

Surviving the Pandemic

GROUND REPORTS FROM INDIA'S VILLAGES

DEEPAK K MISHRA

Awadhesh Kumar · Bailochan Behera · Chandi Charan Mehentar ·
Dibya Nag · Jitendra Padhan · Krishna Surjya Das ·
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DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH INSTITUTE
BHUBANESWAR

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Deepak K. Mishra

with

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Ground Reports from India's Villages

A report on the conditions of migrants, cultivators and
labourers in rural India

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Foreword

Three months after the outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic, a directive was issued by the Government of India for a complete lockdown of the country. An unprecedented act, it had far-reaching implications made visible by the tenacity of a group of people, the migrants, defying all rules of the lockdown to reach home. Migration in India has always been a critical process but the catastrophe of COVID 19 created a situation producing a stunned silence in the country but, captured visuals of thousands of men, women and children walking away from a callous system which had not responded to their basic demands of food and shelter.

There are emerging views, comparing the movement to that of the Partition. My family had moved to India after the division of the country and I had seen their struggle to re-establish themselves in a new environment. There was fear and hard work but, there was also the anticipation of a better future, as they saw the founding of democracy and a Constitution. The pandemic in contrast is a human crisis of an enormous magnitude which has created mass despondency. The study by a group of young researchers brought together by a renowned migration expert, provides a clear understanding of the migration movement as situated in the region. Through these writings, it can be perceived that the COVID 19 migrant crisis is a humanitarian catastrophe and powerfully underlines the failure of the system, but also shows the resilience of people on many fronts.

It is important to recognise that the crisis had already begun before the pandemic started. Globalisation and the decline in agriculture had brought in its wake inequality, poverty, exploitation and injustice which had forced people mostly from rural areas to search for work usually in hostile urban spaces. This demographic transition for new livelihoods outside their homes highlighted the weakness of the economy and governance structures. It also forms the backdrop of the migrant movement during the pandemic. To build on this setting and the findings of this foundational study, I foresee that future research would have to interrogate our existing epistemology.

We recognise that the pandemic has essentially affected our core existence and is the catalyst for the crumbling of a global system as we know it. The overarching issue at the forefront however is local and related to inequalities affecting millions of men and women migrants across rural India. We need to ask, if now there is a need to create a fundamental change in our understanding of words such

as 'poverty' and thereby redefine it? Is it a fact that the manifestation of the pandemic is part of a shift that strikes at the very core of our social structure? This would mean asking how much worse could it get for women, Adivasis, Dalits, disabled and other groups on the margins.

Remittances are the most important part of a migrant economy but as the study shows, countless fled, many not even listening to the material promises of some State government's promise of food and employment. In this context then, to understand the situation, and create new policies is the question if we should look beyond the concept of 'basic needs' and enhance it to recognise the elements of the psychological security and stability of the worker? Inquiries are required to be formulated on future research related to the pandemic and its impact on migrants.

The study contributes to our raising of these queries and understanding of the ways in which pandemic and human mobility intersect to place pressure on migration patterns and quality of life of the poorest citizens of this country. The publication is thus a tangible response towards the objective of contributing meaningfully to our understanding of migrant labor during this great upheaval. With a commitment to learning that can create change, but faced with the complexities of researching a crisis that overwhelms us with no solution in sight, it would not have been an easy task to document the field research. The authors have however managed to produce a document that will help us to formulate a new incisive but humane research on migration.

-Prof. Asha Hans

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Preface

The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the normal lives of people across the globe. The impacts of the crisis are still unfolding in a complex and uneven manner. In India, the pandemic and the lockdown created a crisis of survival for a vast majority of workers. Unable to survive the loss of livelihoods and earnings, thousands of migrant workers started moving out of the cities. Many of them had to walk hundreds of kilometres to reach their homes. Many of them had migrated out from their villages in search of work, and the remittances that they send was crucial for their families. Rural India was already under severe economic stress.

This report is a modest attempt to capture the unfolding crisis in a few villages. It only provides a snapshot of a rapidly changing situation. This study has not been financially supported by any institution. It was part of a voluntary effort by some young scholars. I am grateful to all the contributors for their effort to collect the required information under very difficult circumstances. Some of them have written reports about their own villages and some have written about villages they have recently studied. Most of the contributors are current or former scholars associated with the Centre for the Study of Regional Development at Jawaharlal Nehru University. I am particularly grateful to Dr Rukmini Thapa for her support in the preparation of the report.

The Development Research Institute (DRI), Bhubaneswar has been established by Gabeshana Chakra, an independent collective of scholars and social activists. It has been proactive in organising a series of webinars and weekly discussions on the evolving situation in rural Odisha. The discussions, in which grassroots-level activists and researchers presented field reports from various parts of the state, has helped us in preparing this report. I thank the participants of the DRI web-meetings and webinars. I am particularly grateful to Profs Manoranjan Mohanty, Asha Hans, Bidyut Mohanty, Bijay Bohidar and Swarnamayee Tripathy for their encouragement and support.

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Krishna Surjya Das is a final year PhD student in the Jawaharlal Nehru University. His doctoral thesis investigates the educational and skills mismatch, alongside the assessing quality of job and job satisfaction of the workers in the urban labour market. His research interest lies in the areas of labour market including employment and unemployment, employment relationships, job security and unemployment dynamics, wages and social security benefits and work and family balance. He holds a master degree in economics from Dibrugarh University and an M.Phil degree from Jawaharlal Nehru University. His research has been published in *Journal of Social and Economic Development* and *Manpower Journal*.

The Covid-19 Pandemic and Rural India

Migration from Rural India: The Context

Rural India was already in deep crisis. The post-reform period was marked by a process of uneven economic growth. Rural India was changing but in an uneven manner. The gap between rural and urban India was widening. Agriculture was undergoing a significant transition. Following the dismantling of state support to agriculture in the post-reform period, there was a prolonged period of deceleration of growth in agriculture (Walker, 2008). Even when there were signs of recovery in agriculture, it was accompanied by a great deal of uncertainty for many. As more and more small and marginal farmers started cultivating commercial crops, with little or no support from the state, they borrowed heavily from informal sources at high-interest rates. They faced a fluctuating output price market, partly induced by greater global integration following the WTO agreements. Often, farmers had no option but to commit their outputs to traders and their agents at low prices. For a vast section of farmers in India, agriculture became a risky option (Mishra and Nayak, 2020).

The unusually high rates of suicides among farmers were an extreme manifestation of the unfolding agrarian crisis (Nagaraj et al., 2014; Basu, Das and Misra, 2016; Rupakula, 2016). For many rural households, it is a crisis that is not just confined to a

As migrants have started returning to their villages, rural India is facing a severe and unprecedented crisis.

few years of slow growth or stagnation in productivity. It is essentially a crisis of survival (Reddy and Mishra, 2009; Das, 2013). A large section of the farmer households simply could not survive from the incomes from agriculture (Basole and Basu, 2011). For labour households, the shrinking opportunities in agriculture meant a dire need to find alternative livelihoods opportunities.

It was under these circumstances that rural labour started moving out of agriculture (Mishra, 2020a). Decades of flawed policy priority and underinvestment in education and health in the rural areas meant that this out-migrating labour force was largely unskilled or low skilled. For the first time since decades, the absolute number of cultivators in rural India declined in the 2011 census. There were only two options for those who wanted to move out of rural India with low human and social capital. One was to search for employment in the rural non-farm labour market, and the other was to look for employment in the urban informal sector, either through commuting to a nearby town or migration to distant cities.

The Indian economy was growing fast but it was not creating enough jobs. Workers made a shift from agriculture to non-agricultural work but manufacturing played only a marginal role in creating work to absorb workers (Thomas, 2012; Ghose, 2016). The employment that was being created offered very low earnings and no social protection for workers. India's informal economy was already huge, accounting for more than 90 per cent employment and more than 55 per cent of income. Neoliberal globalisation created a favourable condition to push forward the agenda of informalisation of the formal sector - more and more workers in the formal economy began to be absorbed and designated as casual, contractual and temporary workers. Using data from the Annual Survey of Industries on the use of contract workers in registered manufacturing, Chandrasekhar and Ghosh (2014) found that the number and share of contract workers has increased more prominently since the mid-2000s. Instead of ensuring greater formalisation of work, Indian manufacturing was found to be 'sidestepping' labour laws by getting more reliant on the use of casual contract labourers who have few legal rights.

The vast, mobile labour force that started leaving agriculture and rural areas, found employment in the booming construction and real estate sector with low skill requirements,

The post-reform period has been marked by an increased informalisation of employment in India.

but also in the globally connected manufacturing and service sector. Survival-level forms of self-employment of migrants in the informal economy as street vendors, rickshaw-pullers and similar occupations became a ubiquitous feature of urban employment creation. As cities grew with massive investments in urban infrastructure, the dependence on the informal service providers also increased, but migrants were frequently evicted and were ghettoised in shanties, jhuggis and jhopris. A section of this mobile labour force, who played a vital role in building world-class cities, stayed in the worksites, under the over bridges, temporary roadside shelters and makeshift 'camps' at faraway construction sites.

The migrant labour force and their sufferings remained invisible for long. They were invisible from the official data sources. Scholars did point to the possible underestimation of the number of migrants. Activists started questioning the denial of basic rights to the migrant workers, who started crossing the boundaries of states in increasing numbers. Only occasionally did the inhuman treatment meted out to domestic workers and seasonal migrants in brick kilns make national headlines. But, overall, globalising India's dazzling success made the plight of the migrant workers invisible in their own country. They not only faced exploitation at the workplace, but some of them also faced violence and discrimination at the destinations. At times, they were targeted by nativist politics as 'outsiders' at their destinations. In their own places of origin, their political voices got weakened and bypassed because of their absence.

Even when the rising levels of migration was recognised in official documents, it was celebrated as a way towards 'moving out of poverty'. Given the regionally uneven process of development in a vast country like India, such outflow of labour from the relatively less developed regions to the relatively better-off cities and urban regions was expected to reverse the flow of remittances, change attitudes and consumption patterns. It is true that migration has helped economies to reap the benefits of remittances. Migrants often see migration as an opportunity for a better life. At times, non-economic factors such as career and life-style aspirations, freedom from caste and gender-based oppression and rigid social norms, and a sense of personal achievement drive migration decisions. However, a generalisation of such a view tends to neglect the diversities and socio-economic

There was a substantial section of the labour force that circulated across space, without much improvements in wages, or working and living conditions.

complexities within migration flows. A new optimistic view on migration started to project it as a win-win situation for both host and sending areas. This argument perceives that a fair balance exists between benefits from remittances received by origin areas and the benefits of cheap labour (without spending much on housing, education and health of the migrant labour force) accruing to the host cities and towns where migrants work. The agency of the migrants as individuals aspiring to move away from the constraints that defined their lives at origins is also credited as a form of assertive decision making. Migration of workers from poorer and less developed areas to the relatively developed areas is seen as a market-mediated path to poverty reduction that characterises a 'normal' trajectory of growth.

It is true that migration opened up several opportunities for a section of the labour force, particularly for the youth. In the context of uneven regional development, it is the spatial aspect of the labour market that shapes the way the demographic dividend plays out within the country. Emergence of a new migration corridor from eastern India to the Southern states is among the relatively new developments of the past decade. Language barriers are no longer able to restrict inter-state migration flows (Government of India, 2017). At the same time, there was a substantial section of the labour force that circulated across space, without much improvements in wages, or working and living conditions. It is this section of the labour force who tried to survive under precarious conditions. They tried to cut down their living costs and expenses in urban areas by living in shanties, by sharing costs and thus heavily compromising on basic social amenities (Vijay, 2005). The migrants who are recruited through layers and hierarchies of contractors, typically work under a tied contract, where they work-off their loans. Such labour recruitments through informal channels are not just a pervasive feature of some specific sectors like brick kilns (Prakash, 2009; Sengupta and Vijaya, 2015; Mishra, 2016), quarries (Talib, 2010) and construction (Srivastava and Sutradhar, 2016), but even of export-oriented and globally integrated sectors like garments (Ruthven, 2012; Mezzadri and Srivastava, 2015). Increasingly, the elements of unfreedom and bondage are emerging as persistent features of labour migration and work in the informal economy (Breman and Guerin, 2009; Mishra, 2019a, 2019b, 2020b).

Migrant Workers during the Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has taken the country off-guard and starkly exposed the existence and plight of a vast number of migrants who had been surviving in the interstices of a highly segmented urban informal sector. Extensive media coverage has to a good extent undone the invisibilisation of the magnitude of migrant labour force in India. From the point of view of economic migration, the pandemic has struck not just as a health emergency but more so as the unveiling of a chronic rural crisis that is extremely ill-prepared to handle the reverse-exodus of thousands who have returned to the villages. The pandemic was unanticipated. But it revealed the vast inequalities that characterise the Indian economy and society. The nation-wide lockdown imposed on 24 March 2020 within a short notice meant an abrupt loss of livelihoods for a vast majority of informal workers. For the middle classes, the lockdown was a period of being confined to their houses. But for the poor, social distancing was a luxury (Wasdani and Prasad, 2020). The suddenly announced lockdown in India did not give any time for the working poor to prepare for the unanticipated loss of employment and income. Retrospectively speaking, there was no awareness about the number, location or conditions of a large number of migrant workers with the government agencies, while announcing the lockdown. The invisibility of the workers from the official data systems and policy discourses made them further marginalised in policy thinking. Unable to survive the drastic reductions in their earnings, savings and consumption, many migrants started to move to their home states and districts amidst the lockdown. Thousands of workers crowded railway stations, bus stations and occasionally police stations demanding relief and means of transport. Because of the lockdown the transport and communication had completely been closed. Finding no other alternatives, they started walking back to their homes. This created a humanitarian crisis, not seen since the days of partition of India¹. People walked hundreds of kilometres to reach their home. The sufferings, hunger, deaths and illness on the way back will haunt the conscience of the nation for years to come.

¹According to newspaper reports, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) recorded over 2582 cases of human rights violation in the month of April, when the country was under a strict lockdown, many of which were related to the plight of the migrant workers (Sharma, 2020).

Quick surveys by several organisations and groups have documented the plight of the migrant workers in the immediate aftermath of the lockdown. A survey by Jan Sahas, through telephonic interviews of 3196 randomly selected workers from a database, reported that 92.5 per cent of the workers had already suffered a loss of employment by the end of March 2020 (Jan Sahas, 2020). The survey conducted by the Centre for Equity Studies in collaboration with others found that 92.1 per cent of the respondents did not find any work during the lockdown. The study also reported that there was hardly any difference between rural and urban areas so far as jobs are concerned, and that inter-state migrants suffered job-loss to a greater extent in comparison with intra-state migrants. Only 46 per cent of workers expected to get the same job that they were doing earlier (Centre for Equity Studies, Delhi Research Group and Karwan-E-Mohabbat, 2020). Such a catastrophic loss of employment, as expected, led to a drastic fall in income. The Jan Sahas survey reports that as such, 55 per cent of workers are underpaid, in comparison to the minimum wages. In April 2020, a significant 66 per cent of workers had mentioned that they would not be able to manage beyond a week.

Similarly, another report by the Stranded Workers Solidarity Network (SWAN) reported that since the lockdown about 78 per cent has not been paid at all (Stranded Workers Action Network, 2020). Another survey on migrant workers from Odisha reported that about one fourth of the surveyed workers did not have any money left with them at all, slightly over one-fifth reported that they had less than two thousand rupees with them, and about sixteen percent reported that they had between 2000 to 4000 rupees with them. The reported median amount at their disposal was only Rs 1900 (Gram Vikas and Centre for Migration and Inclusive Development, 2020). Loss of earnings also led to a food shortage for the workers and their families. Jan Sahas survey noted that 42.3 per cent of workers mentioned that they did not have the ration for the day. SWAN survey noted that between 50-54 per cent of workers had rations left for less than a day and about 72 per cent of the workers had said that their ration would be exhausted in two days. The Centre for Equity study noted that in June 2020, only 38.9 per cent said that they never went entirely out of food, while 10.7 per cent suffered extreme food insecurity, 20.5 per cent had said that they went out of food for

4-7 days and the rest 29.9 per cent faced food shortages for 1-2 days. Migrant labour households tried to survive by depleting their savings and also by borrowing. But it was not easy to borrow money during the crisis. More than 79 per cent of workers in the Jan Sahas survey believed that they would not be able to pay off their debts in the near future, while the Centre for Equity Studies report notes that 50.7 per cent could not get any loans, and only 40 per cent needed help from friends and relatives (Centre for Equity Studies, Delhi Research Group and Karwan-E-Mohabbat, 2020; Jan Sahas, 2020; Stranded Workers Action Network, 2020).

The Report: Key Findings

This report is a modest effort by a group of young researchers to document the conditions of migrant workers and others during the pandemic in villages they were familiar with. In many cases, the researchers studied their own villages, where they were staying after the educational institutions were closed down. In some cases, they have described the situation in the villages which had been studied in their previous research also. In a few cases, the researchers have shared information collected from neighbouring villages. The lockdown and the social distancing norms compelled us to follow a flexible approach towards data collection.

First, the choice of villages reported here was decided purely on the data collection convenience and familiarity of the researchers. We have reports from seven villages in Odisha— one each from Bargarh, Gajapati, Kalahandi, Balasore and three from Balangir districts. We also have reports from one village each from West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Assam. The findings of the survey cannot be generalised.

Second, the information was collected mostly through informal in-depth interviews in person and over the telephone, whichever possible for the researcher. The interviews were conducted in the local dialects and languages. Some of these interviews, particularly those with the migrant workers who were still in the destinations, were conducted through telephonic conversation as well. Apart from interviewing the migrants who had returned to their village, wherever feasible, we also gathered information from left-behind families with at least one migrant member who was still at the destination. Many of the contributors talked to the stranded workers at the

destinations. Apart from the migrants, we also interviewed farmers, agricultural labourers and service holders in the villages to know about the ways through which Covid 19 has impacted their livelihoods. We made an attempt to triangulate the information collected through these interviews but we were not always successful.

Thirdly, a major limitation of these surveys is that they were conducted in the last weeks of May and early June. Most of the impacts described in the village primarily relates to the lockdown phase. As we finalised the reports, we received updates that Covid positive cases are on the rise in most of the districts covered in the report. Thus, the reports might not have captured the impact of the crisis in the study villages to the full extent as it may be now.

Despite these limitations, we think that this modest effort can contribute as a platform to highlight at least a part of the migrants' and migrant households' struggles during the pandemic. These reports provide snapshots of life in rural India during what is clearly emerging as a major disruption of livelihood. The pandemic has done severe damage to the Indian economy as well as to the global economy. In some accounts, it is expected that the major incidence of these disruptions and decelerations would be in the urban areas. However, from the perspective of the vulnerability of rural households, such catastrophic reductions in employment, earnings, and consumption will have substantial and far-reaching impacts on the welfare of the masses. Needless to add, the contraction of rural demand will also affect the post-covid recovery of the economy as a whole. As discussed earlier, vast sections of the rural households were already facing substantial challenges in improving their livelihoods. Unless effective policies are conceived and implemented promptly to revive the rural economy, it will take several years for the affected households to recover. It will significantly alter and deplete their already meagre asset base. The benefits accrued through years of migrant households' struggle in coping with precarious occupations at destinations, often at high social costs, will be undone if the rural economy is not rescued from this crisis immediately.

The major take away from these fragments of evidence include the significance of labour migration in the rural livelihoods. The pervasiveness of 'pluri-activity' and multi-local livelihoods

Catastrophic reductions in employment, earnings, and consumption will have substantial and far-reaching impact on the welfare of the masses. Contraction of rural demand will also affect the post-covid recovery of the economy.

can be judged from the fact that in almost all villages, we find outmigration of labour to be a major contributor to the household earnings. The migration patterns are indeed diverse. In most villages, it is mostly seasonal migration, while in others semi-permanent migration and commuting are more important. Family migration is reported in some villages, but the major trend is that of relatively young workers leaving for distant cities. Also, states such as Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu have attracted migrants from different parts of the country. Dadan or migration through labour contractors against an advance is undoubtedly present. But migration through the networks of family and friends is increasingly occurring even from areas, such as Balangir and Kalahandi, where dadan has a substantial presence. Another striking result that has come out is the ratio between remittances and income at the destinations. In most cases, and particularly in the case of migrants working in Maharashtra, Delhi and Tamil Nadu, the migrants are sending back nearly 70-80 per cent of their incomes as remittances. This clearly indicates the nature of their 'choice' at the destinations. They do not see their future at the destinations, and hence, they minimise their spending to the minimum and try to send as much as possible to their families. Most of the remittances are reportedly spent on consumption expenditure. The overall picture that emerges is that in the villages studied here the flow of remittances have started to play a major role in household consumption of those households who have a migrant member. In many villages, though not all, migrant households are described as better off than the non-migrant households. Given these linkages, the pandemic and the shutdown have affected the migrant households severely.

In most cases, migrants have not reported any harassment during their journey back to the villages. Migrant's experiences with employers were mixed. Most respondents did not receive any assistance from employers and NGOs for return to the village, but there are only a few complaints of non-payment of wages at work sites. In the case of migrants from Uttar Dinajpur, where non-payment of wages was reported, the labour contractor reportedly took care of the migrant's expenses. Travel back home became easier and cheaper once railway services resumed. However, not all migrants could tide over the lockdown period in the destination cities and towns. Facing no work and money and coupled with the fear of the

pandemic, many migrants had to return much before the 'Shramik' trains were started by the government. These migrants travelled back home under harsh conditions. Some of them have reported that they had to walk down long distances or change means of transport multiple times or paid a hefty amount for travel in hired buses and trucks. Some respondents have expressed satisfaction over the treatment they got at the quarantine centres, other complained about lack of space and crowding.

The other important picture that has come from all the villages is that agricultural operations have been substantially affected. Harvested crops, such as vegetables, could not be sold or were sold at a loss. The closure of weekly markets in the villages and the unavailability of transport to reach 'mandis' during the lockdown severely affected perishable crops. Animal husbandry and NTFP collections have been disrupted. Unavailability of fertilisers and pesticides that affected the sowing of new crops was also reported.

The landless households have suffered badly. Unemployment has increased in the villages and there are indications that the livelihoods of the labour households have been completely paralysed. The overwhelming significance of employment creation in general and MGNREGS, in particular, can hardly be overstressed. In almost all villages, labour households and migrants who have returned to the village are either working at wages half the amount they earned in destination cities or are hoping to be absorbed in such public works programmes. The demand for MGNREGS work has soared in the villages but the availability of employment is far from adequate. In most villages, MGNREGS work has not even resumed. The fallout could be a migration back to the cities if the employment situation does not improve soon.

Unemployment has increased in the villages. Livelihoods of the labour households have been completely paralysed. Consumption expenditures have been depressed. Most households are on the verge of spiralling down in debt burdens.

The questions on the welfare schemes reveal the extent of help that reached the people. Since these results are not based on a survey of households, but on the opinions of a few, the results have to be interpreted carefully. In most villages, it was reported that the cash support, particularly the five hundred rupees transferred through the Jan Dhan accounts have reached people. But in a situation of widely prevailing unemployment, the amount was found to be terribly inadequate. Similarly, the in-kind transfers through PDS have been distributed in most villages covered in the survey, and this has helped people

survive during the difficult period. With severely depressed consumption expenditures, most households are on the verge of spiralling down in debt burdens. Therefore, in addition to transfer assistance (cash and food-grains), the households are in dire need of opportunities for regular employment in the vicinity of the villages.



Kapasira

Bargarh, Odisha

The Village

Kapasira is a small village in Bargarh district which falls under Ambabhona Block/Tehsil and Padmapur sub-division. The total area of the village is around 310 hectares. Situated in the Orissa-Chhattisgarh border, there are two urban centres within a radius of 50 km from the village. The urban centres closest from the village are Bargarh in Odisha, which is the district headquarters located at a distance of around 48 km, and Raigarh in Chhattisgarh which is about 35 km away. The closest bus-stop is 3 km away in Bhukta, a neighbouring village. Buses plying to the urban centres are available between 7 a.m. to 5 pm at regular intervals from this bus stop. The village also has primary and secondary level schools. There is one post office, three Anganwadi Centres, one mobile tower, authorised dealers of the dairy farms (OMFED & Milky Moo), the village Panchayat office and one privately owned Kiosk banking centre.

The total population of this village is around 1800. Approximately 50% of the total population are female. There are around 400 households which are categorised into 3 Wards and 7 '*paras*'. The household settlement in the village reflects

the local caste structure. The '*paras*' are situated in different areas of the village on the basis of caste category of households. For instance, the 'para' with schedule caste and schedule tribe households are located outside the village. Almost all the households are Hindu. Approximately 29%, 21% and 45% of the households belong to SC, ST and OBC communities respectively. The ST households belong to the Khadia, and Turi tribes. The SC households are Ganda, Chamar, Ghasi, Keuta, Dhuba and Sanhara in sub-caste. Among these sub-castes, Ganda, Chamar and Ghasi belong to the ex-untouchable castes. Around 70% of the village population is literate.

Occupations

The main occupation in the village is agriculture. Nearly 160 (40%) households are cultivators. Out of this, around 5% of the households are also employed in business, government services, dairy farming etc, besides cultivation. These households belong to the OBC and General categories. The remaining households (around 58%) are labouring households. Amongst them, 32% and 26% are agricultural labourers and non-agricultural labourers respectively. The remaining 2% households are either self-employed in business (as vendors) or in salaried occupations. A majority of the labouring households belong to SC and ST category. Agricultural labourers also predominantly belong to ST and SC category. In animal husbandry particularly the sheep & goat farming and pig farming are mainly carried out by SC and ST communities. Dairy farming is done mainly by OBC households but a few SC and ST households are also engaged in it.

Female work participation is in agriculture as well as in non-agriculture. Out of 160 cultivating households, around 60-70 households are female-headed and engaged in cultivation. Female labourers also participated in agricultural work, livestock rearing, construction and public works. Weaving, bamboo work, '*sal*' leaf collection, making leaf plates and pots are mostly carried out by the ST women.

It is the landlord class and households in business and trading, and in government service holders that are richer in the village. Most of such households belong to the OBC and upper caste category with the exception of few in SC and ST category who are also government service holders. Almost all of them have leased-out their crop lands.

The tenure of tenancy is for one crop year. Although sharecropping is rare in the village, some landlord households have leased-out land without cost-sharing. Land-leasing is usually in fixed-rent, either in cash or in kind (main crop, paddy). The rent for an acre of land for one crop year is rupees 7-10 thousands depending on the fertility of the soil (graded as *Mal, Babal*). If the rent is fixed in kind, the tenant pays 7-8 quintals of main crop, i.e. paddy.

Agriculture

Cultivation in the village is entirely rain-fed and only a single crop is cultivated in a year. However, some farmers whose agricultural land is located at a very close distance to village's ponds are cultivating rabi crops and some green vegetables in summer season. The only source of irrigation in the village that is accessible to some households is the pond. Hardly 5 or 6 households have pump sets in the entire village. Rice is cultivated in a major part of the cultivatable lands in Kharif season. Pulses are also cultivated in a few areas in Kharif season. Besides these, brinjal, green chilli, ginger and ground nuts are the major commercial crops cultivated in Kharif season. In Rabi season very few farmers cultivate potato, mustard, wheat, and sesame. In summer season some of the farmers cultivate green vegetables such as tomato, lady finger, pumpkin etc.

