

INTER-AGENCY REGIONAL ANALYSTS NETWORK

Seasonal Migrations of Marginalized (Tribal) Communities in Madhya Pradesh & Rajasthan

Foresight Analysis and Scenarios by 2020

September 2016

Asia



This report has been commissioned by the Action Against Hunger (ACF) India Country office and its partner organization, the Fight Hunger Foundation (FHF), on the basis of field observations in the states of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. In these two states peaks of child malnutrition are regularly monitored when tribal communities return from seasonal migrations, questioning the potential relationship between the two phenomena. In order to support operational programming, advocacy and strategic decision-making, and knowing that the migratory cycle is a traditional pattern of the area, the analysis focuses on short-term, intra and interstate population movements that are essentially driven by the access to seasonal job opportunities.

Key observations

1. India's socio-economic development is uneven, and marginalized communities (such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) endure continuous structural poverty.
2. Seasonal migrations have long been a livelihood strategy for the poorest households in India, as a mean to access food and money through casual labour.
3. A combination of intertwined social, economic and political drivers sustains tribal seasonal migrations, while external shocks will result in increased movements in the outlook.
4. Women and children are more vulnerable to nutrition and health services deprivation resulting from seasonal migration.

Introduction

Migration flows have shaped some of India's key sectors: labour, foreign relations, or education. Large scale internal migrations and labour mobility in particular have an historical association, which has been widely documented. While flows differ in duration, motives, and migrant profiles, their impact on households and communities also varies at places of destination and origin. Internal, seasonal migrations act as a 'safety valve' among the poorest communities¹, more often than not critical to the livelihoods of the most socially and economically vulnerable. Those belong in majority to tribal communities, Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Class². In this context, the linkage between tribal migration dynamics and child malnutrition has emerged as a salient point from field observations in recent publications³. The vulnerability of tribal communities to undernutrition is broadly acknowledged. Over a third –37% or 61 million– of under-five stunted children worldwide are found in India, and stunting rate in the country is highest among tribal children –54%⁴. Previous studies have also shown that severe stunting was 9 percentage points higher in tribal children compared to non-tribal children (29% versus 20%)⁵. Household poverty, maternal factors (e.g. the age of the first pregnancy) and infant and young child care practices rank high among the core determinants for malnutrition in tribal children.

¹ Srivastava, R & Sasikumar, SK 2003, *An overview of migration in India, its impacts and key issues*, Regional Conference on Migration, Development and Pro-Poor Policy Choices in Asia

² [Other Backward Class](#) - The request for this project was to focus on ST and SC communities (OBC were therefore not included in the scope of the analysis). Considering the composition of the population monitored by the ACF/FHF teams (demographic profile of the total caseload), it was further narrowed down to focus on tribal communities.

³ See notably Mohan, P, Agarwal, K & Jain P 2016, *Study of Tribal Migrant Communities. Child Malnutrition on Rajasthan*, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 51, Issue No. 33, 13 August 2016

⁴ UNICEF 2014, [Nourishing India's Tribal Children](#)

⁵ UNICEF 2014, [Nourishing India's Tribal Children](#)

Acknowledging the lack of reliable and consistent data on tribal communities⁶, this report⁷ analyzes key contextual drivers for tribal migrations in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, and focuses on changing dynamics in the usual patterns of seasonal migrations. While migrations have been a centuries-old mechanism among tribal communities, often associated with positive outcomes, the challenges faced by mothers to provide sufficient childcare are exacerbated in migrant households. As the migratory phenomenon is likely to increase by 2020, putting more vulnerable people on the move in the tribal areas, it can be expected to add more to the problem of child nutritional deprivation in tribal areas.

Demographics – A snapshot at Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan

Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Scheduled Castes (SCs) are official designations in the Indian Constitution (Art. 342/366.24) gathering various groups of historically disadvantaged communities in the country. Also known as *Adivasis* STs mainly live in tribal areas, but not all *Adivasis* are STs. Also known as *Dalits* SCs have the lowest status in the caste structure, but not all *Dalits* are SCs. The specification of a community as Scheduled Tribe can also be a matter for debate⁸. For the purpose of this analysis which combines information from the last national census, field collected data (ACF/FHF activity monitoring tools), and socio-economic indicators, we used the official terminology, i.e. government designations of ST and SC (and State lists of Scheduled Tribes).

Scheduled Tribes (STs): The tribal population of the country, as per the 2011 census, is 10.43 crore, constituting less than 10% of the total population⁹. Close to 90% of STs live in rural areas. The STs mostly inhabit two distinct geographical areas – Central India and the North-Eastern region. More than half of the Scheduled Tribe population is concentrated in Central and South India: Madhya Pradesh (14.69% of the state population), Maharashtra (10.08%), Orissa (9.2%), Rajasthan (8.86%), Gujarat (8.55%), Jharkhand (8.29%), Chhattisgarh (7.5%), and Andhra Pradesh (5.7%). The other area is the North East: Mizoram (94.4%), Nagaland (86.5%), Meghalaya (86.1%), Arunachal Pradesh (68.8%), Manipur (35.1%), Sikkim (33.8%), Tripura (31.8%) and Assam (12.4%)¹⁰.

