticipated to increase to 6 percentage points [8]. As illustrated in the graph below, the economy is contracting during the present phase of the lockdown, indicating degrowth and job losses.

Earlier, India's finance minister revealed a pro-poor expenditure plan of INR 1700 billion (US\$24 billion) including cash transfers as well as food security. Following this declaration the government provided INR 110,92 billion in support of displaced persons with food and shelter to all states and Union Territories. Thereafter, a further investment from the PM CARES as well as the Ministry of Finance for displaced labour has been made of INR 10 billion as well as INR 35 billion (US\$ 490 million), accordingly, on 13 and 14 May 2020. Furthermore, it is still to be verified that these pro-displacement monies reached the target population [3]. Some of the main actions announced by the Indian government (Press Information Bureau 2020) to alleviate the condition of displaced people are as follows:

- Food grain distribution to displaced people that are not covered by the PDS system. This is projected to assist 80 million workers who have been displaced.
- The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana offers low-cost rental accommodation.
- Interest subsidy for Shishu MUDRA loans for a period of 12 months-relief of INR 150 billion.
- Allocation of INR 500 billion to help street sellers.
- “One Nation, One Ration Card” to allow PDS access across the country.
- The government has allocated INR 1100 billion to states to supplement their “State Disaster Response Fund” for the purpose of constructing shelter dwellings for displaced families.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The extant research shows that the health of displaced workers was harmed during the pandemic, and that many lives have been lost as a result. This study will examine how the relocated workers' health and lives were harmed as a result of non-compliance with numerous laws and precedents.

(Bajpai & Wadhwa, 2020) suggested that COVID-19 had a disproportionately negative impact on the displaced workers [1]. They had lost their means of subsistence, and the majority of them believed it would be better to return home, to their homeland. They said that it was preferable to die of the virus at home rather than on the road to famine. Due to a lack of transportation and food, as well as the government's and courts' initial indifference, people's health deteriorated and they died. The right to livelihood and the right to travel have received a lot of attention, but the most crucial fundamental right is the right to life. Life does not imply a purely animal existence, but rather the enjoyment of all of life's abilities. The right to worker's health is emphasized in the Constitution's fundamental rights and directive principles. The Inter-State Displaced Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act of 1979 outlines the Contractor's, Employer's, as well as Government's responsibilities, as well as the demand for special compensation for displaced workers. Despite the fact that there is a strong legislative framework in place, many data reveal that health is one of the most devalued rights, especially when it comes to displaced workers, who are frequently abused caused by poverty as well as ignorance. The study focused on the displaced worker's fundamental right to health. It examines the constitutional and legislative frameworks, examines precedents, as well as offers recommendations.

Rajan and Aditya, (2020) investigates the effects of the COVID-19 migratory epidemic. The rapid spread of the epidemic has taken nations off guard across the globe, leading to massive lock-outs that have hampered travel, trade and social connections. In India the epidemic caused a major 'migration issue,' as displaced employees in many big towns wanted to return to their hometowns. In many places, frantic efforts by residents to get home by all conceivable means have made the lockdown ineffective, resulting to police clashes, policies release at last moment as well as ultimately transportation measures. The essay seeks to emphasise the vulnerability in terms of flexibility, gender but also psychological health of the displaced people of India. It moreover examines the public policy deficiencies in the treatment of displaced persons and offers future solutions [10].

Ranjan, (2020) analyzed the COVID-19 problem has presented governments around the world with unprecedented economic challenges, with particular industries becoming increasingly vulnerable to the epidemic. The predicament of displaced workers in India during the shutdown revealed flaws not only in the economy, but also in society. The pandemic has exacerbated the plight of displaced people in both India and China, posing serious hurdles to poverty-eradication efforts and farmer income growth. This study contrasts the fate of displaced workers in India and China during the current epidemic to position the causes of their misery in the broader context of land reform as well as the capabilities of both countries to incorporate them into the rural economy [11].

Bhattacharyya and Sarma, (2020) examined the predicament of India's interstate/intrastate labour displaced people, which emerged just days after the Indian government announced the lockdown on March 24, 2020. The study will

analyse and evaluate the D-series Census of India data using secondary literature as well as GIS techniques to investigate the plight of internal labour displaced (especially semi-skilled and unskilled). This will try to see if COVID-19's impact would open up beneficial opportunities for these displaced people, such as the creation of a "government-mandated database" as well as the revision of labour laws to ensure social security for workers in the informal economy [5].