Land preparation operation such as ploughing is mainly done by tractors for all crops. Harvesting of rice is also done by harvesters except in case of some marginal and small farmers. All other crop operations of all the crops are done manually. Farmers generally hire labourers from within the village. Labour shortage occurs occasionally for weeding and transplanting operations of paddy but this is managed by exchange of family labour across farms or by hiring around 30 to 40 labourers from the neighbouring village in the Kharif season.

Wages

The wage rates for both male and female labourers are Rs.200/day and Rs.150/day, respectively for all the activities in agriculture. In the non-agricultural sector, female labourers are paid the same wages as in agriculture. Male labourers in non-agriculture are paid a little higher at Rs.250/day in private

work. The wage rate in government/public work is Rs.250/ day for male and Rs.200/ day for female workers.

Credit

Non-institutional sources of credit such as village money lenders, landlords and business men are approached during times of urgency by labourers and small and marginal farmers. The interest rate for lending this money is generally 3-5% per month. There are some Self-Help Groups (SHG) are present in the village but they are not functioning well. Due to failure of repayment of loan instalments by some of the SHG's members their quick access to credits has not been sanctioned by the authorities. Therefore, they are not a reliable source of credit to the needy during their urgency. Lack of quick access to credit and inadequate amount of credit availability are two crucial reasons for the failure of credit reliability of SHGs in the village.

Outmigration

Migration from this village is of seasonal as well as permanent types. Migration is mostly individual and families are not taken.

Seasonal migration for harvesting paddy generally occurs between mid-October to January every year. These migrants are mostly illiterate, landless and belong to SC and ST communities. This stream constitutes about 70% (around 100 households) of total migrants households (140). The age group of this type of migrants is between 30-60 years. Migrants are predominantly male and they migrate in groups. Generally, the destination is the canal irrigated areas of Bargarh district, some other districts and also the neighbouring villages of Chhattisgarh.

The second stream of seasonal migration is to work in brick-kilns in Chhattisgarh, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Journey starts from January to May. This type of migrants move with their families. There are about 6 or 7 households belonging to the SC (Ghasi and Chamar) communities that migrate to work in brick-kilns. Work is fixed either by contractors of the village or of neighbouring villages, or by friends of previously migrated labourers or by relatives of the employers residing in the village. Seasonal migrants usually travel with the agent or the contractor. The agent bears all the travelling expenditures

including the lodging and food expenses. But, none of the migrants are given wage advances from the employers through agents or contractors.

Permanent migrants generally migrate to Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, Haryana and Delhi. They work in factories or as salesmen in shopping malls or stores. The age group of this type of migrants is between 20-35 years. Migration is individual and families are not taken. This stream of migration involves male and female workers who are generally literate. They comprise around 30% (around 40 households) of total migrants. These migrants belong to OBC, SC and ST communities and are economically better off than other labour households. Information about work is accessed from social networks of friends or relatives who have either previously migrated to these states or at least know about it. These migrants usually return to the village during the festivals of Nuakhai (in September) and Durga Puja (in October).

Seasonal migrant who travel for agricultural work earn rupees 15-20 thousands approximately, in a year. Migrants who work seasonally in brick-kilns take home about rupees 30-40 thousands in a year. But the migrants who are working in different factories earn relatively more than these seasonal migrants. They remit around rupees 60-90 thousands in a year to their families. Money is remitted 3-4 times in a year, roughly in a quarterly interval. There are five or six men employed in factories near Delhi and Haryana. Three to four women are working in a garment industry in Karnataka and one worker is employed in Chhattisgarh.

None of the migrant households have been able to purchase land or construct a house with the remittances. The households usually spend the remittances for daily consumption needs and/or to repay the loans taken from the village money lenders. Remittances are also used to pay for children's education and marriage expenditures.

Those who are working in the cities were happy with their work before the pandemic situation but are now waiting for a chance to get back home.

Migrant Workers during the Pandemic

Actually most of the permanent migrants are still in their respective destination places during the lockdown 4.0 (from

18th to 31st May, 2020). Seasonal migrants who had travelled for paddy harvesting work had returned to the village in January. Seasonal migrants from the brick-kilns returned during the lockdown 4.0. One migrant couple employed in brick-kilns (Male-55 years, Female-50 years, both ST) returned from Telangana and they are still in the quarantine centre. Personal interaction with them could not be possible.

I collected information about them from the Anganwadi Centre. It is reported that during the lockdown, this migrant couple spent their savings for their survival. They normally earn around 9-10 thousand per month and save around 6-7 thousands per month. During lockdown, they were unemployed and the employer gave them some money for their daily expenses. During their return to the village, they were paid only rupees 10 thousand by the employer. Their full wages that was due was not paid. They faced problems in getting food and other essential supplies during the lockdown but managed to survive with the help of some local people. They were not subjected to any type of ill treatment during their stay. The migrant couple have not received any financial help from any source.

One permanent migrant, (Male-34 years, OBC) from Delhi returned to the village during the same time. In Delhi, he was working in a private company named as Hi-Lex India Private Ltd. His survival story is also similar. He spent his savings during lockdown. During the lockdown he stayed inside the house but was paid half his salary for the previous two months. His monthly salary was rupees 25-30 thousands per month out of which he usually saved around rupees 20 thousands. He, too, has not received any financial support from any source.

Another person (Male-30 years, OBC) who had returned from Chhattisgarh during lockdown 2.0 was suffering from viral fever. He was working in a private owned cupboard/almirah making factory. He had been earning around rupees eight thousands per month out of which he usually saved about rupees five thousand per month. He was given all his due payments at the time of return to the village.

Returning Home

When the migrant couple mentioned above did not get any work and had exhausted all their earnings; they decided to return to the village. The fear of COVID-19 virus also forced

A migrant couple employed in brick-kilns spent all of their savings for survival. During lockdown, they were unemployed and did not receive their full wages that was due.

them to return home. They returned by Shramik Special Bus arranged by the state government. They registered in the government portal for return. They did not have to bear any travel cost during their return to the village.

The permanent migrant who returned from Delhi travelled in a car that was hired jointly along with some other migrants. He paid rupees 16000 as his share of the expenditure. He had to return to the village because his marriage date had been fixed for the same date. He reported that he was not harassed during his return journey. The Chhattisgarh migrant returned to village in his bike. The owner bore all the expenses for his travel.

Life during Quarantine

All migrants were kept in the quarantine centre except the Chhattisgarh migrant during lockdown 3.0 and 4.0. They did not report having faced any difficulty during their quarantine period in the month of May, 2020. They were served breakfast and two meals (lunch and dinner) including chicken, egg etc. Tea was served two times with biscuits. People were happy and satisfied with the food quality and quantity served. Separate and clean toilets for both male and female were arranged. The toilets and bathrooms were sanitised with proper care every day. Liquid hand wash was also provided by the village Panchayat. Uninterrupted electricity for 24 hours was provided by installing a battery inverter. The only complaint from migrants was that the place was quite hot during the day time and no cooler facility was arranged. After completing the quarantine period, migrants were given rupees 2000 from the government before they returned home.

The migrant from Chhattisgarh refused to stay in the quarantine centre and he was in home quarantine for 14 days. All the inter-district migrants (5/6 persons) also stayed in home quarantine.

Migrants usually stayed for home quarantine at their own expenses. They, generally, did not face any difficulty during their quarantine period. They were allowed to use the public tube well for drinking water and bathing. However, the public tube well accessed by migrants were not used by other households in the village until the quarantine period of 14 days was completed.

Migrants in the Village

The inter-district migrants had started to work in the village. Employment was found in construction and in agriculture. However, work was not available for the full month. They were employed for about 14/15 days in a month. The migrant who returned from Chhattisgarh was now driving a tractor in the local area. The work under MGNREGA had not started. Households were using the wages and previous savings for survival. People were also buying grocery in credit from the village's shopkeeper. Households were unsure about how long their savings would last. They expected to survive for a maximum period of one month with their savings. They had not yet borrowed from sources other than shopkeepers.

The migrants are not interested to return to their working places in the destination. They want to search for employment locally. They hope to get work and survive if the public works under MGNREGS starts. Permanent migrants reported that they would return to their working places when the COVID-19 pandemic situation is under control. Till then, they planned to stay back in the village and work in whatever employment is available in the local area. Migrants commented that if employment and remuneration suitable to their skills is available locally, they would never want to migrate again. Migrants had been requesting the government to provide sufficient works in the village.

Migrant Workers at Destinations

Three/four persons (all are Males, age 25-35 years) were working in a private company, Sentec India Company Private Ltd. in Haryana. They were employed in different works in the company, according to their skill and qualification. Some of them were operating machine equipment and others were labourers. All stayed together in a rented house. They earned about rupees 16-20 thousands per month and saved around rupees 10-15 thousand per month. During the first three Phases of lockdown (from 25th March to 17th May, 2020) the Company was completely closed and not produced any product. Therefore, they were unemployed during these days. As they had no work, the migrants stayed inside the house and relied on their savings. Sometimes they did not have anything to cook and managed with the help of neighbours and friends. During the lockdown period they did not receive any kind of

financial help from anybody, including their employer. They were usually paid wages regularly at the end of every month. The company had credited their wage payments by transferring cash in their respective bank accounts and so they had no dues remaining with the employers. When the lockdown had been announced suddenly, they had already remitted their earnings to their families and therefore did not have enough cash to survive for a prolonged period. The migrants lived in uncertainty about whether the company would reopen or not. Later on, the company paid only 50% of their salary of the last two months of the lockdown period. After lockdown 3.0, the factory reopened and the migrants were able to resume work. During the lockdown period, the migrants did not face any type of ill treatment from anyone during their stay.

All the migrants were willing to return to the village. They had registered themselves in the government portals but had not received any help from the government to purchase tickets. Migrants were still waiting for the government to initiate in sending them back to the village. Actually all other persons (from eastern Odisha) who registered with the government portals had returned to their villages. Therefore, migrants criticized the local MLA for not taking any serious initiative in arranging for their return. So they were planning to purchase flight tickets from their own money. Till that, migrants were waiting for a few weeks for air fares to become affordable. But air tickets were not available at affordable fares due to heavy demand.

Left-behind Families

Migrant member were remitting around rupees 5-8 thousands per month. It is a very important source for the survival of the household members. Most of the remittances are used for the households' regular consumption needs. Very few households were able to use the remittances for renovating or constructing new houses. Six to seven migrant households own very small plots of land. Only 2 to 3 migrant households were capable to leasing-in agricultural land. These households invest small amounts of their remittances in agriculture.

The dependent households have been affected in many ways since the lockdown. They have even postponed their all economic activities like renovation of houses before rainy season. They have started to borrow money from others in case

of medical emergency etc. The dependent households do not have sufficient money to send as assistance to their migrant members. Migrants' households have reduced the quality and quantity of food consumptions significantly. They were consuming only necessary commodities and trying to limit their consumptions. Migrant households also borrowed grocery for their survival from the village shopkeepers for a limited period of not more than one month. Households with ration cards received rice for 3 month in advance. 5 kg of rice per person per month was provided free of cost from PDS. In addition, rupees 1000 also given by the government. Apart from this, no other help was received by them.

Life in the Village

The lockdown affected both the social and economic activities in many ways in the village. In the village most of the activities are interlinked to each other. During lockdown nobody was allowed to go outside and work. This created an artificial labour shortage in the village. Despite this labour shortage, there was no change in the wage rate. As a result, many farmers who cultivated green vegetables were not able to sell their produce. Labourers were not available for harvesting their crops. It was not only a loss to the farmers but also for agricultural labourers who lost wage employment. Perishable vegetables (brinjal, tomato, lady finger, pumpkin etc.) were destroyed in the agricultural fields. Due to lockdown many hotels, restaurants, dhabas were shutdown. It drastically reduced the demand for green vegetables, milk and milk products. Therefore, the dealers of milk (both OMFED and Milky Moo) did not collect milks from the farmers regularly. They collected milk only once in every two consecutive days. As the authorised dealers refused to purchase milk from farmers, it was sold at a very low rate (i.e. Rs.15-20 per litre of milk) in the village.

Generally the mandis and weekly markets open for two/three hours in every day. Due to the partial closure of the mandis and weekly markets, farmers themselves sold their produce by door to door vending in the village and nearby villages at very cheap prices. Most of the vegetables were sold at less than rupees 20/kg. In this respect farmers faced problems in transporting large quantities of vegetables. A share of the unsold vegetables was fed to domesticated animals as fodder. Rotten vegetables had to be thrown away. This caused a huge loss to the farmers.

New crops could not be sown during the lockdown. The seeds were not available in the markets. Stocks of older seeds (previous year's seeds) in the markets were sold at a very high rate. Like seeds, there was a shortage of fertilisers and pesticides too. Agricultural inputs (both seeds and fertilisers & pesticides) are sold by private traders not from a single government institute (like Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Cooperative Society etc.)

Similar situation was seen in the case of livestock and animal husbandry. An interesting point to be observed in the village is that the people believed that COVID-19 virus could be spread through fish and meat. This depressed the demand for fish and meat. During the lockdown, the chicken meat was sold at rupees 50 per kg and fish was sold at rupees 70 per kg. Households in livestock business suffered great losses during the lockdown.

Welfare Schemes

The households in the village who had Antodaya and BPL cards received rupees 1000 per family from the state government. Apart from this, women who had 'Jan Dhan' accounts also received rupees 500 per month through cash transfer by the government. In this village around 20-25% (out of 900) women had Jan Dhan accounts. Now other women are also found to be opening the accounts in order to get the cash benefit. In village the KIOSK banking centre is opening such accounts and charging Rs.100 per account. The government also provided advance social security pension for three months to all the beneficiaries (Old person, Handicapped and widow).

The beneficiaries are able to withdraw their money either by using their bank passbooks in the KIOSK banking centre or by using their ATM cards in nearby ATM Centres. But, the KIOSK banking centre is charging Rs.10 per one thousand withdrawals. Besides these, the LPG gas card holders under the 'Ujjwala Yojana' were also refilling their gas cylinders free of cost. This was done by crediting the money equivalent of the cost of one LPG gas cylinder, in their bank accounts. Beneficiaries could withdraw the same amount and refill the gas cylinder. These initiatives were reported to be helpful to the households but only to a certain extent.

Households with Antodaya or BPL card were getting food items from the PDS. The beneficiaries under ration card

received 5 kg rice per head per month, free of cost for three months. 35 kg of rice per month per households at cost of rupees 1/ kg was provided to the beneficiaries under 'Antodaya Yojana' for three months. Besides this, the beneficiaries under both the card holders also received 3 kg of pulses free of cost. Most of the labour households either had BPL card or Antodaya Card. Except these beneficiaries, no other household in the village benefited from PDS.

The Anganwadi workers were actively functioning in the village during the lockdown. They recorded the travels history of incoming migrants, assisted the district and local administration in tracing contacts, kept health records of all households on a regular basis, distributed nutritious food to children, and spread awareness amongst people on the preventive measures to limit the spread of disease. Except for the regular classes of children, all other activities of Anganwadi were functioning normally in the village with proper sanitation measures. Cooked mid-day meal was not distributed in the village. Cooked meals were substituted with dry food items. The Anganwadi workers were engaged in distributing dry ration and eggs to the beneficiaries of their centres.

Works under MGNREGS had not started because of the pandemic situation. None of the households had purchased consumer durables goods like television sets or mobile phone on EMIs.

The village does not have any ATM or Bank branch but there is a KIOSK banking centre which deals with opening of bank accounts, receiving deposits and withdrawal of money, at an extra charge.

The village tube well is the only source of drinking water and the residents were allowed to access the public hand pumps during lockdown. There was no restriction imposed by the local government authorities. But in some Paras (not in every Para, where more than one public or private tube wells are available) households did not access tube wells used by migrants for at least 14 days until the quarantine period was completed.

Government's order of staying indoors was not possible for all the households in the village. The households that did not have access to toilets and electricity, or those that lives in small and cramped houses were forced to go outside the house for their

daily activities. They used all the public facilities such as tube wells, ponds and open places for defecation etc.

There were no COVID-19 positive cases in the village and its periphery. There were two positive cases detected in a nearby Block (Bhatli, 15 km. away from this village) on 30th May, 2020.

Apart from distribution of ration to the beneficiaries in PDS, the gram Panchayat played a vital role during the pandemic situation. The government delegated the power of district collector to the 'Sarpanch' for effective management of COVID-19 situation. Village Panchayat organised the quarantine centre in the village. The gram Panchayat was also assigned with the duty of looking after the stay, food and treatment of migrants in the quarantine centre. Gram Panchayat was also given the charge of providing free food to the poor. They also ensured that the social distancing norms in the village were followed. Village Panchayat helped by creating awareness among the people, teaching the use of masks and sanitizers by arranging meetings in the village.

The Impact on Livelihoods

In the village, apart from migrant labourer households there are some other households that had been adversely affected during the lockdown. Particularly, the self-employed households such as the village vendors, such as the thela wala, gupchup wala, Ice-cream wala, barber etc. lost their source of livelihood. Among them, only those with ration cards received assistance from government but others remained deprived. They also did not have much savings to fall back on. Therefore, most of them borrowed from village money-lenders and incurred huge debts.

Households that solely depended on forest produce by collecting *Sal* leaves and Bamboo also suffered during the lockdown as social gathering was not allowed. As a result of this, many social activities like marriage ceremony, temple visits and other religious and social ceremonies were postponed. This caused the demand for plates and pots made by *Sal* leaves and bamboo to slump. Households with livelihoods dependent on forest produce thus lost their earnings. Artisans and painters also lost their earnings as there was no demand of their services.

Self-employed households such as the village vendors lost their source of livelihood. Households that solely depended on forest produce such as *sal* leaf and bamboo also suffered as social gatherings were not allowed.

In this respect, the government particularly the local authorities should arrange some assistance. More importantly, the village Panchayat should start work under MGNREGA and also ensure that social distancing of workers is followed. 'Shikshya Sahyak' (teachers) who are employed on a contract basis teachers are also not getting any salary since last two months. They do not have much of savings to survive for longer periods. These teachers have been engaged in the COVID-19 survey duty along with 'Asha' and 'Anganwadi' workers. The government must ensure that these workers get their salary in time and at a regular basis.

Overall, the economic activities in every respect have suffered in the village area during the lockdown periods. There is urgent need of adequate financial assistance to fulfil the requirements of every segment of the village economy.

Karlakhunta

Kalahandi, Odisha

The Village

Karlakhunta, is a village which comes under Kesinga Block of Kalahandi District in Odisha. The nearest urban centre from the village is Kesinga. To access railway and bus services, the people have to travel to Kesinga (either by auto service or in a private vehicle) which is located around 10 km away from the village. The bus does not pass through the village. The village has a primary school. For secondary education, villagers access a school in Kandel, which is 2.5 km away. People use personal bicycles to reach the secondary school. The village has no health center and people travel to Kandel to access health care services. The village also does not have a post office. The nearest post office is located 5 km away in Sirol village. The mobile network reception is good in the village and BSNL, Airtel, Vodafone, Jio services are available.

The rough population size of Karlakhunta is around 2000 consisting of roughly 400 households. The village has six different 'paras' namely Saukipara, Ambagichapara, Limpara, Bastipara, Malipara and Nimpara. It is a Hindu dominated village and with less than one per cent of Christian households (converted from Hinduism). The caste composition is Goud (65%, OBC), Kandh (20%, ST), Dam (10%, SC), Mali (4%, OBC) and Sundhi (1%, OBC). The households in the 'paras' are

heterogeneous in caste composition. Untouchability is still practiced and SC and ST households are located at a distance from the remaining households. They also use their own hand-pumps for water. SC and ST households are not allowed to attend the social ceremonies organised by other castes. Untouchability is practiced even between ST and SC communities. However, the village is united. Whenever any decision is made for the whole village, all communities are informed and consulted. Monetary contributions are also collected from all communities in the village, in case the need arises.

Occupations

The main occupation of the village is agriculture and roughly 80% of the population is directly dependent on cultivation. Roughly 25% of the population are wage workers in agriculture and non-agriculture. Labour households in the village predominantly belong to SC, ST and OBC. The percentage of SC and ST households in the labouring class is higher than even OBC. None of the Shundhi (OBC) households are engaged in wage labour. The Mali (OBC) community also represent less than 1% of the households engaged in wage labour. Within the population of labourers, both men and women are in more or less equal numbers.

Women participate in agricultural work in the village. The labour demand in agriculture goes up during the sowing and transplanting stages of paddy crop. Female labourers are demanded in large numbers and hired if paddy harvesting is done manually. Otherwise, mechanization through harvesters is more commonly used in the village. Female labourers also participate in other work such as wage labourers in construction and public works. Women also undertake livestock rearing. Female labourers predominantly belong to SC and ST categories.

Roughly 80% of the workers are engaged in the agricultural sector and the remaining in the non-agricultural sector. Non-agricultural work includes construction works (10%), business in general stores (5%), salaried employees such as teachers, police, revenue officers, railway service holders and army personals, electricians, bicycle and bike mechanics and others (5%). Some households are richer and better-off than others. These households are basically those with members in regular

salaried government employment and a few who have ownership of large land holdings. All households are Hindu, by religion. Rich households belong to different caste categories and are employed in business and government services. Rich households with larger landholdings also lease-out agricultural land to others for cultivation. However, a larger portion of the land holdings is retained for self-cultivation.

Roughly there are 20 per cent tenants in the village. Most tenants are relatives of the land-owners. The duration of leasing land is for a year. The landowner pays a part of the cost of cultivation and receives a fixed cash-rent per acre of land leased. There is mutual agreement between tenants and landowners and no case or evidence of exploitation by the landlord was reported in the village.

Agriculture

The village is partially irrigated by canals fed by a dam which is called the 'Turla' Project. The coverage of irrigation is only around 30 per cent. Paddy is the principal crop in the village. Where irrigation is available, farmers double crop paddy. Roughly 5 per cent of the farmers have pump sets. Other kharif crops cultivated in the village are pulses, vegetables and cotton. In the rabi season too, paddy, cotton and vegetables are grown.

There was some amount of mechanisation in the agricultural operations. More than 50 per cent of land is prepared using tractors and other machines. Use of harvesters has also become common in case of paddy cultivation. Other operations such as transplantations and ploughing is done manually. Labour is hired from within the village as well as outside. A large number of labourers (around 200) migrate from neighbouring villages in the entire cropping year. These agricultural labourers belong to villages such as, Brahmani, De Gaon, Ma Gaon and Tol Brahmani which are located at a radius of 5 km from the village. They are hired on a contract basis and are paid a fixed sum of wages per acre of land. Migrant labourers are hired both in the Kharif and Rabi seasons. It is more in the Kharif season. Labour shortage has been reported from the village as a major problem.

More than 50 % of the households have livestock. Poultry farming at the household level is also very common. Livestock is sold to pay for healthcare and social ceremonies. Collection

of forest product is very rare. A few households access the forest for fuel wood to be used for self-consumption.

Wages

The prevailing wage rate in the village is rupees 120 for female workers and rupees 140 for male workers in the agricultural sector. The wage rates are the same, irrespective of the kind of agricultural operations/work. In the construction sector, the rate is slightly different for male workers who are paid rupees 150. Skilled masons are paid around rupees 350 per day. Petty workers such as those who make wooden doors, windows, and furniture are paid at piece-rate. MGNREGS workers are paid as per the prevailing government rates.

Credit

Credit is generally given by rich households in the village who are employed in government services or by large farmers. Credit is usually lent to relatives or to those who have good networks with the creditors. When credit is not available from any source, households sell assets such as livestock and even land to get the required money. There are many SHGs in the village that have been working smoothly. SHGs also lend money at an interest rate that varies between (5-10 per cent per month). SHGs borrow from banks to finance their small businesses. Some of the groups have also started their own business such as fishery in local ponds. There are a few micro-credit groups as well like the Annapurna group that disburse credit to the needy with collateral (generally it is an affidavit of houses or land as collaterals, people also keep gold as collaterals in some cases) and charge a fixed interest rate of around 7%.

Outmigration

There are around 200 migrants in the village. Around 10 per cent of the total households in the village have at least one migrant member. Migrants are generally male and migrate individually from the household. However, there were also a few cases of family migration. But the share of such households is very low. Out-migration occurs throughout the year. However, most of the migrants leave the village for work, in the months of January-February during which employment is scarce in the village. Therefore migration is somewhat seasonal. Many migrants are engaged in the agricultural activities in the village and migrate as soon as the crop season ends. They

return home once or twice in every six months. Four-five households in the village have migrated with their family since many years. They are known to work in railway sites. These households can be categorised as permanent migrants. The percentage of semi-permanent migrants is low and roughly at 10-15 per cent of total migrants. They stay in the destination areas for work throughout the year. They return to the village twice-thrice a year. Seasonal migration is very frequent. Roughly 70 per cent of the migrants are seasonal migrants.

Migrants generally belong to the farming community. They are usually school dropouts. Most migrants are in the 20 to 50 years age group. There is a higher number of male migrants. They mostly belong to the landless and small farmer households. Although migration is prevalent amongst all caste groups in the village, the percentage of migrants from SC/ST communities is very high.

Within the state, many migrants go to Bargarh for their livelihood. Transport and communication networks to Bargarh is good because of which migrants can travel easily from the village. Young migrants generally prefer migrating to Bargarh. Employment in Bargarh usually involves very heavy and strenuous work such as lifting pipes in the pipe industry. Some migrants were working in Rourkela and Bhubaneswar as construction workers. A few were employed in restaurants as waiter or as security guards in Bhubaneswar.

Outside the state, the migrants have diverse destinations. Some of the destinations were Telangana, Kerala, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Mumbai, Surat, Pune, Vijayawada, Secunderabad, Tamil Nadu and Delhi. The Southern states in India was a common destination. The most common work was in the construction sector as labour or masons. Some migrants specialised in tiles-fixing work in Ahmedabad. A few were painters in Surat. Two migrants worked as security guards in a medicine industry in Secunderabad. Four-five were employed in a garment factory in Tamil Nadu.

Migrants usually travel in groups. There are no labour contractors in the village. Some reported that there are contractors from neighbouring villages who were approached for work in the destination places. The contractors charged a commission from the Set (owner of the building for whom contractors work by supplying workers to construct the building) as they call. The contractors are not just agents who

have contacts with supervisors but they also work with other migrants and do not practice discrimination. The supervisor pays such contractors money and other benefits for working as a reliable source to provide labour supply in the work sites. The workers are not paid in advance. However, the contractors are paid to provide train tickets for the workers for travel to destination work sites. Although migrants knew that the contractors were paid by supervisors, none could report the amount that was paid.

A number of workers also migrated without the help of labour contractors. Such migrants contacted other known workers for information on how to reach and get work at destination sites. Such workers had been migrating for a long time and understood the kinds of work that was available. Those migrating for the first time took help from fellow workers to get work. Such workers either travelled with other migrants or contacted them before reaching the destinations.

Generally, migrants leave after the Kharif season and return to the village during the beginning of the next Kharif season. Cultivation is the main motive behind seasonal migration. However, it is reported that a significant number of migrants return for the 'Nuakhai' festivals.

Households with migrant members were relatively better off than others since they received remittances from migrants at regular intervals, compared to other households who stayed back in the village and depended completely on the rural sector for a livelihood. The standard of living of migrant households were better than others.