STs in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan¹¹: Madhya Pradesh has a tribal population of 15,316,784 persons (within 46 recognized different groups). This contributes to 21.1% of the total population of the State. The State of Rajasthan has a tribal population of 9,238,534 persons (12 different groups). This contributes to 13.5% of the total population of Rajasthan.

⁶ Kumar, V. & Agrawal, A. 2015, [Poor numbers misrepresent the development of India's tribes](#), East Asia Forum

⁷ This report is based on a qualitative methodology: workshops have been conducted within the two partner organizations, as well as interviews with researchers and specialists in Delhi and Mumbai. Fifteen focus group discussions (FGD) were also conducted in Burhanpur district of Madhya Pradesh (8) and Baran district of Rajasthan (7) using a questionnaire elaborated with ACF/FHF teams (translated into Hindi) that focused on social practices before and during migrations. The FGD produced qualitative, context-specific data around five themes: migration calendar, motives and decision making processes, preparation of the migration, food and child care practices during migrations, and access to health facilities during migrations. FGD were conducted with men and women (together and separately), adult care-takers of SAM and MAM children, migrants and non-migrants, ST and SC, ST from various tribes.

⁸ Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, [definition](#): "The criterion followed for specification of a community, as scheduled tribes are indications of primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large, and backwardness. This criterion is not spelt out in the Constitution but has become well established. It subsumes the definitions contained in 1931 Census, the reports of first Backward Classes Commission 1955, the Advisory Committee (Kalelkar), on Revision of SC/ST lists (Lokur Committee)."

⁹ Government of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs 2013, [Tribal Profile at one Glance](#)

¹⁰ Government of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs 2013, [Tribal Profile at one Glance](#)

¹¹ [Census of India 2011](#)

Scheduled Castes (SCs): As per the Census 2011 SCs represent 16.6% of the total population of the country and account for more than 201.3 million persons¹², though SCs are a heterogeneous group composed of many castes and sub-castes. Out of roughly 3000 castes estimated to exist in India, as many as 779 have been designated as Scheduled Castes. The portion of rural SC population is just below 80%. In terms of geographic distribution, while Uttar Pradesh has the highest concentration of Scheduled Castes population as per the Census, Punjab —with 31.9% Scheduled Castes population— occupies the first position in terms of percentage of SC to the state population.

SCs in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan⁸: The state of Madhya Pradesh accounts for 5.6% of the total SC population, distributed in 48 castes and sub-castes, which represent 11,342,320 persons and 15.6% of the total population of Madhya Pradesh. The state of Rajasthan accounts for 6.1% of the total of SC population, distributed in 59 castes and sub-castes, which represent 12,221,593 persons and 17.8% of the total population of Rajasthan.

In total, 36.69% of the population of Madhya Pradesh is constituted of both SCs and STs; and 31.3% of the population of Rajasthan is constituted of both SCs and STs.

These figures provide an overview of the geographic distribution of marginalized communities at national level and state level. However, there are strong limitations to the sole use of India's ten-yearly national statistics, such as disharmonized state lists of Scheduled tribes¹³. Beyond the technical challenge of assessing 1.2 billion people across India, political and economic factors have driven inaccuracies and inconsistent data in censuses¹⁴.

In addition, while STs and SCs in India constitute two distinct social groups, with different cultural identities and socio-political backgrounds, they share a common institutionalized vulnerability as per their status assignation and the socio-economic characteristics related to it. This common vulnerability allows considering some of the findings hereby presented as relevant for both populations. In Madhya Pradesh, the MAM and SAM cases monitored by ACF/FHF India were constituted of respectively 77% and 86% of children identified as Scheduled Tribe —against less than 2% of the total caseload identified with a Scheduled Caste social background—, hence the focus given to Scheduled Tribes in the analysis of contextual drivers of migration.

¹² [Census of India 2011](#)

¹³ Kumar, V. & Agrawal, A. 2015, [Poor numbers misrepresent the development of India's tribes](#), East Asia Forum

¹⁴ Agrawal, A, IEG, & Kumar, V 2012, [How reliable are India's official statistics?](#), East Asia Forum

Key contextual drivers for tribal seasonal migrations

Geographically and socially isolated, tribal groups have traditionally lingered outside the realm of the country's development process. After India's independence, the Government did set up special provisions for their recognition, welfare and development. However, with low political weight within State institutions, infrastructure development in the tribal areas (education, roads, healthcare, communication, sanitation, etc.) remained comparatively low, widening the socio-economic gap between STs and the rest of the population. Exploring the multiple dimensions of the relationship between seasonal migrations and tribal poverty, five key contextual drivers for migration¹⁵ attest of the continuous vulnerability of tribal communities. Analysing them allows for better anticipation of how this phenomenon may evolve in the coming years.

