

CHAPTER VIII

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter summarises the discussions made in the earlier chapters. Secondly, it presents a brief note on the analysis and findings arrived at so far using different methods and techniques. In the end, this chapter provides probable recommendations of the study. The present study attempts to assess the livelihood sustainability of the Bihari migrant labourers in the two states of NER— Sikkim and Assam, chosen on the basis of peaceful and conflict-ridden states respectively. To answer the objectives set, besides primary and secondary data, a few case studies have been included. The specific questions which we strived to answer in this study are:

- a) What are the major factors for the Bihari labourers to migrate to two states of NER?
- b) Have the armed conflicts and anti-immigration movements of the locals at the destination really been deterring factors for the Bihari migrants?
- c) What are the factors that enhanced livelihood sustainability of the Bihari migrant labourers in NER?

There are eight chapters in this study including the present one. Chapter one contains the introduction, the background of the Bihari migrant labourers, rationale of the study and the specific objectives. Second chapter presents the theoretical background and research gaps. The third chapter contains methodology of the study that includes area of the study, the sampling framework and methods in details. The next chapter (fourth chapter) is solely based on information gathered from the secondary sources. Using population census of India 1991 and 2001, the very chapter

highlights Bihari migrant labourers in Assam and Sikkim. The fifth chapter represents the socio-economic profile of the migrants and the findings of the first objective, which is to understand the reasons for migration to the two states. The sixth chapter contains the findings for the second objective, tries to understand the factors that enhanced the livelihood sustainability of the migrant labourers. The seventh chapter focuses on the quality of life of the Bihari migrants in both the states, and the eighth chapter wraps up with the summary and a few recommendations of the study.

8.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

For the sake of convenience, we would present the summary in four different parts. In the first part, we would present the background of the study and the rest three parts would cater the three specific questions set in this study.

As given in the literature, the major factors responsible for outmigration from the rural areas are the uneven development, inequalities among the regions and lack of employment opportunities. In general, migration has become one of the important livelihood strategies for individuals and households. Connecting to the reality, Bihar is the state in India where development deficit is very high, and because of the lack of economic opportunities, the labourers from the rural areas are bound to migrate to other states in order to improve their economic status. From the data and analysis made in the previous chapters, it is evident that migrants in Assam and Sikkim coming from the state of Bihar are generally male dominated in nature. It is also corroborated with the theories of migration discussed above that the male members of the low agricultural sector prefer to migrate from the state in search of livelihood. Research studies on the theme in different states have also manifested the extent of

migrants from Bihar. For instances, the Bihari migrants are found to be engaged in the informal sector like the construction workers, porters, rickshaw pullers, petty shop/pan shops, barber, etc., which are male dominated jobs. Majority of the migrants coming from Bihar seem to be dominated by the people belonging to the schedule caste and other backward classes. Negligible number of general social category of poor Bihari migrants are found at the destination, primarily to avoid stigma to engage in the blue collar jobs at the origin.

What we have understood from this study is that the migration, over the years, has slowly become a way of life for the rural people of Bihar. They have developed an instinct to move to different places to acquire basic necessities of life, so as to provide a better life to their family and children. While investigating the status and scenario of Bihari migrant labourers in Assam and Sikkim, of the all states of India, the highest number of interstate migrant labourers in Assam belonged to Bihar. It is more or less same in Sikkim that the Bihari migrant labourers in the state ranked the second highest after West Bengal. Despite odd circumstances like distance from home, conflicts, unwelcoming attitude of the local towards the migrants, poor labour laws, little apathy from the government, lack of facilities, etc. the Bihari migrant labourers have been living in NER. Economic factor is found to have been a dominant factor for migration. Other reasons like education, marriage, conflict at the origin, family problem, etc., are not so significant. The findings also show that most of the migrants belong to the working age group. Now, in order to understand the reasons very specifically behind the migration of the Bihari labourers, a primary survey method was used and the sub-reasons have been regrouped into push, pull and networking factors. The study found that out of the several factors responsible for the migration, the push factor was found to be dominating. Particularly looking at the

push factors that influenced Bihari labourers to migrate to Assam and Sikkim has been unemployment/joblessness and financial crisis at home. Under the push factor, insufficient income in the previous occupation, landlessness, natural calamities, problems with the society, discrimination by the upper castes have also been responsible for the migration. Of the third category, the network, it is found that the contacts developed with the friends and relatives at Assam and Sikkim who had already migrated before has also been a major factor for migration. Rural Bihari underemployed people are influenced by their friends and relatives who had already migrated to NER before to take a decision to leave rural hardship and follow them for a better life. They generally provide information about the place and numerous job opportunities at the destination.