The remittance sent back to the family differs between migrant households. According to migrants, remittances varied between rupees 5000 to rupees 15000. On an average, migrants remit around rupees 8-10,000. One of the migrants was working in Palkar (Kerala) in a stone crusher industry as a manual worker. He was paid rupees 520 rupees per day as wage. Other than that he was given a space to build his own hut, where he also cooked his own food. Language was a barrier at the work site although he had friends. He was able to send around rupees 10 thousands in a month. Usually, he sends money home once or twice in a month. Another migrant from the village was working in Indore (Madhya Pradesh) with his family of wife and a small daughter. He was earning rupees 400 per day and his wife was earning rupees 350 in a day. Both were engaged in

the construction sector. They usually remit around rupees 5000 per month to their parents in the village. Besides this, they saved around rupees 10 thousand after consumption expenditure. Another migrant worked in Vijayawada (Andhra Pradesh) in a construction site and was able to send around rupees 5000 per month to his family in the village. He was earning rupees 300 per day. He reported that the work conditions was unsafe. Another group of migrants worked in Telangana in a construction site. While the masons were paid rupees 450 per day, others were paid 300 rupees per day. These workers remitted around 5000-6000 in a month whereas the masons were able to send around rupees 8000 per month.

The response of migrants on happiness/satisfaction with work was mixed. Some migrants were happy as they were earning a good income even though there was no security and medical facilities at the workplace. They are given a space in the worksite to make their own hut. Some migrants reported that they had to work in order to earn food. As work opportunities in the village was low, migrants were willing to work under difficult conditions in destination areas even though they were not happy about that.

One household had been able to purchase land and build a house from migrant's remittances. In this household, there were four migrants members who worked in different places across India. Three brothers and wife of one brother had migrated outside to earn money. They remitted around rupees 5000 to their elderly parents in the village to take care of their assets. Each of them earned around rupees 15-20 thousands per month. They were able to construct a house of their own and also purchased land from the remittances. Other than these assets, the household had around 10 animals (buffalos). These animals were sold from time to time and were also used to run a dairy business. It is also reported that remittances were used to finance wedding expenses and for purchasing cattle. This is however not a common case. Usually, the money remitted by migrants is just enough to meet essential expenditures and social ceremonies.

Migrant Workers during the Pandemic

Sanjib Nayak and Sanjay Nayak are twin brothers who had migrated to Gujarat. They are 23 years old and belong to OBC category. They have been migrating since the last two years as

tiles masons. They both earn rupees 15 thousands per month. Together, they remit about rupees 15-20 thousands every month. In the year 2020, they had migrated to Gujarat in February. They had worked for one and half months when the country-wide lockdown was declared by the Prime Minister. Sanjib and Sanjay had some savings and were in contact with other migrants from nearby villages. They faced harsh conditions while returning to the village. They faced difficulties in the registration process of the portals and in preparing documents for travel. No help was extended from government and their employer. They returned to the village by train and paid rupees 1500 rupees each to reach Titilagarh, from where they are taken to the quarantine centre for 14 days. Thereafter, they came back home and stayed at home in a quarantining quarter (a room of their home in the village). The space was very less. So they were managing. Social distancing and other rules were not followed. The brothers were not even tested for Covid-19. During the time of survey, they had been in home quarantine. They reported that they would be happy to get back to work in the village or nearby villages after completing quarantine period.

A group of migrants (OBC) in the age group of 20-50 years were working in Telangana in the construction sector. They were earning roughly rupees 12 thousand per month. At the time the lockdown was announced, these migrants did not have any savings since that had worked for less than a month. The owner paid them all their dues and asked them to leave the work site as soon as possible. They walked for long distances and hitch-hiked in trucks to return to the village. They had stay in two quarantine centres. They finally reached home after 20 days of journey and were sent to quarantine centres at their respective places. At the quarantine centres, they were not given separate rooms nor was there adequate space to maintain social distance and follow the quarantining rules.

A group of fifteen-migrants (all ST and age between 20-30 years) who were stuck at the worksite faced much difficulty in Pune. They were working in Pune as construction labourers. They had no money with them to travel home. They borrowed money as advance wages from the employer to meet their daily requirements and promised to resume work after the lockdown. Fortunately, the work started after one and half month of the lockdown. They will return to the village as soon as possible after repaying the money by work. Their families

are much worried about them as the corona cases has been spiking up each day.

A migrant from Kerala returned to the village after one and half month of the lockdown. His age is around 30 years and was working in a crusher industry in Kerala. He travelled back in a train. As he had some savings, he did not face much difficulty in returning. On his way back, he was given food and water at different points by well-wishers. He stayed in home quarantine for 14 days. He has been working in MGNREGA after completing the quarantine period.

Most of the migrants were able to return home after railway services was resumed in the country. Migrants from Vijayawada, Surat, Ahmedabad, Delhi, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and many other destinations were able to return at their own expenses after the railway services resumed. None of them received any assistance from the government or NGOs.

Migrants' income varies between rupees 10-20 thousands. On an average they earn around 12 thousand a month. The primary expenditure at the destination is on food and clothing. Many migrants reported that they are given space at the worksite to make a hut. Some migrants also stayed in cheap rented rooms. Migrants do not spend more than rupees 5000 rupees per month in the destination. The rest of the earnings are saved. A part of the earnings are remitted home and the rest is saved for their future. Most of the migrants received all their payments, till date.

The condition of the migrants has deteriorated compared to the normal times. They are unemployed now with no source of earnings. The meagre savings has almost exhausted and migrants are now seeking work in the village. Other than paying the due wages, their employers did not extend any other help/assistance.

Some migrants reported that the food served by the government or NGOs was poor in quality. Accessing other items was prohibited at the quarantine centres. In the village, other households stopped visiting migrants' houses after the migrants returned home due to fear of infection. The migrants were allowed to stay outside their houses for quarantining.

The condition of the migrants has deteriorated compared to the normal times. They are unemployed now with no source of earnings. The meagre savings has almost exhausted and migrants are now seeking work in the village.

Almost all the female migrant workers received a cash transfer of 500 rupees in their bank accounts². Male member did not receive any amount. Some of the migrants also received funds from KALIA, PM-KISAN and MGNREGA work. Recipients received various amounts of cash transfers but not more than rupees 5000 during the time of survey.

Returning Home

Large numbers of migrants returned after one month of the lockdown because there was no work in the workplaces. They had to stay there at their own costs and it was becoming very difficult to survive during the crisis. Migrants made their own arrangements to return home. No help was extended by the government.

The migrant workers decided to return to the village because work had stopped and they were not earning. They were distressed and afraid. A few migrant workers walked some distance and also paid huge sums (rupees 2000) to truck drivers. Some returned in trains after it was resumed. Some others hired private vehicles to return home who paid about rupees 5000 each for their journey back to the village. They spent nights under public places such as bus stops, railway platforms, under the overseas road, etc. Two of the migrants are also taken to the quarantine centres in Titlagarh for 14 days. Some migrants travelled with children and women. Most did not need any medical help but some of them reported that they felt sick during the journey and didn't know how and where to go for the treatment. Moreover, because of Covid-19 outbreak they didn't go anywhere for medical purpose as a precautionary measure.

Migrants began their return journeys with very little savings that they had. Some migrants who had insufficient balances, asked the family members to send them money to pay for the journey.

Some migrants were able to travel back in trains, which was resumed after 50 days of lockdown. They were able to procure travel tickets by meeting all the requirements such as registering at the portal of the Odisha government and the respective states they were in. Migrants were also required to

²It is the cash transfer of Rs. 500 for each female who had bank accounts for three months under JAM announced by the Prime Minister of India.

visit the nearest police station for some paper works. Some migrants reported that they faced difficulty in doing the paper works and in producing relevant documents for their identification. None of the migrants received any help, although some philanthropists served them food and water on their way back home. They didn't report that they were harassed by anyone while returning home. Returnees stayed at the quarantine centres while coming back home. They were treated well at the quarantine centres. The government is yet to give them rupees 2000 for staying at the quarantine centres. The quantity of food served at the quarantine centre was ok but the quality was very bad. They were given separate sanitiser bottles, tooth brush, soaps, and oil etc. at the quarantine centres. Migrants reported that it was, however, a good experience and the services at the quarantine centres were up to the mark.

Life during Quarantine

In the village, all migrants who returned had to stay at the quarantine centres. There was dearth of space inside and some of them made huts outside. Food and water was served by their family members and relatives. There were problems in maintaining physical distancing. Moreover some young people did not follow the order of the government and mingled with the people around them.

Migrants in the Village

Some migrants who have returned home have started working. There was dearth of space inside and some of them made huts outside. Food and water was served by their family members and relatives. There were problems in maintaining physical distancing. They are engaged in the rural work at the construction sites and in MGNREGS work. They are able to earn around rupees five thousands per month. They are willing to work under MGNREGA.

As the summer is very hot, not many workers are ready to work in MGNREGS since it involves very strenuous work. Some migrants were taking a short break from work after returning to the village. Migrant households have been surviving from their meagre savings and very little monetary help has been extended by the governments. It would hardly help to survive for a month. Those who do not have any money are surviving by working in the village economy. Some households have

The mandis and weekly markets are completely closed. Farmers sold to the local dealers at lower rates. Vegetable cultivators faced unavailability of fertilisers and pesticides. The demand for dairy products reduced. Sale of livestock and mangoes fell as the markets remained closed.

started to borrow in small amounts. Yes they do get help from other members.

The migrants have decided not to return to their work destinations until the coronavirus outbreak is gone. Some of them are looking for the alternative sources of work in the village in construction or MGNREGA work. As the Kharif season is about to begin, most migrants are busy with cultivation. Inter-state migrants are reported to have gone to Bargarh (another district within Odisha) to seek work. Migrants are in need of job opportunities and better wage rates at the place of origin so that they do not have to migrate again.

Migrant Workers at Destinations

A few migrants were still stuck in the construction sites in different parts of India, one of which was a migrant working in a pharmaceutical company in Secunderabad. The pharmaceutical industry was open during the lockdown.

The group of migrants who were stuck at construction sites faced a severe problem. Four-five migrants could not return as there was no scope to come out of the garment factory where they worked in Tamil Nadu. When they approached their owner/employer for help, they were asked to stay back and continue the work after the lockdown is over. These migrants were earning rupees 15 thousand a month. The employer arranged necessary items for the safety and survival of the migrants at the destination. They have resumed work at the garment factory now. They reported they did not get any cash transfer to their accounts or any help from the government.

A group of migrants from Telangana were in the construction sector. They were earning roughly rupees 12 thousand per month. At the time the lockdown was announced, these migrants did not have any savings since that had worked for less than a month. The owner paid them all their dues and asked them to leave the work site as soon as possible. They walked for long distances and hitch-hiked in trucks to return to the village. They had stay in two quarantine centres. They finally reached home after 20 days of journey and were sent to quarantine centres at their respective places. At the quarantine centres, they were not given separate rooms nor was there adequate space to maintain social distance and follow the quarantining rules.

Another group of 15-migrants were stuck in Pune in a construction site. They were earlier earning around rupees 12-15 thousands a month. These migrants had to stay back at the work place for two-months. The employer gave them advance wages and asked them to resume the work when the lockdown is over. Work has resumed now. Life, for migrants changed significantly after the lockdown as many were rendered unemployed. The employers paid all the wage dues to migrants but no help was received from the government either in the form of cash transfers or essential commodities. Migrants also faced problems in availing essential items from the market.

Some migrants in Pune were willing to return home. They were willing to pay back the advance wages received from the employer and return home with whatever savings they would make. These migrants had registered with the government portals. This group of migrants also expressed that after reaching home, they would not go to any other state for work due to coronavirus. Those who were working in the pharmaceutical company were planning to return to the village for the Nuakhai festival only. They were happy at the work destination and had not registered with the government portals.

A group of migrants who are in Tamil Nadu had mixed opinions. They had registered with the government portals but had not received any communication from the government for travel tickets. However, they were less worried now as their work and train services have resumed.

Left-behind Families

More than 20 migrant families were interviewed. They gave a mix response about the remittances. It appeared that they were trying to understate/under-report the remittances.

However, on an average, the migrant families reported that they receive between rupees 5 to 15 thousands a month. They largely depend on the remittance as there is no other consistent/regular source of income other than agriculture and wage labour in the village. Many migrants reported that a very large portion of the remittance is used in household consumption, social ceremonies and repayment of loans taken by the household.

The households have not been receiving remittances for quite some time. They have been surviving on their savings. One household reported that they sent money back to their migrant member.

The households' food consumption and expenditures on other essential items have been adversely affected. Many households reported that they have not borrowed money from any one yet. The government had transferred rupees 500 to women bank account holders. The beneficiaries were women from migrant households. They also received some cash transfer to their account from the state and central government through schemes such as KALIA and PM-KISAN.

Life in the Village

The village economy has been impacted by the virus. The transportation networks to local towns and neighbouring villages had stopped. People could not travel for trade and business purposes. The agricultural activities in the village, however, were not much affected. Farmers were able to continue with cultivation but those cultivating vegetables faced difficulty in selling their produce in the weekly market, which was closed during the lockdown. Farmers also faced difficulty in getting necessary agricultural inputs from the local dealers.

There is no shortage of labour in the village, because some of the migrants have returned to the village and are engaged in agricultural work. However, the availability of work seems very low as the migrants and villagers wish to work but they are not getting jobs during the pandemic.

Most of the farmers sell their cotton and paddy produce at the mandis. The mandis and weekly markets are completely closed. Paddy was almost sold by the farmers. Farmers hire tractors from the village or from nearby villages to take their produce to the mandis. The transportation cost as well as unavailability of tractors when in need has been an old problem in the village. Few farmers have stored their produce at their home who could not get a ticket to sell their produce before the lockdown. The prices have gone down slightly. Some of the farmers also sold to the local dealers at lower rates. Farmers have incurred crop losses at the place of storage.

The village has a mango orchard. The mangoes are ripened and sold by the villagers after buying from the owner. This is a

seasonal business for around 100 households who do the work to make some money during the summer season. Due to the lockdown, this business has been harshly disrupted.

Vegetable cultivators faced unavailability of required fertilisers and pesticides during the lockdown. This has, however, not impacted the crop significantly. The new crop season has started and demand for seeds in the local agricultural offices has increased. These offices were closed for some time but have begun to remain open for half-day as there is still half day curfew in the district. Farmers are easily getting required inputs in time, but they have to miss a day's work in the field in order to collect these inputs from the dealers.

The dairy business and livestock continued during the lockdown but not as smoothly. The demand for dairy products had reduced as milk sellers stopped collecting milk from the local people. People were reluctant in buying milk for fear of virus contamination. Livestock was sold and purchased in the local weekly market but as the markets remained closed for some time, it adversely affected the business.

Welfare Schemes

Almost all the female account holders received a cash transfer of 500 rupees to their bank account. Wages of workers under MGNREGA was also credited. It was paid in phases. In the first phase, workers received a sum of 1500 rupees in their bank accounts. Many farmers also received some cash transfer from PM-KISAN and KALIA schemes during the lockdown. A small branch of Bank of Borada is located in the village. The villagers could easily withdraw their money without any hurdle in the village. The bank workers were also able to withdraw money of other bank account holders through Aadhar-based withdrawal. However, those without Aadhar Card or Mobile linked accounts suffered in many ways as they had to travel to the local town to do the needful.

The villagers received rice through the PDS. There were different allocations for BPL and APL categories of people. Each member of the family received 5 kg of rice at the government rate. The Antyodaya and BPL card holders were also able to get the food items from PDS easily. Other than this, villagers received 3 kg of dal, free of cost during the last month through the PDS scheme. The Panchayat reported that

there was no problem in the distribution and collection of these items.

The Anganwadis and ASHA workers were given duties to look after the people in the village. They did a door to door to campaign to combat coronavirus. Face masks were distributed to some of the villagers freely. There was, of course, some problems as they were not provided with kits and sanitisers, and salary was not regularly paid to ASHA and Anganwadi workers. Cooked mid-day meal was not distributed in the village. Eggs and other items were distributed in the village.

MGNREGA work has been continuing during the pandemic. Around 500 people are engaged in the work. Workers are making a kutcha road in the village. They are digging the land aside of the road and pouring on the road. The demand for MGNREGA work is very high. However, the type of work (digging land and pouring on the road) has been male dominated though some women also extended their hand in the work. Moreover, many workers have not been registered yet. They do not have job cards with them. Many workers, especially women workers do not prefer to do heavy work like digging land. They want to work under MGNAREGA but type of work does not suit and exclude them from work. Few workers also reported that many labourers are avoiding or feeling reluctant to continue the work due to hot summer.

There is a bank branch located in the village, but there is no ATM centre. The branch manager visits the main branch and brings money. He does the transactions at the village. All the villagers have been accessing the bank and there has been no problem in withdrawal or deposit of cash. None of the villagers were seen buying commodities during the pandemic on EMIs. However, some of the villages purchased fans and coolers for their daily use by cash payment. Some of those who have brought items on EMIs have not been able to pay the EMI on time.

There were no COVID positive cases in the village. About 10 positive cases were reported in a neighbouring village within 10 km radius. People in the village were afraid of community transmission.

Tube well is the main source of drinking water in the village. A few households consume the water from well. Women in the village have been accessing the tube well and wells without

maintaining social distancing. Hand pumps are being used without applying hand sanitiser. Most people also do not wear a face mask in the public places. They are not much aware about the spread of the disease.

Basically, almost all the villagers have built a toilet with assistance from the government. But the use of toilet is not universal and open defecation is still practiced in the village. All households in the village have electricity connection but power-cut is frequent. The houses have two or three rooms available for the entire family. No separate latrine has been attached with the room. Moreover, villagers do not have bathrooms. They usually bath in the river or pond. It has become difficult to allot a room separately to migrant workers who returned home to stay in home quarantine. Few migrant workers have to construct huts outside their home to stay in home quarantine. Families face difficulties to arrange electricity and water to bath. Under such scenarios, it is very difficult to maintain the norms of social distancing in the village.

Collective Action

The Panchayats has not been handling the situation efficiently. No announcement or campaign for the awareness of the coronavirus outbreak is being made. Rather, primary and secondary schools were merely converted into quarantine centres without proper infrastructure. Social distancing was not being maintained and no action was taken by the local government against violators.

The villagers had blocked/barricaded the road which connects the village for half a month and did not allow other people to enter the village. They had blocked with stones and thorny plants.

Badichaka

Balangir, Odisha

The Village

Village Badichaka (of Block-Bangomunda and Tehsil-Bangomunda) lies in district Balangir of Odisha. The distance from the nearest urban centre is 10km. The nearest railway station is located in Kantabanji which is 25 km away from Badichaka. The National Highway - NH 59 is 10 Km away from the village and the nearest bus stop is in Bangomunda which is also 10 km away from the village. The village has one government primary school and the upper primary school is within 1Km distance from the village. The high school is located in a neighbouring village. The village accesses the health centre and private clinics of Bangomunda. The post office is situated in Chulifunka which is 3km away from the village. The village has mobile network connectivity of Airtel and Jio available in the village.

There are 149 households in Badichaka with a total population of 664 persons (data according to ASHA worker's House listing in 2020). There are two 'paras' or Hamlets in the village which are distinctly caste-based settlements. One 'para' is inhabited by 'Gouda' OBC households and the other is a SC (sub-caste

Ganda and Dom) Harijan 'para'. All households are Hindu. OBC comprise 81 % and SC households comprise 19% of the total households in the village.

Occupations

The main occupation in the village is agriculture, farm and non-farm wage labour, minor construction and business. Roughly 20 % of households that have ownership of small agricultural holdings also depend on wage labour. Workers from 'Gouda' households are mostly engaged as wage labourers. Female workers also participate in economic activities such as wage labour in agricultural work and in public works such as MGNREGS. However, all female labourers belong to either land-poor or landless households. Farming is the primary occupation of all households except four households that have member/s employed in Government Service. Nine households are engaged in non-farm work as a secondary occupation. Six among them are engaged in construction and three in business.

There are 10 households that are financially better-off than others in the village. Three among them have large landholdings, four are employed in government service and three own private businesses. All 10 are OBC-Gouda households. Agricultural land was leased-in for paddy cultivation by about 20 households. Land leasing contracts are based on share cropping as well as fixed rent. 10 households had leased-in under share cropping and the remaining 10 paid a fixed rent.

Agriculture

Agriculture in Badichaka is mostly rain-fed. Canal irrigation is available but only in the later stages of cultivation after the crop is sown. The village has a single cropping pattern and the principal crop is kharif paddy. Cotton as a commercial crop is also cultivated. In the rabi season, pulses like moong, chana and urad is cultivated. Crop cultivation is partially mechanised in the village. Half of the households use tractors for land-preparation and the rest use bullock. Harvesting is completely manual. Farmers hire labourers only from within the village and in-migration of agricultural labourers is absent. There has been no report of labour shortages in the village.

Apart from cultivation, households also rear chickens and livestock. Almost all households keep chicken, either for own

consumption or for sale. Around 35 households and 40 households own at least one Goat/Sheep and Cow respectively.

Wages

The wage rates for agricultural labour vary across various agricultural operations. On an average, wage for male workers is Rs 200 and wages for female workers is Rs 150 in agriculture. Wages rates for manual labour in non-farm employment are also the same. The MGNREGS wages are Rs 298 for both male and female workers.

Credit

Informal sources of credit are important for the villagers. Households in the village borrow credit from friends and relatives. The moneylenders in the village also lend loans at a charge of 10% interest per month. The villagers also get loan from the money lenders of Bangomunda, the nearest urban centre, at 5% interest per month). There are 12 Self Help Groups (SHG) in the village. All groups are active and SHGs function as a reliable source of credit for members.

Outmigration

Migration is an integral part of livelihood in the village and around 70 % households have at least one member who is a migrant. Most migration is predominantly male and single where families are not taken to destination places. Migrants fall in the age group of 20-40 years. Out-migration from the village usually starts after Nuakhai (a local agriculture festival) and Dusshera, in the months of October-November-December. Not all migrations patterns are seasonal. Some have migrated semi-permanently and some even permanently. However, seasonal migration is most common and around 90% are seasonal out-migrants.

Migration is common among all kinds of households but it is observed that four to five rich households in the village that have large land holdings do not have out-migrating members. Migration is also common among all caste and ethnic groups. Seasonal migration is more common in OBCs (Gouda) households whereas SCs are either permanent or semi-permanent migrants. All migration streams are interstate. The main destinations are, Mumbai, Gujarat Raipur and Bilaspur. In Mumbai, the migrants mostly work in construction sector

Around 70 percent of households have at least one member who is a migrant. Migrants are predominantly single, unmarried males. All migration streams are interstate.

(painting buildings) and in Gujarat migrants are employed in an iron making factory. Migrants in Raipur work as wage labourers and in Bilaspur, they work as labourers in digging bore wells.

Migrants travel in groups but there are no intermediaries such as labour contractors or brokers who come to the village to recruit them. Most of the time, migrants find information about the availability of work in destinations through friends and old contacts with contractors (Thikadar). Seasonal migrants leave the village in October-November and return in May-June. Semi-permanent and permanent migrants migrate for longer durations and return to the village only once a year during Nuakhai and to attend marriage ceremonies in the family. Migrant households are better-off than others to a certain extent. Most migrants are able to remit between rupees 80,000-1, 00,000 in a year.

A migrant respondent, Bhakta Teji who works in Mumbai as a labourer (painting buildings) earns around rupees 1, 00,000 in a span of 6-7 months. He is able to send rupees 15,000 every month to his family. Another migrant, Kishor Sagria who is employed in an iron factory in Gujarat also remits rupees 15000 per month. He works in Gujarat for around 6-7 months in a year. Susil Thela, another migrant who operates machines used to dig bore wells, earns around rupees Rs. 2, 00,000 in a span of 9-10 months. It is commonly observed that remittances are used for renovation and construction of houses. 4-5 households were also able to purchase land last year. Other than this, remittances are used for daily consumption expenditure, to repay loans, to purchase gold and to pay for the expenses in marriage and other rituals.

Migrant Workers during the Pandemic

Migrants who worked in Mumbai normally earned between rupees 15,000- 20,000 per month. Since they had received their wages when the lockdown started, they had some money with them. Those who were working in the iron factory in Gujarat normally earned rupees 10,000 - 20,000 per month. These migrants had already sent the earlier month's wages to their families in the village, they had less than five thousand rupees with them when the lockdown was announced. After the lockdown, the migrants lost work and income leading to a steep decline and change in consumption levels. Migrants who were working in Gujarat were employed for 20 days in May, the

wage payment for which was still due. The rest of the migrants in Mumbai, Raipur and Bilaspur did not get any employment and earned nothing at all after the lockdown was announced. Migrants in Mumbai did not get any help from employer except their wage payments. They received food rations of rice and dal from the Government. In Gujarat, the employer of the iron factory provided migrants with some food but did not pay their due wages. Besides this, none of the migrants received any other kind of help from Govt. officials, local people and NGOs.

Migrants had been happy to be working in the destinations as they were earning well. However, in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, all want to return to the village. Seven migrants who were in the Mumbai received supplies of Rice and Dal but no vegetables. Prices of vegetables had soared and migrants had to use their own money to purchase it. 11 migrants who were there in Gujarat were provided with food by their employer. Four migrants, who were there in Raipur, survived with their own money.

Returning Home

Migrants started returning to the village from April. Seven migrants returned to the village in May from Mumbai due to unemployment following the lockdown. Four among them travelled in a truck and each spent rupees 2250 towards travel expenses. It took them three days to reach home and they also walked for 3km and spent the night in open space. One of them also borrowed rupees 1500 to pay for travel. Two travelled in a bus and paid rupees 1200 each. The bus was arranged by the government but the migrants paid for the ticket. One other migrant travelled separately in a truck and spent rupees 1000. All seven migrants returning from Mumbai received food on the way and were not harassed during travel. It took them three days to reach the village.

Four migrants returning from Raipur travelled home in April in bicycles and scooters. They returned home due to unemployment during the lockdown and were the earliest to return to the village. It took them four hours to reach the village. They were not served food on the way and did not face any harassment during the journey.

Eleven migrants working in Gujarat returned to the village together on June 1st. They had worked for 20 days in May but

decided to return home due to spread of COVID-19. All 11 migrants travelled in train from Gujarat. The tickets were arranged by the government and they did not have to pay money for the tickets. It was a two days journey in the train. Food was provided in the train and they did not face any harassment during the journey. They were kept in quarantine centres after reaching the village. Resuming the railways service did help migrants travelling in June to save travel expenditures.

Life during Quarantine

Among the migrants returning from Mumbai, four were quarantined for eight days, two were quarantined for nine days and the one for eleven days. Two among them stayed in home quarantine also. None of them reported to have faced any difficulty in the quarantine centres. Four of them were satisfied with the food quality served during quarantine. All migrants from Gujarat reported that the quarantine centre served good food but the sanitation and hygiene was poor. None of the four migrants returning from Raipur were quarantined.

