

*Mukkaddams in the Labour Market of Madhya Pradesh:*  
**Significant but Unrecognized yet!**

**A Study on**  
**‘Mukkaddams (labour market intermediaries)’ in**  
**Madhya Pradesh:**

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**Abstract:**

Apart from various social, historical, economic and resource related characteristics Madhya Pradesh is well known as a 'labour surplus state' as well in contemporary India. With the largest population of Scheduled Tribes and subsequently relatively higher population of Scheduled Castes the state has been supplying labour force, basically unskilled or semi-skilled, to the urban and industrial states having relatively faster pace of development i.e. Gujrat, Maharashtra, Haryana, Delhi, Rajasthan etc. Within the state as well there has been frequent and massive movement of labour force in search of wage work from rural to urban and industrial areas. Particularly since early 90s the process of labour movement, termed as '*migration*' or '*commuting*', depending on the situation, has been increasing gradually. Unfortunately, with relatively poor human resource development index the majority of the persons migrating or commuting have not sufficient knowledge about availability of wage works, good or bad work sites, wage situations, health and hygiene issues, means of remittances, citizen rights etc. These persons (labourers, once out of the village) are amongst the poorest and most vulnerable groups of the village society.

In this situation their recruitments are done mostly by labour market intermediaries or recruitment agents known as 'Mukkaddams'. They often belong to the communities that they recruit from. Mukkaddams are either slightly better educated or are more experienced about wage work sites and opportunities while they are socially better connected than the labourers. Historically Mukkaddams played an important role in bringing migrants to the Havelis from the Mahakaushal region (the plains with fertile land, larger landholdings, good irrigation and agricultural productivity). With time, as non-farm works are overlapping farming works in the development scenario, their roles and attractions are also being diverted towards the non-farm sectors. These days they can recruit labourers for any kind of wage work for telephone cable work, road construction, canal construction, building construction, sugar mill work, brick kiln work and bamboo cutting work etc. In spite of the fact that they have a crucial presence in the labour market of/out of Madhya Pradesh (for MP labourers mainly) and have been playing multiple roles regarding labourers, their needs and facilities, serving needs of the contractors or employers and earning own livelihoods these are generally ignored in the development sector. Other than this, their relationships with the labour laws, Labour Department and officers appear as 'thief-police' relationships as they are not educated in this concern while labour laws and related policies do not provide a logical space to them to work and operate accordingly. This situation, finally, harms labourers and the process of development. The present study attempts to know the ground realities related with Mukkaddams and to come out with few realistic suggestions to make the process of migration 'migrant friendly (not necessarily the migration friendly)' and employers' labour-friendly within and out of Madhya Pradesh.

**Mukkaddams in the Labour Market of Madhya Pradesh: Significant but  
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**Introduction**

**Madhya Pradesh** has the largest population of Scheduled Tribes, over 23% of the total population, of all states and a high proportion of Scheduled Castes. 23 districts of the total 45 districts are predominantly tribal. *Gond, Baiga, Bhil, Oraon, Kork and Kol* are the major tribal communities of the state, living mostly in forest, hilly and countryside areas. Some 50% of tribals in MP are classified as “landless”. With a tribal population of some 15 million, equivalent to some 5 million households, and with an average farmed area of 5 acres per household, data for 1995-96 shows that around 61% of landholdings in the state belong to marginal and small farmers.<sup>2</sup>

The central part of Madhya Pradesh is relatively more developed in terms of farming, mines, industries, business centers and urbanization. This is where the non-tribal population is concentrated. Factors like landlessness, nominal and unproductive landholdings, inability to invest in farming, decreased importance of traditional forest based livelihoods in day to day life etc make them active to look beyond the village economies in search of earning opportunities other than own farming and small scale wage works available in/around their villages. The share of marginal and small farmers in the total landholding area and the number of holdings in the state increased from 9.6% in 1970-71 to 21.5% in 1995-96, an increase of 75% in terms of land under small and marginal farmers.

In spite of the fact that the State and Central Governments have been working hard to provide employment to the rural people in around their villages this has emerged as an unavoidable fact that migration, whether within and out of the state, has been increasing particularly since 90s. The governments functioning at the State and Central levels are

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<sup>2</sup> PACS programme Background paper for MP. *Livelihood challenges and opportunities in Madhya Pradesh*

the largest development agencies and invest substantial part of their budget to augment social and economic empowerment of the population. Therefore, effective implementation of the development programmes run and sponsored by various agencies become very important. However, each developmental activity has its own impact. It is desirable to know then that which developmental activity affects the socio-economic conditions of the targeted beneficiaries and to what extent so that necessary prioritization could be planned to achieve better outcomes. Unfortunately, few significant issues, like migration, concerned with at least 40 percent of the population of Madhya Pradesh, is not looked at policy and programme levels. Apart from having its own process 'migration' involves various stakeholders as well. *Mukkaddams* or 'labour intermediaries' are one important amongst those who have been playing important roles in labour management at different levels in various directions. As 'migration' is important for a big proportion of the 'moving manpower' '*Mukkaddams*' have appeared vital for 'migrants'. Instead of being recognised at policy and practice level they are somehow convinced to work in hidden ways, operate from behind the curtains and appear with masks on their faces. In a development situation where demands for different types of labour force are increasing with flourishing areas and sectors several gaps too are emerging at the level of number, skills and performances. This is not the matter of encouraging or discouraging migration as this is a great policy issue but indeed there should be efforts to make the process of development hassle free and to smoothen the life of labourers who are exploited at various fronts of their migration. *Mukkaddams*, now more a market phenomenon than the labour facilitators, can play effective roles regarding the needs of the development processes as well as towards the dignified betterment of the moving labour force of the state, if recognize and legalized under a the policy frame work of the state.

### **Objective of the Study**

The *main objective* of the present study was to asses the ground realities of the extent of the presence of '*Mukkaddams*' in the labour sector of Madhya Pradesh, their roles for labourers as well as employers, affectivity and dynamics of their operational system. The study also attempts to look at the ongoing changes in the labour sector and the changing situations and roles '*Mukkaddams*' at the same time. Based on these, the study tries to

come out with few suggestions and recommendations, which might be contributive in future in any efforts to reform the labour sector in the state.

### **Methodology**

In order to conduct the study four out of various government sponsored schemes were reviewed in two districts Baran and Churu. Both the districts are different with each other in various way i.e. topography, human resources, natural resources, livelihoods and pace and impacts of the development.