In totality, it is the push factor that dominates over the pull and network factors in making the rural Bihari unemployed/underemployed people to migrate. From the analysis above we can arrive at a judgement that the conditions at the destination do not necessarily impact the decision of the migrants while choosing the place to migrate. The migrants hardly bother/care about the conflicts that take place at the destination, especially in Assam because they are driven by economic opportunity at the destination. As long as the place attracts them with employment opportunities and provide them better livelihood they do not bother about the attitude of the local and difficulties at the destination. Saving and remittances are the importance components of the migrants and migration study. Therefore, migrants tend to maximize savings so that they can send more money to home and it makes them work harder at the destination.

Sustaining lives at a place other than their native/origin is a difficult task. During the survey the sample migrants allude over the importance of savings in their lives. They tend to maximize the savings so that they can send maximum portion of the savings back at home and it acts as a major force to make the migrants sustain their lives at destination despite of all their hardships. As per the findings, average monthly savings of migrants in Sikkim is higher than that of the Bihari migrants in Assam. Along with the savings, on an average, monthly income and monthly expenditure is also higher in Sikkim than that of the Bihari migrants in Assam. So, in that sense, the migrants living in Sikkim have greater sustainability than the migrants living in Assam. Particularly, looking at factors that influenced savings, it was found that those who earn more are able to save more and hence able to sustain their lives at destination in a better way. The social category of a migrant also impacts their sustenance at destination. The self-employed migrants were found to save more and sustained their lives better than that of the casual labourers or monthly wage earning migrants. Literacy or education has a positive impact on livelihood sustainability. Understandably, the literate ones are able to save more than the illiterates. In a similar manner, all other variables like years of migration, migrant's fixed employment status and those are willing to continue their stay in future are more able to sustain their lives at destination. Variables like increase in member in the family leads to lower savings and makes the migrants less sustainable at destination. Further, we understand that the aged migrants or a person with higher age, age above 50, is unwillingness to stay at destination. It has also been reported in many studies that ageing does have an impact on migrant's decision to continue to stay at the destination. For instance, older people are willing to stay closer with his family and people. Knowing local language also helps a migrant to sustain his life at destination in an improved way. Years of

migration is a substitute for experience and can also measure how accustomed a person is with a place. Despite of higher savings and income, it was plausible that around 67.5 percent of the respondents were willing to continue their stay in Assam where as 58.66 percent of the respondents are willing to continue their stay in Sikkim. In that case another important factor to make the migrants sustain their lives at destination is the income difference which acts as one of the main driving forces. By higher income difference we mean the difference in income at origin (earnings at the time of departure at origin) and destination. Another important factor is the percentage of savings to the total income, Bihari migrants in Assam save around 43.06 percent of the total income which is 38.60 percent for the Bihari migrants in Sikkim. Hence, the higher income difference and percentage of savings makes the Bihari migrants sustain in Assam easily.

Last but not the least, we intended to compare and contrast the livelihood condition (Quality of Life) of these migrant labourers between the conflict-ridden state– Assam and the relatively peaceful state– Sikkim. We tried to understand the condition of Bihari migrant labourers by using several parameters like per capita expenditure on different items. We found that the average per capita expenditure of the migrants in Sikkim is found to be more than that of the Assam. Comparing the mean of monthly expenditure on different items gave us an idea about standard of living of the migrants. We found that the mean of monthly expenditure on almost all the item in Sikkim was found to be more than that of the Assam. As discussed in the previous chapter that the quality of life is a very subjective concept, we tried to understand it from many aspects like economic condition, which include work status, condition of the job, etc. Along with it, the personal factors (like condition of health and facilities etc.), social factors (social relationship of the migrant with family and

locals etc), and physical factors which include type of housing, locality and different type of assets they own have also been included. The labour migrants staying at destination have different assets and facilities.

