1. Circular Internal Migration and Development in India

It has been recognized for some time by migration experts that internal short-term population movements ranging from daily commuting to seasonal migration have become widespread all over Asia. India is one such country where internal migration is more important than international migration in terms of the numbers of people involved and possibly even the volume of remittances. Besides, temporary internal migration is more likely to involve the poor, lower caste, and less educated and thus has large implications for poverty reduction and meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Such movements have become a routine part of livelihood strategies for people living in marginal areas such as drought-prone villages and forested areas and there is powerful evidence which shows that temporary migration is growing. India is now criss-crossed all over by thousands of circular migratory routes between villages within the same district, across districts, and across states sometimes at opposite ends of the country.

But policy remains ill-informed and ill-suited to supporting people who move around for work. This is partly to do with faulty data collection but also to do with urban, middle-class attitudes which are biased against illiterate, poor, and lower-caste people, accusing them of overcrowding cities and spreading disease, crime, and filth. Current approaches to poverty reduction have sought to create employment in rural areas and many (such as watershed development programs) aim to reduce migration. A combination of policies that aim to keep people out of cities and keep them in villages has resulted in millions of poor migrants not being entitled to government assistance even though they are contributing significantly to economic growth. While policies that seek to limit population movements will certainly not stop people from migrating, they will obstruct a potentially important means of reducing poverty and developing marginal areas.

The focus of this paper is circular labor migration, wherein poor people from low productivity areas migrate for part of the year, often on a
seasonal basis, to areas with more job opportunities and wages. The central argument is that this kind of population movement is increasing, and while the outcomes for those who move and those left behind are not uniformly positive, on balance, circular migration is preventing people from sliding further into poverty and helping some to escape poverty. Without the opportunity to migrate, millions of people would be dependent on deteriorating employment in agriculture and forests.

The paper begins with an overview of migration trends based on recently emerging quantitative and qualitative data. It then goes on to discuss major areas of debate in the discourse on migration, including conflicting evidence on migration trends and the inadequacy of official statistics in capturing temporary migration, the informal economy, migration and poverty reduction, migration and caste, migration and the development of marginal areas, official neglect, and the difficulties faced by migrants. Finally, the implications for policy on urban and rural development are discussed and a plea is made for urgent support to migrants.

2. Conflicting Evidence on Migration Trends

While there are no accurate figures on the number of temporary migrants in India, the latest figure doing the rounds in policy circles is thirty million, which is ten million up from the informal estimate of a year ago. But given the kind of micro-level evidence that is emerging from various parts of the country, this author argues that even thirty million is an underestimate.

A large number of village studies from different parts of the country conducted in the last five years show a marked increase in temporary migration for work. This includes seasonal migration, circular migration, and other forms of short-term population movements such as commuting. While some of these studies are based on resurveys of villages others have used recall to arrive at this conclusion. The evidence is emerging from marginal areas all over the country. Roughly 66 percent of the arable land area in India is limited to dryland agriculture due to climatic factors, soil erosion, poor water retention capacity, etc.

For example, a study of Bolangir district in Orissa estimates that nearly 60,000 people migrated during the drought of 2001 from that district alone (Wandschneider and Mishra 2003). Bolangir is one of the three infamous KBK (Koraput-Bolangir-Kalahandi) districts in Orissa with low levels of

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1 An informed guess by migration policy researchers on the DFID-funded Western India Rainfed Farming Project (see Jones and de Souza).
agricultural production and persistently high levels of poverty. Studies in the drought-prone areas of West Bengal by Rogaly et al. (2002) observe that over 500,000 tribal, Muslims and lower-caste people migrate seasonally to the rice-growing areas of the state.

Madhya Pradesh shows similarly high levels of outmigration from both drought-prone and forested tribal areas. For example, Deshingkar and Start (2003) found that more than half the households in four out of six study villages in Madhya Pradesh included migrant family members. The proportion was as high as 75 percent in the most remote and hilly village with infertile soils. A study by Mosse et al. (1997) of the first phase of the Western India Rainfed Farming Project (Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan) funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) revealed that 65 percent of households included migrants. A few years later, another study in the same area found in many villages up to three-quarters of the population to be absent between November and June (Virgo et al. 2003). In Andhra Pradesh, a study by the Society for the Promotion of Wasteland Development (SPWD) in the highly drought-prone and poor district of Ananthapur similarly showed an increase in migration between 1980 and 2001 (Rao 2001). Migration among small and medium farmers has increased mainly because of the lucrative Bangalore market, which pays INR100 (Rs.) to INR150 (Rs.) per day, nearly three times more than the local wage.