Migrants in the Village

Four migrants (two from Mumbai and two from Raipur) who returned to the village had found employment in construction work. They earned between rupees 200- 400 per day. None got work under MGNREGS. Moreover, nobody wanted to work under MGNREGA mainly because of delayed payment of wages. In a situation of lost earnings in the destination centres and unemployment in the village, migrants have been spending their savings on consumption; which anyway would not last for more than 2-3 weeks. So far, they had not started borrowing money. All the migrants who have returned to the village plan to go back to their places of work when the pandemic is over. Only a few reported that they were unsure about when they would return to work. All expressed that the common problem in the village was irregular employment because of which they had no option but to return to the destination cities for work. Only in the case of availability of regular employment that migrants would consider staying back in the village. Migrants expressed that they would consider not returning to the destination for work if any kind of regular employment was available either within or in the neighbouring villages at a wage rate of at least rupees 200 per day.

Migrant Workers at Destinations

Ten migrants were still in the destination and had not returned to the village. Two were in Mumbai (painting houses), one in Nagpur (lift/elevator operator), three in Raipur (chicken farm worker, gardener and wage labourer) and two in Hyderabad (one male and one female brick kiln workers) and two in Tamil Nadu (both female tailors). The migrants in Mumbai were earning rupees 15000 per month. The lift operator was earning 20000 per month and the chicken farm worker was earning rupees 12000 per month. While the brick kiln workers had taken an advance loan, other workers in Raipur and Tamil Nadu earned between 5000-8000 per month. After the lockdown, all the workers were able to get some employment in the month of May except the brick kiln workers and the wage labourer in Raipur. The workers who could resume working also received their due wages. However, during the lockdown none of the workers received any kind of help from the government except the brick kiln workers. The tailors, brick kiln workers, chicken farm worker and the gardener received help from their employers too. None of the 10 migrants were helped by NGOs. None of the migrants received any kind of cash transfers in their accounts from any source. All migrants faced difficulty in getting food rations and other essentials except the chicken farm worker and the gardener. The two were able to continue working and their employment was not affected by the lockdown. None of the other migrants reported to have faced ill-treatment during their stay except the tailors in Tamil Nadu. These two female migrants were not provided with adequate food during the initial phase of lockdown as there was no work. When they requested the employers to return home, they were threatened with the sexual harassment.

All migrants who were still in their destinations, were willing to return to the village except the chicken farm worker (in Raipur) and the lift operator (in Nagpur). Among the eight workers who wanted to return, the wage labourer (in Raipur) and the two female tailors in Tamil Nadu had not registered to return in the government portal. Even the brick kiln workers in Hyderabad had registered in government portals and they were the only migrants who had received help in purchasing return tickets to home. The female tailors who were also willing to go home had planned to later return to Tamil Nadu for work after the pandemic is over.

Left-behind Families

The amount of remittances varied among migrants. The earning and remittances of Mumbai migrants was the highest. Those who worked in the construction sector in Mumbai (as building painters) normally earned rupees 15,000-20,000 per month and were able to remit around rupees 10,000 - 15,000 per month. Whereas, those who were employed in the Iron factory in Gujarat normally earned rupees 10,000- 20,000 per month and sent home rupees 8,000-15,000 per month. The migrants of Raipur worked as wage labourers earned the least. Their earning were about rupees 5-10 thousand per month and therefore their remittances were the lowest between rupees Rs.2000-.5, 000 per month. Only one migrant who worked in Raipur and owned a bore digging machine was able to earn around 20,000 per month and sent home around rupees 2 lakhs in a year.

The remittances sent by migrants play a very significant role in the survival of the households. Around 50% remittance money was usually used for household consumption purposes. Only those households that received at least rupees 15,000 per month were able to use the money on non-food expenditures such as house construction and renovation or to buy agricultural inputs.

In the absence of remittances, migrant households have been relying on their savings for survival. One household from the village had even sent rupees 1500 to the migrant member. The loss of remittances has made migrant households reduce their food consumption levels. Having exhausted their savings, around 10% households had also borrowed money since the starting of lockdown. Households that received cash transfers from the govt. used it to purchase some daily essentials. The distribution of free food grains from the state and central government enabled households to avoid hunger and maintain a minimum diet. However, apart from food grains and some cash transfers (that was mentioned earlier), no household had received any other kind of assistance from the government, NGOs and relatives. The prevalent anxiety among households is regarding the possibility of the lock down being extended further for more than 3 months? As their savings will get exhausted, households were worried and insecure about employment and incomes.

Life in the Village

The lockdown had no impact on harvesting of crops. There were no crop losses and farmers did not face any difficulty as no new crop was cultivated in the village during the period of lockdown. Labour shortage was also not reported in the village. However, due to the partial/complete closure of many mandis and weekly markets, farmers faced difficulty in selling their produce.

Welfare Schemes

Around 80% of the households in the village received a cash transfer of rupees 500 for 3 months in the Jan Dhan accounts of women. Rupees 2000 under PM Kisan Yojana and rupees 5000 under Kalia Yojana was also received. The beneficiaries were able to withdraw money and 90 % reported that it was a substantial help (as the transfer was provided for free). Only 10% thought that the benefit was too little to compensate for the loss of earnings of 2-3 months. Apart from cash transfers, the households received food grains from PDS. The state government provided 5kg of rice per person for 3 months, April to June (at a nominal price of rupees one per kg). The central government disbursed 5kg of rice per person for 3 months and 3 kg of Dal for 3 months, free of cost. The Antyodaya and BPL households received rupees 1000 and rice from PDS but no other items. The functioning of Anganwadi was affected by the lockdown. Classes for children was stopped and cooked mid-day meal was not provided. Anganwadi workers visited the village at the end of the month to supply dry food grains such as two kg of 250grams of dal per child. MGNREGS has resumed in the village and around 40 people were working in a pond renovation project. However, the work has not been able to match the increasing demand for employment in the village.

The functioning of Anganwadi was affected by the lockdown. Classes for children was stopped and cooked mid-day meal was not provided.

Panchayat & Collective Action

During the lockdown, households were allowed to access the public hand pump of the village. Nobody was turned away from the hand pump. However, nobody in the village followed the orders of staying inside houses. Most residents were using the same public pond, public hand pumps for drinking water as well as for bathing purposes (since no household in the village has a private bathroom). In respect of not maintaining the norms of social distancing, it must be mentioned that the

Panchayat too did not take their responsibilities seriously. The rules for social distancing was not enforced. The police also visited the village to check public gatherings. In accordance with Govt. orders, the panchayat only organised a quarantine centre in a nearby high school. In the early days of the lockdown, a few migrants who returned to village were not quarantined by the panchayat. Even after the quarantine centre was made, many people visited their relatives without following social distancing. The Panchayat was also found to be releasing everyone without check-up (sometimes as early as after 7 days only). Fortunately, no COVID patient was found in the village till date. Some COVID-19 positives were found only in a village 5km away from Badichaka.

Dumermunda

Balangir, Odisha

The Village

Dumermunda (Block-Bangomunda, Tehsil-Bangomunda) is a village located in district Balangir of Odisha. The nearest urban centre is 5km away from the village. The nearest railway station is in Kantabanji which is 20 km away from the village. The NH 59 road and the nearest bus stop located in Bangomunda is 5 Km away from the village. There is one Government primary school and the Upper Primary school is 3 km away. The nearest high school is situated in another village. A primary health centre and some private clinics are available in Bangomunda. The nearest post office is in Goimund which is 3km away from the village. Mobile networks connectivity of Airtel and Jio is available in the village.

There are 145 households in Dumermunda with a population of 754 persons (according to ASHA worker's House listing in 2020). There are 5 'paras' in the village distinguished by caste background of households. The OBC (Gouda caste) households live in Kanda 'para' and Bharasagria 'para'. OBC (Mali caste) live in Putel 'para' and the SC (Ganda and Dom Caste) live in Harijan Para. The ST households of Kandha caste live in Bhoi Para. All households are Hindu. There is a preponderance of OBC households (70%), while the percentages of SC and ST households are 20% and 10 % respectively.

Occupations

The main occupation in Dumermunda is agriculture. Around 90% households are farmers and around 10 % households working non-farm occupations such as business and govt services. Roughly, 40% to 45% households are dependent on wage labour and the wage labourers predominantly belong to Mali and Harijan caste (dalit) who have very small land holdings (nearly half an acre). A few other households from other castes are also wage labourers with ownership of very small land holdings.

Women workers also participate in agriculture as well as other economic activities such as wage labour in construction/public works. There are about 15 households in the village that are financially better-off than others. Three of such households have large land holdings and the remaining either own business or are employed in government services. SC and ST castes are also employed in government services.

Land is leased-out for cultivation and around 15 to 20 households cultivate as tenants in the village. The duration of tenancy is for one crop year and land is leased-out for sharecropping where the cost is shared between the land owner and tenant.

Agriculture

Agriculture in the village is mostly rain-fed with some parts of the land irrigated by canal water. Most of the land is single cropped. Only one household owns a pump set in the village. The principal crop is kharif paddy, followed by cotton (a commercial crop). Moong, chana and biri are rabi crops. The method of cultivation is largely traditional even for operations like land preparation and harvesting. There is no influx of migrant workers in agriculture and farmers employ labourers from within the village. So far, farmers have not faced shortages in labour supply in the village. Almost all households keep poultry (chicken) for self-consumption and sometimes for sale. Around 35 households have goats and sheep and 5 households have at least one cow.

Wages

Female workers are paid less than male workers in all forms of work except MGNREGA. The wages for male and female

workers in agriculture, mainly transplanting, weeding and harvesting, are Rs 200 and Rs 150 respectively. In casual labour in non-farm work, the wages are higher- rupees 250 for males and rupees 200 for females. In public works undertaken by the government, males earn Rs 250 and females earn Rs 200 per day. Some workers reported this to be their wages in MGNREGS as well.

Credit

Households get credit from friends and relatives and from money lenders in the village as well in neighbouring villages. There are about 4-5 households in the village that lend credit at an interest of 10% per month. A money lender in Bangomunda (neighbouring urban centre) charges a lower interest rate of 5% per month. There are 8 Self Help Groups (SHGs) in the village which are active and serve as a reliable source of credit for members.

Outmigration

Out-migration for employment is common from the village among all caste groups. Roughly 85% of the total households in the village have at least one member who is a migrant.

Migrants fall in the age group of 20-30 years. Most migrants are male and they migrate alone. Female migrants do not migrate alone and are part of only family migration. It is mostly the landless and those with small land holdings that migrate for work.

Out-migration from the village starts in the months of October and November. The migration pattern is seasonal, semi-permanent as well as permanent. However, seasonal migration alone comprises 80% of all migration from the village. The main destinations of inter-state migrants are Mumbai, Andhra Pradesh, Raipur, Durg and Bhillai. The occupations are varied across destinations. In Mumbai, migrants work in construction sites. In Andhra Pradesh, they are employed in brick kilns. In Raipur, they work in Hotels and as domestic workers. In Durg and Bhillai, migrants work in agricultural fields.

Migrants mostly travel as a group. There are no labour contractors in the village. Recruitment is done by labour contractors who come from Kantabanji (20km from village) and Khutlumunda (15km from village). Most of the labour contractors are politicians. An advance wage of rupees 30,000 is paid per individual migrant. Not all migrants are recruited by

Roughly 85 per cent of the total households have a migrant member. It is mostly the landless and those with small land holdings that migrate for work. Seasonal migration alone comprises 80 per cent of all migration from the village.

labour contractors. Others use network with friends and previous employers to access information about employment opportunities in destinations.

Most often than not, migrants leave the village in October-November-December and return during May-June (before June 15). Other migrants return during Nuakhai (a local agriculture festival) and for marriage ceremonies of relatives. In contrast to Badichaka village, migrant households are not economically better off than others. A few migrants from the village send money (Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 15,000) to their families every month. As most of the migrants are young, they are not found to remit any money home.

Migrant Workers during the Pandemic

Three migrants from Dumermunda were interviewed. One, who helps at a pharmacy stores in Raipur sends around rupees 50,000 in a year. Another two migrants who work as construction labourers in Mumbai for 6-7 months in a year remits around rupees 10-12,000 every month. The migrants were happy with their work and incomes at their destination until the pandemic broke out. All seasonal migrants wanted to return to the village. Only a very few migrant households in the village were able to either purchase land or construct a new with the remittances. A very large portion of the remittances were used for loan repayment, to meet daily consumption expenditures and to perform marriage functions and other rituals in the household.

The author was able to collect information on 15 out-migrants from the village. Eight among them were working in Mumbai as construction workers. Seven migrants were from the OBC (Gouda and Mali caste) and one was SC (Ganda). Each earned rupees 12000-15000 per month. They had rupees 6000-10000 when the lockdown was declared. During the lockdown period, the migrants received rice and dal from the government but prices of other food items such as vegetables soared high. Apart from food grains, the migrants in Mumbai did not receive any help from the local people or the NGOs. The migrants also did not receive any cash transfer to their accounts. They however did not face any kind of ill treatment from anyone during their stay.

Returning Home

As all eight migrants were unemployed and were facing significant losses in earning, they decided to return to the village. Four of them travelled on 20th May and four on the 28th May. All travelled home in trucks and spent around rupees 4000 for the journey. They had some money and did not borrow from others. The journey was arduous and the migrants had to walk some distance as well as sleep at night in open spaces. None of the migrants who returned home by making their own arrangements for travel received any kind of help from the government.

Among those who returned home after the lockdown were five households (family migration with 2-5 members in each family) that were working in a brick kiln in Hyderabad. Four households were ST (Kandha) and one was OBC (Gouda). Each family had received an advance of 30000 before beginning the work. After the lockdown was declared, work at the brick kiln stopped and they decided to return home. Until the time they decided to return home, the migrants were provided with food by the employer. All five households returned to the village 5th June by train. Each household had around rupees 1000-3000 with them during the start of journey. Their employer procured the travel tickets and the cost of the tickets was paid by the government. During the journey these migrants also received food. Therefore, they did not have to spend money on travel and food.

Two other migrants (both male and SC) returned to the village from Raipur. They worked as helpers in a hotel in Raipur and earned around rupees 10000-15000 per month. Both migrants made their own travel arrangements and returned to the village on 23rd May by bus. They spent rupees 500 on travel expenses and did not receive any kind of help from the government to return home. As Raipur is not very far from the village, the migrants did not have to walk or spend the night in open spaces.

None of the migrants from either Mumbai, Hyderabad or Raipur faced any kind of harassment during the journey.

Life during Quarantine

After returning to the village, all migrants were sent to the Quarantine centre provided by village Panchayat. Nobody

faced any difficulty in the quarantine centre. The food was good and adequate for all. The sanitation facility was also satisfactory. Only migrants who returned from Mumbai were asked to stay under self-quarantine at home after completing their stay in the village centre. During their home quarantine period, they faced much difficulty. As they stayed in tiny huts in the agricultural fields, it was a difficult experience due to inadequate space, the summer heat and the rain.

Migrants in the Village

After returning to the village, none of the migrants had started working. Work under MGNREGS had not started but if available, all were willing to work. With no earnings in the village, migrant households had been using their meagre savings to meet consumption expenditures. Four migrants had begun borrowing loans. They were also relying on the help of family members. All migrants wanted to return to their places of work in the destination states as employment was scarcely available in the village. They would be able to stay in the village and stop migrating only in case of availability of regular employment in the village periphery.

Left-behind Families

Remittance money had a significant role for the migrant households and a large portion of it was used on household consumption expenditure. Other common use of remittance was to purchase agricultural inputs. Loss of remittances had adversely impacted the households that were left with no option but to use up their meagre savings. Few households had started borrowing since the beginning of lockdown. Loss of remittances also adversely affected the purchase of agricultural inputs. Some migrant households received some cash transfer. The assistance from state and central government through rice and dal distribution played a significant role in maintain the households' food consumption levels. As per the welfare scheme, households received rice and dal from PDS for 3 months from both State and Central government and also received rupees 1000 from the central government. Other than this, no households received any other kind of help from the government, NGOs and relatives.

Life in the Village

Although the distribution of food grains through PDS helped the households to a certain extent in maintaining their consumption levels. However, the households have been adversely affected due to lockdown as prices of the vegetables crashed in the village due to over-supply but farmers were not allowed to sell their produce in other villages and markets. The lockdown affected transport facilities and farmers could not access urban markets. Much of the crops perished and farmers distributed them among relatives and neighbours. The farmers were able to sow cauliflower and corn during the lockdown even though there was labour shortage and problems in accessing fertilisers and pesticides.

Welfare Schemes

Almost all households received a cash transfer of rupees 500 for 3 months that was transferred to women's Jan Dhan accounts. Other transfers of rupees 2000 under PM Kisan Yojana and rupees 5000 under Kalia Yojana were also provided in the village. The beneficiaries were able to withdraw the money through the Customer Service Centre (CSC) which was located within 2 km distance from the village. The respondents considered that the subsidised and free food rations was a substantial help during the lockdown. Food grains were also distributed through PDS. The state government's scheme provided 5kg of rice per person for 3 months from April to June at a price of rupees 1 per Kg. From the central government, 5kg of rice per person for 3 months and 3kg of Dal for 3 months were provided free of cost. Households with Antodaya and BPL card were given rupees 1000 and only rice through PDS.

The Anganwadi centres in the village did function during the lockdown. Both teaching and feeding the children with hot mid-day meals were affected. Anganwadi workers only visited village at the end of month and to provide dry (uncooked) food items such as two kg of rice and 250gm of dal per month. Work under MGNREGS was available for around 15 days in the month of May, after which it stopped. Around 200 people had worked in the pond renovation work. In the absence of other employment opportunities, the demand for MGNREGA work had increased in the village but there was insufficient work generated.

Prices of vegetables crashed in the village due to over-supply. Crops perished and farmers distributed them among relatives and neighbours.

Collective Action

Residents of the village were not following social distancing and stay-at-home norms. Most residents were using the same public pond and accessing common sources of drinking water such as the public hand-pumps. Till the date of survey, there were no covid-19 positive cases in the village. Some persons were found Covid-19 positive in a village which is 15km away from Dumermunda. The village Panchayat, on their part were handling the situation very well. They had pasted pamphlets written in Odia in front of every house to create awareness among village residents on the importance of staying inside their houses. The Panchayat members also frequently visited the village to prevent public gatherings. They had also organised a quarantine centre in the high school.

Gurjibhata

Balangir, Odisha

The Village

Gurjibhata is a small village located at a distance of 8 kilometre towards south from the nearest urban centre and its block headquarter is Loisingha in the Bolangir district of Odisha. The village falls in the Koraput Bolangir Koraput (KBK) region, which is projected as one of the least developed regions in the country and is covered under special development package by the Government of India. An all-weather Pradhan Mantri Sadak connects the village with the block headquarter where the nearest railway station is also situated. Similarly, the village is also connected to the National Highway by an all-weather road. There is also bus service available to the village. The village depicts a gloomy state in terms of the development of social and economic infrastructure. The only temple of learning that the village people are blessed with is the state government run upper primary school located at the heart of the village. In the absence of a health centre in the village, people access the nearest primary health centre located at Jogisarda (Panchayat headquarter) even for minor ailments.

The Anganwadi centres functioning in the village have been discharging their duties and responsibilities very well. The

importance of credit in development is very high. There are no financial institution or banks in the village. Banking facility is accessed through various bank branches based in Loisingha. A Sub-Post Office is situated at Jogisarda. The village has two small Kirana shops, one mini drugs store and one *paan* shop that cater to the needs of the villagers to some extent. Most of the time people are dependent on the neighbouring village, Jogisarda and the block headquarter for additional needs.

With a population size of 1030 as per the latest government figure, the village is inhabited by 260 households spread over 6 paras that are organised according to communities broadly divided into two categories: SCs and Others with the later comprising STs, OBCs and General. The para that accommodates only SC households is alienated from the village and located by the road in the western direction. The village has a predominance of OBC households followed by SCs, General and only two households in the ST category. Each caste comprises roughly 78.07%, 11.54 %, 9.62 % and 0.77 % respectively out of the total households. Most of the houses in the village are 'kutchra' and basic amenities necessary in life is largely absent.

Occupations

Livelihood in this village depicts an amalgam of farm and non-farm occupations. Non-farm occupations comprise petty business and government service. Roughly 50 % of the households are engaged in petty businesses most of which are carried on by peddling household items, such as, vegetables and other perishable consumer goods, low quality garments, shoes, etc., in the village market as well as in the nearby villages. 40 % of the households are engaged in agriculture and 10 % are employed in government services, respectively. Except a few households that are in government service, others are engaged in petty business and function at survival levels.

Agriculture

Agriculture is seasonal in the village because of lack of proper irrigation facilities. Farmers in the village are mostly from SC and OBC communities and more than 80 percent of them cultivate either self-owned land or land leased-in from others. Extremely poor households from ST, SC and OBC communities work as wage labourers such as in house construction, etc which generates work at a very small scale.

The Brahmins roughly constitutes 25 households in the village and do not work as wage labourers.

An upper caste youth (male, age 25 years) unveiled an interesting fact concerning livelihood in the intervening period since the outbreak of COVID19. As he is not interested to out-migrate again in the future, he has been searching for work in and around the village. He voices that he will gladly accept to work even as wage labourer in the village, if he gets the opportunity. This manifests the peculiar nature of social transformation in response to contemporary livelihood in the rural areas, especially among the poorest of the poor. The upper caste people are also in the queue to work as wage labour.

Livestock rearing is practised by roughly 20 households where the rearing activity is done by males with the exception of two females, from SC and OBC castes each. The institutional arrangements reflect a rigid social order that determine the organisation of the economic activities and the functioning of the village economy. The distribution of occupations among households between farm and non-farm activities in the ratio 40:60 has interesting economic implications. Roughly 40 percent households belonging to OBC category are farmers and the rest are working in non-farming occupations. It is observed that some households belonging to the OBC and the General Category are richer or in a better-off position than others. The principal source of income of the relatively better-off households is either government service or petty business. With the exception of a very few OBC households, these people reportedly did not have larger land holdings before. Yet, the socio-economic status enjoyed by them is not less than a typical traditional landlord as far as their superiority in the village is concerned. The poorest of the poor often knock the doors of such households for money that helps them in meeting their basic requirements for household consumption and investment in agriculture and petty businesses.

The village market shows the existence of inter-linkages between different markets, such as of labour, land and credit. Tenancy is one such manifestation observed in the village with about 10 households get land under lease for a crop year to cultivate paddy in the Kharif season and to grow vegetables in the immediately following season under the condition that the total yield shall be shared in the ratio 2:1 between the

landowner and the tenant. Of course, the entire cost of farming is not borne by the tenant and the landowner bears a part of the burden.

Agriculture suffers from low productivity due to insufficient irrigation and high dependence on monsoon. The wells dug by most of the landlords facilitate the cultivation of vegetables immediately after harvesting kharif paddy. Some lands are also used to cultivate 'moong' in the rabi season. Almost all farmers in the village have their own pump sets purchased with the help of a subsidy loan made available through the local cooperatives. Yet, they become useful only for vegetables cultivation. Farming is mostly traditional and labour-intensive in the village with the exception of a few farmers who use tractors and machines to perform limited tasks.

Unlike farming in the neighbouring district Bargarh, where most of the cultivable lands are fed by canals from Hirakud dam migrant agricultural labourers are also employed from the KBK region; the relatively low labour demand of small landholders in Gurjibhata is fulfilled by cheap labour from within the village. Even in the past, the locality has never faced shortage of labour for unskilled manual work in agriculture. Male and female workers are hired in every activity. Since farming is a seasonal activity in the village, the labouring poor sustain themselves by hiring-out labour mostly during the peak seasons, for operations such as sowing, weeding and harvesting. Other sources of income like animal husbandry, collection of non-timber forest produce are insignificant for sustaining livelihood among people; although men and women from some poor families collect fuel woods from the nearby forest for sale in and around the village.

In every agricultural operation, such as land preparation, sowing, transplanting, weeding and harvesting, wage disparity between males and females is observed. Female workers are normally paid rupees 100 while male workers are paid double the amount for the same task. The 'kutia' system of hiring agricultural labour is practiced in the village. The term 'Kutia' is commonly used in the large western patches of Odisha to mean hiring labourers in a group that includes both males and females for a particular task by paying an agreed lump sum amount to the group as per the contract. This way of hiring labourers has implications for economic efficiency in

agriculture. Economic efficiency in this context can be understood in terms of the following:

First, the cost of inputs and supervision is minimised because the incentive of the group of workers to finish the agricultural task early, results in saving time. Early completion of the task also entails higher average daily earnings for workers.

Second, the landowner need not bother about the calculation and payment of wage by equating it with the marginal product of labour. Since it is incumbent upon the group as a whole to complete the task for a lump sum payment, the contribution of individual workers is immaterial to the landlord. This system of labour use is preferred by the farming community in the locality to ensure efficiency in various tasks and because of the fact that most of the agricultural activities need to be completed quickly to avoid disturbances caused by bad weather.

Wages

The wage rate of rupees 200 rupees for males and rupees 100 for female workers for unskilled manual work is universal in the village, both in agriculture or non-farm casual labour.

On the basis of the skills suitable to the local area, such as in the case of masons and casual labour, the wage rates among the labouring class differ substantially. The masons, who normally are males, are paid 400 rupees for 8 hours work a day. Even in government work like MGNREGS, the wage-disparity is observed between male and female workers. This clearly reveals how improperly the records of MGNREGA are maintained. The practical application of the mandated provisions enshrined in the Act is hardly realised. This, of course, is determined by a host of institutional factors that reflect the compulsion faced by the poor to work at the prevailing market-determined wage rate that violates the provisions of Minimum Wage Act 1948.

Credit

Like in most villages in the region, formal credit is found to be inadequately available in the village, particularly for the poor. There are two moneylenders in the village belonging to Brahmin (General) and Kultha (OBC) castes. It is reported that loan for agricultural purposes are lent at 5 % rate of interest per month against a deposit of collateral like gold. Collateral-free

loans are given at an interest of 10 % per month. Access to formal credit is facilitated through Self Help Groups in the village. There are as many as 17 SHGs active in the village. It is learnt that though the groups utilise the loans for individual consumption purposes, it is formally declared that they are invested in paddy business. Thus the real purpose of group formation and activity remains fulfilled only in pen and paper. This questions the sustainability of the groups in the long run and livelihood sustainability of the group members through the flagship scheme 'Deen Dayal Antodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY NRLM)'.

Outmigration

In the event of livelihood crisis due to social, economic and institutional factors, migration is the most preferred alternative livelihood for the poor. The general context of migration reveals a mix of trends and outcomes. The COVID-19 pandemic has been an eye-opening phenomenon that has unveiled the reality of temporary and permanent migration across the country.

Government records shows that 20% of the households in the village have at least one migrant member. From a reliable source we could gather accurate data regarding migration that occurred in the village before the pandemic surfaced. Out-migration from the village is only inter-state in nature and mostly occurs for employment in manual unskilled work in the construction sector, factories, domestic work, hotels and restaurants, etc. There were 30 households in the village with at least one migrant member. Migrants from 28 households had migrated to Tamil Nadu and two had migrated to Andhra Pradesh to work in brick kilns. The brick kiln migration involves family migration whereas only single-males migrate for construction work. The brick kiln bound migrants normally migrate after the Kharif season, which reveals that there is a seasonal connection between the brick kiln and agricultural work in the village.

