

Searchlight

SOUTH ASIA

TRACKING URBAN POVERTY TRENDS IN INDIA, BANGLADESH, NEPAL AND PAKISTAN

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FEATURE

Worker Migration from South Asia

BY NISHA KUMAR KULKARNI

Without a doubt, rural-to-urban migration is a symptom of the larger problem of scarce opportunity. Though South Asian countries largely qualify as “rural” and are dominated by agrarian economies, the modern age has made way for limited growth and development in villages. This fact is no more apparent than when one surveys the cityscapes of South Asia and sees the proliferation of expansive slum communities, home to hundreds of thousands of the urban poor – the once-were-villagers.

There is, however, another migration pattern that must be paid attention to, and it is that of intra-regional and international migration. Poor people are choosing to leave behind their home countries, and

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oftentimes their immediate families, to work abroad where jobs are more available. Crossing national borders for cheap labor, certain industries – such as construction and domestic work, for example – find a steady flow of ready, able-bodied applicants to fulfill these roles just so they are able to send their hard-earned money home and offer financial support.

MIGRATION PATTERNS

According to a 2012 Asian Development Bank (ADB) working paper entitled “[Worker Migration and Remittances in South Asia](#),” the number of migrant workers going abroad from South Asia reached approximately 1.5 million in 2010. Remittance inflow for the same year was logged at a record high of US\$72bn. South Asia’s economy has overwhelmingly become a “remittance economy,” whereby countries like Bangladesh, India and Nepal are increasingly dependent on remittances by migrant workers. (Not enough data is available on current worker migration statistics from Pakistan to be conclusive on the degree to which the country relies on remittances.)

South Asia’s economy has overwhelmingly become a “remittance economy,” whereby countries like Bangladesh, India and Nepal are increasingly dependent on remittances by migrant workers.

This figure, however, only captures formal remittances, or those that were officially recorded. Informal remittances will likely push that figure much higher.

A vast majority of migrant workers from South Asia are finding work in the Middle East, as well as Southeast Asia. A common sight on flights from Delhi to Dubai, or vice versa, are groups of Indian migrant workers, all hired to help build the “new Middle East.” In spite of the global recession in 2008, there is a steady stream of work available in countries like the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman and Saudi Arabia, amongst others. These migrant workers – also from Bangladesh and Nepal – are treated much like a group of schoolchildren going on a field trip: there is one “leader,” often representing the interests of the foreign employer, who keeps the group together and, more importantly, holds onto their passports.

In 2011, the Government of Bangladesh estimated that more than five million people – nearly 3% of the country’s total population – are migrant workers. On average between the years 2000 and 2010, Bangladesh has seen an annual outflow of 435,000 people migrating for work. During the same period, India has seen six million people leave the country for work, and the annual outflow has been steadily climbing at 16%.

Unlike Bangladesh and India, Nepal’s migration patterns are less transparent. A majority of Nepalese migrants – 1.5 million people – move to India for work. However, the Government of India does not consider Nepalese workers “migrants” because there is a no visa policy between India and Nepal. According to Nepal’s [Ministry of Labor and Transport Management](#) though, in July 2009, the official figure for migrant workers was registered at 219,956. As of 2010, 1.6 million workers had left the country since 2000. Official figures pin annual outflow at an average 26%. Given these statistical discrepancies, there are some obvious issues in how migrant workers are being defined, registered and recorded.