Out of more than 30 on going government schemes in the district, a sample of four schemes was taken. The basis of selection was:

- Availability of information,
- Coverage of scheme (area, population),
- Achievement status of the objectives of the schemes,
- Recommendation/guidance from district officials, and
- Suggestion/guidance from the project guide

Similarly, the basis of selection of the research area for impact study was:

- Availability of information (particularly secondary data),
- Schedule of the respondents,
- Area covering maximum number of the schemes,
- Distance from district headquarter, and
- Suggestions/guidance from the government officials/NGOs.

### **Wage works and employment situation in Madhya Pradesh:**

The nature of rural and industrial employment situation in Madhya Pradesh is largely unorganized. As the National Sample Survey Indicates about 75% of rural workers depend on agriculture in 1999-2000 but agriculture contributes for only 35% of the GDP. Casual labour forms a major part of the total labour force of Madhya Pradesh and has been in an expanding mode. For instance, the proportion of casual labourers increased from 35 per cent to 40.5 per cent between the periods of 1993/94 - 1999/2000. An

increase in the number of marginal and small farmers in the State is an important reason behind this.

The 2001 Census shows that about 28.7 percent of the workers in the State are agricultural labourers who have maximum concentration in the southern tribal and forested districts, along with Sheopur district (in and around the MPRLP districts at by and large). Since the late 80s rural non-farm employment in Madhya Pradesh has almost stagnated, particularly in tribal districts, which have relatively higher migration (migration within Madhya Pradesh and out of the State migration).

Of the 45 districts in the state 16 have less than 20% of the workforce in non-farm employment. According to studies conducted by NRI on rural non-farm employment (RNFE) in Madhya Pradesh<sup>3</sup>, in fact Madhya Pradesh has the lowest share of rural non-farm employment to total rural employment in the country (Human Development Report 2002) and it is limited to certain areas such as Sagar/ Damoh/ Katni/ Jabalpur in central Madhya Pradesh, Gwalior/ Bhind/ Morena in the north, Ratlam/ Ujjain/ Indore in the western Malwa plateau, and the Hoshangabad/ Bhopal belt in the west centre of the state. Many of these are important destinations for migrants.

Madhya Pradesh has been experiencing waves of multi-dimensional development at various fronts, basically since early 90s. Fast growing real state sector, construction works in cities and towns, construction of national and state highways with rural link roads, communication and cable works, industrial works, emerging aspects of farming related activities etc have been creating 'more than ever before a specific demand of labour force'. If applied properly, then the SEZs will enhance demands of labour force in Madhya Pradesh in near future.

In spite of the fact that the work force in the state has been shifting gradually from agriculture to non-agriculture sector and that the share of non-agriculture sector in SGDP

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<sup>3</sup> Kleih, Ulrich, Richa Som, Yogesh Kumar, Surendra K Jena, Amitabh Singh and Leena Singh Household Access to Rural Non-farm Livelihoods Synthesis of Participatory Rural Appraisals and Questionnaire Surveys in Four Blocks of Madhya Pradesh. NRI Report No: 2378. May 2003

has been increasing simultaneously, there is a big visible gap between demand and supply sides in terms of meeting labour force requirements.

### **Migration situation in Madhya Pradesh:**

Migration has emerged as an important livelihood source for most of the poor ST, SC and OBC household living in countryside and forest areas. This has also captured a big place in the contemporary labour markets of Madhya Pradesh. Though rural to rural migration still covers a significant proportion of in-state/ inter-state migration from the state but since early 90s rural to urban migration and its impacts, both positive and negative, have become more important in various regards. According to the Census 2001, about 30 per cent of the population or 307 million people were classified as migrants in India. NSS estimates in its 55<sup>th</sup> Round that the number of short duration migrants (staying away from place of residence for 2 to 6 months) is about 12.6 millions. While there are no official estimates of temporary migration (for less than 2 months) various micro-studies estimate informally that nearly 30 million people have been moving from one place to another by opting wage works at different level as a source of livelihood. These studies also show that migration is increasing every year. Increasing population and un/under-employment are the biggest reasons for this.

Madhya Pradesh, with bigger proportion of poor people, in comparison to the developed states like Gujrat, Delhi, Maharashtra etc, is predominately a labour exporting state. This has higher level of migration from both its tribal forest and drought prone areas. Surveys done by GVT for Migrant Labour Support Programme (MSLP) in Madhya Pradesh, along with Rajasthan and Gujrat based Palayan Seva Kendras (PSKs) estimate that about 65 per cent of households covered under the DFID funded Western India Rainfed Farming Project had at least one person migrating. This figure may vary from district to district but stands always somewhere between 40 to 75 percent i.e. in Dindori and Jhabua districts respectively<sup>4</sup>. Migration in Madhya Pradesh has various forms i.e. single men (sometimes women as well), couples and entire families depending upon the duration, distance and nature of works. The first one is more prevalent in many regards. The duration of migration has a span of 3-4 months at a time. Because of decreased per-capita

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<sup>4</sup> Covered under DFID funded Madhya Pradesh Rural Livelihood Project (MPRLP)

landholdings, increased financial and other socio-economic factors like partition of joint families into nuclear families, youths' inclinations to experience city life, decreased socio-psychological levels of security etc, it has continued despite introduction of land reform programmes, double crop farming, NREGS and likewise programmes and improved food security. According to the findings of a recent ODI research in Madhya Pradesh<sup>5</sup> the majority of migrants from the state, about 70 per cent, are circular migrants. This creates a big scope for the emergence of *Mukkaddams* and their services to meet emerging labour needs in various development works in and out of the state. A study by Catalyst Management Services (ref) found that 47% of all households across the eight tribal districts covered under MPRLP have at least one person migrating for at least 3 months every year. Migration is highest in Jhabua (83%) followed by Sheopur (76%) and Dhar (72%) districts.

**Migration increases in spite of various development programmes:**

For certain development programmes, such as JRY, EAS, FFW, PMGSY, SGSY and the recent NREGS, local politics plays an important role in selecting beneficiaries and determining wages and its payments. In Madhya Pradesh, according to the Gram Swaraj Reforms of 2001, the Gram Sabha was meant to select all individuals who would participate in Gram Sabha concerned programmes but to find a substantial and effective role in the right selection of beneficiaries and actual payments is really a tough practice.