In case of brick kiln migrants, labour contractors from outside come to recruit them and put them under bondage by paying an advance. This mostly happens during Nuakhai, the most important festival in Western Odisha. But migration to other sectors continues throughout the year and is observed as the most frequent type of migration. The duration of migration

varies between households and some have been found to work in destination sites even for as long as 2 to 4 years. It is obvious, therefore, that migration from the locality is difficult to judge through a common parameter. Yet, it is found that the migration in the village is an inevitable outcome of lack of livelihood for the poorest of the poor. Migrants are mostly males in the age group 22-35. They normally prefer to migrate in groups often through networks and connections with the relatives both inside and outside the village. The migrants belong to all types of households. Landholding position in the village is unequal with a significant percentage of either landless or marginal landholders. Though migration is prevalent among all castes, Scheduled Caste people constitute the majority.

Migrant Workers during the Pandemic

No migrant household is economically better off than others in the village. However, remittances play a significant role in the livelihood of this socially and economically marginalised groups. Remittances range between 50000 rupees to 80000 rupees annually. It is reported that the migrants felt happier at the destination because they could earn money. But as the COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc, the huge network of business came to a standstill and the informal sector was one of the hardest hit in the country. Initially the production in the informal sector came down substantially and the employers adopted a dual strategy to retrench workers. Wages or salary was cut as applicable and/or some employees were asked to quit. The outcome of the pandemic took a severe turn in the economy when migrants working in informal and formal sectors started returning to their native villages to not only save themselves from contracting the disease but also to escape the threat and insecurity of survival at the destination. Migrants from Gurjibhata met a similar fate. They made a beeline to the village and reached home in phases. It has been the universal choice among the poor migrants that, given the chance, they would like to come back to the village rather than continue working at the destination even in the normal period. This opinion has been formed amongst migrants in spite of the many benefits of migration even to the informal sector.

Migration from the village is invariably to the informal sector because most migrants leaving the village are unskilled with low levels of education. There are many instances where

remittances from the migrants have had a huge positive impact on their economic position. Some migrant households have been successful in owning a house in the village and some have purchased an exiguous piece of land each. For a majority, however, migration had enabled households to meet their survival level necessities. The negative side or disadvantages of migration has been exposed for all to see due to the pandemic. The nonmaterial costs (social costs) borne by the migrants' families when a member migrates is much more because of several considerations. The old aged people and children who need care suffer setbacks let alone the loss of earnings due to the temporary absence of a member of the household. Besides, attending social functions becomes a remote possibility for them thereby affecting the social bonding. The costs and benefits of migration to the household weigh almost equally. Yet, migration has become an integral and unending cycle in their lives. All these issues witnessed a significant turn with the appearance of the pandemic. Hence, the current situation of the migrants and labour households needs a thorough appraisal to understand the facts involved in the phenomenon.

Girdhari Tripathy, a 25 years old male, who migrated to Tirupur in Tamil Nadu and worked in a yarn spinning mill, shared his experiences as a distressed migrant from the village. He belongs to a poor Brahmin family and migrated during December 2019 leaving his father, mother and brother at home. For him migration was not new. He has been in the sojourn since 2011, with one foot at the destination and one at home. His decision to migrate was a response to both pull and push factors. Regular work and regular wage payment in Tamil Nadu worked as a pull while extreme poverty and debt burden emerged as the push factors. Their extreme poverty was evident from the inability of the family to meet the medical expenses towards treatment of the migrant's ailing father who was suffering from kidney disease. The family did not want Girdhari to migrate and preferred that he worked in the village, but it was the burden of debt amounting 13000 rupees that prodded them to consent.

Girdhari was one among the 8 migrants who had travelled to various destinations in Tamil Nadu in December 2019. He was influenced by the behaviour of the group although, initially, he was attracted to the destination by receiving information from a friend who was working there. In the mill, he had reportedly been engaged in the simplex department and was given the

work of gathering and shelving the product after preparing the bundles of yarn. All migrants are at home now. They reached Balangir, the district headquarter, on April 15 in a private bus that they hired by paying 80000 rupees. The travel cost was shared equally amongst the migrants. Then reached their home villages the same day and were lodged in the quarantine centres. It took 3 days for the entire journey. Until April 12 they had spent the most crucial period of lockdown at their respective establishments. The establishments had continued production, albeit in a very small scale due to various reasons such as escalation in the cost of production as a result of shortage of inputs, problem of transport and the plummeting demand for the output. This condition entailed the company to retrench and it tried to optimise through wage-cutting principle. Girdhari was paid only 2000 rupees a month instead of 330 rupees per 8 hours of work that he received on normal days in the pre-COVID19 situation. Earlier he was provided free meals and accommodation by the establishment and he had made a very good impression upon the employer. The situation changed completely in the pandemic. Although he remained engaged full time in the production activity as on other normal days, he was paid only 2000 rupees instead of 10000 rupees during the post-COVID-19 situation. The employer, instead, demanded 3000 rupees from him towards meeting consumption expenses, explaining that as production was running at a very small scale it was impossible on his part to bear such expenses. This made Girdhari dissatisfied with the employer. Therefore, even though he did not have any money with him, he decided to leave the establishment without taking any help from his employer. He arranged money by borrowing 2500 rupees from other fellow migrants. His family sent him 7000 rupees from the village, which he utilised in meeting the expenses towards the return journey. He paid 10000 rupees towards bus fare and utilised the rest of the money on other needs on his way back. He purchased four jars of water on the way for which he had to pay 30 rupees a litre on average. Since the employer did not want the migrants to return home, Girdhari left with his fellowmen without informing the employer. They conceived of a plan with one of his friends who was living in another place. They decided to walk about 15 kilometres from the place where they stayed after which they would board the hired bus for the rest of the journey. "Similar is the fate of other migrants to other destinations too", he lamented.

Interestingly, a female from the village, aged 50 years, was also working in the same establishment where Girdhari was employed. She had been employed as a sweeper (who cleaned the floor) as the employer considered her incapable of doing hard work for which young males were preferred. Her job was usually cumbersome and required uninterrupted work for long hours. Spinning yarn generated a lot of dust particles that workers inhaled during their work resulting in lung ailments frequently. Workers had to bear all the medical expenses which the employer knowingly evaded. The female worker returned home with the group and equally shared the monetary and non-monetary costs of journey. There were 8 passengers in the hired bus, 5 persons from Gurjibhata and 3 persons from Barpali in the neighbouring district Bargarh. The migrants received free food at two places and free medicines at one place.

Life during Quarantine

On reaching the village, each migrant was quarantined for 7 days in the Gram Panchayat Office, Burda. The centre took care of maintaining good hygiene. Arrangement of sanitation and electricity was good but migrants were not satisfied with the food served to them during the quarantine period. The menu comprised either Chuda Upma or Pakudi in the morning breakfast at 8 a.m., Rice, Dal and Sabji in the day meal at 1 p.m., either biscuit or savouries with tea in the evening at 5 p.m. and Rice, dal and sabji as a part of night meal served at 8 p.m. Migrants reportedly did not appreciate the taste of the food and commented that the food quality was not good. Moreover, as the quantity of meals served was often not sufficient, inmates broke the social-distancing and other norms of the quarantine centre and rushed to the table to secure their share of food.

Migrants had a distressing experience both at the institutional quarantine centre during the stipulated period of seven days as well as during another 7 days of self-quarantine that followed immediately. For fear of spreading the virus at home and in the village, migrants had collectively decided to stay at the small concrete structure that had been constructed earlier by the Panchayat as a shelter. It was located at one extremity of the village and was completely alienated. The self-quarantine was done as a compulsion to avoid any retaliation from the villagers for entering the village. The plight the migrants suffered was

Migrants had a distressing experience both at the institutional quarantine centre and during self-quarantine due to lack of space, food quality and difficulty in following social distancing norms.

unprecedented and never encountered in any earlier spells of migration. It was an outbreak of a disaster like COVID-19 that awakened migrants to deeply understand the woes of their insecure livelihoods. Like Giridhari, other migrants had the same opinions that the author understood through conversations with them over the phone.

Migrants in the Village

The author interacted with some migrants a day after their safe return to their homes. Giridhari made it clear that they have not been engaged in any income earning/generating activity at the village. He hopes to be absorbed in construction work as a coolie that contradicts sharply with the livelihood tradition of his family and his community. He is a Brahmin by birth and in his village no person from his community has ever worked as a coolie in construction sites. He asserts he has been forced by economic circumstances to embrace 'low quality occupation' in the absence of other livelihood alternatives for his survival. He finds no trace of MGNREGS work in the village even in a crucial period when most households need it most and when he too (despite belonging to an upper caste Brahmin household) is willing to perform unskilled manual labour. He along with others are utterly ignorant of the recent provisions of MGNREGA to fight the post COVID-19 livelihood crisis. As he was unemployed in the village and unable to remit money to his family due to his low earnings at the destination, the household borrowed 15000 rupees a month ago from the local moneylender at 10 per cent rate of interest per month. His family had exhausted their savings further by sending rupees 7000 to Giridhari to pay for his travel expenses during his return from Tamil Nadu. The family has no savings right now and whatever savings they had accumulated had been spent on his father's treatment for kidney disease.

Like Giridhari, poor migrants often encounter a lot of constraints that inhibit their freedom of choice. The pandemic has forced migrants to return home and depend on very scarce avenues of livelihood in the village which they had tried to escape by migrating. Moreover, the current situation has dispelled all possibilities of migrating in the future too, and exposed how easily they can fall victim to exploitative employers in the same way as they suffered recently.

“Our lives are destined to embrace the curse of exploitation, we are cursed by the Gods! There is no potential to ensure livelihood here and nobody listens to our woes. We cannot migrate again because there is no expectation of a reversal in the present scenario in the following days”, says Himanshu, a migrant from the same village. There is a common perception that a suitable alternative for livelihood at home village can alleviate their pain. Himanshu is 28, unmarried and belongs to Kultha caste (OBC) who along with his father was responding to the author’s queries during a conversation that took place the next day of his home-coming. His family manages livelihood with the help of the paltry sum of money earned from cattle rearing by his father who is 67 years of age. The family is landless and though Himanshu’s parents have already attained the age to be eligible for old-age pension, their prayer before the competent authority at the local level has never been heard and redressed for the last seven years. They are however covered under the benefits of the Public Distribution System that partially ameliorates their food requirements. Neither MGNREGA nor NRLM has benefitted the household. Poverty had led Himanshu to migrate to a destination based in Tamil Nadu, hundreds of miles away from his village.

In July 2018, after car festival he left his village and stayed up to April 12, 2020. The decision to come back from the destination came in the wake of COVID-19. During his stay at the destination, he used to remit home 7000 rupees a month for maintenance of the household. He travelled with Girdhari and paid 10000 rupees towards bus rental to reach Balangir, his district headquarter. Himanshu and other seven migrants who travelled together had registered themselves with government portals to return home. On their way back home, they were registered at Rayagada border for entering the home state. But the government reportedly failed to deliver the promise of financial assistance to the migrants. Until the day of survey, migrants had not received the government provision of 2000 rupees for completing the quarantine period.

Life in the Village

The impact of lockdown has led to a significant decline in the demand for perishable commodities produced in the village. Normally at the end of Kharif season, a large patch of land in the village is used for cultivating vegetables. Similarly, farmers

owning livestock also earn some income by selling their livestock products in the nearby urban centre and adjoining villages. In the post-COVID situation, frequent lockdowns and the fear of contracting corona virus caused significant decline in demand and consequently the producers suffered great losses. However, the lockdown did not affect cultivation and harvesting of either paddy or moong and other cereals because the harvesting of such crops had already been completed before it was implemented. In the post-COVID situation, shortage of labourers was not observed in the village as well since the demand for labour in the lean agricultural season remains already low. The change in wage rate was also not seen in the village. The farmers sold paddy in Mandi at Jogisarda and the moong crop in weekly markets. These products were sold to the village money lenders too. Money lenders advanced loans to the needy farmers during sowing and weeding periods to be repaid in kind through paddy after harvest. It is a sort of loan-purchase agreement and the interest cost of loan is equal to the difference between the market value of the product to be recovered from them and the advance amount. It is reported that they advanced 1100 to 1200 rupees in June or July to get a quintal of paddy after three or four months. Since, the farmers sold paddy through Mandi, the lockdown did not affect the prices. They did not face any problem in transporting paddy to the Mandi too because, they could manage it by hiring tractors or with the help of bullock carts. When there was delay in the sale of paddy in the Mandi, every farmer stacked his supply on the Mandi field and wrapped them with polythene covers. But there was a crop loss due to rain because the produce was kept for weeks in the open place. The farmers did not grow a new crop and rather stopped vegetable cultivation too during the lockdown. The problem faced by them was two-fold in nature: one being low demand for the produce and the second was low prices. Since this was not a period of peak agricultural operations, the availability of inputs like fertilisers and pesticides was not affected at all.

Welfare Schemes

Cash transfer was received by almost 80-90 per cent of households. The households withdrew the money immediately for fear that it might be returned to the source. Although they were happy with such an initiative of the government, it did not generate any substantial help for the poor. The villagers did not face any problem in getting rice or wheat through the

Public Distribution System too. They got 5 kilogram of rice or wheat per household member at 1 rupee a kilo. The Antodaya and BPL card holders have also been getting PDS items regularly.

In Anganwadi centres were closed following government orders and cooked food was not served. Rather dry rice, oil, dal, egg and vegetables were distributed to the children during lockdown. Only dry food items instead of cooked food were distributed among the beneficiaries of Mid-day meal scheme too. The work under MGNREGA had not started in the village. Earlier the work generated by MGNREGS was sufficient because only a few people demanded work under the scheme. People do not consider the scheme as an important, reliable and regular source of employment and livelihood because the work is reportedly provided only occasionally in a year.

During the lockdown period, access to banking facility was severely affected. There are 14 tube-wells that remained fully operational in the village for drinking water. The residents did not face problems in accessing public hand pumps during the lockdown. Although people were being sensitised about how to stay away from the risk of infection, they did not take it seriously. The governments have been insisting upon staying inside the house to avoid spread of the disease but rural people did not pay heed to such orders. In spite of the availability of toilet and electric facility in every household, people preferred to practice open defecation.

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Collective Action

Until the day of survey, there were two COVID positive cases, one each in Budhipadar and Karlipat at distance of 9 and 8 kilometres respectively from the village. The Gram Panchayat was not found to be successful in dealing with the situation. People knew that social distancing is vital to fight the pandemic, yet the directions given by the Panchayat to enforce the norms were not followed in the village. The quarantine centre was located in Jogisarda Gram Panchayat where the G.P. authorities provided both cooked food and dry food items and maintained complete hygiene at the quarantine centres.

Kardasingi

Gajapati, Odisha

The Village

Kardasingi village is located in Rayagada C.D Block (8.1 km) and Tahasil (6.1 km from the village) of Gajapati District in Odisha, India. It is 25 km from the district headquarter Paralakhemundi, 12 km from block headquarter and 271 km from Bhubaneswar. Paralakhemundi, Gunpur, Palasa, Kasinagar, Ichapuram are the main nearby cities as well as service centres of the village. There is no railway station near Kardasingi village and in order to avail the train services, villagers have to travel to Paralakhemundi. The main artery of communication is PMG road and it is well connected with 326A Paralakhemundi-Mohana Road National Highway (upto Lanjipadara) and State Highway (SH-34). The nearest bus stop is Rajaseetapum (15km away from the village). Villagers avail auto service for frequent communication from nearest bus stop.

This village has two Anganwadi Kendras, an Upper Primary School (Estd. 1979) and a Govt. High School, but no college. There is an ANM centre in the village but no other higher order health care facility. For seeking higher order health care

services, villagers go to CHC Hatibadi (8km), CHC Rayagada (8km), Hospital Bagusala (13km) and DHH, Pralakhemundi or M.K.C.G Medical College and Hospital, Berhampur. There is also a post office in the village (with pin 761213) and the nearest police station is at Gurandi (14km). There is a Gram Vikas Centre which looks into various aspects of village welfare. The village does not have a Bank or ATM kiosk. So, in order to avail the Banking services, villagers go to Rayagada. The villagers avail banking facilities mostly through Syndicate Bank (8km) and SBI. The nearest ATM point (Syndicate Bank ATM, Oriental and Union Bank ATM) is located within 14km from the village. The village has a water tank of 10m height with storage capacity of 50000 litres from which water is supplied to the village through tap. Besides, there is a hand pump and a well. This village does not have a market place and the nearest small weekly market or Hata is at Rayagada.

According to Census of India 2011, the total number of households in the village is 262 with a population of 983. The male and female composition is 447 and 506 respectively. However, the latest Geo-economic survey conducted by Dept. of Geography, S.K.C.G.(Autonomous) College, Paralakhemundi in August, 2019 provides some great details on various aspects of the village economy. It collected information from a randomly selected sample of 156 households (60% of total households of the village) with a population of 666. According to the Geo-Economic Survey Report 2019, the male-female composition of the sampled households of the village is 357 and 309 respectively. Total number of child population (0-6 years) is 43 (Male-24, Female-19). The overall sex ratio of the village is 1060 as per Census of India, 2011.

The overall literacy rate of Koradasingi village is 59.8% where Female Literacy rate is 50.4 % (Census, 2011). According to Geo-Economic Survey, 2019 the mean year of schooling is 6 years (Max=25 years, Min=0 years, SD=5.3 C.V=113%). Around 17 % households are female headed (26 of 156 HHs) in this Village.

The morphological pattern of the settlement also exhibits typical caste-based segregation. The major Sahis / Para/Hamlets are Bada sahi, Indravash Sahi, Pano Sahi, Gandhichhak Sahi.

This village is dominated by Hindu population. According to Census 2011, the broad caste composition of this village is 7.7 % SC, 63.6 % ST and 18.7 % (OBC+ General). So, this village

has a predominant tribal population of 70 % (as per the Geo-economic Survey, 2019) of the total households. Within the tribes, Sabar Tribe constitute 81 % and other tribes 19 %. The second largest social group is OBC category (Gauda, Teli, Sundhi-19%), followed by Schedule Caste (mostly Pano & Duma 8%) and general category (other than Brahmin 3%).

Occupations

According to Census 2011 workforce participation rate is 49%. Female work participation rate is slightly higher than their male counterpart (50% and 48% respectively). Within the main workers around 72 % workers are engaged in agriculture. The percentage of Cultivators and Agricultural Labourers is approximately equal 36 % each and 28 % workers are engaged in Other works. Within Marginal workers category 98% workers are engaged as agricultural labourers and 2% as cultivators. The share of cultivators to total workers is 15% where the proportion of female cultivator is less than 1% .

The main occupation of households is agriculture. 34% households depend on wage labour. Within wage labourers, a majority (24%) of households are engaged in non-agriculture sector and 10% are engaged in agriculture. Majority of wage labour households belong to landless category & most of them belong to Schedule Caste & Scheduled Tribes social group.

Women participate in agricultural work in the village. They also work in non-agriculture sector as unskilled wage labourers particularly in private construction sector, livestock rearing and weaving. Despite having a labour card (Job card), people are not interested in working under MGNREGS due to low payment structure, corruption and delays in wage payment.

It was reported that contractors often use machines rather than hiring labourers in order to get work done quickly and also save money. Women workers from the village mostly belong to SC and ST communities.

7% of the households are engaged in business and 11.4% in govt. services. Around 20 households are financially better off than the remaining in the village and their main source of livelihood is govt. service.

Among the 20 households, four have large land holdings which are used for cotton cultivation. A majority of the richer households belong to General and OBC. A few households who

are doing in govt. jobs, leased out their land for a fixed rent of rupees 5000/ acre per year for cotton cultivation. Land was leased-out for paddy cultivation under sharecropping, where the produce was shared equally between tenant and land owner. Mean land holding size is 1.3 acre (Max=8 Acre, Min=0, SD=1.74, C.V.=133 %).

Twenty three households are engaged in agriculture through leased-in contracts (sharecropping of paddy with cost sharing) but in case of cotton cultivation, the rate is fixed at Rs. 5000 per acre per year.

Agriculture

According to the Geo-economic Survey, 2019 the agricultural land in the village is partially irrigated and hence, the village can be classified as mostly rain-fed. Irrigation is mostly done for rice cultivation and river and ponds are the main sources of irrigation. Single-cropping agriculture is practised in the village. Around four farmer households have their own pump sets.

Around 50 % farmers cultivate rice, 21% Cotton and 26.3% both. Few farmers cultivate vegetables on the bank of river Mahendratanya as Rabi (Pulses, Arhar, Biri etc.) and Zaid crops separately. Less than one-fourth of the total agricultural land is mechanized by tractors, harvesters. Otherwise, traditional methods are used for cultivation. In rice cultivation, some farmers use harvesters. Farmers often hire labour from within the village or from other (nearby or distant) villages. Around 30-40 labourers come to work in a group from nearby villages such as Murusing, Tudumul, NuaSahi, GudiSahi village. All these labourers are from hilly and tribal dominated villages. They mostly come for weeding operations and harvesting of crops. Farmers face shortage of labour as significant proportion of labour from the village are engaged in private construction work. Animal husbandry is significant source of livelihood for some households, particularly from OBC categories (Gauda) and ST. None of the households were involved in the collection of non-timber forest products.

Wages

The wage rate of male and female labourers in agriculture sector is rupees 300 and rupees 150 per day respectively. Wages in the non-farm sector is rupees 450-500 and rupees 300 for

male and females workers respectively. In the non-farm public works, particularly MGNREGA both male and female workers are paid rupees 207 per day.

Credit

Credit needs for cultivation is accessed from Syndicate Bank or SBI. But, farmers mostly take loan from banks as well as Lamp (Cooperatives). There are three households who lend credit at an interest of 2.5-3% per month. There are seven Self-Help Groups in the village. They are active and reliable source of credits for households.

Outmigration

According to Geo-economic survey, 41 (26.3%) households of the village have at least one migrant. Migration is mostly individual and families are not taken along with them. There are only 4 households from which both husband and wife had migrated. According to villagers, migration among the youth has increased as communication has improved in the village over the years. The youth now migrate to different cities of the country. However, migration is seasonal and occurs mainly in the lean agricultural seasons. Most of them migrate after January and return during monsoon when rice and cotton cultivation starts. Around 75% migrants are seasonal migrants, 20% are semi-permanent and 5% are permanent who work as regular salaried employees.

The median age of migrants is 28 years for male and 30 years for females. The population in the 25-35 years age cohort is the most predominant among migrants. Female migrants are very few (only three female migrants). Two of them had migrated with their husband and only one had migrated alone to Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu. A majority of the migrants are either landless or small and marginal landholders and most of the migrants belong to ST (72%), followed by OBC (20%) and SC (8%) communities.

Most of these migrant workers are engaged in construction sector as daily wage labourers. Some of them work in shops, some as waiter in hotels and two are employed in a garment factory in Coimbatore. They all migrated individually. So, there is an absence of labour contractors in the village.

Most of these migrant workers are engaged in construction sector as daily wage labourers. They all migrated individually. There are no labour contractors in the village.

Most migrants found their job on their own after migration and some through relatives who were already working in the place of destination. Seasonal migrants normally leave the village after January every year (which is the lean season in agriculture) and return during June. Other migrants who were employed in factories, hotel or in garment company, generally return only once or twice in a year. They mostly returned in December or April for the village festival of “Thakurani Puja”. Household having migrant members are relatively better off than non-migrant labour families. Seasonal migrants remit around rupees 25000-30,000, semi-permanent migrants send between rupees 40000-50000 per annum.

Some migrant households are better off than others. For example, Chandrakala Parichha works in a garment factory in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu and earns around rupees 12000 per month. She stays in a hostel provided by the factory which also serves food. She is able to save money and remit around rupees 70-80,000 per annum to her family. She remits home her savings once or twice in a month. In many households, migrants' remittances had been used to renovate or construct houses. The remittances are mainly used to purchase food, and pay for children's education and health care. Expenditure on house renovation or construction was done only after meeting the basic needs. Some household also used remittances to lease-in land for agriculture. Only one household in the village had purchased a small plot of land from the migrant member's remittances. A larger proportion of semi-permanent migrants opined that they are happy because they get regular work and earn more than in the village before the lockdown began. Seasonal migrants opined that during the agricultural lean season, they do not get regular work or even if they do, are paid very low wages; which is why they prefer to migrate. So they were relatively happy before the COVID-19 pandemic. Now after the pandemic, a majority of the migrant workers have decided not to stay in the destination places. They were willing to work at lower wages and accept fewer days of work in the village than to stay in the destination places.

Migrant Workers during the Pandemic

A survey was conducted taking 27 samples of migrants workers, including those who have returned (N=3), those who registered to return (N=14) and those who neither registered nor were willing to return to village (N=10). The interview were

conducted through video conferencing, telephonic conversation and a field visit during June 1st- 6th June 2020. So we can divide these migrants into two categories i.e. those who have returned (N=3) and those who have not returned (N=24) yet. The focus of the survey was on impact of covid-19 and the country-wide lockdown at the place of work as well as in the village and on the migrants 'families.

Three male migrant workers returned to the village during 1st and 3rd phase of country-wide lockdown. Two migrants returned during the 1st phase of lockdown from Hyderabad and one returned from Khorda in Odisha during the 3rd phase of lockdown. Migrants who returned from Hyderabad were working in the construction sector as daily wage labourers. The worker who returned from Khorda worked in a factory. The country-wide lockdown and consequent lack of employment in the place of destination made the migrants face a sudden economic crisis. Lack of money forced the migrants to reduce food consumption. They also faced scarcity of water. Fear of the virus and hardships collectively, put a toll on the mental health of the migrants. They normally earned rupees 7000-9000 per month. After remitting their earnings to the families, they hardly had any savings left. During the lockdown too, the two migrants had very little money to fall back on. Employment was not available in the city and apart from receiving the remaining wages that were due, they did not receive any kind of help from the employers. They also did not receive any help from the local people or NGO or the state government either in the form of cash transfers or through supplies of food and other essentials. Difficulties apart, the migrants however did not experience any ill treatment at the place of destination during their stay. After returning to the village, the migrants are still unemployed and are struggling to find work, income and food.

Returning Home

The migrants decided to return to the village when they started facing severe scarcity of food, income and work. The fear of getting infected by the virus also made them decide to leave the city. They travelled in a goods truck (which was carrying goods to Paralakhemundi) by paying rupees 700 each. One migrant returned home from Khorda by covering a distance of 300km by truck and then on foot.

Life during Quarantine

The two migrants returning from Hyderabad were asked to stay in home quarantine. When the migrants returned to the village, the villagers forced them to first register at the police station and get a medical check-up by Asha workers. They were then allowed to go home and quarantine themselves as they did not carry any symptoms of COVID infections. Only the migrant from Khorda completed 14 days of institutional quarantine and 7 days of home quarantine. He stated that he was satisfied with the quantity and quality of food, medical check-up and sanitation in the institutional quarantine centre provided in the village. Other persons quarantined in the same place also stated that they were satisfied with the facilities and care they received.

Migrants who returned or were planning to return (registered migrants) did not want to go back to their destination for work due to the very bad experiences they had during the lockdown. They said that they would do any work available at the local level. However, migrants who had not registered in the Govt. portal did not want to return to the village, due to panic of getting infected with covid-19 virus while travelling home by bus or train. Also, as factories and work sites had started to open migrants were again getting employment in their places of destination. In addition, a majority of the migrants who had not returned to the village said that they would not get any work in their native place immediately if they will return. So, all migrants including those who wish to return migrants did not have any concrete future plans. They were seeking work and financial assistance from the government to start a small business on their own.

