



"Struggling for a Future: Navigating Educational Challenges Faced by children of Migrant Laborers in the Brick Industries of Demow Block"

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Abstract

The study titled "Struggling for a Future: Navigating Educational Challenges Faced by Children of Migrant Laborers in the Brick Industries of Demow Block" delves into the intricate challenges hindering the educational development of children within the context of migrant laborers employed in the brick industries of Demow Block. The research aims to identify and comprehend the multifaceted obstacles encountered by these children, as well as their parents, in accessing and pursuing quality education. Through an exploration of socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors, the study seeks to propose targeted interventions and policy recommendations to ameliorate the educational disparities experienced by this vulnerable demographic. By shedding light on these challenges and offering viable solutions, the research aspires to contribute valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and organizations committed to fostering inclusive and accessible education for all.

Key words: Migrated Labour, Children, Education, Problem

Introduction

This paper is about the educational problems faced by the children and their parents, who are migrated workers working in the Brick industries of Assam. Seasonal migration is a growing phenomena in India. "It is estimated that the number of internal migrants is four times higher than that of cross-border migrants" (Human Development Report, 2009). Mostly, rural people are migrated to urban or industrial areas. In rural area due to acute poverty and unavailability of work in their locality rural people seasonally migrate to different parts of the country in search of work merely to survive. These migration are of differ types namely international to district level. The type of migration, we considered in this paper is cross-district migration of Assam. The migrated labour who come to work in the



brick industries of Demow are mostly from lower Assam part of the Assam (Dhubri, Barpeta, Goalpara district), which is considered as the most undeveloped area of Assam. In the process of migration labour migrate to different parts of upper Assam along with their children (school going age). Demow block, situated in a developing region of Sivasgar district, and has seen an influx of migrant laborers attracted by employment opportunities in brick industries. These laborers often come from rural areas seeking better economic prospects for their families.

Process of Seasonal Migration

The season of migration starts after sowing but in many cases migration started in the month of September-October. Generally the brick industries start their production from Oct-Nov to March in Assam. The brick kilns work do not operate and close down after approaching of the monsoon. During the off period (from April to July) of *Sardar* (labour contractor/middle man) move different villages and contact prospective seasonal migrant laborers and provide them some advanced money. As brick making work is team work they pay advanced money family wise on per head basis. Once poor people receive advanced money they make a commitment to *Sardar* to migrate for brick kilns work. The entire family (besides old, differently abled dependent person) comprising of husband, wife and children migrate to the brick kilns and work as one team for the whole season of the functioning kiln. *Sardar* takes laborers in general coach of trains or hire bus more than thousands of kilometers. Journey is very pathetic and painful. Many times they get tortured by both police and local rowdy in different location. Two *Sardar* namely *Hasan Ali* and *Prodip Das* explained the process of seasonal migration in the following ways. "The brick kiln owners contact us in the month of August/September. We then visit village to village, door to door of the laborers and negotiate the deal with them. After that we pay advanced money to the laborers and we fix the date for their journey. Generally, we bring brick kilns laborers to Guwahati by bus. Then from Guwahati to Simulguri by Trains (As Demow do not have train station) in general coach. The train remains crowded at the time of supply of laborers. The laborers just come as live luggage because there is no space at all in the *bogies* (General Coach). One cannot even go toilet. We pay money to police so they do not trouble to laborers. Traveling in train for brick laborers, women and girls are not safe."



Reasons of Seasonal Migration

There are different socio-economic factors for which people of Lower Assam area migrate to different district of upper Assam for brick kiln work. Many of the studies indicates that Less land holding, less agricultural production, unemployment, underemployment and indebtedness are considered as major factors of seasonal migration of labourers to brick kiln work. Some of the broad reasons of seasonal migration to the brick kiln sectors discussed below:

Economic Factors:In seasonal migration of labourers to the brick kiln sites, “it is considered the relevance of non-economic factors as the reason of labour migration but many studies indicate that migration is primarily motivated by economic factors” (Kainth, 2010,p.2).

Lack of livelihood option in the Origin area:People migrate seasonally due to the lack of alternative livelihood options after sowing. There are also numerous pull factors for distress seasonal migration, including the high seasonal demand for manual labour in labour intensive sectors like brick kiln works (Deep, 2017).

Failure of MGNREGA:The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) which was launched on 7th September 2005 by the Government of India, is a pivotal legislation in the area of social security after independence. The NREGS scheme latter on has been renamed as ‘Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). Despite some success, it has failed to captivate seasonal distress migration, especially in the lower Assam.

Objective of the Study:

1. The objective of the study, "Struggling for a Future: Navigating Educational Challenges Faced by Children of Migrant Laborers in the Brick Industries of Demow Block," is to comprehensively investigate and understand the specific educational challenges encountered by the children of migrant laborers working in the brick industries within the Demow Block region.