The ability to manipulate programmes highlights a number of powers, which Sarpanchs and Gram Sabha members have at their disposal. This includes collecting and forwarding the list of beneficiaries to the district administration for approval. Theoretically, contractors should not be involved in the process but practically, the list of names being negotiated at this juncture includes those of labour contractors, in many cases. Sarpanchs and ward members have some autonomy to decide the type and location of works, in formal consultation with the block/district level administration or concerned government body that normally goes to 'their areas'. This creates a big geographical gap within the village Panchayat in the light of development programmes and their overall impacts. At the same time, a feeling of deprivation is conveyed to those sections and communities

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<sup>5</sup> Livelihood Options Project, Overseas Development Institute-2000-2001

who are not included in a particular work. This makes them 'not to wait for wage works from the government side and to look beyond such opportunities. Then, commuting and migrating for livelihood becomes a compulsion for them. *Mukkaddams* and labour contractors become significant then. This form of power mode politics under the Panchayati Raj System has become a reality in this decade and affects corruption free and quality implementation of development programmes which are designed to benefit labourers.

***Mukkaddams (labour market intermediaries):***

Almost every State in the country has some kind of informal labour management systems to implement development programmes, particularly which have components of construction and industrial works. The forms and processes of this system may vary from one place to another and situation wise but with a determination a person would come to the village to identify individuals (apparently labourers) with whom construction work could be done. In many cases, this would be done with PRA officials, influential persons and potential contractors who are basically from the village or community and have enough work experience and contacts with local labourers.

In most of the occupations and construction works depending up on labourers, recruitments are done by labour market intermediaries or recruitment agents. They often belong to the community that he or she recruits from. In Madhya Pradesh these labour agents are known as *Mukkaddams*, while in Rajasthan and Gujrat this term has got a slightly different spelling as *Mukardam*. *Mukkaddams* have better experience in particular labour markets and have good connections with labourers of their native areas and communities. With experience these are slightly better educated and socially connected than the labourers he recruits. Historically *Mukkadams* played an important role in starting migration to the Hawely from the *Mahakaushal* and Narmada basin region in the state. With time, *Mukkaddams* have adopted the similar roles in the urban labour markets as well, particularly in the construction and industrial sectors.

*Mukkaddams* play key roles in all kinds of farm work (Madhya Pradesh, Gujrat), telephone cable work (Madhya Pradesh, Chhatisgarh), road construction (Madhya

Pradesh, Chhatisgarh), canal construction (Madhya Pradesh), building construction work (Madhya Pradesh, Gujrat, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh), unskilled industrial works (Gujrat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh) sugar mill work (Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra), brick kiln work (Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan) and bamboo cutting work (in Maharashtra). *Mukkaddams* generally provide the labourers some cash in advance so that they help family members to manage daily needs for 2-3 weeks in their absence and they themselves can manage transportation expenses to the destination and buy the things that they need to take with them. The advances are repaid through migrant wages and the length of time that this takes depends on the payment that the migrant receives at the destination. The *Mukkaddam* recruits migrants in groups who stay together at the destination. He or she takes care of other needs as well including small health expenses, travel expenses, shelter and communication with the family in the village.

Though, the modernization and diversification of agriculture has created increased labour demand in agriculturally prosperous areas, particularly in Hawely regions as well but because of traditional links (personal or through *Meths* and *Mukkaddams*) between large farmers and migrant labourers, availability of labourers has not been having any quantity and quality concerns. Oppositely, the non-agriculture sectors with different forms and dimensions have been facing problems in terms of labour management at different fronts. Having no direct or minimal connections with labourers, who are basically from rural parts of the State, employers have been largely dependent on 'outsiders' who generally do not work but establish linkages between employers and job seeker villagers. This kind of labour arrangement has a big history, goes back to the Colonial Period and largely related with the agriculture sector but with the dynamics of socio-economic changes in Madhya Pradesh it has been getting different forms and becoming important by playing major roles in their concerned areas. But at the same time, as every system, this too has little negativity in its operational character. Complaints have been made by many labourers regarding low wages, unfulfilled promises of employers and/or *Mukkaddams*, cheating and no payments at different locations

Realizing the contemporary importance of *Meths* and *Mukkaddams* and future of labour arrangements made by them this would be an important step to know more about them, the system and analyse the overall scenario regarding existing/future labour market arrangements to create a labour friendly atmosphere in the State.

In Madhya Pradesh, migration for on-farm work, popularly the *Hawely* migration has been deeply rooted in history while this is relatively a new phenomenon in off-farm sector, particularly in the construction, industry and services sectors. *Hawely*, agriculturally prosperous regions, industrial belts and cities in the State have different kinds of socio-economic and cultural aspects than of countryside, tribal and remote forest habitats.

The first one has relatively better-off households with better food subsistence levels throughout the year. These have relatively secured and lucrative livelihood sources with effective social networks that help them to manage their emergency needs and to make effective coping strategies while the other does not offer any kind of sustainability in the life to its households. Lower food subsistence level, generally for 3-6 months in a year, uncertain wage work opportunities in/around the area and poor social networks force them to be guided by the situations and circumstances of the life. Lack of education and awareness about the outer world, poor financial situation, indebtedness and lack of capacity to cope with emergency needs are the basic traits of their socio-economic life.

Traditionally, *Mukkaddam* has been a family based post created for overall management of village related issues, particularly regarding revenue and labour management, at the village level in the Colonial India. *Kotwar* is also a more or less the similar post that has been focused partially on revenue and particularly on law and order issues at the village level. Since, *Mukkaddams* were the main source persons for development works in/around their villages or even in other areas they got connection with labour contractors and labour employers in modern context and got informal names as *Meth*, *Mukkaddam* etc. *Mukkaddams* are known as *Mukardams* also in South Rajasthan and North Gujrat regions. These three names indicate four different forms of labour managers. These are briefly explained as:

***Methods or gang leaders:***

A *Meth* is a labour group organizer who does wage works at the same site with the labourers whom he/she organizes for a *Mukkaddam*, sub-contractor, contractor or employer. He/she leads a relatively small group of labourers (5-10 labourers) and gets some extra money/grain/goods for his/her services in addition to the usual wages like other labourers working in the group. *Methods* are involved mainly in off-farm works for construction and government related development works for shorter periods in/around their native places. In Madhya Pradesh, PWD, Telephone, Electricity and Irrigation Departments have been the main employers of labourers through *Methods* or gang leaders. In proportion, *Methods* constitute about 25 per cent of labourers in such works but these are now being eliminated fast because of the involvement of big companies in such works and the subsequent emergence of *Mukkaddams* and labour contractors with their support. *Methods* commute or migrate with their groups in agriculturally off-seasons as they are involved in farming works as well in farming seasons. Rainy season is always an off-season for them.