Migrant Workers at Destinations

A telephonic survey was conducted to understand the occupations of migrant workers who never returned to their native place during Covid-19 Pandemic. Of 24 sample migrants, 18 migrants are engaged in the construction sector as daily wage labourers. Two migrants work as assistants or salesmen in shops and as supervisors in construction sites. two each work in private companies and as a tailor in a garment company in Coimbatore.

The maximum earnings of migrants is rupees 16000 and the minimum is rupees 8000 per month. A majority (90%) of them

stated that the earnings were hardly enough to make savings. Every month, migrants sent between rupees 4500-6000 to their families.

The abrupt country-wide lockdown had a very negative impact on migrants' income, work and their consumption levels. The crisis is now slowly getting ameliorated due to phase-wise reopening of shops and work sites. More than 90% of workers did not have any work during the entire phase of lockdown at the place of destination. Many of construction workers said that they were normally paid their wages on a weekly basis the sudden announcement of the lockdown in the third week of March, many of them had very little money with them (less than rupees 1000). Much of their wages were due with contractors or agents under whom they worked. Those who were working in shops or private companies received some help in the form of food supplies from the employer but none of the daily wage labourers received any help from employers. Many migrants said they remained hungry some times and also reduced their food intake. Although many of them said that they received cooked food from local government but the quality and quantity of food was not sufficient. Among the migrants interviewed, two had approached the Odisha Govt. for food and they received 5 kg of poor quality rice, a spoonful of salt, a small packet of turmeric powder (worth rupees five), a small amount of dal(pulses) and 100ml of mustard oil. So, most of them (particularly construction labourers) faced a very difficult situation in getting food during the lockdown. Many migrants also faced water scarcity but very few of them were subject to ill treatment at the place of destination. All most all workers had panicked about the spread of corona and this had led to psychological stress as well.

More than ninety per cent of workers did not have any work during the entire phase of lockdown at the place of destination. Many migrants said they remained hungry some times and also reduced their food intake.

Left-behind Families

Migrants send more than 50 % of their income as remittance to their family every month. The average amount of remittance sent per month is Rs. 5800 (with N=27, Maximum Rs.= 11000, Minimum =Rs. 3000, SD. =1912).

As remittance forms the most important source of household incomes, the inability of migrants in sending money to their family during the entire period of lockdown caused much difficulty. Migrants' families in the village could not purchase food. A part of the food crisis was solved as they received 5kg

of rice per person for 3 months, wheat, 1kg Dal (Pulses)1kg, and kerosene from PDS. Households received a cash transfer of rupees 500 (those who had a zero account), and rupees 1500 (for those who had a labour card). The old and eligible persons were given three months advanced pension. A majority of households reported that that they managed to run their households from their own savings and by borrowing from relatives.

Some households which are very poor, or with old or disabled members were given cooked food during the lockdown period. However, such benefits were not adequate as the households were passing through severe psychological stress and worry about their migrant member's health condition, food, shelter, work and incomes.

Life in the Village

There is a severe impact on the daily life of the villagers during lockdown. In particular, agriculture has been affected, Agricultural work was disrupted due to the lockdown. Farmers who cultivated vegetables suffered as they could not harvest the vegetables regularly. Land preparation for kharif paddy and cotton, which is usually done in April-May, was disrupted. Due to shortage of labour, tractors, seeds and fertilizers farmers were unable to prepare the land. This delay resulted in no new crops being sown for the year. Besides this, those who cultivated vegetables also faced a lot of problems due to shortage of labour. On the other hand, there was a sudden decline in demand for vegetables and fruits (like (Mango, Jackfruits, Pineapples, cashew nuts etc) due to closure of Mandis and weekly markets.

In normal times, middle men would come to the village to take these products from the farmers but due to the lockdown not a single middle man came. Farmers were also not able to take these products to the market due to lack of transport facilities. Hence they faced difficulty in selling their agricultural products due to shutdown of hotels, temples, restriction imposed on gathering on various social cultural programmes i.e. marriage, local festivals etc. During this phase, farmers carried their produce in cycles and sold them by door to door vending. Due to lack of storage facilities, the perishable items such as vegetables and mangoes were often destroyed, causing much loss.

There was a decrease in the wage rates for agricultural as well as non-agricultural labourers.

Welfare Schemes

Basically 10-12 women (from 5-6 households) with zero accounts in the bank received rupees 500 as cash transfer. As the banks (Syndicate Bank or SBI and the ATMs) are located (at Rayagada) far away from the settlement, the beneficiaries faced difficulty in withdrawing the money. Two women said they could withdraw money from the bank agents in their village. All most all agreed that the amount they received was not sufficient. However, villagers who had either an AAY or BPL ration card received food items. They were given 5kg /per person of rice or wheat for three months and kerosene from PDS. During the period of lock down, the two Anganwadis in the village did not function properly. Only dry food such as Chhatua, eggs etc. were provided to pregnant women and children (<5 years of age) on a monthly basis. Before lock down, children from the village regularly visited to Anganwadis for cooked food and to play and study. During the lockdown, unfortunately, one Anganwadi Karmi badly affected by paralysis as a result one Anganwadi centre remain closed while other centre was could not function properly due to over burden and fear of the pandemic put children out of the renter for a long time.

Mid-day meal was served to selected people (such as old, single, differently abled etc) in the village, twice a day in at Krushnapur (a nearby village). During the lockdown, no cooked food was substituted with dry food.

After the 4th phase of lockdown, work was available under MGNREGA but was not adequate for all. Around 30-40 people were working in MGNREGA. Reviving/building ponds and construction of roads were under process. The work, however, is not sufficient enough to meet the demand for work in the village. Some households that were eligible for job cards were not given one and thus could not seek work under MGNREGS. Some complained that due to malpractices like proxy attendance and corruption by some agents/ contractors/ supervisors; the beneficiaries could not get 100days of work.

None of the households of the settlement bought consumer durables like television sets or mobile phone on EMIs and there is no ATM/Bank Branch in the village. Some of

households got cash from Bank Mitra (Syndicate Bank) who were appointed under PMJDY. However, villagers found difficulty in accessing banking facilities particularly during lockdown.

The village has a water tank with a capacity of 50000 litres. Water for public use is supplied to different taps that are located particularly in the road sides. There are also 2 public hand pumps and people were allowed to access these sources during the lockdown. As the village was still in the 'green zone', no one was asked to keep off from the water sources.

Almost all households have electricity but latrine/toilet facility within the household is not 100 per cent. Open defecation is practised in the banks of River Mahendranaya. Also, some households, particularly in Indrabas Sahi where a majority of Pano caste (SC) reside have very small rooms in the house because of which social distancing could not be followed.

Panchayats & Collective Action

There was not even a single positive case of covid-19 in the village or in neighbouring villages, but the panchayat had made an arrangement of quarantine centre (Q.C) at schools. Migrants or visitors from other states or districts were kept in this centre for isolation. Cooked food, shelter and medical check-up facilities were provided for those who were staying in the quarantine centres. Social distancing was also maintained as much as possible. One migrant who returned from Khorda completed his duration of quarantine.

Rajnagar

Balasore, Odisha

The Village

Village Rajnagar (Post Office: Olmara, Police Station: Raibania and Block Jaleswar) is at a distance of 72 km from the district headquarters of Balasore and nearly 250 km away from the state capital Bhubaneswar. The nearest airport is in Kolkata that lies at a distance of 132 km. To travel to the village from Bhubaneswar, one must first take a train from Bhubaneswar to Balasore or Jaleswar and then take a tempo at a fare of around rupees 300. The travel time is about one hour due to the Subarnarekha River passing between the railway station and the village. If one takes the bus, the fare is rupees 30/40 and the travel time is two hours.

There is one Upper Primary Nodal school up to Class 8 in the village. There are two Anganwadi but no hospital (except one Primary Health Centre for the entire GP) and no post office. The village has four wards with around 578 households with a population of around 2000. Among them, there are 1400 voters.

The village is dominated by SC population (around 80%), followed by 15 % OBC and rest 5 % belong to the upper castes. The entire village is Hindu. There are no ST households. The sub-caste composition of SC households comprises a majority of Majhi (main occupation is fishing and also work as casual labourers), followed by Khadal (cultivate vegetables on small plots of land over the year), and Hadi (main occupation is casual labour). Among the OBCs, most are Kamar/Kamila whose main occupation is their traditional work of making wooden furniture or fabrication, part time work as casual labour). Upper Caste Hindu households own land but work in non-agriculture. Their land is leased-out for cultivation in crop sharing contracts). They are engaged in miscellaneous occupations such as temple-priests, business, and construction contractors and also in government work like Indira Awas etc.

Occupations

The main occupation in the village is agriculture and casual wage labour. More than 80% of people are directly or indirectly attached with cultivation, mainly paddy. In the last two to three years, some households were able to cultivate two crops of paddy in a year due to subsidies on the use of bore-well by the government. Land which lies near to river (*palo jami*) was used to cultivate vegetables.

The occupation of most of the households is wage labour in agriculture labour and non-farm work in brick kilns. Some people also migrate to West Bengal for better remuneration and regular work opportunities. There are construction labourers, wooden furniture makers who work on daily wage basis (only Kamara/Kamila sub-caste), tractor drivers and labourers in sand mining (i.e. *Bali Khadan*).

Most of the labourers belong to SC. Some SC households cultivate paddy and vegetables in leased-in land. The rich or landlords who belong to higher caste lease their land to lower caste households. The land lord households themselves, are engaged in non-agricultural occupations. Some female workers from SC households work in agriculture, otherwise SC women do not work in agriculture. In the last two to three years, some female workers have been migrating to work in brick kilns in neighbouring villages to support their families. Women from OBC households only participate in the household's own cultivation of vegetables. None of the women participated in

MGNREGS, or any other public work. Although SC women previously worked, they have stopped now for issues related to dignity and respect in village. However, SC women migrate to nearby villages to work in brick kilns. None of the women in the village work in other occupations except in agriculture and brick kilns.

More than 70-80 per cent of households are farmers but they also work in wage labour and in other occupations such as driving and construction labour.

Some households whose economic condition is better compared to others work in non-agriculture activities. However, the SCs are predominantly labourers. Some SC labourers migrate to West Bengal for agricultural work after working in the village because of higher wage. The higher caste households generally work as contractors, furniture makers (carpenters), teachers in government schools or in private companies outside the town. Such households have ownership of large land holdings which has been fragmenting due to division within the family. Such households lease-out land and engage in occupations outside agriculture. The rent is often fixed at 50:50 crop sharing and sometimes it is also fixed at rupees 3500-4000 per acre of land for one year for one crop of kharif paddy. In the rabi season, the land owner is paid 1/3rd of total crop output. Sharecropping is more common in the village than fixed rent in cash.

Agriculture

There is less than 20 % of irrigated land in the village and the remaining is rain-fed. Irrigation is done by bore well and canal (from the river). In the last two years, more than 70 per cent of village could not produce any crops due to drought. Recently, some parts of the agricultural land is being irrigated by bore well. Otherwise, the river water is lifted for irrigation using pump sets. Paddy is the principal crop and covers 90 per cent of land. It is usually a single crop.

Some land is under vegetable cultivation and is double or triple cropped. Less than 20 farmers in the village own a pump set. Two years back, some farmers received subsidies for bore well because of which the number of pump sets in the village increased.

A respondent from the village, Santosh Mandal reported that he got 60 % subsidy for the bore well. He spent around rupees 80,000 to 1, 00,000 to construct it.

Most of land in the village is used to cultivate paddy once in a year. Only some households cultivate two crops of paddy and less than 5 % of the land is used to cultivate all types of vegetables. None of the households cultivate commercial crops in the village. 50 % of the total cultivable land is still ploughed by using a wooden plough pulled by oxen.

There has been some increase in the use of tractors for ploughing but the rest of the crop operations are still manual. Farmers carry the crops on their shoulder using bamboo sticks (called Bahungi). The wage rates for manual labour is low in the village due to the presence of a large supply of labourers. Sometimes in the rabi season, there is some labour shortage as most the labourers work at a brick kiln near the village. Advanced wages (known as 'dadan') is paid to workers. In the kharif season, agricultural labourers from neighbouring villages come to the village for work as the demand for labourers is very high that time. Labour shortage in the village was not reported earlier but in the recent times, there is a dearth of labour supply due to out-migration and due to work in the debt-bondage contracts in brick kilns.

Wages

In the village most of the labourers belong to lower caste and are mostly male. There are some female workers too and wage rates for male and female workers is equal. The wage rate for transplanting is rupees 160 for work five to six hours of work. For harvesting (Rs. 180-200), post-harvest transport and processing (Rs. 200-250), ploughing with rent for oxen (400-500), carrying the produce (Rs. 350). The wage rate for non-agricultural labour like construction work is rupees 200-250 per day for work of around seven hours. Wage rate in MGNREGS for both male and female is rupees 183-200.

Credit

If a small or a landless labourer wants to borrow a loan from any informal sources like rich farmers or landlord or relatives or from any private agency, he has to pay rupees three to five for every hundred rupees per month as interest. The poor farmer must mortgage his ornaments or some asset as collateral for

the credit. Collateral is required as lenders do not trust borrowers that they will repay the loan.

In case a tenant cultivator borrows money from the land owner (whose land was leased-in), the latter does not ask for a collateral because the crop produce or yield cultivated by the tenant is kept with the land owner (in his khola) after harvest. This assures the landowner that the tenant will repay the loan.

There are many SHGs but most of them are not functioning well as the loan taken by borrowers are not returned. Some SHGs provide loan to other individuals outside the group at a charge of rupees 2-3 per month for every hundred rupees. Daily wage labourers and farmers take loan from private sources like L&T group, MFI such as Bandhan (which has now become Bandhan Bank) etc. These informal agencies charge a monthly and weekly principal amount with some interest rate on the security of group commitment. The interest charges are normally 18 per cent per year. Another group charges nearly 62 per cent of interest per annum. Around 30-40 per cent of households accessed such loans from private institutions.

Outmigration

Out-migration from the village is low because most labourers work in the brick kiln or in sand mining (bali Khadan) on a daily wage basis. There are only about 20 to 30 % of households who out-migrate for work from the village. Out of the 30 % of migrant labourers, 10 % go to West Bengal for a short period of less than three months, and the remaining 20 % migrate outside the district and the state (mainly to Bhubaneswar, Hyderabad, Chennai, Pune, Gujarat and Mumbai). Most of these migrants are SCs in the age group of 15-22 years.

Migration from each household is individual. Migrants travel with friends mainly after the kharif season (in late-August-September) and return to the village before starting of the next kharif Season. 80 % of the migration is seasonal and some are semi-permanent. Seasonal are more frequent than other type migration. Nearly 80% of the migrants are in the age group of 15 to 22 years and the remaining 20 % are between 22 to 25 years. Migration is individual, all male and none took their family members to the destination. Majority of them were either landless or poor farmers from SC.

Most of the migrants are Scheduled Caste youth in the age group of 15-22 years. The contractor provided information about work opportunities to migrants. They also arranged travel tickets for migrants to the work destination.

The most common destination of migrant labourers was Mumbai, Pune, Surat, Chennai etc. Recently, migrants also go to Hyderabad and Bhubaneswar as construction labourers (in marble setting work). Some also worked in ply board factories, in laying cable pipelines and some in plastic producing factories. Migrants mostly worked individually and sometimes with friends. Migrants reported that the employers or supervisors did not permit workers from the same village to work together as they thought it would hamper progress. Contractors were unknown to migrants and introduced through labour contacts. Incentives were offered to contractors by the company to supply labour. A migrant reported that contractors did not work regularly with the company and were paid wages like migrant workers. The contractor provided information about work opportunities to migrants. They also arranged travel tickets for migrants to the work destination. The migrants refunded the cost of the tickets in the first week of work. Seasonal migrants usually left for work destinations in August and returned to the village after six to eight months. Some migrants even stayed for about one year in the destination. Migrant labourers usually do not have any fixed time to return home but they normally return before the festivals like Durga Puja, or Odia new Year (Pana Sankranti).

The economic condition of migrants has improved marginally due to migration. But it has not resulted in a sustained improvement in their standard of living.

Most migrant households spend their income on marriage expenses, religious functions and on house construction/renovations. On an average, rupees 5000 to 7000 is remitted by migrants working in Hyderabad and Chennai. Those working in Surat (Gujarat) and Pune (Maharashtra) remit around rupees 7000-10000 per month. According to migrants, the reason for the difference in earnings and remittances is that they work for 8-10 hours per day in Hyderabad and Chennai, but in Surat and Pune their work duty is for 12 hours because of which they earn rupees 15,000 per month. Migrants expressed that they were not happy to stay away from home but their economic condition had compelled them to migrate away. They would be happy if employment was available in the village or at least within the state even if the wages were relatively less than at the destinations. Migrants had planned to work outside the state for a fixed period of time to fulfil certain targets after

which they would work in their own village even if earnings were limited.

Migrant Workers during the Pandemic

Earnings of migrants varied across work destinations. On an average, migrants earned about rupees 10 to 12 thousand if they worked 12 hours a day. After meeting all the expenditure in the destination, they could save between rupees 5 to 7 thousand per month. During the lockdown period, migrants could not earn as the company closed down. The labour contractors and agents who kept the migrants provided them with some essential grocery items and gave some money for other consumption purposes.

After a week, the agents refused to give anything to migrants. Migrants were then left with no other option than to return to the village with the help of the Odisha Government. Most labourers were not able to get even two meals in a day after 10 to 12 days of lockdown. Some savings were used to tide over the period.

After the lockdown, the employers refused to pay the migrants and also did not help to send them back to their villages. Wages were not paid and no help was offered to provide migrants with essential items. Migrants also did not receive any financial help. They said they did not require any medical help during the period. They only purchased few medicines from the shops. They did not have ration for more than ten days at the time of the lockdown.

Till the date of survey/interview, the migrants had not received any help, financial or otherwise, from the government or NGOs. A household was entitled to receive 5 kg of rice and one kg of Arhar dal/ Koloth Dal for the period of three months.

Returning Home

Migrants reported that they would be bound to return to the village if their savings were exhausted. They were already facing problems in getting basic items for consumption purpose.

The migrants returned to the village by registering in the Odisha government portal. They received help from the government and did not have to spend money on travel. It took them four and a half days to reach home from Pune. They also had to walk for 3 km to reach the bus stop in order to catch the

After the lockdown, the employers refused to pay the migrants and also did not help to send them back to their villages. Wages were not paid and no help was offered to provide migrants with essential items. Migrants also did not receive any financial help.

bus arranged by the Odisha government. One of the migrants brought home rupees 1500 from one of his relatives who was with him during the journey. The agent had helped them to get travel ticket and other information. The migrant does not know who paid the ticket fare for them. The migrants were not harassed during the journey period and upon reaching their home districts, they were taken to a school for 14 days quarantine.

Life during Quarantine

The migrants stayed in the village quarantine centre for fourteen days, after which they were allowed to go home but were asked to maintain social distancing for another seven days and not interact directly with other family members. During the quarantine period, the migrants were served enough food and sanitation facility was also good. There were no other problems either in the school facility or at home. One person reported that during his migrant son's home quarantine period, a few villagers treated him like an 'untouchable'.

Migrants in the Village

At the time of the survey, the migrant had not begun working in the village as his home quarantine period had not been completed. He plans to work in the village as a tractor driver or helper. The wages in the village varies between rupees 250 to Rs. 300 per day for work of six hours. He said that ready to do any type of labour work in the village. Their family is fully dependent on the agriculture. Supply of food comes from the cultivation in leased-in land. For other essential food items he plans to work as casual labour.

The migrant labour reported that they had no savings in the household but had also not borrowed money from others. For the migrants, the village life was better, happier and more peaceful compared to their lives in work destinations outside, because help was available in the village if anyone was facing problems. The migrant expressed that even if he would be paid rupees 150 instead of rupees 400-500 (that was paid in destination), he would still be satisfied.

Most labourers did not want to migrate out for work again but a few were not sure about it because of the need to earn money for sister's marriage and brother's higher education. Some migrant labourers were still interested in returning for work to

destinations outside the village due to the availability of regular work and wages that was not available in their own states.

Migrants reported that the next time they migrated, they would have to register themselves as migrant labour both at the destination state and well as the home state. Because they have heard that migrants who did not have Aadhar card or a voter card of that locality did not receive any help, including food, in Surat.

Migrant Workers at Destinations

Migrant labourers at the destination have to do all kinds of work that is available. Labourers are provided with machinery equipment in the work site after completing the training period. The type of work varies between locations. In Surat, a maximum number of labourers work in cotton textiles

In Pune, migrants work in bike and auto spare parts company.

In Hyderabad migrants lay down cable wires under roads and in Chennai some labourers worked in a chemical company.

On an average, if a labourer works for 12 hours, they earn around 10 to 12 thousand per months. After paying for their consumption needs, migrants were able to save rupees 5 to 6 thousand. Some time, by working overtime migrants can save rupees 8,000 in a month. After the lockdown, migrants faced problems as the company remained closed for some days. It has now reopened and is functioning smoothly but there is a labour shortage in the company as migrants have returned to their own village. During and before lockdown, the company employers did not create any problems for the migrants as they were not asked to leave. So migrants stayed in the company with the assurance of the contractor and the company supervisor. As per the views of Mr. Bapi Gharai (male, age 22 years), 30-40 % of labourers were still working. The company supervisor monitored all aspects of migrants' living condition as well as employment over the lockdown period. In Ahmadabad, migrants did not receive any help from NGOs, government official or agents. Migrants did not face any medical problem during the lockdown period in the destination.

Migrants were ready to quit migrating after two to three years during which they wanted to complete the construction of their house in the village and have some savings. A migrant who

was still working the destination had already registered in the government portal to return home. He did not get any call from the government official about the confirmation of his rerun journey. He also does not know if he has to pay for travel tickets. The migrants only hoped that once he reaches his village, he will get some employment. If he does get employment, he plans to return to Gujarat only after two or three months. Otherwise, he will have to return in 20-25 days. He is however, not interested in returning to the village immediately as he and his family have exhausted all their savings in the lockdown period and are in need of some income.

Left-behind Families

A household that had a male migrant member was not able to remit money home during the lockdown. The migrant's father reported that his son did not send money home regularly but on an average they received around rupees 5 to 6 thousand per month. The remittance money was important for the household and was spent mainly on food and grocery items. The remittances were also used to build their house under the government's Indira Awas Yojana. However, the work was still incomplete and the roof of the house was yet to be fixed. Most migrants used their remittances on essential consumption expenditure, on house construction, and social ceremonies such as sister's marriages and other functions.

Since the lockdown, a migrant from the village had not been able to remit any money home because all wage payments from the company had stopped. The migrant's father sent him rupees 2000 to pay for food items in the destination. Later he was given rupees 5000 from the company.

During the lockdown period, a maximum number of households faced financial problems and could not meet consumption expenditures. Money was borrowed from relatives and friends. No help was available from the government or from any organisation during the lockdown, except for the provision of 5 kg rice per head and one kg Arhar Dal for three months.

Life in the Village

The lockdown adversely affected the economic condition of several households in the village. The lockdown coincided with the period of harvesting rabi crops because of which farmers faced many problems in selling their output as they did not get good prices. Farmers faced black marketing of their crops due to deficits in demand. Although labour supply for agricultural work was constant, there was a fall in labour demand as farmers did not have money to make wage payments. Thus most farmers used family labour to harvest their crops.

Agricultural produce of farmers are mostly sold in West Bengal as the prices are better than in Odisha. The wage rate of the labour increase for a short period due to temporary shortage of labour. For example, normally the village wage rate is rupees 150-170 per days but it rose to rupees. 200-250 for a short period.

There is no facility of government procurement in the village so farmers have no option but to sell their produce to the commission agents and traders of West Bengal in the weekly and daily markets. Usually they get do not get a fair price for their produce.

The communication/transport facility from the village to the town of Jaleswar is relatively difficult than to West Bengal. So most farmers from the village are willing to sell their produce in West Bengal which is at a distance of only 2km from the state border. The absence of storage facility in the village to enable farmers to keep their produce during low market prices, compel farmers to sell at prevailing prices rather than damage the outputs.

It was reported that during the lockdown, farmer were also unable to sow new crops after the rabi harvest due to scarcity of vegetable seeds.

Welfare Schemes

Around 70 % households received cash transfer from the government as LPG Subsidies. They received rupees 798 per cylinder. However, less than 30 per cent of households were able to withdraw their subsidies from the bank due to long queues in front of the village Grameen Bank (distance from village 3-4 km) and UCO Bank (distance from village 10 km).

The LPG subsidies were transferred to households again after a few days.

More than 97 % of households received PDS subsidy of rice, wheat and kerosene. Households with BPL card received 5 kg of rice/wheat per head and with Antodaya card received 35 kg of rice, irrespective of household size (number of household members). Rice/Wheat was priced at rupees 1 per kg and kerosene at rupees 17.48 per litre. Other than items under PDS, households also received 5 kg of rice per person for the three months (given at a single time) from the dealer as well as 3 kg of Arhar dal, free of cost.

The Anganwadi work in the village was not hampered or stopped during the lockdown period. Anganwadi female workers visited each house on a weekly basis or once in two weeks to meet pregnant women and to also supply food to the new born.

The school remained closed during the lockdown and cooked mid-day meals were not distributed in the village. During lockdown, public work like MGNREGS works was also closed. The village does not have any bank or ATM centres to help households in withdrawing subsidies money. The government provided tube-wells for each village so households did not face problems related to drinking water during the lockdown. Recently, there are 10-15% households that have their own hand pump for drinking water. These households also allow others to access drinking water, if needed. But some households of higher caste still treat low caste households as untouchables.

Panchayats & Collective Action

During the covid-19 pandemic, households cooperated with each other. They did not ill-treat or misbehave with each other. In accordance with the government guidelines, each and everyone in the village followed the lockdown rules and people were aware about how to reduce this epidemic. The Sarpanch himself created awareness about the virus and requested people to stay at home. He tried to help the needy households who were facing food shortages, medical emergencies or other problems. Until the date of this survey, no one in the village had tested positive of Covid-19.

Saini

Madhubani, Bihar

The Village

This is a report of village Saini which is situated in Phulpras Block of Madhubani district. The total area of this village is 554.2 hectares of which 288.64 hectares are the net sown area (Census, 2011). Saini has about 1500 households with a total population of 7500 persons. The sex-ratio is 953 per thousand males. The village has a predominant population of OBC which comprise about 68% of the total population. Others (General) and SC population comprise 18 % and 14 %, respectively. There are two primary schools and one middle school (upgraded to Class X) within the village.

According to Nal-Jal Yojana, each house has a tap water connection but the supply has not started properly. Households still use hand-pumps to access drinking water. Each house has an electricity connection which regularly provides power for almost 20-22 hours in a day. Almost every household also has a gas (LPG) connection. The roads in the village are all-weather and motor-able. Transport facilities such as auto-rickshaws and buses connecting the village with the main town is frequently available. Under 'Swachh Bharat Mission', each house also has a

latrine facility, and open defecation has stopped almost completely in Saini. Unfortunately, sound health infrastructure is still lacking even though ASHA workers have been performing their duties diligently. There are six SHGs and two Anganwadi in Saini. The weekly village market (haat) opens two days in a week.