Khanna, (2020) discussed some of the major concerns about the impact of epidemics such as COVID-19 on the displaced people. These consequences are particularly concerning for low-income households, who are less well equipped to cope with wage losses during a recession, lack alternative sources of income, and do not have access to social security. Most of these people are paid just enough to live on and have no alternative way of ensuring their financial security if they lose their jobs. Displaced workers make up a significant component of this vulnerable demographic. Due to the lockdown and the resulting threat of recession, millions of displaced workers are expected to be jobless in India. Many displaced employees have returned to their villages, while many more are waiting the lifting of the lockdown. Those who work in unorganized sectors, do not have written contracts, or whose contracts are about to expire are at a higher risk. The lockout and ensuing recession are likely to strike contract workers first in a variety of businesses [8].

III. CHALLENGES

Due to enforced lockdowns, closure of work places and loss of income, it is quite evident that the economic damage caused by COVID-19 is massive. The government revenues have fallen drastically. Many businesses have lost income on a large scale. There are also challenges related to inadequate public health infrastructure, poor working conditions, lack of protective kits and overburdened manpower in healthcare facilities. The challenges are more severe in small cities and rural [1]. Because to COVID-19, when most nations are experiencing the dual health crises as well as the accompanying economic slump, India has another challenging problem: the huge displaced workers problem. It is difficult to tell how long this house relocation might have a long-term effect, although in early May certain aspects were very apparent to us:

- There are virtually no significant work opportunities awaiting the displaced workers when they are back home in their villages.
- The agriculture sector is already saturated with existing workers.
- Most states do not have any major rural area agro-based industries which could potentially employ some of these returning workers.
- While the workers will be back home with their families (which in itself is a big relief), but lack of earnings will push millions of them back into poverty.
- Within weeks, they will all be ready and desperate to go back to their jobs in the cities, but when will those jobs come back is a complete unknown factor at this stage.
- Cities will find returning back to normal very difficult without these workers.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

To create employment opportunities for the displaced workers, in mid-late May, we recommended that the government should consider undertaking the following:

- The central government should design and fund major public works programs and the states should help implement them.
- These should be in rural areas, namely road building, digging up ponds, (for rainwater harvesting) tree planting, engaging workers in the PM's nation-wide affordable housing program, seriously think about easy to set-up agro-based small scale industries, solar paneling where needed; and so on.
- Lots of jobs in the cities, in all likelihood may not come back, hence creating employment opportunities in the villages is key. Agro-based industrialization will have major backward and forward linkages and will be very beneficial to the rural areas.
- India needs to develop an epidemic control strategy to be put in place so as to contain and control the spread of the infection in India, something that is not being done currently.
- Largely, the governments or the public sector is best equipped with resources, both human and financial to deal with a public health crisis of such proportions. Hence, just as South Korea did, all testing should be made free of charge, undertaken on a far higher scale, and followed up with thorough contact tracing.
- In India's public health system, there are approximately 900,000 community health workers called the "Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs)". They are an extremely vital human resource that can be used for effective identification of potential cases and in contact tracing if the ASHAs are adequately paid and trained. This is all the more vital since cases are now seen to be surging in rural India; and

- Experience from numerous countries suggests that premature opening up after a period of lockdown and letting the guard down by not wearing masks, not physically distancing, being a part of large events or being indoors, such as in restaurants or bars etc. are in all likelihood going to spread the infection.

V. CONCLUSION

A preceding strategy dealing with displaced persons, employees in the informal sector, and livelihood possibilities for daily wage earners, displaced workers was completely missing on the Indian side. There was a lack of adequate planning prior to the first proclamation of the statewide lockdown on March 24, 2020, leading in prejudice among rural displaced people. In the lack of any government actions, the overall health and well-being of rural displaced people worsened. These rural displaced people were experiencing social pressures such as poverty, loss of livelihood, stigmatization, and alienation from their compatriots, who abandoned them alone on the roadways to meet their fate, where many of them died. However, government actions were implemented late, and many displaced individuals were forced to die while returning home. The truth is that rural displaced people are a critical component of our economy, without which neither rural nor urban communities would be able to thrive.

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