If works are related with the farming sector i.e. harvesting, weeding, threshing, transplantation etc. then these are known as *Kuta group leaders*. The roles and duties are almost the same as the *Methods* or gang leaders but they work on a seasonal pattern which includes migratory works in Rabi and Kharif seasons basically. For last 5-6 years they have been migrating with their groups for on-farm works for 20-30 days in summer season as well. These works are related with vegetable farming and processing of agri-produces at the farm level only.

***Mukkaddams:***

*Mukkaddams* are a wide source of organizing labourers and labour groups in contemporary Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, particularly in farming, construction and industrial sectors. These have appeared as an important bridge in the rural-urban continuum as far as development practices are concerned. With time, with the help of experience gained in urban labour market and exposure to the urban centers many of the *Mukkaddams* are transforming themselves as small labour contractors in the changing

labour context. In spite of lacuna and criticism they form the biggest and most important segment of the labour management system, particularly in the unorganized sector.

The findings of this study are that more than 95 per cent *Mukkaddams* have no awareness and concerns of existing labour laws and work in informal ways without having any registration with the State Government. To avoid the so called complexities of labour laws and to avoid the interference of the Labour Department in their routine practices they make verbal agreements with labourers and contractors/employers in all manners.

### **Types of *Mukkaddams*:**

*Mukkaddams* in Madhya Pradesh can be classified in three broad categories:

**1. *Mukkaddams* in farming sector:** These are basically involved in labour management practices in farming sector for years. They have good and old connections with labourers at the village level and employers at *Hawely* level. Most of such *Mukkaddams* have been labourers at the beginning of active life in the on-farm labour sector. Over, having acquired experience and trust of labourers and employers they have been performing as *Mukkaddams*.

About 60 per cent of labour management regarding migrant labours in the farming sector is done by them. For instance, there are at least 5 labour groups in Partala village in Mandla district who migrate to *Hawely* regions in Rabi and Kharif seasons at regular basis every year and all go through *Mukkaddams*. Four out of five *Mukkaddams* are from Partala itself while the other one belongs to a neighbouring village. In recent five-six years period the proportion of *Mukkaddams* has been declining gradually because of financial attractions of fast growing construction and industry sectors within and out of Madhya Pradesh (i.e. in Maharashtra, Gujrat, Chhatteesgarh, Delhi, Haryana etc), migrants own direct links with employer farmers and enhanced communication through mobile phones and improving road connectivity.

**2. *Mukkaddams* in non-farm sector:** Construction, industry, PWD, irrigation and forests related sectors are the main sectors in which *Mukkaddams* work with labour groups. *Mukkaddams* active in these sectors work in collaboration for employers through

contractors generally. Cities like Jabalpur, Indore, Bhopal, Surat, Ahmedabad, Pune and Mumbai are the main destinations for labourers migrating with *Mukkaddams* to work in construction sector. The average daily earnings for labourers are about Rs.70-120/day while masons get Rs.120-200/day. This kind of migration occurs in agriculturally off-seasons while rainy season is not suitable in this regard. As average, labourers are able to do wage works in cities through *Mukkaddams* for 3-6 months in a year. This is a fast growing sector in Madhya Pradesh and other States in India and has become an important source of migratory earnings. *Mukkaddams* have been involved in non-farm government works as well in/around their native villages i.e. for the government departments like PWD, Irrigation, Communication, Road Construction (for the contractors involved on various road projects of the *Bhootal Parivahan evam Jahajrani Mantralaya* of the GoI), Forest department etc.

This and other researches show that about 50 to 75 per cent per cent migrant labourers work in construction sector out of which about 50 per cent work through *Mukkaddams* as this is a difficult task for them to search work sites by spending own time and money. Bilateral trust is another significant reason behind the emergence of *Mukkaddam* system as they operate as a bridge between employers and labourers regarding establishing labour links, facilities at work sites, determining wages and payment of wages, medical facilities, remittances, police related dealings and searching for new wage opportunities once the work is finished. The PWD and irrigation works are also bit similar to the construction works while industry works have various kinds of involvement of manual or unskilled labourers in the same manner. The forest works are also done on manual basis and has become limited now for last 5-6 years. Agro-industries such as sugar mills do not need to hire services of *Mukkaddams*, as unskilled labourers are aware about the seasonality and nature of the work and they approach the management directly for work. These *Mukkaddams* too are well exposed to the cities and possibilities of work and have good contacts and understanding with potential employers.

**3. *Mukkaddams* playing in both the sectors on seasonal basis:** A small proportion of on-farm *Mukkaddams* have been involved in off-farm sector as well. After managing

farming related works they move towards off-farm works in agriculturally off-seasons, for about 4-5 months/year. They get connections with such works through their employers in farming sector who either hire their services for their own construction or contract business or introduce them with contractors/employers from their social circle. Though not significant yet, but this is a newly emerging trend in Madhya Pradesh that shows the gradual shift of labourers' priorities and choices from farming sector to non-farm sector jobs available in/around cities. So far, we can say that about 5 per cent of on-farm *Mukkaddams* have adopted dual functions in this regard. Though, not well exposed to the cities, they work mainly when employers call them according to the labour needs. They do not spend time in search of wage work opportunities and networking with potential employers in cities. They manage limited but assured works.

#### **A case from Partala (Mandla):**

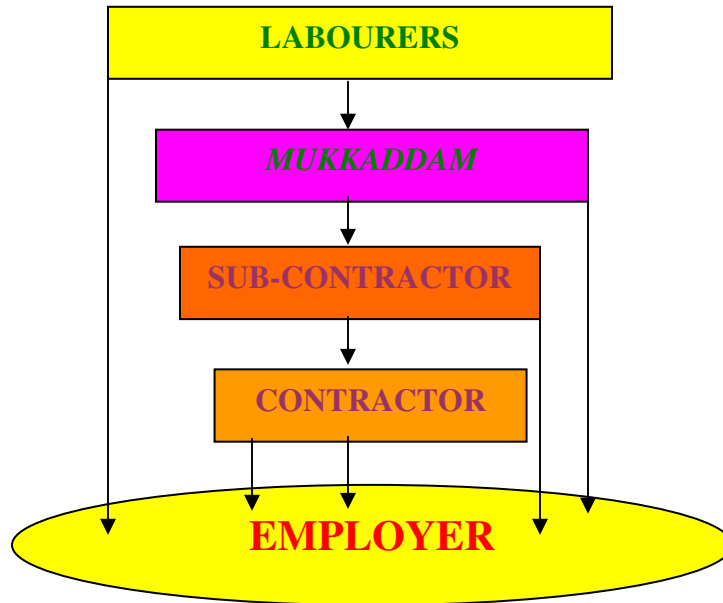
**Mahendra Singh Baiga**, a 40 year illiterate labourer-cum-*Mukkaddam* from Partala village in Mandla district, has been working as a migrant labour for about 25 years. He recalls labour groups (4-6 labour groups, each group with 10-20 labourers including women, teenagers and children) were organized by senior or elderly labourers or *Mukkaddams* of the village for *Hawely* migration works every year once a *Mukkaddam*, with a senior profile from the employer's side came and informed them about the availability of the farming work and sites of the work.

