



MAZDOOR
MONTHLY

JUNE 2021



ABOUT MAZDOOR.CO

The idea behind Mazdoor.co germinated during the Covid19 pandemic. As we scrambled to hoard food, we forgot the millions in India who don't have the luxury of owning fridges. We forgot about the millions who don't have enough savings to buy enough in advance, who earn their wages on a daily basis and dispose of most of it on essentials. We scrambled to respond to their crisis as an organization by organizing ration kits, community kitchens and medicines and sanitizers for them. But the bigger question was, why did the crisis arise in the first place? Why were so many in the urban workforce without sufficient social security? Had Covid19 just laid bare the divide that was always there? And if it was always there, then why weren't we doing anything to bridge it? These were some of the questions we are here to discuss and answer while helping countless informal sector workers in the urban workforce .



EDITOR'S NOTE

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“All labor that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence”

- Martin Luther King Jr.

Welcome to the first edition of Mazdoor Monthly! This is our effort to bring you stories of our work and of labour in India on a monthly basis. The platform Mazdoor.co was created last year with an aim to streamline our work on informal labour. We as a country are run by the informal sector. Our roti, kapda and makaan for the most part come from the informal sector and yet we know very little about them. 85% of India's labour force is in the informal sector, most of them being farmers who grow the food we eat. After that, construction labourers who build our homes are the biggest contingent, followed by small manufacturing units, houseworkers, street vendors and so on.

They live amidst us, and yet remain unseen. We don't know what they do when it rains nonstop and their homes get waterlogged or what they eat when their stoves can't burn due to damp wood. Our relationship to them is a limited one, its not even one of an employer and an employee. After all, we as employees get weekends off, maternity leaves, insurance and pensions after we retired. Our workplaces have restrooms and canteens and coffee machines. What about them? Does the househelp in your home (Which is her office) has access to the bathroom? And the security guard? Does he get paid leaves every month or do you see him on duty 30 days a month? The construction worker? When was the last time he got a pension to live on when he was too old to do manual labour.

These are some of the questions we ponder on as we work towards making our cities more hospitable to the migrant labour. After all, when we go to villages, we are entertained with chai, access to their homes and the best of facilities, but what happens when they migrate to the city?



NATIONAL MIGRANTS DRAFTS POLICY

NITI Aayog, along with a working subgroup of officials and members of civil society, had prepared a draft National Migrant Labour policy.

The Policy is a clear statement of intent to better recognise migrants' contribution to the economy and support them in their endeavours.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DRAFT- KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Facilitate Migration: Migration should be acknowledged as an integral part of development, and government policies should not hinder but seek to facilitate internal migration.

Increase Wages: The draft asks source states to raise minimum wages to bring major shifts in local livelihood of tribals which may result in stemming migration to some extent.

A central database should be created to help employers "fill the gap between demand and supply" and ensure "maximum benefit of social welfare schemes".

Grievance Handling Cells: The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) and Ministry of Labour should set up grievance handling cells and fast track legal responses for trafficking, minimum wage violations, and workplace abuses and accidents for migrant workers.

It also proposes a new **National Migration Policy and the formation of a special unit within the Ministry of Labour and Employment** to work closely with other ministries

WHAT AILS THE POLICY?

- The policy does not delve deeper into the causes underlying the poor implementation of labour laws that are linked to the political economy of recruitment and placement.
- There is a reference to unfair recruitment practices in the document, but virtually no analysis of why the system persists and how it is enabled by the employment structure of businesses and enterprises.
- It does not address gender differences in employment.



As per Census
India has
45.6 Crore
Migrants in 2011
to 31.5 Crore
migrants in 2001

BACKGROUND:

The latest government data on migration comes from the 2011 Census. As per the Census, India had 45.6 crore migrants in 2011 (38% of the population) compared to 31.5 crore migrants in 2001 (31% of the population).



FROM THE FIELD

HEERALAL, 55-60 | BALLOON SELLER (PHUGA WALA) | LAW GARDEN

“

I do not want any further
nuisance, already
I have been suffering...!

हमको कुछ मगजमारी नहीं
चाहिए, ऐसे ही
बहुत तकलीफ है...! ”



You know, those times when you are so frustrated with everything around you - even with the ones who are trying to help you! You are so fed up that you don't want any further interruption in your life. You have given up all hope and have surrendered. Those were the vibes we got when we first met him. Drenched in sweat, he looked close to age fifty-five or sixty, trying to set up his business at a roadside corner in Law Garden. When asked whether we could click some of his photographs, he snapped at us, “हमको कुछ मगजमारी नहीं चाहिए , ऐसे ही बहुत तकलीफ है..”

We did not protest because we could sense his frustration from the institutions he had faith in or from people like us who came every second day promising they would do something for them. Quietly, we sat there, at the threshold of his small set up trying to get our things arranged for the next potential candidate to interview. But Heeralal had a story and he had his own medium to communicate, like so many others we covered in our earlier posts. He was communicating his story through annoyance. Gradually, he softened when we stopped insisting, and started opening up. But his annoyance was visceral and had waited for long to come out so it started coming in spurts of anger. Initially he spoke in Gujarati and we didn't dare disturb his flow, for we knew this outburst helped. We silently listened as he told us how he fought a court case for his daughter and how he wishes to get his wife treated who has breathing disorders. We discussed how lockdown has affected his business and how he wishes we could get him some medical support for his differently-abled son. His story is that of the thousands out there struggling to get their livelihoods back, supporting families just like ours. As we finished our conversation with him, to our pleasant surprise, he agreed to get photographed. Despite all that he was going through, it didn't stop him from smiling for that brief moment and it made our day.

RECENT INITIATIVE

BEAT THE HEAT



With the temperature rising, it gets more and more challenging for onsite workers to get through the day and constantly feel energetic. We wanted to do something special for people who work tirelessly in the heat. Beat the Heat initiative allows construction workers, traffic police officers and security guards to keep going as the temperature soars in Ahmedabad. During the 2020-21 edition of this initiative, we served 20+ security guards in and around 10+ societies and 5+ housekeepers who personally approached us.

Our Summer
Their Summer
Why the Difference?



KHARCHI

THE AMOUNT GIVEN TO AN
INFORMAL SECTOR WORKER AS AN
ADVANCE WHICH IS LATER
CUT FROM THE MONTHLY INCOME.

When labourers don't get any work during the pandemic and can't even earn enough to afford two-meals a day