1. Entrenched tribal poverty despite national schemes in place

India is home to a third of the world's extreme poor (people living with less than \$1.25 a day)¹⁶. Poverty measurement has generated many debates in the Indian public arena, and eradication of poverty has been a recurrent commitment from key political actors in the past decades. Latest estimations¹⁷ state that it will take India 25 to 30 years to lift its poor above the international poverty line, and about 200 years to lift them above the \$5 a day line. At present, while India's GDP annual growth rate is one of the highest globally (over 7% for 2016¹⁸), it was estimated that 70% of the population is without access to proper toilets, 35% of households do not have a nearby source of water, and 85% of villages don't have a secondary school¹⁹. Among the poorest Indians figure the Scheduled Tribes, accounting for a great part of the rural poor of the country.

During the 2014 Indian General Election campaign, Narendra Modi, leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), promised '*achhe din*' (or 'better days'). More than a slogan, it was Modi's assurance that if he became Prime Minister, government policies would focus on modernizing the country and alleviate poverty. Through this commitment, BJP endorsed the transversal '*samajik nyay*' (social justice) approach, which emphasizes the fact that social justice is incomplete without economic justice and political empowerment²⁰. '*Samajik nyay*' in India is implemented by The Department of Social Justice and Empowerment. It focuses on the welfare of the most 'disadvantaged and marginalized sections of the society' –such as STs– through several national schemes aiming at social, educational and economic empowerment and justice for those communities. The protection of Scheduled Tribes is also entrenched in the Constitution²¹ through an annual Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) whose implementation falls under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs' responsibility. Its main objectives are the substantial reduction of poverty along with the general welfare of tribal communities. The

¹⁵ Identified through two workshops conducted in Delhi and Mumbai with ACF/FHF teams

¹⁶ World Bank 2010, [The State of the Poor: Where Are the Poor and Where Are the Poorest?](#)

¹⁷ [25-30 years needed for lifting Indian poor above international poverty line](#), *The Times of India*, 3 August 2016

¹⁸ Trading Economics, [India, Economic Indicators](#)

¹⁹ Poverties 2016, [Poverty in India](#)

²⁰ Saez L, Singh G (eds) 2012, [New Dimension of Politics in India](#), Routledge Advances in South Asian Studies, 94

²¹ The Constitution (1950) incorporates provisions for the '*the promotion of educational and economic interest of Scheduled Tribes and their protection from social injustice and all form of exploitation*', [Ministry of Tribal Affairs](#)

monitoring of past plans, however, revealed underperformance of the TSP, notably because of a weak and scattered implementation through the different states²².

It is uncertain whether the '*achhe din*' policy will significantly contribute to alleviate the poverty of Scheduled Tribes, who rallied in great numbers to it²³, in the outlook. During the 2014 election, BJP won all seats in the ST reserved constituencies in states where Indian National Congress (INC) and BJP are usually tight contest (amongst which Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan)²⁴, and even though BJP never really spoke out for Adivasis' rights before. In this context, new political alliances between some tribal leaders and BJP seem to be developing²⁵. Though such alliances are controversial, they might carry some changes for tribes, or at least bring a new light on their extreme state of poverty, which is in essence multidimensional. Indeed, tribal poverty is made of closely intertwined economic and social factors (such as limited access to education or health care). This is particularly blatant in the states of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan where, in 2012, a substantial percentage of tribal population was living below the '\$1.25' poverty line (53% for Madhya Pradesh and 40% for Rajasthan) and had extremely limited access to basic services²⁶. In both states the illiteracy rate was at least 50%, and less than 15% of the population had completed secondary school, compared to more than 40% for the population from general social categories. While seasonal migration among tribal communities has been a traditional mechanism to generate greater welfare for the household, occasional or new migrants are forced to move by external shocks, to which they are extremely vulnerable²⁷.

2. Compensating for a challenged access to food and safe water in rural, tribal India

90% of Scheduled Tribes live in rural areas²⁸, where poverty strikes most (216.5 million people in rural areas are poor, or 80% of the total poor population)²⁹. Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan are characterized by shortages of water and recurrent droughts –impeding the transformation of agriculture that the Green Revolution has achieved elsewhere—, and by a discriminatory access to cultivated lands and forests. In agricultural states, such as these two, public investments in rural literacy, education, farming technology and infrastructure have been fairly inadequate so far to reduce rural poverty. In addition, the country's economic transition essentially rests upon a shift towards the services sector, which now accounts for most of India's GDP but is unable to provide enough job opportunities for the growing majority of the low-skilled, rural workers (a growing labour force that manufacturing and commercial industries have taken advantage from in the classic liberal model). As a source of livelihood, agriculture including forestry and fishing remains the prime driver for rural economy.

The economic imperative of raising agricultural productivity, however, opposes the traditional subsistence model of tribal agriculture systems. Despite some success³⁰, unachieved developmental

²² Business Standard 2015, [Implementation of Tribal Sub Plan](#)

²³ Traditionally, STs supported the Indian National Congress (INC), the other major Indian political party with the BJP.