With time, he gained experience about the labour management at source and destinations like the *Mukkaddams* from the employers' side. About 12 years ago, once an employer farmer from Hawely region (Narsimhpur) sent a letter to him that "I am not able to send his *Mukkaddam* to Partala to manage labour groups as usual. You please manage 20-25 labourers in a group and bring them to us for farming works". Mahendra was well known to that farmer. Following that Mahendra managed 26 persons first time ever in life playing all the roles any *Mukkaddam* can perform. Since then he has been doing this every year at regular basis. He gets some cash (Rs.500-700) and grain (1-1.5 quintal wheat or paddy) for his services from the employers apart from usual wages.

In addition to the *Hawely Mukkaddamship*, Mahendra Baiga has been playing as a *Mukkaddam* for a telephone cable related contractor of Indore for last three years. He works with a group of 10-12 male labourers from the village for 4 to 8 weeks in a row when contractors sends him message through individuals. Out of which 4-5 are changed every time because of their business in other works, unavailability, and unwillingness or poor health. All labourers get Rs.100/day as wage while they have to manage all their needs including transportation by own. Mahendra gets some cash gifts at the end of the work that can be any amount between Rs.500-1000 that depends on the duration of the work. This type of work is stretched for 4-5 months every year. Regular availability of

work and surety of wage earnings are the vital attraction for him to work for this contractor who deals fairly in all manners.

**Structural relationships of labourers and *Mukkaddams* with employers:**



**Where from *Mukkaddams* come?**

The labour sources areas having good and historical connections with destination sites create suitable conditions for the emergence of *Mukkaddams*. The tribal areas of the state with prolonged links with the *Hawely* regions have produced many on-farm *Mukkaddams*. But, with time, the number of *Hawely Mukkaddams* has been decreasing as the overall share of farming sector is gradually being displaced by non-farm sector, mainly since 90s.

Areas with poor farming situations, limited livelihood opportunities and weaker local economies are conditionally forced to establish livelihood links in urban and industrial centers whether these are within or out of the state. Older links with such centers assures frequent supply of labourers with increasing numbers every year. The number of labourers indicates the proportionate number of *Mukkaddams* by and large. The three

studied districts (Mandla and Jhabua in Madhya Pradesh while Banswada in Rajasthan) during this research verify it. Mandla, a tribal dominated district has historical connections with *Hawely* regions of the state. Migrants have been more reliable on on-farm migration traditionally and hence the supply of on-farm migrants from this district is more from here than of any other district. This has created a good base for on-farm *Mukkaddams* in comparison to the off-farm sector related *Mukkaddams*.

Contrary to this, Jhabua (Madhya Pradesh) and Banswada (Rajasthan) have been more linked with the non-farm sector and industrial areas of neighbouring Gujrat. The overall dependency of migrants from these districts has been more on off-farm works. The socio-economic situations of both the districts also create typical push-factors for –off-farm migration. Increasing migration indicates better out-puts and increasing demand of labour force and creates ideal situation for the emergence of off-farm and industrial *Mukkaddams*.

The research findings indicates that there are about 200 on-farm and only about 50 off-farm *Mukkaddams* in three Development Blocks of Mandla ( Narayanganj, Mandla and Mawai) while this number is about 50 and 200 for Jhabua (Jhabua and Alriajpur) and 50 and 500 for Banswada (Sajjangerh and Kushalgarh) respectively. The actual number of off-farm *Mukkaddams* may be little less as it varies from time to time. Also, many of them do not want to expose their identities to avoid above mentioned labour law complexities.

Though the number of off-farm *Mukkaddams* has been increasing every year with increasing urbanization and industrialization but this has been a widely unorganized segment of the labour market in Madhya Pradesh. Certain uncertainties are also attached with this making them not to adopt *Mukkaddamship* as the full time livelihood source. This situation creates gray-zones between two states (senders and receivers) regarding proper implementation of labour laws.

**Roles and responsibilities of *Mukkaddams*:** *Mukkaddams* play active and important roles regarding managing labourers for employers at various levels. At one hand they

assure wage work opportunities for labourers seeking cash earnings, particularly in agriculturally off-seasons. They manage work for those as well who are 'extra manpower' at household level in the light of small landholdings and poor farming and livelihood situations. Those, who are semi-skilled or skilled, (i.e. masons, carpenters, plumbers, electricians etc) but not able to earn according to their skill levels locally, also find *Mukkaddams* useful as they manage the right kind of work with better wages (i.e. Rs.100-200/day in cities against Rs.50-80/day locally). The major roles and responsibilities of *Mukkaddams* can be summarised as follows:

1. Managing labour at village level and link them with employers in cities,
2. Providing cash advances up to Rs.1000-5000 through the employer (s), if demanded by labourers,
3. Determining daily/piece rate wages for labourers on mutual basis,
4. Assuring appropriate shelter, sanitation and other facilities at the work site,
5. Negotiating with employers for hassle free work environment for labourers,
6. Watching labourers output and assuring quality of the work from employers' side,
7. Taking care of health and related problems (i.e. accidents etc).of labourers and minors,
8. Assuring an exploitation free work atmosphere for women labourers,
9. Communicating with household members of labourers at their native place in need,
10. Making remittance transmission safe,
11. Bringing back labourers safe to their native places at the end of the work.

As on average, *Mukkaddams* are considered successful in the overall performance of above mentioned roles and responsibilities. Because of this only they have gained a great acceptance from the both sides, labourers and employers. Though there have been negative stories and incidents as well in the form of cheating, less payments against promised wages at the end of work, exploitation of women and no assistance in illness and accidents etc. but most of such cases are related with outsider *Mukkaddams* who do not have a long history of association with the same labourers. Local *Mukkaddams* are always concerned with and responsible for labourers in various regards. They can not cheat them because of certain social and moral boundations. This is the major reason as

to why labourers prefer to work and manage their relations with *Mukkaddams* from their surroundings.