Karan’s study of labor migration in northern Bihar based on primary survey data collected from 1981 to 1983 and from 1999 to 2000, from six randomly selected villages (two each in Gopalganj, Madhubani, and Purnea districts) showed that increasing rural–urban migration to work in the non-farm sector was the new trend. The traditional destinations of rural Punjab and Haryana are not as popular as they were twenty years ago because fewer jobs were available as agriculture became more mechanized. He found that migration rates had almost doubled from 7.5 percent to 13.4 percent of the total population during the intervening period. There had been an increase in long-term migration, but this concerned mainly the upper and wealthier classes. Though migration duration for the poor also increased, there were still more short-term migrants among them. Roughly 24 percent migrated to work as non-farm labor in 2000 against 3 percent in 1983. The figures

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2 For more details of studies, see Annex 1.
3 The Society for the Promotion of Wasteland Development is an internationally respected NGO working in India on participatory management of natural resources. The study was part of a larger research study on “Household Livelihood and Coping Strategies in Semi-arid India,” by the Natural Resources Institute, UK.
4 Based on focus-group discussions and key informant interviews across eight villages.
for agricultural labor were 15 and 1 percent, respectively. Dayal and Karan (2003) studied 12 villages in Jharkhand, using household surveys and PRA methods. They found that one-third of the households had at least one member migrating. Short-term migration was higher among poorer groups, involving over 80 percent of the landless and 88 percent of illiterates.

Studies conducted by SPWD in Jhadol tehsil of Udaipur, Rajasthan, a typically drought-prone area, found that 50 to 75 percent of the population migrates seasonally to work in agriculture in Gujarat. In Girva, another drought-prone area, 25 percent of the households have commuters who work in sand mining, stone quarrying, and construction work, and another 25 percent migrate over long distances to work as, e.g., truck drivers, while a further 10 to 15 percent work in service sector jobs in the urban informal economy.5 Seasonal migration began in Jhadol fifteen to twenty years ago. First, young boys and girls migrated in groups to the fertile Malwa region to harvest chilies, garlic and wheat for two to three weeks at a time. But this kind of migration is no longer seen. Later, young men started traveling to construction sites for four to six months in a year. Now more than half of the households have at least one person (male) who is employed as wage labor for eight to ten months in a year in nearby Pratapgarh, Udaipur (140 kilometres away) or Ahmedabad (250 kilometres away). Women migrate only from female-headed households for agricultural labor during the harvest season at the destination.

Gujarat emerges as one of the top destinations in the country. A study of migration in Gujarat and Rajasthan by Jagori, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) working on women’s rights in Delhi, highlights the magnitude of temporary migration in several sectors. Fish processing attracts large numbers of women from Kerala – there were 5,000 in just one processing area of Veraval. The thousands of “saltpan” workers along the coastal area are also mainly migrants. Ship-breaking yards also employ large numbers of migrant workers from UP, Bihar, and Orissa. Additionally, an estimated 100,000 migrant workers from Orissa work in the powerlooms in Surat city (Jagori 2001).

Punjab has also been a favorite destination for a long time, first for jobs in agriculture and recently for industrial jobs. The latest Human Development Report for the state of Punjab in India identifies migration streams into the state from the poor areas of all northwestern states as well as eastern and central states. Wage rates are double that in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (UP). Agriculture attracted 700,000 (mainly seasonal) migrants per year in the

5 Personal communication with Viren Lobo.
1990s but other sectors attracted a further 1.4 million migrant workers. In the early 1980s, 40 percent of the workers in the unorganized hosiery sector were migrants. Numbers have increased steadily since the 1970s. Migrant workers also form a large proportion of the workers in the twenty-two sugar mills in the state.

These are just a few examples; a number of other studies show very high levels of temporary migration, particularly in the case of underdeveloped regions. The main point is that, in the absence of other opportunities to diversify locally, many households are exploring outside opportunities but are keeping options open in their villages.

In addition to these studies, there are plenty of other examples, many of which continue to be regarded as “anecdotal” and remain undocumented. Project staff and local government officials who are involved in rural livelihood programs frequently mention the growing incidence of seasonal migration. For example, staff of the DFID funded Western Orissa Livelihoods Project estimate that around 300,000 laborers migrate from Bolangir every year. Bolangir is one of the poorest and most drought-prone districts in the state. Similar numbers have been reported by staff on the DFID-funded Andhra Pradesh Rural Livelihoods Project from Mahbubnagar, a poor and dry district in Andhra Pradesh.

In sharp contrast to the narrative that is developing through village studies, macro-level data sets and studies based on these tend to underemphasise the importance of migration and may even draw the conclusion that population mobility is decreasing. Amitabh Kundu, a leading analyst on rural-urban links in India, argues that mobility is decreasing despite inter-regional inequalities (Kundu 2003). According to him, the explanation may lie in the fact that rural migrants are no longer settling in town and city centers but tend to move to the periphery where they may not be counted as migrants. Other analysts such as Munshi and Rosenzweig (2005) believe that India has a relatively low level of population mobility despite increasing inequalities because caste networks smooth consumption in rural areas, preventing the need to move. But the main problem with conventional surveys on which such analyses are based, is that they are unable to capture information related to temporary movement and part-time occupations. We return to this issue later.
3. Why People Move

The decision to move is complex – it is not just a simple rational choice by individuals seeking to maximize incomes but a decision rooted in social relations and influenced by history, culture, and policy regimes as, abundant research has shown. Although the decision to migrate cannot be explained through simplistic push-and-pull analyses it does help to identify some of the new pushes and pulls that are facing people who live in marginal areas of India today.