FEATURE continued**A REMITTANCE ECONOMY**

Remittance inflows have become a critical component of funding for South Asian economies. In 2010, South Asia realized formal remittance inflows at US\$75bn, up from just US\$16.13bn in 2000. Globally, India and Bangladesh ranked first and seventh, respectively, with regard to the level of remittances received. In terms of GDP, Nepal receives the highest level of formal remittance inflows, at 23%, in South Asia, followed by Bangladesh (12%). There is a clear relationship between economic

In cities like Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai, they take jobs as household maids, cooks, drivers and delivery persons, for example, where they live meagerly in slum communities and send almost the entirety of their earned incomes back home.

growth in other global regions and the levels of remittances received in South Asia. For example, the ADB working paper notes that Bangladesh's remittance inflow in 2010 was US\$11bn, a 6% growth from the previous fiscal year and the "highest remittance inflow in its history." This rise makes sense given the rate of economic growth being experienced in "migrant worker host countries," like Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Remittance inflows may come via formal or informal channels. Formal channels include bank drafts, electronic bank transfers, foreign exchange centers, money transfer companies or other legal organizations. There is, however, a growing unregulated remittance economy that supports informal channels like unlicensed brokers or traders, and transfers via family and friends. Most remittances to South Asian countries come via informal channels. The economic implications of informality are evident: there is no transparent record of exactly how much money comes from migrant labor. There is another consequence as well whereby the ignorance of migrant labor abroad is exploited: they can be cheated out of funds, pay exorbitantly high transaction fees or lose all their earnings altogether.

South Asian governments have taken steps to prevent remittances coming from informal channels. Measures like exchange rate liberalization, special remittance units at central banks, improved licensing for money transfer agencies and stronger ties between domestic and foreign banks have been encouraged. For the poor, however, it is easy to understand how formal remittance channels may be out of the question: dealings with banks or any legal entity requires what seems to be a surfeit of personal documentation and perhaps even funding that they do not have access to.

WHY LEAVE?

South Asia's urban poor communities are former rural residents. Cities have become beacons of economic – and, to a degree, social – hope for domestic migrants. But with a high influx of migrants to cities, there are disadvantages that may drive a person to consider working abroad. Low wages and few stable opportunities inspire migrant workers to move to larger cities, where they have a better chance at supporting themselves and their families. For a resident of Bangladesh or Nepal, this does not necessarily mean taking the drastic step of moving to the Middle East directly, but instead to try his luck in India.

In Nepal, Kathmandu is not only the capital city, but also the *biggest* city that holds promise for any rural migrant. Making the physical move to the city is the first step, but next comes the search for a job. A February 2013 [article](#) in *The Himalayan Times*

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notes that more than 27% of young Nepalese people, between ages 25 and 34, are leaving the country “due to lack of confidence in the government, fewer employment opportunities and social pressure... Formal job creation remains weak, while informal jobs and underemployment have also shrunk...” In 2012 alone, 554,441 young people left Nepal “in search of greener pastures.”

The challenges that young people face in finding a sustainable livelihood highlights significant problems in the overall economy and the government’s approach to addressing such issues. If Nepal is truly witnessing a contraction in its job markets – both formal and informal – it is easy to understand why so many people are seeking their fortunes outside the country. Many Nepalese people migrate south of the border to India, where they readily take jobs in the informal economy: in cities like Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai, they take jobs as household maids, cooks, drivers and delivery persons, for example, where they live meagerly in slum communities and send almost the entirety of their earned incomes back home.

If the poor are being hired to help build cities in another country or region, why can they not do so in the high-growth atmosphere of their home country’s cities? Why should countries endorse exporting work when there is much to be done at home?

Bangladesh is also seeing a high incidence of migration to India. Opportunities in India’s cities, as well as in rural areas where further infrastructural development is unfolding, has inspired many legal and illegal migrants to cross the border and find relatively lucrative jobs. As a matter of fact, migration is happening at such a rate that the Government of India has formally requested that the Bangladeshi government exercise [more control](#) over the country’s migrants.

DESPERATE TIMES, DESPERATE MEASURES

Foreign migrants to Indian cities are not just taking jobs as domestic workers and manual laborers. There is also a desperate pitch to the jobs migrant workers may take in a new country to gain financial independence. Prostitution and sex work may also come to the fore, particularly for young women. The Bangladeshi village of Basatpur was profiled in a January 2013 [article](#) in *The Guardian*: it is dubbed “Bombay Colony” because of the number of women who move to Mumbai and end up working in one of the city’s notorious bars. In the case of Basatpur’s villagers, crossing the border to India is infinitely more promising than moving to Chittagong, Dhaka or Khulna. “The girls go because there’s nothing to eat here. The men can’t earn a living, so they send us across the border,” says Anjuman Ara Begum who was interviewed in the article.