### **What *Mukkaddams* get?**

Indeed, like wage labourers and contractors earnings are the main motive behind working as a labour arranger/manager or *Mukkaddam*. The actual earnings in this regard vary according to the sector of work, number of labourers, duration of work etc. The present research elaborates usual earnings and benefits of *Mukkaddams* sector wise as:

**Farming sector:** As informed and as field level estimates indicate, about 50 per cent *Mukkaddams* in the farming sector do wage works with the same labour group(s) they organize for employers, but in addition to the usual wages they get some fixed commission from the employer farmer(s) as well. This can be either in the form of cash or in grain. Such *Mukkaddams* prefer to work for one or two employer at a time with relatively 1 or 2 mid-size labour groups of 10-20 labourers as their additional earnings are not substantial to change their financial situation significantly. A small proportion of *Mukkaddams*, about 5 per cent, play the roles of labour management only for two or more employer farmers at a time with labour groups of 15-25 labourers. They work on commission basis only that is around Rs.5-7/labourer/day. Since they work with bigger numbers they get better financial rewards from the employers. These *Mukkaddams* are well exposed to the cities and know the possible sites of works and have good contacts and understandings with potential employers.

Generally, no commission is taken by them from labourers who migrate with them for wage works in the farming sectors though exceptions are possible.

**Non-farm sector:** The *Mukkaddams* in non-farm sectors work on commission basis and get their commission in cash from employers on the basis of per labour per day. Literally they do not accept anything from labourers but in practice the level of negotiation between them and employers regarding wages (either on daily or piece rate basis) and

then with labourers determines their commission. For instance, in a case, if labourers agree to work on Rs.70/day while the *Mukkaddam* makes employer agree to pay Rs.80/day/labour then the difference i.e. Rs.10/day/labour becomes his commission. This is a bit transparent but informally done practice. In return he/she is supposed to manage all above mentioned roles and responsibilities. In some cases, both way transportation cost for labourers is also given to *Mukkaddams* but they keep that amount with them asking labourers to bear transportation cost on their own as ‘this is what they get from the employers as their commission’, though this varies from situation to situation.

#### **A case from Mawai (Mandla)**

Mr. Dwarika, a 60 years old Irrigation Department employee for GoMP, belongs to Mainpuri village of Mawai Block in Mandla district. Following the suggestions and directions of his senior officers he started managing labourers from village, (i.e. from Nandram, Bharkhi, Devri Dadar, Mainpuri, etc) nearby his native place for various construction works, mainly of canals, in Datiya, Chambal Ghati, Mandsaur, Bhopal etc regions where the Department was getting shortage of manpower to complete projects within the timeframe. Apart from his salary and other financial benefits from the Irrigation Department he used to get 10 per cent commission of the total wage of the labour groups from labourers and contractors of the Department organized and managed by him every month. With a labour group of 50-80 labourers @ Rs.50-100/day wage/labourer his monthly earnings stands around Rs.2000-3000/month. In addition to this he is able to save some cash from two way transportation fair given by the contractors to bring labourers to the worksite. It has been a regular earning for him for 6-8 months every year except in rainy and festive seasons.

About Rs.105000.00 is his outstanding balance yet to receive from an Irrigation Department contractor Balbir Chhabra as accumulated commission for his services as *Mukkaddam* over last 5 years period.

#### **A case from Banswada**

Kalji, Dalu Bhai and Harban, age 35, 36 and 26 years respectively, are tribal *Mukkaddams* from Sajjangarh Block of Banswada district in Rajasthan. All started their earnings as wage works with *Mukkaddams* in Gujrat years ago. Now, establishing good connections with construction work contractors of Surat Municipal Corporation in Surat they work as *Mukkaddams* for them. At present, each of them manages labour groups of 100-150 tribal labourers, including individual labourers, pairs and families, out of which about 50 per cent are women and 10 are masons, from Sajjangarh and neighbouring Kushalgarh Blocks. They play managerial and supervisory roles at work sites and take care of all the needs of labourers. In return they get Rs.10-15/labour/day from the contractor.

### **A case from Mandla**

**Mahendra Singh Baiga**, a 40 year illiterate labourer-cum-*Mukkaddam* from Partala village in Mandla district, has been working as a Hawely migrant labour for about 25 years. With time, he gained experience about the labour management at source and destinations like the *Mukkaddams* from the employers' side. About 12 years ago, once an employer farmer from Haweli region (Narsimhpur) sent a letter to him that "I am not able to send his *Mukkaddam* to Partala to manage labour groups as usual. You please manage 20-25 labourers in a group and bring them to us for farming works". Mahendra was well known to that farmer. Following this Mahendra managed 26 persons first time ever in life playing all the roles any *Mukkaddam* can perform. Since then he has been doing this every year at regular basis. He gets some cash (Rs.500-700) and grain (1-1.5 quintal wheat or paddy) for his services from the employers apart from usual wages.

### **Pay-offs faced by *Mukkaddams*:**

Certain pay-offs are also attached with the job and earnings of *Mukkaddams*, particularly for those who work in non-farm sectors. Less, partial and late wage payments are common in the sector and to maintain relations with employers for the sake of future they avoid arguing with them. In that case they have to face anger of labourers. Other than this, in some cases it is seen that employers (mainly contractors) elope in the night without making full payments. In such situation *Mukkaddams* are either in great financial loss or they loose their earned faith of labourers. Since neither they nor the employers are registered with the Labour Department they are generally unable to take effective and prompt assistance from the existing labour welfare laws.

### **A case from Jhabua**

Ram Singh, a tribal migrant labour from Jhabua district in the industrial area of Indore did wage works at a building construction site for a contractor through a neighborhood *Mukkaddam* from his native place. He worked in a group of 17 labourers, all from the same location in Alirajpur Block of Jhabua district, out of which 7 were women. They did work for 2 months for a daily wage of Rs.80/day. It was Rs.75/day for women labourers. They were assured by the contractor through their *Mukkaddam* that at the end of the work they will get their accumulated wage together. In the mean time they were paid Rs.200/labourer at the end of the week so they could manage their daily needs. They believed the contractor as *Mukkaddam* assured them with a blind faith. At the end of the work the contractor said them that he will pay remaining wages tomorrow to everybody but escaped from the site silently. After waiting for all the day they approached the owner of the building regarding payments but he shown them a stamped paper that he had paid all the wages to the contractors and hence does not bear any responsibility in this regard. Forged labourers had no other option than to return back to their villages empty handed

with a broken heart and lost faith in the system. They could not do anything as still they trusted their *Mukkaddam* that he had no share in that cheating. But they promised themselves not to work with him again in future.