²⁴ Jyoti M. 2014, [Voting Patterns among Scheduled Tribes](#), *The Hindu*, 9 June 2014

²⁵ [BJP New Ally](#), *NewsDias*, 7 April 2016

²⁶ World Bank 2012, Social Inclusion in [Rajasthan](#) and [Madhya Pradesh](#)

²⁷ Mattern, B 2015, *Link NCA Final Report (Khaknar Block, Burhanpur, Madhya Pradesh, India)*, ACFIN

²⁸ As well as 70% of the country's 1.2 billion population

²⁹ According to data released by the Indian Planning Commission in July 2013

³⁰ Business Standard 2014, [Government efforts boost agriculture sector in MP](#). Figures from Agriculture 2014 survey

policies have failed in providing the necessary productive assets and financial resources to achieve greater productivity in the tribal areas, concurrently weakening communities' traditional model. Many inherited agricultural techniques have been lost in the process of transitioning to different cultivation practices. As a result, food insecurity among STs is extremely high: in Madhya Pradesh more than half of Indian tribal children under five years of age are stunted³¹ and the state is among the bottom five in terms of women with body mass index inferior to 18.5 (41.7%)³². Besides, tribal communities' dependence on Monsoon rains is a determinant factor to their vulnerability. Public investment in irrigation systems has therefore a direct impact. With the support of international institutions, funds³³ have been allocated to the state of Madhya Pradesh, a state that produces 10% of India's wheat, 23% of the country's pulse and 25% of its oilseeds (55% of soybeans)³⁴, which can explain that Madhya Pradesh registers a comparatively higher agriculture growth rate. Innovative programs, such as the first prepaid card-enabled irrigation system for the states' farmers, have also been initiated. Rajasthan is building an extensive network of major drinking water projects across the state, including 109 large drinking water projects meant to benefit 83 cities and more than 18,000 villages and hamlets. Migrating tribal households, however, do not necessarily benefit from these investments, notably for many of them are landless, daily labourers. Nation wise, 34% of tribal households are landless and semi-landless³⁵, while qualitative surveys have shown a correlation between land ownership and migrations³⁶. According to the 2011 Census only 14% of the tribal population in rural areas had then a source of drinking water within their premises. Eventually, both Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan are prone for water scarcity in summers and water logging during rainy season. Long distances to fetch drinking water are a daily drain on tribal households, and low levels of irrigating water a reason for migration. Stretching or disrupting traditional patterns, population growth³⁷ and intensifying weather-related disasters (drought in particular) result in increasing migratory movements, and in less people benefiting from this positive deviance behaviour.

3. Endangered 'forest' lands in the tribal areas

An essential characteristic of the tribal lifestyle and values is associated with forests, in a relationship traditionally presented as of mutual benefit and co-dependence. However, tribal lands and forests have long attracted investors' interest or have been used for infrastructure development projects, often in abuse of existing protection laws and regulations. Land alienation, displacement and poor compensation are underlying factors for tribal poverty, adversely affecting their livelihoods and nutritional status.

Madhya Pradesh is endowed with rich natural resources, and is one of the economically fastest growing states in India (with a yearly growth rate above 10%³⁸). According to government estimations³⁹, the state has generated investment proposals of over US\$100 billion, notably in

³¹ UNICEF 2014, [Nourishing India's Tribal Children](#)

³² ADB 2015, [Initial poverty and social analysis in Madhya Pradesh](#)

³³ Such as through the [Madhya Pradesh Irrigation Efficiency Investment Program](#), funded by the Asian Development Bank

³⁴ Evans, A, Giordano, M & Clayton, T (eds), 2012, *Investing in Agricultural Water Management to Benefit Smallholder Farmers in Madhya Pradesh, India*, International Water Management Institute, IWMI Working Paper 151

³⁵ SinghaRoy, D K 2014, *Towards a Knowledge Society: New Identities in Emerging India*

³⁶ Mattern, B 2015, *Link NCA Final Report (Khaknar Block, Burhanpur, Madhya Pradesh, India)*, ACFIN

³⁷ The decadal population growth of the tribal population, from Census 2001 to 2011, has been 23.66% against 17.69% for the entire population (Demographic status of Scheduled Tribe population and its distribution, 2013).

³⁸ Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (2015)

³⁹ Government of Madhya Pradesh, [Industries](#)

relation to mineral resources (coal, iron ore, diamond, copper ore, silica...) and forest biodiversity. 14% of India's coal reserves and 12% of the country's forests are to be found in Madhya Pradesh (30% of the state's surface is covered by forest). 22,600 villages are located in or near forest areas, and believed to depend on forests for their livelihood. Rajasthan, the largest Indian state, has smaller forest coverage (less than 9%) but is in proximity to the Delhi-NCR economic hub and also presents many opportunities for investment. To catalyse industrialisation, the Rajasthan Industrial Development and Investment Corporation has developed 327 industrial areas acquiring 74,228 acre land throughout the State⁴⁰. In this context, competing agendas between the state economic development and the protection of tribal communities' assets seems hardly preventable.