4. The ‘Push’: Declining Opportunities in Agriculture

Surplus labor arising from the scarcity of cultivated land, inequitable land distribution, low agricultural productivity, high population density, and the concentration of the rural economy almost exclusively on agriculture have led to a continuous increase in outmigration. Having little access to land in a predominantly agrarian society leaves the landless and marginal farmers with few alternatives to migration. In India 80 percent of the holdings are now small and marginal and per capita net sown area is less than 0.2 ha.

4.1 Drought

Drought is the classic push affecting a growing number of people which exacerbates the problems described above. Nearly two-thirds of the arable land in India is rain fed and low potential, and this is where the effects of drought are most severe. Natural drought is exacerbated by manmade drought: groundwater exploitation in western and southern India has reached unsustainable limits (see several reports by International Water Management Institute).

A majority of the villages in the dry areas stretching across eastern Maharashtra, eastern Karnataka, western Andhra Pradesh, and southern Madhya Pradesh have very high rates of migration. A typical case is the drought-prone Mahbubnagar district in Andhra Pradesh, which has had high migration rates for several decades. It is now well known for the legendary *Palamur* laborers who work in construction all over India. The neighboring district of Ananthapur is also highly drought-prone and is one of the poorest districts in India. There too seasonal migration has become routine (Rao 2001). The study by Mosse et al. (1997) of the first phase of the DFID funded Western India Rainfed Farming Project (Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan) revealed that 65 percent of households included migrants. Another later study in the same area found that in many
villages up to 75 percent of the population of is absent between November and June (Virgo et al. 2003). The dry areas of Bihar, Orissa, Gujarat and West Bengal are also known for high migration rates. Bolangir, a very poor and drought-prone district in Orissa, is a striking example. An estimated 60,000 people migrated out during the 2001 drought (Wandshcneider and Mishra 2003) alone and, as mentioned before, current informal estimates are in the region of 300,000. The situation in the arid Panchmahals district of Gujarat (Shylendra and Thomas 1995) is similar, where seasonal migration was so high that 44 percent of the labor force was migrating and the average number of persons migrating from each household was 2.2, including women. The situation in many backward and dry areas of India is increasingly resembling this because of the low levels of diversification and deteriorating access to common property resources.

4.2 Poor Mountain and Forest Economies

Out-migration has also been historically high from poor mountainous areas which suffer similar problems of low agricultural productivity, poor access to credit, or other prerequisites for diversification and high population densities. A recent increase in migration has been reported from Uttaranchal by Mamgain (2003) as the fragile mountain ecosystem cannot support increasing populations. The poor mountainous districts of Nepal also have high rates of outmigration (Bal Kumar 2003). More or less the same factors create a push from many forested areas where population pressure has increased and livelihoods based on common property resources (CPRs) have become unsustainable. A study on linkages between the degradation of CPRs and out-migration in arid and semi arid regions by Chopra and Gulati (2001) found a significant positive relationship between land degradation and out-migration. The very high rates seen from forested tribal areas of Madhya Pradesh are an example of this.

4.3 Other Push Factors

The most recent push factor appears to be a fall in agricultural commodity prices brought about by macroeconomic reforms linked with liberalization and globalization policies. Fresh evidence of this has emerged across India. For example, recent research by Ghosh and Harriss-White (2002) in Birbhum and Bardhaman districts of West Bengal suggests that paddy

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6 Land degradation was measured through increases in the proportion of sheep and goats in total livestock. Out-migration was measured through increased sex ratio in favor of female). Among other important factors, irrigation was found to have a significant negative impact on out-migration.
producers are facing heavy losses as prices have fallen sharply by over 50 percent since 1999. This situation was created by the reduction of subsidies as well as the de-restriction of interstate transport, which has allowed cheaper paddy to come in from Bihar, as well as from Jharkhand and Orissa where distress sales were occurring. Another example is that of rubber – prices fell to a third of what they used to be five years before, because of cheap imports. Similar stories are being reported about tea, groundnuts, rice, and many other commodities that were previously remunerative. But there are few other academic studies in this area because it has emerged very recently. Press coverage, however, has been extensive.7 More research is urgently needed in this area.

5. The ‘Pull’: New Opportunities in the Urban Informal Sector

5.1 The Informal Economy

Many jobs in urban areas and even at the lower tiers of many large corporations are in the informal economy, which is expanding and larger than the formal economy, accounting for around 60 percent of the GDP and more than 92 percent of the workforce.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, informal sector jobs do offer prospects for accumulation and exiting poverty because even if wages are not higher than rural areas, more work is available and there are unmatched opportunities for switching rapidly between different non-farm jobs where entry barriers are low (e.g., security guards, street vendors, bicycle rickshaw pullers, house maids, porters, attendants, petty traders, etc.).8 However, many informal sector jobs actually become illegal because very few permits are issued and this fuels an enormous system of bribery and corruption known as the “licence permit raj” in India. Clearly there is a need to deregulate the informal sector in ways that support multi-localational livelihood strategies, but as Box 1 shows, this is not an easy proposition and there are few successful examples.