Basatpur is exceptional, mainly because so many of its women have fled the country. In the fiscal year ending June 30, 2012, Bangladesh recorded remittance inflows from all migrant workers at 11% of GDP. The official number of female migrant workers, however, stood at just 30,000, which is less than 5% of the total outflow of workers, as reported by the Government of Bangladesh’s [Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training](#) (BMet). From these figures, and what can otherwise be reasonably assumed in the case of most migrant workers in Bangladesh and in other South Asian countries, men make up the majority of migrant labor. Dr. Nurul Islam, director of BMet, agrees and said to *The Guardian*: “Social attitudes towards women going abroad to work are still conservative.”

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THE ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT

Despite numerous challenges posed by out-migration, Bangladesh has the most inclusive overseas employment policy in South Asia. Since 2006, three government agencies have managed the rights of migrant workers abroad: the [Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment](#), the BMet and the [Bangladesh Employment Services Limited](#). Each agency is involved in different aspects of international migration of Bangladeshis, from organizing pre-departure information sessions to registering recruitment agencies to training for national and international markets.

Unlike Bangladesh, India's involvement with its migrant workers abroad has been limited. This has slowly changed recently, especially in the face of short-term worker migration to the Middle East and Malaysia. New migration policies in India prepare migrants for going abroad, monitor licensors and brokers, and preserve the rights of Indian citizens working abroad.

For Nepal, overseas employment has been treated as a tool in the country's poverty alleviation toolkit and its policies reflect that attitude. The [Department of Labor and Employment Promotion](#) must register foreign employment recruitment agencies, issue appropriate licenses to these agencies, and promote foreign employment by collecting information and implementing training activities for migrant workers.

URBAN RELEVANCE

Migrant workers have a clear incentive to leave their countries for work, and employers seeking cheap labor will continue to find ways to lure them abroad. But the government's attitude towards worker migration is ambiguous. On the one hand, the high level of remittance payments coming into a country does fund economic growth. This is a source of funding that South Asian governments cannot afford to lose, particularly with the needs arising from rapid urbanization.

On the other hand, the steady outflow of labor does signal a serious national problem. Local economic growth is not keeping pace with labor market growth. This is apparent in rural areas where agrarian economies are trying to regain their foothold in the post-recession, inflationary global market. Rapid urbanization has made cities the next frontier, but to a certain degree, they are also failing national residents. Aside from having to settle for a questionable quality of life, urban migrants lack stability – that which they so need to achieve any semblance of financial independence.

Does it make sense, then, to view worker migration as a poverty alleviation tool? Nepal has embraced this philosophy, but the country's young people are frustrated by it. Though the opportunity to find work abroad is important, so too is stronger reform

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within a country to create opportunities for its citizens. Part of this may obviously require political will and effective policy measures, but it also requires an acknowledgement of the labor done by lower-income groups: if the poor are being hired to help build cities in another country or region, why can they not do so in the high-growth atmosphere of their home country's cities? Why should countries endorse exporting work when there is much to be done at home? There is a structural and social failure that prevents this match-up between the needs of a city and the needs of the poor from cleaving together.

CONCLUSION

Migrant workers are conspicuous in all South Asian cities, but what may be less apparent are the lengths to which the urban poor must go through to secure a livelihood and a certain standard of living. Remittances have garnered myriad national and regional media headlines, but in viewing just the fruits of migrant labor, the larger issue of safeguarding the rights and welfare of national citizens gets lost in the mire.

The opportunity posed by worker migration is powerful and undeniable, but it cannot be a consequence of negligent politics. Poor workers, in particular, are susceptible to exploitation in any context, irrespective of government efforts to ensure otherwise. Do the poor have access to resources that can adequately teach them their rights while abroad? Do they have a voice to ensure that these laws are obeyed?