From a legal perspective, the 'Recognition of Forest Rights' Act (2006) is a milestone document aiming at protecting forest dwelling tribal people, and at encouraging their participation in the conservation and management of forest and wildlife in India. In reality, the Act divided social activists and environmentalists, opposing livelihood security arguments to conservation objectives. Initial attempts to regularize forests rights resulted in considerable eviction in various states, followed by mass protests by tribal communities. While pro-Bill lobby viewed the new legislation as a means to rectify an historical injustice, conservationists expressed concern over the potential adverse impact of its implementation on the existing scarce forest cover⁴¹. In order to reach a consensus, the Act was ultimately criticized for failing to integrate neither the livelihood concerns nor the conservation ones. Besides, following the notification of the Act and of its subsequent Rules in 2008, implementation has been hindered by litigations questioning their validity⁴². Environmentalists notably feared that the provision recognizing the right to occupation of forest land to a maximum of 2.5 hectares would lead to the distribution of 2.5 hectares of forest land to each of India's 20 million tribal nuclear families⁴³, although the land is heritable but not transferable or alienable and most of it consisted of already degraded or completely denuded forests. A second key regulation, the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act (2013)⁴⁴, does not more significantly prevent land grabbing –through marriage or fraud by lenders to recover debt from tribal families–, with inadequate compensation, poor resettlement and livelihood arrangements still being reported when forestland was acquired by the authorities for development motives⁴⁵. Low level of legislative enforcement, governmental action regardless of existing regulations and vigilance mechanisms, and unrestrained commercial exploitation of natural resources have had as a side effect the trust deficit that ST communities have in public administration, which in turn impacts their access to nutrition schemes and programmes and reinforces their marginalization. With growing population and various increasing pressures on resources, livelihoods are more than ever a key issue for tribal communities in India, a greater share of which having no other choice but migrating.

4. Cash-earning activities and the negative cycle of tribal indebtedness

⁴⁰ Resurgent Rajasthan website, [land availability section](#)

⁴¹ Bhullar, L 2008, The Indian Forest Rights Act 2006: A Critical Appraisal, *4/1 Law, Environment and Development Journal*

⁴² Not to mention another barrier to implementation: the Tiger Protection Program (launched in the 1970's)

⁴³ Ibid-41 That would represent a total of 50 million hectares out of the 68 million hectares of forest land

⁴⁴ Which promises fair compensation to land taken by the state for development purposes

⁴⁵ UNICEF 2014, [Nourishing India's Tribal Children](#)

The tribal economy combines several types of income-generating activity on a seasonal calendar. Cash-earning jobs provide immediate relief and satisfy some of the primary needs of ST families and employment is presented as the main factor for migrations. With reduced forest coverage and increasing loss of their traditional livelihoods, cash-earning opportunities have mechanically taken greater importance. A number of tribes subsist on crafts such as basket, rope and tool making, spinning and weaving, metal and iron work, or even performing magic tricks, but the majority will earn wages through casual labour which concerns 45% of STs in Madhya Pradesh (as against the 6% who have salaried jobs) and 43% of STs in Rajasthan (4% being involved with salaried jobs)⁴⁶. This high ratio directly contributes to their vulnerability, both in terms of the unsustainability of the income and in terms of their sensitivity to external economic or climatic shock.

Harvesting season (wheat, pulse, paddy) will drive the main bulk of seasonal migrations in March and April. The post-Monsoon season (from August to October) will mainly be dedicated to sugarcane and cotton harvest. The June to November period is usually devoted to forest activities (a short-term migration known as *Naward* in Madhya Pradesh). The winter months will see a significant share of the tribal communities working at brick kilns, construction sites, mines, and doing some rail work. In general, with the opening of mines and industries in tribal inhabited regions, ST communities in the surrounding areas have taken up non-agricultural labour in search of unskilled employment. This diversification of occupation can be seen as a coping mechanism, allowing tribal population to find income when their environment is changing. This shift in occupational patterns, however, also came with new forms of exploitation. Historical discrimination, tribal endowment disadvantage in particular, is difficult to eliminate from the Indian hierarchical system in which division of labour has been practiced for so long, in spite of the legislative and policy actions taken over the past decades⁴⁷. Seasonal employment of tribal population is thus characterized by low wages (especially for women), child labour, abuses from unscrupulous contractors, and the seemingly unbreakable cycle of indebtedness.

While SC and ST groups have a higher worker to population ratio⁴⁸, it likely reflects the greater need for participation in remunerative activity by all household members, including women and children⁴⁹. The need for enlarging the labour force among family members itself results from deep poverty and low wages per worker⁵⁰. Women constitute 30% among SC and 37% among ST workers (as against only 18% among Muslim population for instance). Participation rate is also the highest among Scheduled Tribes. They account for about 10% among workers (while they represent only 8% of the total population), but they follow a reverse order in terms of the quality of employment (i.e. access to relatively better earning and some measure of social security)⁵¹. While chances of securing a regular

⁴⁶ World Bank 2012, Social Inclusion in [Rajasthan](#) and [Madhya Pradesh](#)

⁴⁷ Such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) with its legal framework and rights-based approach, notified on September 5, 2005

⁴⁸ Defined as the number of persons employed per thousand persons

⁴⁹ Papola, T S 2012, Social Exclusion and Discrimination in the Labour Market, *ISID Working Paper 2012/04*

⁵⁰ Wages vary according to the nature of the employment and are not always prefixed. For jobs at mills, brick kiln, as a mason or doing railway work, men can expect to be paid between 200-400 rupees per day, women around 150-200 rupees per day and children (starting working between the age of 10-15 years) 150-250 rupees per day. Agricultural daily labour would pay much less: around 100 rupees per day (or being paid per cubic meter daily collected). Data from FGD

⁵¹ Ibid-49

job are 21.5% in the case of caste Hindus, they are only 12.4% in the case of those belonging to Scheduled Castes and 6.7% in the case of Scheduled Tribes⁵².