7 Several articles have been published in The Hindu a respected English newspaper in India, particularly by P. Sainath, an internationally recognized journalist writing on drought, poverty and migration who is known for his book Everybody Loves a Good Drought.

8 See Harris 2004.
Box 1: The Bicycle Rickshaw Economy and Challenges for Policy

Bicycle rickshaw pulling is one of the main jobs that poor and illiterate people enter when they go to the city in Bangladesh and India. In Bangladesh bicycle rickshaw driving is the second most economically important occupation for the poor after cropping (pers comm. Bijoy Kumar Barua, Addl. Dir. Gen Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development). In New Delhi, the Indian capital, there were some 73,000 licensed and 300,000 unlicensed rickshaws in 2001. Partially in response to civil-society group pressure, the government of India repealed the Cycle Rickshaw Bye-laws, and thus control over registration and regulation of rickshaws in 2001 in order to make it a more pro-poor environment. The impounding of rickshaws by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and by the Delhi police ended, barring a few “No Rickshaw Zones.” However, this led to an explosion in the number of rickshaws to more than 700,000 in just one year, and the emergence of so-called rickshaw lords – people who own about 10,000 rickshaws each, charging a rent of Rs. 50 to 60 per twelve hours. What the government discovered was that rent seeking by officials was replaced by rent seeking by these rickshaw lords. In case a rickshaw driver was unable to pay the rent, he faced the threat of being beaten up by the owner and having his belongings confiscated. The change in legislation was then reversed because of these problems and also because intelligence reports had suggested that many rickshaw pullers were illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

5.2 Hostile Urban Policies

Linked to the overregulation of the informal sector are urban development policies that are hostile to the interests of the poor. An important example is the Delhi Master Plan, which aims to keep migrants out. Added to it is the floating population which travels to the city every day from the National Capital Region (NCR). An estimated 500,000 migrants enter Delhi every year and they are viewed as a burden on the city: In an effort to ease this pressure, the Delhi government was speeding up plans for the development of townships in the National Capital Regions to divert the flow of population and reduce the congestion in the capital. Another example is the “Mee Mumbaikar” campaign launched by the Shiva Sena

\[9\] http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/thscrip/pgemail.pl?date=2001/10/04/&

\[10\] http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/thscrip/pgemail.pl?date=2000/12/21/\&
in Mumbai, which capitalizes on people’s fears that there has been a disproportionate influx of people from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, although there are no official statistics to prove this. The Sena further alleges that the culture of the people from these states is altering the ethos of Mumbai.\textsuperscript{11}

6. Why People Continue to Circulate

Circular migration has been explained in the development literature as a contract of mutual cooperation and insurance between sending families and the migrants themselves. This occurs due to failures in both urban and rural markets (see Kuhn’s 2000 study on Matlab in Bangladesh). The logic is that urban markets do not offer high-quality employment because the contracts are usually informal and do not carry social security/insurance. Rural areas do not offer access to much needed capital and therefore circular migration enables the household to access urban capital while maintaining rural security by maintaining the option of farming. Thus access to land is a critical element of circulation. According to this theory, the movement of entire families or the spouse to the destination and/or losing access to land in the village signifies the beginning of the end of circulation. But evidence does not always corroborate this – entire families may migrate seasonally year after year and also there are millions of landless circular migrants, and there may be a host of other reasons for choosing to keep a foothold in both locations.

7. How Migration Can Contribute to Poverty Reduction

While many authors maintain that migration is mainly a distress phenomenon – see for example D Narasimha Reddy (1990), Usha Rao (1994), Prasad and Rao (1996) – they rarely examine the counterfactual; i.e., what prospects exist within the village and what would these people have done in the absence of the opportunity to migrate?\textsuperscript{12}

Seasonal migration can bring in crucial cash, which can be used to prevent the household from sliding further into poverty and even facilitate its exit from poverty. Seasonal migration is often linked to debt cycles and the need for money for repaying debts, covering deficits created by losses

\textsuperscript{11} A parochial project LYLA BAVADAM Frontline, Vol:20 Issue:10 http://www.flonnet.com/fl2010/stories/20030523004803200.htm

\textsuperscript{12} Existing Central and State legislation in India includes: the Minimum Wages Act (1948), the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (sic) Act (1979), the Contract Labour System (Regulation & Abolition Act) (1970), the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act (1975) for women under the Equal Remuneration Act (1976), the Construction Workers Act (1996), or the Factories Act (which, e.g., sets a handling limit for women of twenty kilograms).
in agriculture, or meeting expenditures of large magnitude on account of marriages, festivals, ceremonies, etc. The earnings from migration can be substantial. It was believed by many scholars for a long time that remittances form an insubstantial part of household income. A major proponent of this theory was Lipton (1980), who based his argument on the widely quoted Indian village studies conducted by the Institute of Development Studies at Sussex in the 1970s (Connell 1976), which estimated remittances at 2–7 percent of village incomes, and less for poor laborers. But the situation has changed and migrant remittances now account for a substantial proportion of household incomes in several marginal areas (dryland farming and forested areas) across the country. For example, Singh and Karan’s study in Bihar (2001) found that remittances accounted for one-third of the average annual income of landless and marginal households sending migrants.