**Case: Death of an infant:**

Dalu Bhai, a 36 years old 6<sup>th</sup> standard educated tribal *Mukkaddam* from Devkhodiya village in Sajjangarh Block of Banswada district in Rajasthan brought a group of 40-45 tribal labourers in April 2005 once a builder from Ahemdabad contacted him as usual. There were about 15 families (husband, wife and minors) also in that group. A woman labourer was working at an earth moving site while she left her 3 years old daughter sleeping on the ground covered with a blanket making her invisible at first glance. By fault a trolley driver crushed her. That was an on the spot death. Seeing this Dalu Bhai went in mental trauma with the mother of that girl. He found himself unable to face labourers for long time though it was not his fault.

**Labour laws and *Mukkaddams*:**

In spite of the fact that *Mukkaddams* have capture a big proportion of the fact growing labour market and have proved themselves as an important to fulfill labour needs of the various sectors, particularly of the construction and industrial sectors, they do not show any organized presence following the contemporary legalities. Being a bridge between wage work seeking labourers and labour seeking employers they stand somewhere in dark as far as the government and rules are concerned. Lack of positive interactions with Government Intuitions they are unable to link labourers with labour welfare programmes regarding health and hygiene, education for their children, laws protecting labourers from multi level exploitation in cities, insurance packages and facilities available in their villages.

The Labour Officer for Mandla<sup>6</sup> district points out that “there are thousands of in-migrants from UP, Jharkhand and Bihar who come every year for brick kiln works in Madhya Pradesh in Indore, Reewan, Satna, Hoshangabad, Gwalior, Ujjain, Bhopal etc districts. Contrary to this, Madhya Pradesh has become a big sender of industrial and construction labourers out of the state in Gujrat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Delhi and other state. Ideally, this migrant labour force should have labour licence to work in Madhya Pradesh or in any other state, if come and work in a group of 5 or more labourers as per the law but it happens seldom because of illiteracy and lack of awareness of labourers as

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<sup>6</sup> Mr. S. R. Sendare, Labour Officer of Mandla (interviewed in September 2007)

well as the complexities of formalities concerned with registration and follow ups of the whole procedure. Unwillingness to be registered as labourers and ‘fear of unknown’ keeps them away from the Labour Department that makes it unable to ‘work to facilitate their migration and labour rights’. Also, this situation creates chaotic conditions regarding preparing an authentic and solid data base for survey, research and analysis purpose for the sake of future. Though, the degree of migrant labourers and concerned *Mukkaddams* from Mandla district is high, only 113 contractors and 5129 labourers are registered with the labour department in Mandla till date. Ideally this numbers should be at least 10 times high.”

**Inter State Labour Act of Madhya Pradesh:** As per the Act *Mukkaddams* must be registered and avail a labour license in case of he/she is managing a labour group of 5 or more labourers at a time for a particular person, contractor, factory, principal employer or work. In case of ‘direct employment’ this type of registration and license is not required. A registered *Mukkaddam* has to pay the following things to concerned labourers in case of labour management/movement from one place to the other:

1. Transportation fair,
2. Wage for the transportation period,
3. Bank account,
4. Identity card,
5. Wage slip,
6. Medical facilities.

All these can be managed by following a simple formality by *Mukkaddams* but because of their own wasted interests, manipulative tendencies and instructions from contractors and employers they have been ‘avoiding’ this willingly. The Government Machinery knows about certain manipulations of *Mukkaddams*, contractors and employers as well as the exploitations of labourers at various levels but they it can not help labourers in chaos and darkness. This is the matter of ‘proof’ and ‘mutual cooperation’ that always lacks in the existing system. *Mukkaddams*, contractors and employers avoid to be registered as they are unorganized and uncertain about future prospects of the labour needs. Unfortunately, this has been a widely un-researched sector for the whole system.

**Registration of Labourers:** Labourers need to be registered by paying a refundable security fee of Rs.200 while doing work for some registered contractor or employer. This opens a gateway for them to avail facilities and entitlements from the Government and employers in case of accident and other tragic situations. Contractors too need to be registered under the *Contract Labour Act* in the same way. The Labour Department needs only a certificate from the Gram Panchayat so the amount could be released in the name of labourer.

But, non-cooperation from migrant labourers is the biggest obstacle in helping them according to the rules and regulations. Most often the change their identity even to avoid any sort of enquiry on the way to their destination. “*Baal tak muda lete hain*”. The Government has been performing watchman ship as far as exploitation of migrant labourers is concerned. Wherever and whenever informed it acts accordingly. Since most of the cases are of the violation of labour laws by *Mukkaddams*, contractors and employers it has got a negative image like police.

**Views of *Mukkaddams* and Labourers: Hassles only in the name of laws?**

Contrary to the Government’s views about the nature and implication process of existing laws *Mukkaddams*, contractors, labourers and employers find these laws irrelevant or unnecessarily complex to follow practically. For most of them, these laws are the means of hassling them and creating obstacles in the name of law to take money. This delays the process of labour supply in time to the worksites that in most of the cases, results as the loosing earning opportunities by labourers and *Mukkaddams*.

Every *Mukkaddam* interviewed during the research that the labour inspectors and the police department officials keep watching buses during usual migration periods in source areas. By seeing group(s) of labourers migrating together they come, ask labourers and *Mukkaddams* to show permission, labour license, registration certificate and so on. The main intension of them would be to take some money from the group. In many cases, the group has to ‘adjust with them’ for sake of work. Other than this, labourers and *Mukkaddams* do not get any support in case of any tragedies or law and order related

problems, i.e. wage cheating, loss of money, robbery, sexual harassment, abusing etc, occurs with them as they wear a tag of ‘outsiders and poor migrants’. They become more vulnerable if any crime done at/around the worksite. The police and residents view them as prime suspect in most of the cases.

The situation is more or less the same at the destination also. Labourer groups, with *Mukkaddams*, are tortured and exploited generally, though there is neither and ‘violations’ of labour laws by labourers nor any ‘lawful followings’ of labour laws by its government representatives. If few genuine cases of the violation of labour laws are excluded then generally unnecessary interventions in the demand and supply process of labour force puts many of negativities in the life of already suffering migrant or local labourers in many ways. Because of these only, few *Mukkaddams* are educated and experienced enough to incorporate new trends and facilities to facilitate migrants; they do not dare to thing beyond the traditional ways of labour arrangement and management.