Central governments need to pay heed to the fact that though migration is providing a short-term solution to a long-term problem, more must be done to understand what can be rectified at home so that citizens can make a decent, sustainable living. Be it further rural development, education reform and active skills training, or stronger networks and resources at the disposal of urban residents, migrant workers need to be seen as more than a statistical probability of external funding; they need to be perceived as active players in their home economies.

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DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

Domestic Work in India

BY UTHARA GANESH

Over the last decade, India has seen extraordinary growth in the number of its domestic workers. In 2009-2010, the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) [estimates](#) the total number of domestic workers at 2.52 million, up from 1.62 million in 1999-2000. Of this, nearly two-thirds reside in urban India, and nearly 57% are women. As in other countries, domestic work as a means of employment in India has undergone what economists refer to as a “rapid feminization,” where almost 75% of the increase in domestic workers over the last 10 years is accounted for by women.

DIFFERENT NUMBERS

A [report](#) by the International Labor Organization (ILO) sheds light upon some of the glaring data discrepancies in the various estimates of India’s total number of domestic workers. It states that while official NSSO data posits the number at 2.52 million, the actual number could be considerably higher at almost 4.2 million. Some media peg the total at as high as [90 million workers](#).

Despite the significant difference in estimates, what is uncontested by all sources is the fact that the majority of domestic workers working in India’s large metropolises constitute migrant *women* labor. The ILO claims that nearly 3% of the current female workforce engages in domestic labor as a primary means of employment. Domestic work has historically been viewed as the realm of the woman with crucial household chores continuing to be either being unpaid (if performed by a household’s women) or underpaid (if outsourced to a domestic worker).

While the question of why a thriving economy such as India’s has failed to generate an adequate number and variety of jobs for its female populace merits investigation, the most immediate and pressing concern – given the surge in the numbers of domestic workers – points to the need for a thorough scrutiny of the circumstances under which

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such work is carried out. The mostly female, mostly urban domestic workers in India today continue to live and work in contexts that are best characterized by inequity, as well as a reprehensible precariousness.

UNREGULATED WORK CONDITIONS

Domestic workers are often migrant women hailing from some of India's most deprived regions, such as the tribal hinterlands of Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal. Self-styled "agents," representing private employment services based in cities, recruit and place these women in households to provide domestic services. Other times – as is the case with a sizeable number of Tamil migrants in New Delhi, for example – women migrate to cities and find jobs in urban households through their own informal, word-of-mouth networks. Living a considerable distance away from their familiar community and environment, these domestic workers are susceptible to varying degrees of exploitation.

While official NSSO data posits the number at 2.52 million, the actual number could be considerably higher at almost 4.2 million. Some media peg the total at as high as 90 million workers.

In India, the operational context for domestic workers is one that is deeply entrenched in the feudal practice of keeping servants. Domestic workers are not perceived or treated as service providers; they hold a subservient position clearly "below" their employers. The relationship between the employer and employee is thus characterized by a highly unequal dynamic with the latter having little power to negotiate equitable employment terms.

In general, wages for domestic workers tend to be low. In the Tier-I city of Bangalore, for instance, domestic workers earn a monthly income of anything between INR2,000 (USD ~US\$37) and INR5,000 (~US\$92). This effectively translates into daily wages of anywhere between INR66 (~US\$1.20) and INR166 (~US\$3) for a 6-8 hour workday. This is far below the minimum wage stipulations in Bangalore's home state, Karnataka, whose government determined a fair, minimum monthly income of INR5,044 (~US\$93.40).

While wages for domestic workers in India vary minimally from city to city, they are on a whole lower than the remuneration received by other labor. With the exception of few Indian states – [Andhra Pradesh](#), [Karnataka](#), [Rajasthan](#), [Bihar](#) and [Kerala](#) – domestic workers are not included in the purview of state-specific minimum wage legislation. The salary a worker is paid thus tends to be at the discretion of the employer or recruitment agent. In the states where wage legislation exists, its enforcement and efficacy has yet to be formally assessed.