Dayal and Karan’s study of twelve villages in Jharkhand found that 98 percent of the migrants reported an improvement in their lives because of migration. Remittances accounted for 23 percent of the annual household income in sending households. Migrant households have a better diet and spend on average 15 percent more on food than non-migrating households. Roughly 13 percent of those owning five to twenty acres of land spent their additional income on productive uses. Mukherjee’s study of migrant women from West Bengal to Delhi who go to work as housemaids notes that the additional income has helped them to come out of poverty and acquire some dignity, but the social costs have been high because they are separated from their families (Mukherjee 2004). A recent study of nine villages in Jhadol, Rajasthan (Custer et al. 2005) shows that remittances accounted for 42–48 percent of total household earnings. Khandelwal’s 2002 study of temporary migration from the Ghattu Mandal of Mahbubnagar District, in Andhra Pradesh, found that migrants to the paddy fields of Karnataka save on average Rs. 2000-3000 each season. Another recent study of 955 migrant households from drought-prone areas of Tamil Nadu (Sundari 2005) showed that migration has raised the economic status of about 57 percent of migrant families among the lower income groups, in terms of household income. There was an improvement in asset holdings of 53 percent of migrant families, belonging to the low-income strata.

It has been argued that migration worsens poverty because migrant households are often in debt. But the relationship between debt and migration is not straightforward. While some analysts have concluded that migration increases debt levels because of higher expenditures during transit and at the destination, others have argued that migration improves the creditworthiness of households and they are able to borrow more because of that (Ghate 2005).
In conclusion, migration can bring much-needed extra cash but at a cost, and some of these costs could be minimised through appropriate policy interventions.

8. Migration and Caste

An important but under-researched dimension of migration in India is the relationship between migration and the caste system. Some studies have noted that certain castes and tribes have a higher propensity to migrate. Deshingkar and Start (2003), for example, found that the scheduled tribes had higher migration rates in Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Similar observations have been made by Dayal and Karan (2003) regarding Jharkhand: Whereas 15 percent of scheduled castes and tribes migrated, only 8 percent of upper castes and 3 percent of “other backward castes” migrated. A study by Jagori, an NGO on migration in Rajasthan, found that 95 percent of the migrants congregating at recruiting points (locally known as Chakoris) are dalits coming from Bhilwara, Ajmer, Tonk, Kota areas of Rajasthan (Jagori 2001). The latest Human Development Report for the state of Punjab notes that many migrants coming in to the state from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are dalits and tribals.

This is related to the generally poorer asset base and lower education levels of these social groups. A study of northern Bihar shows that migration rates among scheduled castes (SC) and backward castes have risen more strongly than for other castes (Karan 2003). Migrant job markets are often segmented along caste lines at the destination, and the demand for certain castes to perform certain kinds of work will continue. It has also been suggested that lower castes face less discrimination in modern markets than traditional village societies, but this is a hotly debated point and some would argue that discrimination is no less intense. Where discrimination is less, such as the market for security guards, gardeners, drivers, and street vendors, migration can provide lower castes and tribes prospects for a more dignified existence.

9. The Difficulties Faced by Migrants

Whether or not migration is poverty reducing, it is a tough undertaking. Migrants travel and live in very difficult conditions. Mosse et al. (2002), for instance, note in their study of Madhya Pradesh, India, that migrants work long hours in harsh conditions, injuries are common, and there is inadequate medical assistance or compensation. Water, fuel, sanitation and security are major problems. They quote a study by DISHA, a nongovernmental organization in Gujarat, which found that over half the migrants slept in
the open and the rest had very perfunctory accommodation. They face harassment, abuse, theft, forcible eviction, or the demolition of their dwellings by urban authorities or police. The sexual exploitation of women by masons, contractors, the police, and others is routine but unreported by women for fear of the consequences (loss of employment, violence). Children are even more vulnerable to such abuse.

10. The Need for Migrant Support Programs

While a number of laws exist to protect the rights of migrant workers, especially in India these are widely disregarded by employers and intermediaries because of a lack of political will to implement them and ignorance among illiterate migrants of their rights as workers. There is a need for widespread awareness creation among the general public, policymakers, and migrants themselves.

Although India has one of the most comprehensive systems of pro-poor programs in the developing world, the millions of poor migrant laborers cannot access these for the entire time that they are away due to proof-of-residence requirements. Thus, the Public Distribution System-supplied food grains are inaccessible to them, as are government schools, hospitals, and other pro-poor schemes. There is an urgent need for these to be made more flexible and different states need to reach agreement on how this should be done.