Methodology

The present paper is based on ethnographic field work carried out for two months in the brick kiln sites of Demow area under Sivasagr district of Assam. Three brick industries are closely observed for two month. Qualitative data has been collected through casual conversation, opportunistic interview, informal group discussion and participant observation with brick kiln laborers, children and other stakeholders engaged in brick kiln works.

Finding of the Study:

1. Limited Access to Education:Migrated laborersare facing challenges in finding adequate educational facilities for their children. Though Demow have sufficient number of public and private primary schools, but those schools are situated far from the brick industries resulting limited options for education.
2. Financial Constraints:The nature of work in brick industries involve irregular income and low wages, leading to financial constraints. Migrant families may struggle to afford educational expenses, including school fees, uniforms, and textbooks.
3. Poor Working Conditions:Laborers engaged in brick industries often work in challenging conditions. Long working hours and physical exhaustion leave parents with little time and energy to support their children's education actively.
4. Lack of Awareness:Migrated laborersare unaware of the importance of education or the available resources as most of them are illiterate or having very less years of schooling. Limited information about local schools, government schemes, and educational support systems arehindering their ability to make informed decisions resulting deprivation of their children from the available facilities.
5. Language Barriers:Migrant families face language barriers, as they speak a different dialect or language from the local community. This affect effective communication with teachers and school authorities, making it challenging to stay involved in their children's education. Moreover, children are also not feeling comfortable in schools as they are treated as illegal citizen.
6. Health Concerns:The working conditions in brick industries can pose health risks. The water facilities, health and hygiene facilities are very poor. Moreover, alcohol



addiction, drug addiction of the parents also affect the overall health condition of the children affect the overall well-being of the family, indirectly impacting the children's ability to attend school regularly.

7. Seasonal Nature of Work: Brick industries are operate seasonally, leading to periods of unemployment for migrant laborers. The Labour return to their original place during the off-seasons. This leads to stagnation and in long time leads to dropout.
8. Cultural Adjustment: Cultural differences between the migrant children and the local educational environment, impacting their ability to integrate and feel comfortable in the educational setting.
9. Insecurity and Transience: Insecurity associated with the transient nature of migrant labor, leading to a lack of stability for both parents and children, making it difficult to establish a consistent educational environment.
10. Cultural and Social Isolation: Feelings of cultural and social isolation for migrant parents, impacting their ability to engage with the local educational community and understand the educational system.

Possible Solutions and Conclusion:

Addressing the educational challenges faced by children of migrant laborers in the brick industries of Demow Block requires a multifaceted approach involving collaboration between governmental bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local communities, and educational institutions. Here are potential solutions that can be considered:

1. Establishing Mobile Educational Units: Introduce mobile educational units that can move to the vicinity of the brick industries, providing accessible and flexible learning opportunities for children.
2. Financial Assistance Programs: Implement financial assistance programs to alleviate the economic burden on migrant families, ensuring that they can afford educational expenses, including school fees, uniforms, and textbooks.
3. Awareness Campaigns: Launch awareness campaigns targeting migrant communities to emphasize the importance of education and inform them about available educational resources and support services.



4. Inclusive School Policies: Develop and implement policies that promote inclusivity and accommodate the unique needs of migrant children, such as language support programs and cultural sensitivity training for teachers.
5. Health and Safety Measures: Collaborate with health organizations to implement health and safety measures in the brick industries, ensuring a healthier environment for both children and parents.
6. Bridge Programs: Introduce bridge programs that help migrant children catch up with their peers by providing supplementary education and support to address any gaps in their learning.
7. Community Learning Centers: Establish community learning centers near the brick industries to provide a safe and conducive environment for children to study, with additional support like homework assistance and extracurricular activities.
8. Flexible School Hours: Work with local schools to implement flexible school hours that accommodate the working schedules of migrant parents, enabling them to participate more actively in their children's education.
9. Vocational Training for Parents: Offer vocational training programs for parents to enhance their skills and employability, ultimately improving their financial stability and reducing the need for child labor.
10. Collaboration with NGOs: Collaborate with NGOs that specialize in education and child welfare to implement targeted interventions, provide resources, and advocate for the rights of migrant children.
11. Scholarships and Educational Support: Introduce scholarship programs and educational support initiatives to ensure that talented and motivated migrant children have the opportunity to pursue higher education.
12. Sensitization Workshops: Conduct sensitization workshops for teachers and school staff to raise awareness about the unique challenges faced by migrant children and foster a more inclusive and understanding educational environment.
13. Government Policies and Advocacy: Advocate for and participate in the development of government policies that address the specific educational needs of children in migrant laborer families.



Implementing a combination of these solutions, tailored to the local context of Demow Block, can contribute to overcoming the educational challenges faced by the children of migrant laborers in the brick industries, promoting a more inclusive and supportive educational environment.

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