Aggressive methods of recruitment, wage discrimination, advances and yearly contract renewals imposing the return of labourers, discriminatory credit policy, leasing or mortgaging of tribal land contribute all together to maintain tribal communities in dire poverty. Poverty, land alienation, indebtedness, landlessness and migration are working a cyclical way⁵³, and the impact of social marginalization is such that even education, a usually widely-recognized driver for poverty reduction, plays a relatively smaller role to that regard in the case of ST population. While having a stable financial income can usually translate into increasing school enrolment rate, not only do seasonal migrations disrupt the learning process, but the same level of education also tends to benefit ST workers comparatively less than others. Ultimately, population growth adds to the pressure on rural and urban ST unemployment while agricultural mechanisation (for both harvesting and ploughing process) and the use of pesticides (where grass cutting was manually done before) both negatively impact the casual job market in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

5. Tribal resilience and the dependency relationship towards contractors

Not only external factors perpetuate tribal poverty in relation to seasonal migrations⁵⁴. Migratory movements and a balanced relationship towards natural resources (extracting just what is needed) were original features of the tribal lifestyle. Seasonal migrations therefore appear as a 'safety valve', activating tribal communities' capacity to migrate and find elsewhere the necessary resources to their own survival. Alongside forced migrations resulting from land alienation and complete dispossession, the phenomenon of semi-voluntary seasonal migrations –as a consequence of late rains for instance– translates into extended periods of time spent on the move, growing numbers of migrating families, collective acceptance of lowering daily wages, and a growing vulnerability towards contractors (*thekedar*) or corruption practices.

The contractor is a key actor of tribal seasonal migrations. Veritable interface between villagers and their employer, he establishes a determinant, binding relationship with ST communities. In collected accounts, his authority seems to sometimes equal this of the usual decision-maker (elder and/or husband) when it comes to decide when and where to migrate. The relationship is solidly established throughout the year, with communities attesting that they often receive payment in advance for their winter work, as soon as in July and August (from 5,000 to 35,000 rupees). With no option but to accept these loans which they need to provide for their families, villagers are obliged to send some workforce to the lender once November comes. Arrangements, such as organizing the transportation from the village to the employment site (mills, brick kilns, etc.), can be opportunities for subcontractors to deduce the cost from workers' wages with some overcharging amounts having been reported, highlighting an often imbalanced power relationship. Once on site, providing housing elements –as rudimentary they might be–, attributing space for setting up huts (*sopari*), giving weekly allowances to buy food for daily consumption, and advancing some exceptional

⁵² Ibid-49 According to a study based on the NSSO data (2004-05)

⁵³ One group of villagers (Faldi, in Rajasthan) thus indicated: "There is no specific time [to migrate], when we are under the debt of around 10,000-15,000 rupees, then we go".

⁵⁴ This section results from 15 focus group discussions conducted in the two states of Madhya Pradesh (8) and Rajasthan (7), based on a questionnaire (open questions) designed for the purpose of this analysis. In addition, 2 in-depth individual interviews have been conducted with families with SAM children.

disbursements for medicine or health consultation fees if a worker or one of his children is sick, will also be systematically deducted from the promised salaries. Besides, villagers who have let children or livestock behind to relatives have to pay back another share of their hard-earned wages to the caretaker (reportedly between 500 and 1500 rupees), and most seasonal workers would also try to send back some money to their non-migrating in-laws and elders via systems of cash-transfer. The financial benefits gained from seasonal work, or the amounts of cash that tribal households can effectively bring back for themselves afterwards, are therefore very limited and insufficient to break the cycle of poverty. Ultimately, gender role distribution in upbringing children and poor infant and young child practices remain persistent factors for malnutrition during migration, with mothers hardly finding any time to feed their children when working on site.

Overall, while short-term migrations are embedded in traditional patterns, and might be perceived preferable than seeking for governmental protection, ST communities' margin for decision-making is extremely frail. It almost entirely rests upon avoiding being cheated by contractors, and comparing the wages in different places to make the most of the migration⁵⁵. With very low levels of education and of access to information, even that is not easy.

Of some potential reasons why migrating tribal children come back with a deteriorated health

The conducted focus group discussions highlighted a number of facts and practices potentially contributing to PLW & U-5 malnutrition. One significant difference between the 'forest migration' (*Naward*) and the migration motivated by daily labour, cash-earning activities (*Palayan*) is that in the second case the entire household migrates, including pregnant –usually until the last stages of pregnancy– and lactating women, as well as most children of all ages⁵⁶. While older children rapidly join the family workforce, the younger ones are left under the surveillance of their older siblings (sometimes not older than 6 or 7 years old) for the entire day⁵⁷. Most participants to FGD reported preparing some food which they would leave in the hut before going to work so that children can eat as they need or please. Even when an adult, often a woman, stays in the area where migrants have settled (a role a group referred to as the 'watchman' and attributed to heavily pregnant or old women, the least capable of working long hours), her role will be to oversee the belongings of the group, including livestock if any, and to make sure children don't get away too far, not to supervise their feeding. Children do not receive any kind of education either (school dropout during migration), which also prevent them from accessing government nutrition schemes. Ultimately, health expenditures will be considered a last resort, if and only when the child is really sick, as migrants do not have an easy access to costly health facilities or to trusted medical/healing figures ('*baghat*') on migration sites⁵⁸.