The transaction costs involved in sending remittances are a particular concern for migrants. Rarely do official channels (private or public) exist in the region of origin; money is usually carried back by migrants themselves or sent through trusted friends and relatives. Improved channels for internal remittances, e.g., via post offices, could ideally reduce the cost, delays, and risks of sending money within a country.

11. Policy Recommendations and Knowledge Gaps

11.1 The Future

India is currently going through a transition from an economy that consisted of very large numbers of viable small and marginal farms to one where the structure of agriculture and industry is changing rapidly in response to globalizing forces, environmental limits, and stresses and population pressure. While new industries and informal sector jobs have emerged in urban areas, creating a considerable pull for poor laborers, a stronger push
is also being experienced in many rural areas with land fragmentation, drought, groundwater scarcity, and falling agricultural commodity prices.

While it is clear that increasing agricultural productivity and growth must remain key goals for poverty reduction, it must also be recognized that a sole focus on enhancing productivity growth in agriculture as a source of poverty reduction in rural areas is likely to be insufficient in the context of a global economy. Not only are small farmers exposed to many new risks due to price volatility, but also many marginal areas are unlikely to provide significant opportunities for expansion of agricultural yields. While some marginal areas such as the eastern Indian states may still have the agro-climatic potential to yield high returns in agriculture because of good rainfall, untapped groundwater, and perennial rivers, many other marginal areas do not have this potential. This points to the need to recognize that: a) other sectors such as urban areas and manufacturing may be equally if not more important in some contexts; b) efforts to keep people within difficult and marginal areas may yield poor results. Indeed, there is some evidence that landless laborers are better off than marginal farmers in locations where agriculture has become highly risky and urban labor markets have expanded.

Huge amounts of money are currently invested in improving productivity in marginal areas – for example, in excess of a billion dollars is invested in watershed development projects in India. On the one hand, given that the fiscal, environmental, institutional, infrastructural, and governance constraints in marginal areas have shown little improvement over the years and are unlikely to change dramatically in the next ten to twenty years, the goal of keeping people in rural areas seems elusive. On the other hand, well-supported rural-urban links can reduce regional inequalities through transferring some of the benefits of intensive agriculture, construction, and urbanization to poorer regions.

It is very likely that short-term/circular/seasonal migration will continue to increase in India with increasing populations of young adults, a concentration of economic growth in some locations, and persistent regional disparities due to stagnation in rural areas. Although the demand for skilled labor will probably increase in some sectors, the demand for unskilled labor will continue to increase for informal employment in road and building construction, cable networks, and coastal activities where mechanization continues to be limited despite growth.
While earlier projections expected temporary migration to go down, current trends indicate that a growing number of people are choosing to keep one foot in the village because of social ties, lower costs, other safety net aspects, and a long-term intention to pursue a better life in the village.

Women and children who migrate independently or accompany men need special attention as they are more vulnerable, often carry a heavier work load, and are systematically underpaid.

A combination of political will and bureaucratic commitment is needed to enforce existing regulations that have been designed to protect migrant workers.

On the research side, there is an urgent need for more disaggregated data on occupations that capture part-time and seasonal activities. Census and National Sample Surveys need to be supplemented with additional modules. Meanwhile, valuable information on seasonal migration can be gleaned from the many existing and ongoing village-level research projects on rural livelihoods implemented by regional research centers and universities.

Unlike other countries in East and Southeast Asia where demographic features and development policies may reduce the flow of temporary migrants in the near future, circular migration in India is likely to grow and the government urgently needs to take steps to make it a more remunerative and less painful process for the poor.
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Annex 1
Migration Streams in Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh villages