In order to understand quality of life in detail, they were observed from different dimensions and each dimension is represented by a set of variable. A composite index gave us to gauge overall crux of all the four dimensions. From the finding, we conclude that the overall composite index of Sikkim is higher than Assam. In particular, the self-employed migrants have better composite index score (higher the score better the life) than the daily wage earners and manual labourers in both the states. It was concluded that over the years, there is increase in the overall index value. All the dimensions perform better for the migrants staying for longer duration vis-a-vis the shorter duration. So, based on the composite index value, we conclude that migrants in Sikkim have a better quality of life. Secondly, the self employed migrants have better quality of life than the daily wage labourers and manual labourer in both states. Understandably, the quality of life of migrant increases as their period of stay increases at the destinations. The study used two widely used psychological scales, which measure migrants' own perception regarding their quality of life or well being. The scales are the subjective indicators used in several studies to assess individuals' perception of the conditions of their lives and their satisfaction with such conditions. The scores of the two scales support the same conclusion like the composite index value. We found that the migrants in Sikkim are more satisfied with their life and happier than the migrants in Assam.

As of now what we understand is that in spite of all the adverse conditions stated above and political conflicts prevailing in Assam, Bihari migrants are still

willing to continue their stay in the state, estimated at 69 per cent of the respondent in the stat. Whereas, in Sikkim, which is considered to be one of the most peaceful states in the country, only 58 per cent of the respondents are willing to stay longer in the state. This indicates that the state of Assam is relatively a better place for earning for the Bihari migrant labourers. From this we can draw a conclusion that Bihari migrants are primarily driven by the economic factors. For Bihari migrants what matters the most is the income they earn and send to the family members at home. The argument is underpinned by the fact that the percentage of savings to total the income is more in Assam (43 percent) than those of the Bihari migrants in Sikkim (38 percent). In simpler terms, Bihari migrant labourers save more portion of their income and can remit more in Assam vis-a-vis Sikkim.

8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The migrant labourers belong to the lowest rung of the society and their problems are often ignored. There have been several incidences of violence against the Bihari migrant workers in many parts of India like Maharashtra, Karnataka and particularly in Assam. In the absence of willing workforce, to do the menial and blue collared jobs, the Bihari migrants have stepped in to fill the demand. There is no doubt that Bihari migrants have gained certainly in terms of economic benefits, but they fail when it comes to social benefits. We need to understand that the Bihari migrants cannot be compared to the illegal migrants (Bangladeshi migrants in certain parts of India). As a matter of human rights and constitutional rights, violence should not be involved. The constitution of India guarantees the citizens, the freedom to move freely and reside without restrictions in any part of the country. If the local people and politicians are not in favour of entertaining the outsiders, they can use certain

mechanism to restrict them but using physical and verbal abuse should not be a solution.

The Bihari migrant labourers and migrants involved in the informal sector are merely considered as floating population, there is no official record where they get registered. They do not have the access to many basic facilities like ration card and other benefits which locals enjoy. As an inclusive society, there is need to address the problems of this very section of the society.

Since mostly the push factors are responsible for the migration of people from rural Bihar, the issue needs to be addressed by the policy makers and politicians from the origin side. The inadequate employment opportunities in Bihar and lagged agriculture should be the initial focus. Given the limited scope of the agriculture sector, other allied activities like horticulture, dairy farming etc. could be encouraged to supplement the primary sector in Bihar. The policy makers and concerned officials can focus on the agro-based industries as there lays huge potential in the respective field which requires less finance and tend to be highly labour intensive.

Since many migrants reported to be landless and poverty stricken, they are forced to migrate in other places. The state government of Bihar could practice proper implementation of government programmes like Jawahar Rojgar Yojana, Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana, and National Rural Employment Programme etc. so that the migrants can sustain themselves and their family.