Occupations

The main occupation of households in Saini is agriculture. The principal crop in the kharif season is paddy while wheat and pulses like moong, etc are cultivated in the rabi season. 68 percent of net sown area is irrigated by a canal. Irrigation is also done by lifting water from ponds with pump sets. There are around 15 pump sets in Saini. About 7 tractors are available for land preparation operations. Sowing and harvesting is done manually and female labourers form a majority of the labour force hired for these crop operations. Threshers are used and therefore mechanisation of agriculture is partial. Almost all agricultural activities are performed by tenants and not by land owners. Livestock is reared by households mainly for self-consumption and not on a commercial scale. Households are also engaged in other non-agricultural occupations such as business and as auto drivers etc.

Agricultural productivity in Saini and Madhubani is among the lowest in the districts of Bihar (Economic Survey of Bihar). However, Primary Agricultural Credit Society (PACS) and Kisan Credit Card (KCC) plays a significant role for farmers to market their produce at Minimum Support Prices (MSP) and to avail credit from rural banks. Still, it is observed that farmers' dependency on informal credit sources such as land owners and local money lenders (mahajan) has not reduced.

Agricultural productivity is low on account of illiteracy of tenants and disinterest of land owners in cultivation. Agriculture is mainly for subsistence. High population density and burden on agricultural land has fuelled out-migration for employment from Saini. Out-migration is high among landless households.

Outmigration

According to interactions with village respondents, around 30-35 % population (comprising young and to a certain extent

literate persons) have out-migrated to urban areas for better opportunity.

Therefore out-migration from Saini is mainly rural-urban. The purpose of migration is either for education or for better employment and earnings. Out-migration for education occurs among students that belong to well-off and land-owning households or moneylenders. Those who out-migrate for employment are either government employees or Private Job (limited company) holders. Outmigration for employment is also rampant among landless households who leave the village to work in the urban informal sector as labourers or casual workers. Such households dominantly belong to SC. They work as self-employed hawkers, rickshaw pullers, auto drivers or as wage workers (hourly and piece rated) in the informal sector.

Returning Home

Migration from Saini has occurred to different destinations and for different purposes. After the Covid-19 pandemic, students as well as workers returned to the village. We were able to collect information (in June 2020) from 32 respondents of 'Saini' who returned to the village. Five migrants who were still in the destination (during this survey) were interviewed telephonically.

Of the 32 migrants, two were students (who returned in Shramik train from Kota in Rajasthan), three were private sector employees and 27 were labourers in the informal sector.

The workers reported that they returned to the village due to fear of Covid-19 and loss of employment. Migrants returned home basically two reasons; these are on the basis of afraid from COVID-19 and loss of jobs. Of those who returned, 73 percent migrants said the primary reason for their return was that no work was available at the destination because of lock down. That means most of migrants returned home due to loss of works.

Migrants returned home by using various sources like by shramik train, bus/train, on foot and others. 18 Migrants returned in bus/ truck and spent between rupees 5000 to 6000 out of their own savings. 5 migrants travelled back in 'Shramik train' and paid a ticket fare of rupees 1800 to 2500 out of their savings. Six migrants began their journey on foot and travelled in various means of transport whenever it was available. It cost

them between rupees 1500 to Rs.2000. While some migrants used their savings, others had to borrow money from their employers. One migrant had to take monetary help from his family back in the village. Along the journey, migrants received food cooked in community kitchens 'langar' organised by local people. However, food and water was not always available in the route. It caused much hardship while travelling as migrants and children remained hungry during the journey.

Life during Quarantine

After reaching home, almost all migrants were kept in quarantine. 20 migrants were kept in quarantine at a school, 10 migrants quarantined at home and two were not asked for any quarantining.

The quarantine centre set up in the village school provided good quality meals and breakfast regularly. Regular medical check-up was also provided during the quarantine period. Lighting facilities were sufficient and generators were arranged for power back-up. Overall, the basic amenities were properly arranged by the Panchayat, according to respondents. All members were also asked to follow quarantine rules like wearing face masks and maintaining social distancing. All members successfully completed their quarantine period and none tested positive for Covid-19.

The migrants who returned home were asked if they would want to return to the cities/destination places where they worked/studied. 25 migrants who were employed in different occupations in the informal sector did not want to return. They wanted to stay with their family members in the village and look for employment in the village periphery. All three migrants who worked in private companies wanted to return to their jobs as the quality of employment was much better than what could be found in the village. The student migrants did not want to return to Kota as their course/syllabus had been almost completed.

Migrant Workers at Destinations

Five migrants working in a private company, who were still in the destination and had not returned to the village, were contacted through a telephonic interview.

Some migrants used their savings to pay for their return trip, others had to borrow money from their employers. Along the journey, some of them received food cooked in community kitchens organised by local people. However, for others the non-availability of food and water caused much hardship while travelling.

They reported that they were paid their full salary in lockdown-1. After that, the company informed them that for up to 3 months or until work resumes again, they would be paid only 30 percent of the total salary. The migrants were assured that no one would be fired from work during the lock down but anyone was welcome to leave the job voluntarily. All five migrants decided to stay back at the destination. During the interview, we found that the migrants were very depressed because of the uncertainty of the lockdown. Out of the 5 migrants, two were living with their families and three were single. However, the migrants said that they had access to food like vegetables, cereals, pulses, milk and even medicines during the lock down period. The prices of these essential items had not increased and they could also access home delivery services for these items.

Rampur Chit

Ballia, Uttar Pradesh

The Village

Rampur Chit village is located at a distance of 18 km from its district headquarters of Ballia (in Ballia district of Uttar Pradesh). It lies in the border of the Ballia and Buxar districts. The village is also located at a 20 km distance from block Hanumanganj and 389 km distance from the State Capital, Lucknow. The Gram Panchayat of Rampur Chit Village is Ajour Pur and the nearest town is Chitbadagaon, which is 4km away. The village is well connected with road and railway networks. There is no bus stop in the village but a local bus stand is accessible at a 5km distance. The main bus stop is 13 km away. The village is located at a distance of only 1.5km from the main road where transport facilities such as e-rickshaw, auto, tempo, and jeep services are available. Transport networks, therefore, connect the village with the local market (Chitbadagaon) and the nearest railway station which is situated in Phephana and Chitbadagaon.

The neighbouring villages of Rampur Chit are Cheruia (at 2km distance) and Manpur, Agropur, Narahi, and Mahreo which are located about 3 km away. Rampur chit is surrounded by Ballia block towards the East, Simri block towards the West, Garwar

and Sohany blocks towards the North and South, respectively. The nearest towns are Ballia, Buxar, Rasra and Dumraon.

According to the 2011 population census, the total population in this village is 7213. The female population comprises 49.2 % of the total. The SC population is 9.5 % and ST is 2.9% of the total population. The working population comprises 31.4 %. Although this census data does not have details on the OBC and Upper Caste populations; Rampur Chit is largely composed of the Yadav and Upper Caste populations. There are sub-castes like Tiwari, Ojha, Singh, Ray, Sengar that belong to the Upper Caste. The Yadav, Bind, Mallah, Kumbhar, Gupta and Verma belong to OBC. Chamar or Ram, Dusadh and Dhobi belong to SC and Gond caste under ST.

Total literacy rate in Rampur chit is 65.28% out of which male literacy rate is 79.65% and female literacy rate is much lower at 50.65%. There is one primary and one upper primary government school. There are two private schools in the village. These schools enrol up to upper primary level. There is no health care centre in the village and the nearest health facility, Narahi that is accessed by households is 5 km away. The village has a post office and two mobile towers.

The settlement of households in the village has a distinct pattern whereby, different clusters of houses belonging to specific caste groups are present. There are separate clusters of households belonging to Yadav, other OBC (i.e. non-Yadav OBC), SC, ST and Upper Caste cluster. The village is predominantly Hindu with only three Muslim households. Land distribution in the village is highly unequal as a large percentage of land is under the ownership of the Yadav (OBC) and Upper Caste households. The Yadav and Upper Caste households exert a dominating role in the village economy and politics. The ST and SC households are largely landless and depend on agricultural work and out-migration for livelihood. Economically well-off Yadav and Upper Caste households lease out their land to ST and SC households under sharecropping. Within the Yadav and Upper Castes, a large number of poor households engage in agriculture and also out-migrate for work in the informal sector.

Occupations

About 10 percent of population are economically well off in the village. They belong to landlord households and those having

business establishments and/or members employed in government service (such as in defense, teaching and police service). Besides, a large number of population depends on wage labour in agrarian as well as non-agrarian sectors. Wage labourers belong to specific caste groups such as Mallah, Bind, Rajbhar, etc. from the OBC category. However, some caste groups uphold social prestige and do not prefer to work in the village as wage labourers even though they are poor. Such households engage in wage labour only outside the village by out-migrating for work. For example, the Yadav and upper caste households in the village do not hire out labour in the village.

Agriculture

Rampur Chit village has an area of 508.56 acres out of which the non-agricultural land is 31.11 acres. The total irrigated area in the village is 144.55 acres. About 70 % of the population depend on agriculture as their main source of income. Both kharif and rabi crops are cultivated in the village. The main crops in the rabi season are food grains such as wheat, green gram, mustard, pearl millet, barley, etc. Food grains such as rice, maize, pearl millet are cultivated in the kharif season. The village falls under the flood-affected area as 80 % of land is affected by flood during the Kharif crop, leaving only 20 % as cultivable land. It is only during the rabi season that 100 % cultivable land is available for farming.

Outmigration

Out-migration for employment is common from the village. Migration is mainly seasonal with 75 % migrating seasonally, 25 % have migrated semi-permanently and only 5 % have migrated permanently from Rampur Chit. Migration is mainly for livelihood diversification among the poorer sections of the population who either own small landholdings or are landless. Migration is comparatively higher in SC households due to landlessness. In the place of destination, migrants work in various activities in the informal sector works such as sand mining, welding, cloth factories, iron mining, diamond cutting, as painters, carpenters and as waiters in restaurants, etc. Individual migration is more prevalent but those working in certain occupations such as sand mining migrate collectively in a group. Labour contractors do not operate in the village to recruit workers. Migrants use their own social networks based

on kinship and caste identities to seek and access information about work and destinations.

Migrant Workers during the Pandemic

We recorded information from 17 respondents and collected information about a larger group of migrants, who were working in different destinations and had returned to the village during the Covid-19 Pandemic lockdown. All migrants were male and only three among them had ownership of agricultural land. The destinations of migrants were scattered across the country but a large group of 15 sand miners had returned from Maharashtra. 18 workers from the village had returned from Maharashtra. Among them, a group of 15 workers who were employed in sand-mining in Nanded. They earned around rupees 12000 per month and saved about half the amount every month. The remaining three workers returned from Thane, Ahmednagar and Mumbai. The migrant who returned from Thane was 23 years of age and was employed as a weaver. He earned rupees 8000 per month, out of which he had saved rupees five thousand. The migrant who returned from Ahmednagar was 26 years of age and worked in a welding unit where he was paid rupees 11500 as monthly wages. All 17 workers (including the sand miners) were poor, landless and had kutcha houses in the village. Only one migrant (25 years of age) belonging to the Yadav caste worked in a diamond factory in Mumbai and earned rupees 28000 per month. Back in the village, he lived in a pucca house and also owned agricultural land.

Three migrants returned from Karnataka. One (23 years of age) worked at a call centre (at a monthly salary of rupees 10000), the second (32 years of age) was a construction worker who earned around rupees 12000 per month and the third one was a waiter whose monthly income was rupees 15000. Two other migrants returned from Madhya Pradesh, where one worked as a painter (30 years old) and the other as a stone crusher. Each earned rupees 12000 per month. Two migrants returned from Gujarat, where one was a tailor (21 years of age working in Surat at a monthly income of rupees 10000) and the other was a carpenter (22 years of age) who earned around rupees 17000 per month. One migrant returned from Nepal (painter) and one from Delhi (IT sector). They earned rupees 12000 and 16500 respectively. These two migrants belonged to households that owned agricultural land in the village and had pucca

houses. One migrant returned from Dhoda Giri, where he worked in an iron factory and was paid rupees 25000 per month. The migrant was landless but had a pucca house in the village. Three other migrants returned from Goa (cook), from Ludhiana (worker in garment factory) and from Rourkela (iron miner). Each earned not more than rupees 15000 per month and belonged to landless households.

The age group of migrants is between 20-35 years and they migrate to various cities across the country. Poverty is a common characteristic among migrant households in the village and is apparent by their landlessness, poor housing amenities and the precarious nature of work they do in destination places. A large number of these migrants still live in kutchra houses and practice open defecation system. Financial constraints in meeting the expenditure of children's schooling and health care expenditure of elderly dependent members are commonly found in these households.

Returning Home

Reverse migration was seen the village after the Covid-19 lockdown because migrants lost their job in the workplace. The earnings, savings and consumption level of households was significantly affected by the lockdown. Apart from a few, a majority number of migrant workers who left their jobs during the lockdown due to loss of incomes. As they were left with no cash, they were even unable to pay their room rent. The labourers thus decided to return to the village and travelled in various means of transport such as bus, truck, train, bicycle, and even on foot. Migrants who traveled by train took three days to reach home. Those who travelled by bus took 5-6 days to reach home. Some other migrants even used their bicycle and took 15 days to reach the village. Others who could not access any transport walked for 30 days to reach the village.

During the course of their return, migrants spent between rupees 1000 to 4000 on travel expenditures. As migrants did not have sufficient money in their hands when they started their journey, many had to borrow money from their employers and even from family members. Migrant households had to deplete their savings to enable their members to return home.

Poverty is a common characteristic among migrant households in the village and is apparent by their landlessness, poor housing amenities and the precarious nature of work they do in destination places.

The migrants also hardly received any help and food/cash assistance from the Government, NGOs and individual persons in the destination places. These migrants also got no cash transfer or any assistance from the Government. They got only a bus ticket.

The return journey of migrants from destination places was thus hard and fraught with difficulties and problems. To take an example, Anil (name changed) reported that during his five days journey from Mumbai to Ballia, he survived on only biscuits two times a day that he had carried with him. He did not have supplies of water and food during the journey because of the lockdown. Anil also faced difficulties in travel as he had to change buses frequently from one state to another state right up to his native place.

Life During Quarantine

After returning to the village, all migrants stayed in home quarantine as there was no quarantine facility organized by the Government. None of the migrants who returned to the village tested positive for Covid-19.

Migrants in the Village

Even after escaping unemployment and lack of earnings in the destination area, the migrants again faced lack of work in the village. Public works under MGNREGS had also not started in the village. Households managed to support their family by falling back on their meagre savings and also by taking loans. As savings was getting exhausted, households were facing much trouble in meeting consumption expenditures. Normally migrant workers remitted half of their incomes to family members in the village. Migrants' families totally depended on remittances which was mainly used for various consumption purposes. In some cases, remittance had been used for construction and renovation of houses and also to pay rent for land leased-in for agricultural purposes. Only rarely had migrants been able to use remittances to purchase small plots of land for cultivation. The incomes of migrant workers in Rampur Chit varied as they were employed in different kinds of work. On an average, they saved about rupees 50,000 or above per annum. Loss of income had severely hit the households and impacted their consumption patterns. In some cases, employers had paid a half month salary even without assigning any work, however even though the employers paid

their due wages, it was the loss of future incomes and depletion of savings that caused a severe crisis. This was coupled with lack of assistance from the government in the form of cash transfers or any other help.

Some households had already exhausted their savings by transferring money to migrant members who had been stuck in the city without any money to return home. Households that did not have any savings had taken loans to bring back family members home. Several households have been found to be surviving by borrowing money to meet essential consumption expenditure. Joblessness in the village had led to a state of rampant confusion about the future strategy for livelihoods. In a state of economic crisis, migrants have not been sure about whether to stay back in the village or to return to the cities. In case of availability of better opportunity in their native place, they would not face the dilemma of out-migrating again.

Life in the Village

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was not only confined to the cities but exerted a larger repercussion in the village economy and social life too. Joblessness in the village had escalated out-migration and over the years, households had become heavily dependent upon cities for employment and remittances. The pandemic triggered a massive flow of reverse migration to the village and simultaneously the lockdown brought the village economy to a standstill. March to April is the season for harvesting rabi crops but due to lockdown, the harvesting operation of crops like wheat, gram, mustard, barley, linseed were affected. Farmers were not able to sell their crops and had to face losses due to unprofitable prices for their crops. Farmers facing losses in the market were unable to sell their crops to the Government because being tenants who had leased-in land, they did not have the required land documents. Such tenant cultivators also did not receive support from their land owners who could have used their land papers to negotiate with the government. Cultivation in leased-in land was thus steeped in risk and uncertainty for landless farmers which made work in the agrarian sector, a difficult choice.

Vegetable farmers also faced similar losses and risks. Some farmers had cultivated vegetables like bitter gourd, bottle gourd, pointed gourd, ladyfinger, etc in leased-in land. After harvest, the farmers were not able to sell these vegetables in

The lockdown hampered the harvesting of rabi crops. Tenant farmers could not sell their crops to the Government due to lack of land documents. They were unable to even pay rent for their leased-in land.

the market due to the lockdown. In the absence of storage and transport facilities, the perishable vegetables had to be sold at much lower prices. The tenant cultivators suffered great losses to an extent that they were unable to even pay rent for their leased-in land.

The lockdown has adversely impacted farmers due to shortage of seeds and fertilisers because of which new crops could not be sown. As the market remained closed, farmers could not access subsidies because of which they were forced to buy agricultural inputs at high prices from a few shops. Households engaged in animal husbandry and dairy farming also faced a slumped market as there was no demand for dairy products like milk, sweets, curd etc. The entire village economy was paralysed and engulfed in a deep and prolonged income crisis.

Welfare Schemes

Cash transfers were received by women members of the household in Rampur Chit village. Rupees 500 was deposited in their Jan Dhan accounts by the government. The beneficiaries were able to withdraw the money and it was the first of any such cash assistance provided by the government. Households were also given rice through PDS. The government announced free distribution of rice for three months through PDS. Each member of a household was entitled to a maximum of 5kg of rice. BPL cardholders received 35 kg of rice. The lockdown disrupted the normal functioning of the Anganwadi center in the village. It could not distribute cooked midday meals but unlike in other states, there was no distribution of dry food items either.

The village has a small branch of a bank but there is no ATM facility. The nearest ATM is located in Chitbadagaon which is 5 km away from the village. For drinking water, people use a hand pump or tube-well to lift water. During the Covid-19 situation, there was no restriction for anyone to use the public hand-pumps either on grounds of caste and/or community or even as a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of covid-19 in the village.

Panchayats & Collective Action

Until the date of survey, no positive cases of Covid-19 was reported either in Rampur Chit or in the neighbouring villages. Some Covid-19 positive cases were reported in another village

16 km away from Rampur Chit. Meanwhile the Gram Panchayat was found to be completely non-functional in terms of handling the situation during the lockdown period. It was found that the Panchayat's role was non-satisfactory with regard to the arrangement of a quarantine facilities in the village even though there is a high prevalence of reverse migration. There were grievances among the public due to the Gram Panchayat's apathy towards the sufferings of the citizens in the village.

Bhanail

Uttar Dinajpur, West Bengal

The Village

Uttar Dinajpur is one of the poorest districts of West Bengal as per the Human Resource Development Report 2004. The district ranked 18th among the other districts of West Bengal when per capita income is considered. Uttar Dinajpur has a maximum number of agricultural labour i.e. 43.7 percent in West Bengal. It has a very low literacy rate and ranks low in the Gender Development Index of the state. It also has the highest number of backward villages in West Bengal. Raiganj is the district headquarter.

Bhanail is one of the important villages in Hemtabad block. The total area of the village is around 330 hectares (DCHB, 2011). The village lies 10 km away from its nearest urban centre i.e. Kaliyaganj which also has a railway station. Bhanail is connected with all-weather metaled roads and private and public buses are available within 5 kms distance from the village. Infrastructural facilities like post office, mobile phones, and internet services are available at the village. The village has a government primary school and a middle school but the high

school accessed by children is located in a neighbouring village. Institutes for higher education such as colleges/universities and primary health centres/hospitals are available at Kaliyaganj or Raiganj.

As per the census 2011, the total number of households in the village is 417. There is a predominance of Rajbansi (SC) households in the village. There are also a few Muslim households in the village. Although Rajbansi households form the majority, the settlement within the village is characterised by 'paras'/clusters of households distinguished by caste. The upper castes like Bhahmins and Ghosh live separately in Ghosh para and Thakur paras. Similarly, the santhals (ST) households are located in Shaotal para. SC and ST population in Bhanail is 81.4 % and 8.6% respectively, as per census 2011.

Occupations

Hemtabad block is mainly agrarian without any significant industries except a few rice mills which process the agricultural produce of the area. The soil is very fertile for agriculture. The main occupation of the village is agriculture. Over 90% of the households are farmers. Out-migration for the waged work outside the village is common. Bhanail is known to export labourers to different construction industries of the country. It is mostly able-bodied men that migrate out for work to various urban areas. Out-migration is circular as well as seasonal. There is no fixed destination and migrants go wherever work is available. There are very few people who work in brick kilns. Households also engage in pottery/idol making. Income from agriculture as well as remittances are important. Women in the village work as agricultural labour and they do not migrate with their husbands. Some are employed as ASHA workers and are also members of SHGs.

The economically better off households in the village comprise those with ownership of larger landholdings, business enterprises and those with household members employed in Government services such as teaching. Rich households are engaged in agriculture as well as business in the village. They also operate as informal money lenders. Labour contractors, known in the village as agents/thikadars, have lately emerged as the neo-rich class. They originally belonged to the asset-poor class of the village but have overtime accumulated wealth by supplying labour for employment to other states. Leasing of

land is common at the village. Land is leased out by households with large landholding who have moved out of the village or have no family members to continue cultivation. Land is also leased out by households in case of need for immediate cash to pay for medical treatment or social ceremonies such as marriages.

Nowadays migrant households are seen to lease-in land as they are able to pay rent from remittances. A big farmer and businessman (age 38 years) with ownership of over 10 acres land (30 bigha) commented that:

Ora ek sathe taka pai, aajkal, segulo diye jomi lease e niche, boro krishok rao Rs. 40,000/- - 50,000/- taka eksathe dite parbe na, kintu ora parche.

'Migrants bring lump-sum money, which are now used to lease land. Even big farmers do not have the capacity to pay Rs. 40,000- to 50,000 at a time, but they (migrants) can'

Agriculture

Agriculture in the village is largely rain-fed. The main source of irrigation is privately owned shallow tube-wells. Deep tube-wells are also used (where available). Land is double-cropped. The main crops cultivated are- Amon and Boro paddy, maize is grown all-round the year. Lentil, mustard seeds are also cultivated. Jute as a cash crop was grown earlier but recently due to the lack of demand, most farmers have replaced jute with maize. Some households have also planted bay leaf trees (cash crop) instead of food crops for more profit.

Mechanisation in the form of tractors and other machines is observed. These machines are rented on an hourly basis (eg. Rs. 900/-for an hour of tractor use). Labourers are also hired from neighbouring villages during the peak sowing and harvesting seasons. As most young men migrate out for work, rich farmers have reported the existence of labour shortage during the peak agricultural seasons as well as for daily household work.

Wages

The daily wage rate for male and female labourers in Bhanail is rupees 250/ and rupees 150/ respectively, along with one-time food. The MGNREGA wage rate is rupees 204/- for both male and female labourers.

Credit

Migrant labourers working under *thikadar* take financial help from the latter in times of need. The *thikadar* does not charge any rate of interest and deducts the loan borrowed from the labourer's wages. Non-migrants such as small farmers and labourers borrow from money lenders of the village. The rate of interest varies from 3 to 5 % per credit per month. SHGs are active in the village and allow members to borrow from the group but in case of urgent and/or large loan demands, the SHG are not effective as a source of credit.

Outmigration

Migrants work in different destinations outside the state and mostly belong to poor households. Migration is mainly among young (20-35 years) and able-bodied men of socially backward castes. Most are either landless or cultivate in leased-in land. Migration first started from the village in the year 1980 when one migrant moved out as a helper in construction in Chhattisgarh (Sarkar, 2017). Out-migration from Bhanail is seasonal as well as irregular circulatory, where the migrants do not have any fixed destination. Migrants also change their *thikadars* frequently on the basis of their work experiences and facilities provided by *thikadars*. According to data collected in a household survey in 2013-15, seasonal migrants comprised around 4% of total migrants from the village. The remaining 84% were temporary irregular migrants (who did not follow any fixed season to return home) and 11 % who sometimes returned to the village in certain seasons (such as harvesting or festivals) (Sarkar, 2017). Seasonal migrants follow the agricultural seasons and return to the village when sowing or harvesting is done. It is a time when migrants meet their families and work in the village. The most popular destinations of work are Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Mumbai and Delhi-NCR. Migrants are employed in construction work of metro-lines, fly-overs, roads, sub-ways, where wages are double and even triple than the village wages.

Labour contractors/agents/*thikadars* belong to the same village from where the workers are recruited. Some belong to neighbouring villages and towns. Recruitment of the labourers are done either through telephone or after labourers visit the *thikadar* at his residence. Most labourers are given an advance money before they start a new work. Such monetary advances

Out-migration from Bhanail is seasonal as well as irregular circulatory, where the migrants do not have any fixed destination. Labour contractors from the same or neighbouring villages recruit migrant labour by paying an advance. The contractors have lately emerged as the neo-rich class of the village.

are crucial for migrants' household members who stay back in the village. Advance money ranges anywhere between rupees 5000 to 10,000/- or more before joining the work at the destination. Most often, the labourers are recruited by contractors, but migrants who are salaried and /or skilled in certain forms of work and those with significant work experience under any known company may directly contact the manager for employment.

The remittances sent by migrants were varied in amount and interval. About 7 % remitted rupees 2000/- to 5000 per month. 8.8 % of migrants carried the money home. About 71 % remitted between rupees 1800-10,000/- every two months. The remaining either did not have a fixed pattern or interval of remitting earnings or sent money after every three months (Sarkar, 2017). The remittances are mainly used to construct / repair houses, for daily expenses on food and clothing etc. As mentioned earlier, remittances are now also used to pay rent for leased-in land. In the absence of regular work in the village, the opportunity of availing employment at double or triple wages through out-migration is important for migrant households. However, migrants argue that they would not migrate if work opportunity was available in the village.

Migrant Workers during the Pandemic: Returning Home and Life During Quarantine

This report documents the migration experience of seven workers who had migrated to Tamil Nadu and Mumbai for work in the construction sector, before the Covid-19 lockdown. These men regularly migrate outside the state for work. The nature of work performed by these migrants varies according to their skills. Four were *mistries* (skilled labour) and three were foreman (one *thikadar* himself) working in two reputed construction industries viz. JMC and VIPL based in Tamil Nadu and Mumbai respectively. Five of these migrants returned to the village by private bus service from Tamil Nadu and two returned by Shramik Express from Mumbai. Migrants who worked under the same company stayed together at the destination and returned to their village as a group. To understand the village situation, a wealthy businessman with ownership of large landholding was interviewed. The interviews were conducted via telephone in May - June, 2020.