In FGD, the longer seasonal migration (*Palayan*) was associated with strong benefits. Migrants emphasized their better access to weekly markets and grocery stores –hence to a greater variety of

⁵⁵ One group thus indicated that the reason to migrate to Gujarat (from MP) is that the price for 1,000 bricks there is 500 rupees, as against 450 rupees in Maharashtra, and 400 rupees in MP. Another given criterion is working hours.

⁵⁶ The proportion of children really left behind to other caretakers (grand-parents for instance) seemed to be quite minimal for a number of reasons: very limited resources at disposal of the non-migrating members of the family, the cost of paying them back upon return, the risk of having to come back if the child becomes badly sick, etc.

⁵⁷ Working hours: reported to be from 8am to 8pm or 9pm (for cotton harvest and brick kilns) or – for some factory work, with shorter shifts.

⁵⁸ A representative testimony from Khushalpura (Rajasthan): "If any kid is getting sick, we do not get any support. If we have money then we go for treatment, and if we do not have money then it will just be like that".

food— having then the necessary cash (taken from their wages) to purchase food and commodities. To that regard, adults might have a better diet when migrating⁵⁹ —which they also underlined they need to compensate for greater physical efforts— and children might not. Besides, it was also often mentioned that clean water was provided, as opposed to the home village. Whether being told or believing that the water is safe (coming from ‘proper facilities’), neither was it reported to be boiled nor filtered among almost all consulted groups in Madhya Pradesh. Finally, it was pointed out during two group discussions (one with women, one mixed) that alcohol was part of the usual ‘diet’ on migration or that money was used to purchase alcohol and cigarettes. Addiction habits could impact child caretaking practices on migrations and household budget consumption. This would need to be further documented and examined.

Scenarios (2016-2020)

Considering the above, three scenarios have been elaborated based on the working assumption that migration flows will increase in the outlook (heavy trend)⁶⁰. Each of these scenarios depicts a plausible future for the tribal areas of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

Scenario 1 *Widening the gap between the developmental paradigm and tribal poverty reduction*

The theme of tribal protection is mobilized again during the political campaign ahead of the 2019 general elections, but little concrete achievements in the last years have eroded STs’ hopes for change. Beyond the political discourse, tribal poverty reduction is still not prioritised over the competing agenda for Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan’s economic development. As part of the implementation of developmental policies, increased public and private investments towards agricultural productivity and access to drinking and irrigation water in rural areas in both states result in decreased food insecurity at state level. However, progress is comparatively slower in tribal areas, where, in addition to mutual mistrust (STs-government), the mechanisation backlash continues to challenge STs’ access to seasonal job opportunities, a determinant means for households to buy food. Under-five stunting prevalence rates among tribal remains high. In addition, and despite existing law on land rights, STs’ livelihoods are further endangered by 2020. Indeed, the rhythm of implementation of development-investment schemes by corporations and authorities in tribal areas accelerates, capturing more forest lands traditionally owned and/or used by tribal communities. The percentage of landless ST households therefore increases. Expropriations are hardly followed by proper compensation and adequate livelihood arrangements, strengthening tribal poverty. STs’ lack of viable options, coupled with high rate of unemployment and illiteracy, increase greatly the number of new migrants among tribal communities, in search of casual labour. However, while seasonal casual labour keeps offering a valve to spread the pressure it also incrementally contributes to the cycle of tribal indebtedness by being unable to provide sufficient earnings to break the poverty cycle. Overall, the absence of any real protection from authorities and tribal communities’ lack of bargaining power, maintain STs’ relative dependence on contractors by 2020. As a result, many continue to endure abuses and have to accept comparatively lower wages and unsatisfactory working conditions.

⁵⁹ Therefore having a comparative advantage against non-migrating households

⁶⁰ A recent assessment conducted in the aftermath of a drought which affected 46 districts in Madhya Pradesh found a significant increase in inter-state migrations related to the crisis (Joint Need Assessment Report on Drought, Madhya Pradesh, May 2016)

Scenario 2 *Bridging the gap, sustained traditional migrations in an improved overall context*