List of abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AP</td>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
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<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>Backward Caste</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDS</td>
<td>Institute of Development Studies</td>
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<td>NCR</td>
<td>National Capital Region</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Nongovernment Organization</td>
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<td>NTFP</td>
<td>Non-Timber Forest Products</td>
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<td>OBC</td>
<td>Other Backward Caste</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AP village name and characteristics</th>
<th>Caste, skill and asset base of migrants</th>
<th>Type of work and when</th>
<th>Who migrates</th>
<th>Source, amount and purpose of credit/advance</th>
<th>Coping or accumulative and wage rate</th>
<th>Impact on migrant household and source location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VP: Narsapur hamlet. Far from urban centers but good transport links, un-irrigated agriculture, sericulture was important until recently.</td>
<td>Vaddi (Backward Caste) skilled earth workers, small and marginal farmers, good contacts with government officials who award contracts.</td>
<td>Non-farm: digging trenches for cable networks. Migrate during non-rainy season.</td>
<td>Able-bodied men and sometimes their wives. New/young families: all members migrate. In older/larger families, couples take turns so that others can care for livestock, farm, and children.</td>
<td>Contractor pays for food, transport, and shelter until they get paid for the work at the end of the contract.</td>
<td>Accumulative and always has been. Averages Rs. 110/day.</td>
<td>Increase in wealth, much construction work and drilling of tube wells in village, buying more land from neighboring villages. They are educating their children in good schools.</td>
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<td>VP: SC hamlet</td>
<td>Manage to survive during the lean season and drought.</td>
<td>Better paid than local, casual laboring.</td>
<td>More wealth but children's education suffers.</td>
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<td>Contractor pays for food until they get paid for the work at the end of the contract.</td>
<td>Accumulative Average earning is Rs. 50/day and this kind of work is available all year round.</td>
<td>Accumulative now, started as coping migration in the 1970s. Migrants can save up to Rs. 3000/month after meeting expenses and paying off debt. Most families return with a saving of at least Rs. 10,000 in a season.</td>
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<td>Able-bodied men. Women migrate only if household economic situation is very bad.</td>
<td>Single person from household.</td>
<td>None.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work alongside teams of Vaddi migrants but on the “lighter” jobs in plantations and for the Forest Department. Migrate only during drought and lean months.</td>
<td>Non-farm and farm laboring in nearby urban and 1-2 neighboring villages with irrigated farming. Migrate for 15-30 days at a time.</td>
<td>Employer in destination (he comes or they go in advance of the migration season). No middleman or contractor.</td>
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<td>Mala (SC), marginal farmers.</td>
<td>Mixed.</td>
<td>Two-three adults from a household (usually two males and one female), together with children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Source Location</td>
<td>Type of work and when</td>
<td>Who migrates</td>
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<td>MD: remote, unirrigated, Very large number of marginal and submarginal holdings. Much of the land is unproductive.</td>
<td>Construction labor in Hyderabad. This kind of work is more opportunistic and risky so may be left with no work and may have to sell utensils, etc. to pay for tickets etc. back home or to meet expenses at destination.</td>
<td>Young men, women, and breastfeeding children.</td>
<td>Local moneylender.</td>
<td>Coping. Rs. 70/day when they get work but this is not every day. Expenses in the city are high. For those families that have been doing this for several decades and have acquired skills and contacts, the work may be more regular and therefore accumulative.</td>
<td>Survival in the off-season. But can result in savings and investment in children’s education for the longer-term migrants.</td>
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<td>KO, KA: canal irrigated, prosperous. In KO, very large proportion of landless; KA has more small holdings but land is highly productive.</td>
<td>Agricultural labor in other coastal districts. Only for 15 days–month in a year when there is no work locally, but it is available in neighbouring district. The agricultural seasons are slightly different in neighbouring districts.</td>
<td>Able-bodied men and women, no children.</td>
<td>None.</td>
<td>Coping. Rs. 50/day and 0.5 kg of rice.</td>
<td>Without this work they would have to borrow money.</td>
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<td>Mala (SC), poor marginal farmers</td>
<td>Construction labor in Hyderabad. This kind of work is more opportunistic and risky so may be left with no work and may have to sell utensils, etc. to pay for tickets etc. back home or to meet expenses at destination.</td>
<td>Young men, women, and breastfeeding children.</td>
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<td>Mala (SC), Gowda (BC) Some of them may be tenant farmers.</td>
<td>Agricultural labor in other coastal districts. Only for 15 days–month in a year when there is no work locally, but it is available in neighbouring district. The agricultural seasons are slightly different in neighbouring districts.</td>
<td>Able-bodied men and women, no children.</td>
<td>None.</td>
<td>Coping. Rs. 50/day and 0.5 kg of rice.</td>
<td>Without this work they would have to borrow money.</td>
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<td>PT: hilly with limited agricultural development. 15km off main road, restricted access and transport. But relatively close to Jabalpur city and associated high productivity Havelli areas.</td>
<td>Majority of (ST) Baiga and Ghonds migrate, about 50% of (SC) Pankas. Pankas are most advanced agriculturists, particularly in newly emerging irrigated paddy. Baigas have the worst land.</td>
<td>Wheat harvesting in Havelli region west of Jabalpur along Namada plains. Main migration is in March, though some go for paddy harvesting in other regions in November and some are able to secure pulse harvesting in April, although this overlaps with Mahua collection at home.</td>
<td>Families migrate in groups via contractor (mestri), and often to landlords with whom they have a long term relationship. Sometimes groups of related single women may migrate.</td>
<td>Contractor pays food, and sometimes transport.</td>