Migrants from Tamil Nadu

From 26th April to 3rd May (2020), the company maintained lockdown and there was no work. Workers did not receive any wage payment during the lockdown period. But from 4th May onwards, the company ordered the migrants to work. During the lockdown, migrants in Tamil Nadu did not receive any help from their employers. It was only after continuous protests, that 15 kg rice, 1 kg Dal and 1 litre of cooking oil (distributed by Tamil Nadu government) was given to each worker by the company. Left-over rice and dal was taken by the company, although labours wanted to take their share. Migrants depended on *thikadars* as the only source of financial support for food and daily expenses. Expenditure for daily vegetables and non-vegetarian food items was given by the *thikadar* at the village (who returned home one month earlier for a village fair). Migrants did not report having received any kind of help from NGOs and local residents or even from the company where they were employed. R. Barman had filled up an online form called *Sneher porosh* launched by West Bengal Govt. to help stranded migrants under the mission of *Prochesta Prokolpo*. He also received rupees 1000/- when he was in Tamil Nadu. He received this information from the internet but very few migrants like him got the money after filling up the form.

The migrants, along with others worked for 7 days but protested against the company as they did not want to work. They were very scared at the destination, because they were still forced to work and were staying in crowded rooms with 10-15 people. They were unable to maintain social distance, because they shared same toilet, tube-well and also worked together. Due to differences in language, the company managers could not understand the migrants' demand and called the police to control the situation. Later, the migrants submitted their documents to the police and filled up registration forms to return to West Bengal in the Shramik Express. Most migrants filled up their forms by themselves but the police also helped some of them to fill up the forms.

Booking of tickets in Shramik Express was delayed and even the railway officer could not assure them about their journey. When the labourers protested to be allowed to return home, the police told them to contact the HR department of the company. However, the company staff members did not visit them and no help was offered. The workers threatened to

break the office of the company but the police was called again to handle the situation. 16th April onwards, the migrants started an agitation to return home. They decided to return and hired a private bus for a group of 32 passengers. The cost per person was rupees 12500, out of which rupees 6500 was paid in advance and the balance amount was cleared after migrants reached their village. (The bus charged Rs.6500/- till Howrah and additional amount of Rs. 6000/ to reach the respective villages). There were about 43 migrants in the bus from different parts of Uttar Dinajpur and West Bengal. 20-25 workers belonged to Bhanail. The migrants started their journey on 25th May and reached home on 28th May. The Journey was long and arduous very tough. It took three days from Tamil Nadu (Madurai) to reach West Bengal (Uttar Dinajpur).

While returning, the *mistries* had little money with them. Some had borrowed money from their relatives and some had sold livestock in the village to pay for travel expenses. Most of their relatives/parents had borrowed money from others at the village. Two migrants named J. Barman and C. Barman returned home in the first phase as they had arranged money for the bus. They borrowed some money from their relatives and one had sold two goats (travel cost was 10, 000/- per person in the earlier trip). During the journey, migrants did not face any kind of harassment and were even offered good quality food in three stoppages at Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and another state (which they could not name). The bus they hired dropped them at the door step of their home at the village and for that they paid extra. However, not all migrants were able to travel in the first group. Until 29th May, there were nearly 40 migrants in the destination who had not been able to return home because of lack of money. Among them, 12 were from West Bengal (Raiganj) and 18 were from Odisha. They were planning to return by Shramik Express.

On 29th May, migrants stayed at a temporary shed at a distant location from their house after reaching the village. They had dinner and breakfast. Later most of the villagers and household members wanted migrants to have a health check-up. Thus, they went to Hemtabad police station where thermal testing was done and migrants were sent to a quarantine centre (college building) at Baharail. Two migrants did not visit the police station and stayed in quarantine in a temporary shed for few days at the village.

Some migrants borrowed money from their relatives and some family members sold their livestock in the village to pay for travel expenses.

In the first day, there were 15 people in the quarantine centre in Baharail. However, the number increased to more than 60 people from the second day onwards. The quarantine centre had around 30 big rooms. A single room was allotted to about 5 individuals. Seven new temporary toilets were provided. In the first day, migrants reported that they were given packed lunch of rice, dal, fried vegetables (3 pieces of dry-fried vegetable) and curry (sabji) along with water in plastic pouch. For dinner, they were served a packaged meal of rice, egg curry and a pouch of water. The rooms had no fan, no mosquito net. They were given a plastic sheet to sleep.

On Day 2, migrants were served 2 pieces of 'poori' and curry for breakfast. The *Thikadar* (J. Barman) came to meet them in the second day and he provided each of them with hand sanitiser. The Block Development Officer (BDO) visited them and asked about their problems. The migrants reported that the quantity of food was insufficient for breakfast. Their complaint was noted down. In the second day, three new families came to the centre with children below the age group of 3 years. These families had women and children in the entire group of men in the quarantine centre. The women faced difficulty in using the bathroom as there was little privacy. There was no milk for children in the centre. All these problems were reported to a security guard. The relatives of migrants were allowed to meet them. A relative of R. Barman visited him and brought him food (rice, vegetable curry and fish) and a mosquito repellent that could be of use to everyone in his room. On Day 3, migrants were served three pieces of 'poori' with curry. For lunch, they ate rice and egg curry and for dinner- rice, daal and vegetable curry. The quantity of food they received had improved and was adequate. Relatives also brought food for migrants at the centre. As the BDO had noted their complaints, migrants did not face any problems regarding food from Day 4 to Day 7. However, electric fans could not be managed for the migrants. A night guard was put on duty in the centre. On 6th June, the migrants were released from the centre and instructed to self-quarantine at home for another 7 days.

Migrants from Maharashtra

B.A Barman and B. Barman worked as construction workers in Wardha district of Maharashtra in a company named VIPL. They were employed to build an over-bridge. Work stopped

after the lockdown was declared in March but it resumed in April. They were informed by the team manager that it was safe to work in the region as there was no risk of Covid-19 spreading there. The company provided them with hand sanitizers, face masks and soap. The two migrants learnt from their families and friends about the spread of the pandemic. They became further impatient after hearing that their friends in Mumbai had begun returning to their respective states by taking any means of transport that was available. However, the team manager instructed them to work and not to panic. One day B. Barman, as well as B.A Barman and his friends went to a health centre for Covid-19 check-up with their Aadhar card. The doctor informed them to visit the nearby Government office and fill up the form to book tickets for 'shramik express'. They visited the office and paid rupees 20 for the form. After filling it, they submitted it on 5th May. After seven days, they received a phone call that their ticket had been booked. They submitted their work equipment to the company through the *thikadar*. Meanwhile, they were informed by another phone call that the train was cancelled due to some reason which was not disclosed. They waited again for another 8 days and were again informed that their ticket was booked for 21st May. Unfortunately, the train was cancelled again due to cyclone Amphan. Finally, on 26th of May they boarded the train. The Maharashtra Government provided bus services from their workplace to the railway station. Snacks were also provided during the bus journey. They started from Hinganghat to Nagpur railway station in four buses that carried 22 workers in each bus. There were 30 migrants from Bhanail (Hemtabad block), 12 from Kaliyaganj block and some migrants were from Malda and Dakshin Dinajpur. At the railway station the officers brought their tickets, along with packets of biscuits (2 packets of Parle- G), water bottles (2 each) and chips. Towel and sandals were also given to those who needed them. Their Aadhar cards and address were thoroughly checked. In the train, they were given lunch and dinner and the quality of food served was very good. 100 passengers were accommodated in one compartment, with four passengers per cabin. The West Bengal Government had arranged bus services at the Malda junction and the migrants were taken to Raiganj (the district headquarter). From there, migrants hired a private vehicle to their village and each person paid rupees 100 for the journey.

Migrants reached Bhanail on 31st May. B.A. Barman and his friends stayed at the boys' hostel in the village for 7 days. Although, there was no permission to turn the hostel into a quarantine centre, the migrants broke the lock and later the school head master allowed the migrants to stay there. The arrangement was made by the local people and the *thikadar*. At the centre, there were 33 migrants. Food and water was provided by their family members. B. Barman and his workers went to hospital for medical check-up and stayed in the quarantine centre (college building) for 9-10 days. Migrants were served breakfast, lunch and dinner which was of low to medium quality.

B.A. Barman had little money with him as he did not ask for payment from the *thikadar* for the lockdown period and the months during which he had worked in Mumbai. For him, as long as the *thikadar* was with them, he did not feel the need to worry about financial problems. During the return journey, the *thikadar* paid for tea. The migrants were not charged for the train ticket. They only had to pay for the hired vehicle fare from Raiganj to their village (which was Rs. 100/- each). B. Barman had some money with him, but he did not have to pay for the journey. They also did not face any problems in the Shramik Express during travel.

In the initial 14-15 days of returning to the village, the migrants remained isolated. Even the tea shops are not accepting their money and asked them to visit the stall after 14 days. The household members were anxious and under trauma. They maintained social distancing at the home. Some worked in the field but others remained at home. Work under MGNREGS continued during the lockdown. MGNREGS workers were engaged in earth work (levelling of the land) during the lockdown. As migrants were not employed (until the date of survey), they were being financially supported by family members and relatives. Some even used their past savings. Migrants reported that there would be a vast supply of workers in the village due to the reverse migration.

Migrants in the Village

Migrants who travelled from Tamil Nadu informed that they would stay at the village. They did not have an immediate plan to migrate to other states for work at least in this year. One migrant informed that he will work at the village in agriculture.

But migrants of Mumbai informed that they would probably return to work in August. One migrant who is married and has three children has already planned to migrate to Mumbai. He said that he had no fear of Covid-19 as he was sitting in the village without employment and would not be able to continue that way for long if he has to survive. He reported that in normal times, he earned rupees 60,000-65,000/- for 5 months of work including the extra wage for extra hours of work. But due to the lockdown, he had incurred a loss. He would be paid only rupees 40000 for 5 months of work. Even that payment was missing as the *thikadar* had not cleared his dues. Migrants do not want to leave the village and migrate for work. They want permanent and regular work in the village. Thus, some informed that it would be very helpful if the government provided them some money as capital to start-up any kind of business in the village. A few also informed that any kind of factory/industry would be helpful where they may get work throughout the year at decent wages.

B. Barman who is a *thikadar* as well as the foreman was also planning to migrate in the coming months. His company is ready to provide a bus for travel in which to take labourers from the village. Although B.Barman is not willing to go, he has 15 workers who work under him. He had not been able to pay them their wages for the months during the lockdown. The company officials informed him that they would have to complete the work in order to receive their wages. B. Barman was in a dilemma and was very upset as how he would manage the wages of the workers. He has already paid 500/- per worker from his own pocket.

For 20-25 days during the initial phase of lockdown, there was problem in buying and selling agricultural products. Farmers faced difficulty in buying fertilisers/pesticides for cultivation. When work in the agricultural sector was opened by the Government, the situation in the village improved. The price of the vegetables increased tremendously after Government opened the agriculture sector. Therefore, those who cultivated vegetables were able to make a profit. Labourers were available in the village and Maize was also harvested during the lockdown. The wage rate for agricultural workers remained the same and increased only in the peak agricultural season.

Welfare Schemes

Almost every households who had opened a zero balance account received a cash transfer of rupees 500 along with 3 months of free gas service. Total 10 kg cereal (Rs. 2/- for 1kg rice/wheat) and one kilogram of dal was given to the households under BPL/Antodaya (AAY) through ration dealers. It is reported that the ration dealer distributed 100 grams less rice to the beneficiaries. The dealer later requested people to ignore the issue and not report it.

Anganwadi centres were closed during the lockdown period. Asha workers visited every households for basic health check-ups. Schools distributed rice (under mid-day meal scheme) to the students before the start of the first lockdown phase. Students received rice, potato and soyabean for 3-4 times during the second to fifth lockdown phases. Under 'Prochesta Prokolpo', the West Bengal Government launched 'Prochesta' for workers in the unorganised sector to stand by the working class during the lockdown. Villagers had filled up off-line forms but were yet to receive the money. Panchayat informed them to fill-up online forms again. Another scheme which has launched by the Government provided 10 kg rice and 200gm per migrant through ration dealers. Many migrants have received this benefit.

The nearest ATM branch is in Kaliyaganj. Individual hand-pumps are present in almost every house. The public hand-pump was used by the villagers. There was no report of any covid-19 positive cases in the village. The village Panchayat did not take any pro-active step and initiative to organise quarantine centres for migrants and awareness programmes to create awareness. Villagers took every possible initiative to maintain social distancing with migrants who had travelled from other states. Temporary tents were prepared by the villagers in the open field well before migrants reached the village (as mentioned earlier). After 14 days, migrants were allowed to enter their houses. When the number of migrants increased, they appealed to the school headmaster to make the school into a quarantine centre. When the headmaster refused, the villagers forcibly set up the quarantine centre in the school. Even Anganwari centres and school hostels were turned into quarantine centres in order to accommodate the swelling numbers of migrants returning to the village.

Post-script

From 24th June onwards, many migrants have started out-migrating for work. From Bhanail and its surrounding villages, several men migrated to Hyderabad to work in plywood factories. Many migrants have already started their journey on 25th June and this will continue till 30th of June. Migrants have been going from Raiganj to Delhi via train to different construction industries.

Kaliapani

Jorhat, Assam

The Village

Village Kaliapani Adarsha Gaon (henceforth KA Gaon), falls under the 11 No. Pub Lahing gaon panchayat in the Jorhat district of Assam. Village KA Gaon is a relatively new settlement where households from flood-affected areas of Nimati, Kakila, Daini and Gohain gaon (of Jorhat district) have been rehabilitated by the Assam government in 1992. All the households had lost their land and assets to soil erosion by the Brahmaputra River.

There are 330 households in KA Gaon with a total population of 1292 persons, comprising 52 % males and 48% females. Around 73 % of households are Hindu and the remaining are Muslims. 46.5 % of the households are SC, comprising sub-castes such as Jalia, Kaibotra, Motok and Daini Community. Only one household is ST, of the Mishing sub-caste. 22.8 % of the households belong to OBC and rest of the Hindu households belong to the general caste.

The village is 22 km away from the nearest urban centre and has only road connectivity. The village is only two kilometres away from the National Highway-37. The nearest bus stop is 2

km away and can be reached either on foot or by means of privately owned vehicles. The village has one pre-primary, two government primary schools and one privately owned secondary school. There are very few students enrolled in the private secondary school. The village does not have any primary health care centres in the village. This is a major concern in the village because the absence of an all-weather road makes it difficult for ambulance to reach every corner of the village in case of a medical emergency. Even though the village is connected with telecommunication facilities, the reception is poor and it is almost impossible to access a good communication network from inside the houses. There is no broadband internet connectivity in the village, and hence people only depend on cellular networks which provides poor quality of service. The nearest post office is located at a distance of around 1.5 km away from the village. An important feature of the village is the mixed nature of settlement and the absence of household clusters or settlement patterns based on religion and caste communities.

Occupations

The village economy is primarily dependent on the non-farm sector. Most of the households engage in daily casual work for a livelihood. More than 50 % of the households are employed as daily wage workers. 10 % work as vehicle drivers. They either drive their own vehicles as taxis or as salaried workers of other vehicle owners. Only a few were driving their own vehicles. Other households were engaged in self-employment activities like operating small business enterprises that specialized in food items (snacks and savouries) and bread making for distribution in neighbouring cities. Muslim households are mainly engaged in such self-employment enterprises. Compared to Hindus, the level of literacy and educational achievement is lower among the Muslim households as their male members are observed to enter the workforce at a very young age.

Workforce participation of Muslim females is almost negligible in the village. Female workforce participation was highest in SC households amongst all women in KA Gaon. Female members looked after small poultry farms as a source of supplementing household incomes. Female members of some households were employed as domestic workers in neighbouring villages and cities. There is no agricultural land in

The village was established in 1992 for rehabilitation of flood affected households. There is no agricultural land and cultivation is not practiced in the village. The village economy is primarily dependent on the non-farm sector.

KA Gaon and cultivation is not practiced in the village. However, female workers perform seasonal agricultural work like sowing and harvesting in the neighbouring villages. There is a small tea garden in the premises of the village which serves as a source of employment and income for some households. A micro tea processing factory located near the village processes tea leaves from this garden. Tea pluckers earn rupees 30 per kg of green leaves. At a time, workers are able to pluck around 8-10 kg of tea leaves. Around 4 % of the total households work in this tea processing factory. Except for one female worker, all other workers get paid on an hourly basis in the factory.

Wages

Casual workers of the village, which is mostly non-farm employment, earned between rupees 350-500 per day, based on the nature of the work performed. Construction and construction-related workers were paid a daily wage of rupees 500. For any other work, the daily wage is rupees 350. Female workers who work as domestic workers paid rupees 200 – 250 a day depending on the nature of work given in the employing households. Agricultural wages for female workers in the neighbouring is rupees 150 for three hours of work (9 am to 12 noon or 1- 4 pm). Most female workers work on a double shift and earn rupees 300 rupees per day. In the tea gardens, the wage rate is rupees 23 per hour of tea processing work such as withering, rolling and fermenting of tea leaves. Those employed in drying tea leaves are paid rupees 25 per hour. Only one female worker of the village is paid a monthly salary of rupees 6300 per month.

Outmigration

Out-migration for employment had started from KA Gaon almost two decades ago. Around 5% of the total households in the village has at least one member who out-migrates for employment. The interstate out-migration from the village started almost two decades ago but the nature of the migration was such that out-migrants returned to the village after earning and/or saving some money and did not return back to the destinations again. Only sporadically did some workers again return to their place of work for employment. During the survey, it is found that out-migration from the village first began in Muslim households, but recently it has been outnumbered by Hindu migrants. Most of the previous

migrants learned some skills outside the states, such as in construction of buildings, working in dairy firms or as security guards in factories, etc. Some of these migrants have opened their own kirana shops and some have become skilled building/construction contractors in the village and neighbouring areas.

The nature of out-migration for employment is semi-permanent in the village. Migration is mostly for economic reasons and migrants have usually returned home after earning enough to make some savings. There have been only a few cases where workers have continued to work in the destination places. Migrants in the village fall in the age group of 24-56 years and most among them are young and below 30 years of age. Migrant workers are either school or college dropouts and some among them have never attended any formal education. Except for one household in which all members out-migrated, in all other cases it is only the male member of the household that migrates from the village for work. Most migrants are working in states like Telangana, Gujarat and Karnataka where they are employed in factories and as security guards.

Migrant Workers during the Pandemic

A telephonic interview with a migrant worker who is still in his destination of Ishanpur (in Telangana), revealed that during the lockdown they had not faced any significant difficulties. However, they were petrified due to the uncertainty of the situation. The migrant works as a security personnel in a company, where his primary duty is to oversee the working staff of the company and report any case of negligence in work to higher authorities over the phone or through whatsapp. During the lockdown, his salary was deducted by rupees 1000 and donated to the government fund. The migrant does not know about the details of the fund in which a part of his salary was donated. Talking to another migrant worker of the same place but from another company, it was found that the salary was deducted by his company. All migrant workers employed in the company are paid rupees 18000 per month and live in a shared apartment near the company building. They reported that during the lockdown, their respective companies were functional and hence these migrants did not face unemployment. They were also paid for their work, accordingly.

However, these migrants had planned to return to the village in April and they had booked a flight to Guwahati. Due to an extension of the lockdown, they could not return to the village. Unfortunately, they also did not get a cash refund of the cancelled flight. Instead, the airlines asked them to reschedule the flight and the migrants are now planning to return to the village by the month of October. Over the phone, the worker also reported that he is uncertain about returning to work once he reaches home. Another migrant, however, is very keen on returning to work. They mentioned that they are thankful to the government of Assam, for providing rupees 4000 (two transfers of rupees 2000 each) during the lockdown.

Another worker, who was working at Telangana had returned to the village just before the lockdown began. He had been anxious about his life and survival in Telangana. While talking to him, he reported that he has no plan of returning to work again. Recently, he has started a men's salon (barber shop) near the village and is happy to be back with his family.

Other three migrant workers returned to the village during the unlock 1.0. The author contacted these migrants and enquired about their experiences during the lockdown. The migrant was employed as a security guard at a hotel in Hyderabad. His salary was rupees 12000 per month. During the lockdown, as the hostel was closed, he was not paid any remuneration in the respective months. The hotel only provided their staff with food and shelter. He spent rupees 6500 rupees out of his savings to book a flight ticket to return home. The migrant reported that he will never return to work in Telangana again. He plans to search for any other work inside the state (Assam) or if possible within his own district of Jorhat but he will never leave the state again.

Regarding the facilities in the quarantine centre, he mentioned that he was kept at the quarantine centre for four days only. In the quarantine centre, the quality and quantity of food served was good and adequate. The latrine and washroom was common but all efforts had been made to keep them clean and hygienic. Sanitation workers were working round the clock in the quarantine centre. The migrant was tested and upon getting a negative Covid-19 report, he was released from the centre and advised to stay at home for a 14 days period of self-quarantine.

A female respondent (who is the wife of a migrant worker) now works as a sanitation worker at the quarantine centre because her husband (the migrant) has returned to the village. During the interview, the migrant was staying under home-quarantine and the household had no other source of earnings and employment.

Life in the Village during the Pandemic

The economic status of the households is very poor and most of them are poor. The Covid-19 lockdown has disastrously hit the economy of the village and the households have thus faced a second economic crisis (the first being due to a natural hazard). The author found several cases in the village where the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown had put households in deep economic crisis. Some of these cases are discussed here.

The lockdown period clashed with the 'Ahu' or autumn rice cultivation period (March/April to June/July) due to which many female agricultural labourers lost employment and earnings. A vehicle driver who was employed in driving the school van was left out of employment and lost all his earnings as schools remained closed during the lockdown. He had then started selling vegetables near the village to cope with unemployment. Even the tea garden and tea factory workers were affected by the lockdown and lost incomes.

In a female-headed household, the members (a woman and her daughter) had nothing to eat as they could not seek daily wage employment during the lockdown. In the absence of work and earnings, they were compelled to depend solely on government assistance and/or help from private individuals and organisations for relief packages.

In one case, a woman had to undergo surgery for her gallbladder treatment. The household had to take a credit of almost rupees 60000 from another villager. Without employment and earnings during the lockdown, her husband (who was a construction worker) had no idea about how he was going to repay the loan. They also did not have any savings to meet the essential household expenses.

In another case, a migrant who was working in Bihar returned to the village just before lockdown started. For the past 15 years he had been working as an assistant/helper of a truck driver (goods-carrier). His salary was only rupees 4000 per month

along with food and shelter. As the transportation networks closed down due to the lockdown, he was left with no work. He has no other skills to hire out labour for other kinds of paid manual work in the village. Not wanting to send him back to Bihar, his wife and family members have urged him to find employment in the local vicinity. The family has been struggling to afford three meals in a day and they are hardly left with any savings to support the household expenditure for even a few more days. The household received a cash transfer of rupees 1000 in their bank account from the government (in 2 instalments of rupees 500 each). The financial assistance was not considered sufficient to support the household expenditures. The migrant said that he was expecting some credit from his employer during to lockdown. However, his employer refused to help and the migrant thinks that it is indeed a difficult time for his employer as well due to poor business during the lockdown.

Talking to a few daily wage labourers, the author found that they too were facing difficulties in meeting their daily needs. Workers who commuted to neighbouring cities as domestic workers were unable to leave the village for several months due to the lockdown. Even though the government relaxed most of the lockdown restrictions and norms, the workers could not go in search of work because the mode of transport i.e. bus or auto communication was not functioning normally.

KA Gaon is connected to a weekly market where villagers used to sell vegetables and fruits. During the weekly market, some households opened temporary food stalls as a means of livelihood. The lockdown significantly affected all households that were dependent on the weekly market.

In another case, a respondent (the wife of the owner of a namkeen/snacks producing business unit) mentioned that in normal times, an investment of rupees 10000 yielded a profit of around rupees 1800-2000. The monthly household income varied depending on their production in response to the order they received from the sellers. Sometimes the household was able to earn more than rupees 25000/month and sometimes it was less than 15000/month. This household also borrowed loans from informal sources in the village but the respondent refused to disclose the interest rate charged by the moneylenders. The respondent mentioned that their production unit mainly catered to the demand and orders

placed from Golaghat, a neighbouring district. But during the lockdown, they lost their market as there was no demand from their buyers. Even though the lockdown norms were relaxed in some districts, Golaghat district was declared as a containment zone due to a high number of positive Covid-19. The business had suffered and they were reluctant to take orders from distant places due to uncertainty of the lockdown and to avoid investing their savings until normalcy returned in the state. Formal credit was available from Bandhan Bank and the North-East small finance bank (a microfinance company), from where borrowers could take a credit of up to 1 lakh rupees in a year. The household had also taken a credit of rupees 1,10,000 from the Bandhan Bank just before the lockdown, in order to expand their business. However, the lockdown had jeopardised all their business plans and the household reported that it would be difficult to repay the loan.

An interview with taxi drivers revealed that their consumption pattern had been disrupted by the lockdown. They had not expected the lockdown to be extended for such a long duration. They had lost their earnings since the past three months. The new odd-even scheme introduced by the district authorities, which allows vehicles with odd and even registration numbers to ply on alternative days, had made it more difficult to find any work. They had been surviving on their savings and were forced to cut down consumption expenditures. In addition with the rising prices of consumables, people had begun to alter their food choices and consumption patterns.

Faced with the rising prices of consumables, people had begun to alter their food choices and consumption patterns.

Even self-employed workers who owned Kirana shops in the village and near the national highway reported that their sales had declined drastically even after the unlock 1.0 phase. Moreover, they reported that capital and credit crunch had made them unable in stocking up supplies in the shop to meet the demands of the customers. They had neither the capital nor credit support from wholesalers, which made it impossible to run a normal business let alone, make any profits.

It is observed that some of the youth population of the village are looking to establish their own poultry farm because they have no other option left for income generation. Another female respondent (who has separated from her husband), goes to distant villages on foot to buy vegetables at a wholesale rate and sells them in the street-corners for a living. In another

case, a youth who had qualified for Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) now works as a helper of an electrician because his appointment has been with-held due to the lockdown.

Welfare Schemes

All the BPL households in the village and those who had a zero balance bank account received a cash transfer of 1500 rupees (rupees 500 rupees in April, May and June) during the lockdown. However, as there is no ATM around the village, the beneficiaries spent more than a day to withdraw the money from their respective bank accounts. The BPL cardholders received 5 kg rice per household member. Anganwadis in the village has not been functional during the lockdown. The children enrolled in the primary school of the village did not receive anything in the mid-day meal. Only some other students who were enrolled in a government school outside the village received 5 kg of rice, half kg of pulses, two packets of biscuits, one packet of salt, and half-litre of mustard oil from the school.

A welfare scheme of aquaculture had been started in the village under the MGNREGS. Work was disrupted due to heavy rains in the monsoon just four days after it had started. It was a local project and the fund was used for the development of already existing fishery of the village before the monsoon. But due to lockdown, the project got delayed and now people do not have any work under MNREGA. Both male and female workers of the village was engaged in the project at a wage rate of 213 rupees per day. 80 workers from the village were working under the scheme. However, the project is estimated to provide only two weeks of employment in the village which, the villagers think will be largely insufficient to meet the large demand for work in KA Gaon.

Normalcy might return in the village, but it seems that households will take considerable time to recover from the economic shock that has significantly affected their livelihoods from all quarters.

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Gabeshana Chakra is an academic initiative of scholars and social workers interested in the study of Odisha from multiple vantage points, in interdisciplinary and comparative perspectives keeping in view people's aspirations for equitable, just, secular, democratic and sustainable social transformation. Its annual conferences held in different parts of Odisha bring together researchers and activists to deliberate on specific themes based on their investigation and field experiences. It leads to publication of papers, policy proposals and books in Odia and English.

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