Greater political support from India's main party (BJP) and Prime Minister Modi towards the Ministry of Tribal Affairs to complete its mission translates into greater financial resources and legitimacy to implement ST poverty reduction schemes at national and state levels. As a result, tribal poverty slowly reduces, showing however uneven success across the two states. Capitalizing on STs' consolidated political support to the BJP, a relationship of greater trust is starting to establish between tribal communities and state authorities. In addition, the public debate in India about social protection contributes to greater implementation of binding regulations (e.g. National Food Security Act). As a result, and as investments for better access to safe water also provide positive change in rural areas, the outreach of safety net programs improves in tribal areas by 2020 and food insecurity decreases. Besides, growing mobilization is supported by organizations such as *Ektad Parishad* and social activists involved with the defence of STs' rights. Campaigns directed to governmental authorities and advocacy actions, resulting in a progressive slowdown of tribal land grabbing from companies, are initiated along with programs providing compensation and livelihood opportunities to ST communities suffering from land alienation. Following reports from transnational NGOs, active struggles, and advocacy actions by social activists to address specifically the issue of work conditions and induce better protection and stricter policies, the topic of STs' seasonal cash-earning activities becomes of public concern. The implementation of minimum wages and new process to control abuses is being discussed within the government. In 2020, solutions are yet to be found, and, moreover, implemented, but a great step forward has been made by raising awareness and willingness to take action. Ultimately, though STs' dependence relationship towards contractors remains a key feature of seasonal migrations, development in communication access and 'safer migrations' programs supporting tribal preparedness contribute to strengthening tribal communities' decision making power. This is a long term shift, however, and only marginal progress supported by a few success stories which are widely shared, is made by 2020.

Scenario 3 *India's development 'now and everywhere' hardly means 'for everyone'*

Criticism and deceived expectations from ST communities arise as they fall off successive governments' agenda for poverty reduction towards 2020. Shattering the benefits of unachieved public infrastructure programs in rural areas, successive episodes of droughts and destructive monsoon rains cause the situation in tribal areas to further deteriorate by 2020. The accelerated impact of climate change is perceptible, causing huge loss to agricultural crops, and thereby forcing more families to migrate outside well-established migratory patterns considering tribal communities' vulnerability to external shocks. Children and women are the most affected, suffering from deprivation during migrations impacting their health condition. Tribal traditional agriculture systems are further abandoned, and more households decide to permanently resettle in urban areas. Tribal lands and forests keep being hogged by industries, in the name of growth and development and at the expense of environment protection. This sparks anger among environmentalists while STs' rights tend to be merged into discussions in favour of the environmental cause. By 2020, major civil unrests initiated by environmentalist activists stop a number of infrastructure projects in Madhya Pradesh, putting the economic development of the state on hold, but, as a side effect, further disrupting the access to tribal livelihoods. Only marginal, small-scale actions aiming at tackling tribal malnutrition, illiteracy and addictions, with increased vocational training-oriented service, slowly starts to pay off with positive effects on employment and STs' resilience. Minimal improvements in

STs' access to job security (regular, higher salaries and social benefits) is encouraging for the long-term future. However, positive effects are mitigated by the likes of discriminatory credit policies, leasing or mortgaging, and tribal indebtedness is still a heavy underlying factor.

Conclusion

Intra and inter-state seasonal migrations among tribal communities illustrate one of India's biggest contemporary challenges: the disjunction between the developmental paradigm and the fight for poverty reduction for the most marginalized populations. The political ambition to concurrently achieve the country's economic development and ensure the social protection of the most vulnerable has generated huge support among ST voters. It is, however, a complex task. Despite the existence of governmental schemes and environmental regulations –both relatively poorly implemented so far–, structural poverty (i.e. lack of local resources, accumulated debts, or high vulnerability to external shocks) is a root factor for seasonal migrations. Embedded in traditional tribal practices, short-term migrations can constitute a true safety net and produce positive outcomes for the household. But as tribal populations grow, their environment continues to deteriorate in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan: agricultural mechanisation, industrial land grabbing, and weather-related disasters intensify the seasonal migrations process. In addition, low levels of education since decades have hampered the scope for tribal communities to explore new options for livelihood. As a result, more migrants –having little experience or network– get caught in a negative cycle that maintains them in a situation of high dependency towards their employers. It has a heavy cost on their children's education and health, jeopardizing the possibility for future generations to access better living standards. Women and children who are compelled to travel to worksites with their parents are indeed disproportionately affected by the risks associated with migration.

Considering the key socio-economic drivers at play, tribal migrations are likely to continue accelerating by 2020. Yet, initiatives specifically targeting migrant children, such as India's flagship program *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* ("Education for All")⁶¹, are faced with funding challenges. For instance, the central government decided to close these 'migratory hostels' in Rajasthan in 2015.⁶² Any new attempt to find solutions to tribal malnutrition will need to comprehensively take into account evolving patterns of migrations, together with their impact on young children and women. To that regard, in addition to treatment measures upon migrants' return, civil society actors could find in the preparatory phase preceding migrations an interesting window for action. As part of the existing strategies deployed by migrating families, some reported gathering a few packets of Take-Home Rations (THR) from Anganwadi Centres (AWCs), as well as pain killers and basic medicine. Activities targeting care practices awareness, contextualized to the living conditions on work sites and targeting the adults in charge of the temporary settlement, might also constitute an impactful trigger while operating in the source area.

⁶¹ Allowing students to reside in the primary school building for the time of the migration period with meals and basic supplies provided

⁶² Reed, M 2014, [Ensuring Education for the Children of India's Migrants](#), *Society & Culture*

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