<td>Contract work means that returns can be higher if whole family works together. Accumulative compared to other works. These routes have been plied for 30 years and more. Wages in grain are approx equivalent Rs. 30/day/person.</td>
<td>Families can save up to Rs. 50/day/ family. If they get two weeks' work, they can save up to Rs. 1000. Secures year round food security. Involves children, so has impact on schooling, though some schools shut in March anyway.</td>
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<td>All castes, including non-poor cultivating households such as Lodhis (OBC).</td>
<td>1–2 month trips to urban centers such as Bhopal and Nagpur.</td>
<td>Mainly young males, looking for good pay and experience of city life.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>High savings are possible but there is the risk of unsuccessful work search and of being cheated. Some have developed good skills and returns from masonry. Returns from urban work are Rs. 40–60/day but costs are high (at least Rs. 20/day plus return transport).</td>
<td>As these are often opportunities for single men, the main impact on the home household is positive, if remittances are sent or savings accumulated for return.</td>
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<td>GG: irrigated agriculture, but polarised land holdings. Commutable to Mandla district town.</td>
<td>Mainly poorer castes such as Pradhans (SC).</td>
<td>23 weeks to nearby Bhamni Banji for paddy harvesting in November.</td>
<td>Whole families for contract work. Often in groups, connected by kin or friendship.</td>
<td>Contractor pays food, and sometimes transport.</td>
<td>Contract work means that returns can be higher if whole family works together. Accumulative compared to other works. Wages, in grain, are approx equivalent to Rs. 30/day/person.</td>
<td>Generates surplus income over and above the regular Kharif income from in-village agricultural labor.</td>
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<td>MB: land very poor despite lake irrigation. Close to small block town, Close to bus route, but far from major town.</td>
<td>Single caste village of (OBC) Dhimar fishermen. Two thirds migrate, mostly those with marginal land holdings.</td>
<td>Paddy harvesting in Bhind district. Some wheat/mustard harvesting in Gwalior district. Trips are short: 1–2 weeks.</td>
<td>Groups of women are the main agricultural migrant workers. Most families have some marginal land so men may remain to manage this land.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Ag. migration is secure and fairly predictable and therefore accumulative. These links are often well-established. Wages, in grain, are approx equivalent to Rs. 30/day/person.</td>
<td>Women can face high risks, though these are mitigated by the established relations they have with landlords, and by traveling in groups.</td>
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<td>MB: land very poor despite lake irrigation. Close to small block town, Close to bus route, but far from major town.</td>
<td>Single caste village of (OBC) Dhimar fishermen.</td>
<td>Non-farm, work in Tikamgargh, Gwalior, Jhansi and Delhi.</td>
<td>Mainly young men, though older men and even women may migrate if times are bad.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Work is more opportunistic, e.g., when a contractor comes or friends tell of an opportunity. It has higher returns compared to agricultural work but is more risky. This could be called accumulative, when it comes off. Those who have established secure links are best off. Returns from urban work are Rs40-60/day but costs are high (at least Rs20/day plus return transport).</td>
<td>Migration by young men brings remittances into the household. If female members migrate, children can suffer and if older members migrate, health can suffer. Urban out-migration is disruptive for the education of children. There are no formal facilities and children end up helping their parents or playing by the roadside.</td>
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<td>SM: good land, but much landlessness. Daily commutable to district town.</td>
<td>The semi-skilled artisan Sahu caste (OBC) have turned to ice cream making from oil pressing.</td>
<td>Migrate en masse to Maharashtra during the tourist season.</td>
<td>Whole Sahu families migrate, though if they own land some members remain. Young children may remain with grand-parents.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Previously out-migration was part of a strategy to cope with shocks. However, now it is accumulative as expanding niche market has been located. At least Rs. 60/day, sometimes more if business good.</td>
<td>Migration has lead to investment in land.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM: good land, but much landlessness. Daily commutable to district town.</td>
<td>The landless Ahirwar (SC).</td>
<td>Casual non-farm wage work in nearby urban locations.</td>
<td>Usually men only, while family remain at home.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Work is sporadic and often the work search is not successful. Therefore coping. Wage rate is Rs. 60/day.</td>
<td>Many workers have suffered accidents, which have left them permanently disabled and unable to work. Little or no compensation is received.</td>
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<td>LJ: good land but no irrigation. Surrounding villages with irrigation are more prosperous. Close to small block town and bus route but far from Ujjain city. Traditional links into Rajasthan.</td>
<td>Traditional cultivating marginal and landed (OBC) Thakurs (70%) are main migrants. The former have problematic agriculture due to divided landholdings, drought and lack of irrigation.</td>
<td>To local villages for agricultural wage work.</td>
<td>Whole family migrates as they have no land or livestock to keep them in the village.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>This is coping migration because work availability is not good, particularly following droughts. Rs. 30/day/ person, though more if whole family contributes labor.</td>
<td>Disruptive to the education of children. Low labor demand, particularly during drought, places migrants in a weak bargaining position where they may be open to exploitation or cheating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR: very high productivity agriculture but highly polarized holdings and much landlessness. Daily commutable to Ujjain city.</td>
<td>Mainly landless (SC) Balai and Chamars (90%).</td>
<td>Chamars work in brick kilns and in construction in Ujjain for 1–2 months.</td>
<td>Men and whole families, depending on childcare facilities available in the source village.</td>
<td>Where good relations have been built up, advances and preferential rates may be offered. Where worker are new, terms are often at coping levels.</td>
<td>Depends on the nature of contract. Rs. 40 for construction but Rs. 60 for brick kiln work.</td>
<td>Where strong relations are built up with employer, reasonable domestic facilities are provided, though work is hard and sometimes dangerous.</td>
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