**Problems faced by *Mukkaddams* at source and destinations:**

1. Lack of ID cards make them suspicious in locality except of the employers,
2. No written agreements are done between *Mukkaddams* and employers. This creates a big space for low wage payments, wage cheatings, violation of promises made by employers at the beginning of the work, laws are helpless in such cases,
3. They have to bribe police and labour inspectors if traveling with labourers in group,
4. Many of them are threatened by police to lodge false cases against them in case bribe is not given,
5. Local *goondas* create problematic situations to them,
6. Maintaining communications with migrants’ families in native villages is a big problem,
7. Without having any ID proofs at the destination and bank account managing remittances is a tough job for most of them,
8. They do not have any effective mechanism to identify possible ways to stop exploitation of labourers of their groups, particularly the sexual exploitation and harassment of female labourers.

## **Conclusion:**

As statistical estimates indicate, about a million new jobs every year need to be created to absorb the growing labour force in the State. This is almost the same figure that is applicable to the states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan as well. In situations where both agriculture and the rural non-farm economy have been stagnant migration stands as the main and only livelihood option. They become almost a compulsion when the majority of migrants have little or no education and are broadly in the category of unskilled workers. They need assistance and direction what *Mukkaddams* have been offering to them in broad manners. Although some migrants will be absorbed in new jobs that are being created in agriculture in emerging “green belts” where high value crops are being grown and also in developing towns, many will have to find jobs in other states where there is a demand for unskilled workers. *Mukkaddams* appear as more relevant and needed in the changing development dynamics. Migration is going to remain as reality and integral part of livelihood strategies of poor, countryside and tribal people. Hence, instead of wasting precious time, efforts, energy and resources there is an urgent need to make the migration concerned system effective. An effective system will lead ‘quality migration’ replacing ‘forced and compulsory migration’. If happens so then it would bring better life standards for millions of migrants and their family members.

The following points, if followed and practiced, then bring some positive reforms in the labour sector through *Mukkaddams*:

- This may be important to review existing labour laws in MP to find lacunas and loopholes which keep labourers and concerned parties away from these. The final motives of all these laws and regulations are to help them in the best possible way in given circumstances but somehow this is not done properly at the ground. A review and market friendly modifications in concerned laws may change the situation effectively.
- A single window/one time registration policy may change this scenario positively. This will help existing labourers to convince upcoming labourers in the given system and circumstances to register themselves with own interest and initiatives.

- This is a truth that women migrate and are sexually exploited and harassed at working sites. Validation of *Mukkaddams* may help them.
- Long duration and distant migration is done through labour agents and *Mukkaddams*.
- Interior, inaccessible undeveloped rural and forest regions are favorable for *Mukkaddams* hiring labourers for manual and physical works as they do not bargain with wages and working conditions. Having no better livelihood options they need to do work at any cost for survival and their situation provides a good choice for *Mukkaddams* and concerned contractors.
- Government of Madhya Pradesh is planning to construct shades in every city for *Peetha Sharmiks*. One is planned for Mandla town near the bus stand.
- PWD, Factories, Irrigation Department, Electricity Department, Forest Department and other Government Departments and Institutions are the main principal employers employing labourers and hiring services of *Mukkaddams* as far as organized sector and works are concerned. As an estimate the actual number of *Mukkaddams* has increased fast in last 10 years because of various development works and boom in the construction sector in Madhya Pradesh. This needs to be studied properly.
- *Mukaaddams* or any other concerned parties need a proper orientation-identification-orientation-registration-facilitation etc. This can be done through PPCP model.
- NGOs and development agencies like GVT, Sankalp may work in collaboration with the Government to prepare a suitable and holistic model of migrant support programme as every model made and practiced so far has shown its own limitations and has been limited to certain aspects of migrants' life.
- There is an urgent need to provide poor migrants with social protection which includes access to subsidised food, education, health and insurance. In MP perhaps more than any other state covered in this book, there is a need to enhance the skills of migrants in order to improve their bargaining position in the market and to help them secure them better paid jobs.

**Additional notes:**

Based on the detailed discussions with Mr. Jitendra Agrwal and Mr. Amitabh Bhatnagar after the presentation of the study it was felt that the following points were highlighted to make this study useful for MPRLP specifically and other livelihood projects generally at the practice level:

1. The Labour Department should review the existing labour laws to make a hassle free working atmosphere for labourers, *Mukkaddams*, principal employers and other employers.
2. A logical and need based review and subsequent modifications in the labour laws and also in the process of implementation of these laws will contribute towards labourers' wage works based life. It would be more concerned with '*migrants*' rather than of '*migration*'.
3. There is a need to create awareness among the migrants about their rights; *Mukkaddams* may play positive roles in this concern.
4. Validating *Mukkaddams* and forming a feasible labour system equally matching the needs of the labourers, *Mukkaddams* and the labour seeking sectors may create a better working and development environment; and also regarding the problems of labourers, particularly of the women labourers.
5. A single window/one time registration policy for labour/*Mukkaddams* (i.e. as the driving license system) may be a positive step towards this.
6. This will benefit labourers by improving their bargaining capacity and reducing the uncertainties in the job market by providing information on job availability, wages, duration of work etc.
7. An analysis of the '*existing and emerging skills demands*' of the established and developing industrial sector of Madhya Pradesh would help the State to reduce the gap between the demand and supply of the skill within the state. This may be done through a focused industry sector-study in few major industrial areas i.e. Peethampur Industrial Area near Indore etc, in the state.
8. Subsequently, the identification of '*existing and emerging skills demands*' will help programmes, agencies and institutions engaged in the development, skill

- training and enhancement practices to train the labour force according to the realistic needs of specific industries.
9. Once this process is initiated, it will help concerned industrial units and labour force many folds. Improved Human Development Index and social protection would be two important measures amongst those.
  10. Need based skill enhancement of labourers can be done through:
    - Rajasthan Mission on Livelihood's* (RMoL) model to work in collaboration with NGOs, KVKs, ITIs, Entrepreneurs, Private Sector Agencies, Industries etc.
    - CIDC and IGNOU* (for training and certification)
    - Reddy's Foundation*
    - Aid-et-Action* (particularly for child workers, school dropouts etc).

# Madhya Pradesh (District Map)