The burden of low wages is exacerbated by long, unregulated work hours and no formal benefits for domestic workers, such as leave (e.g. vacation days, sick days, holidays, maternity leave) or social security (e.g. pensions or insurance). The few attempts to address this gap have been poorly executed. In June 2011 for instance, the Government of India [announced](#) the inclusion of domestic workers as beneficiaries in the [Rashtriya Swasthya Bhima Yojana](#) (RSBY), a health insurance scheme covering below poverty line populations from the unorganized sector. This effort, however, failed because no detailed implementation mechanism for the identification and subsequent disbursement of benefits was developed.

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PROPOSED LEGISLATIVE INTERVENTIONS

In 2010, the [National Commission for Women](#) drafted [The Domestic Workers Welfare and Social Security Act](#) to address the various problems faced by domestic workers. Taking cognizance of the issues particular to domestic work, the Act notes, "...Only a Comprehensive Central Legislation specifically designed to meet the working condition of the domestic workers...can ensure the end of the exploitation of these domestic workers."

The Act provides for the creation of solid, formal, institutional mechanisms operating at the central-, state- and district-levels for the regulation of domestic work. It proposes a three-tier mechanism that comprises of the Central Advisory Committee,

The relationship between the employer and employee is thus characterized by a highly unequal dynamic with the latter having little power to negotiate equitable employment terms.

a State Advisory Committee and district-level boards, each of which shall be enlisted with the duty of registering domestic workers, employers and placement agencies. The district-level boards will ensure decent working conditions for domestic workers, covering norms for rest periods, weekly leave, food and the maximum number of work hours. They shall also act as arbitrators of dispute to avail of benefits such as accident relief, financial assistance for the education of children and maternity benefits.

While well-intentioned, even a cursory review of the mechanism proposed by the Act raises important questions. The mechanism proposed has devolved far too many responsibilities to the boards without accounting for how they will be met, especially given the diverse administrative capacities required. More thought needs to be put into how exactly the proposed bodies shall be prepared to effectively provide each of the outlined services.

What the Act has also ignored is the pressing need for formal employment contracts between workers and households. The absence of clearly drawn terms of employment creates loopholes for both the employer and the employee in the original oral agreement. Making employment contracts imperative, however, poses significant questions: Will the neo-feudal employer be able to treat his domestic worker as a formal employee and uphold the contract? Will modes of payment to domestic workers undergo a change (i.e., from cash to check), given the possibility of tax benefits that a contract entails? If so, how would it be ensured that all domestic workers have access to a bank account, especially given the low rates of financial inclusion among the female urban poor? More significantly, what body would be in charge of ensuring the upholding of such contracts?

Though there is need for larger institutional structures to ensure implementation, the benefits accrued would be justified. With no formal contract in place, neither employer nor employee are accountable to any specific terms. For example, due to the insecurity of their jobs, domestic workers tend to take long, unannounced absences from work for personal reasons (e.g. visiting family, illness), or simply quit without adequate notice. A pre-determined contract could ensure that workers have a more stable livelihood while also ensuring that the quality of services received by employers is more standardized.

Another important step towards the protection of domestic workers is the inclusion of domestic work under the schedule of protective statutes applicable to other categories of workers. [The Final Report of the Task Force on Domestic Workers](#), com-

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missioned by the [Ministry of Labor and Employment](#) and the ILO, calls for domestic work as a category to be included in the Central List of Scheduled Employment. Doing so would enable the setting of standard measures for domestic workers that is applicable across all Indian states. This is especially useful for states that do not currently specify minimum wage levels for domestic workers. This recommendation could prove to be crucial to reforms, but is yet to be implemented.

On a global level, the ILO's Congress passed the [Convention for Domestic Work](#) in 2010. The document outlines a desirable, basic minimum standard in terms of employment, wages, minimum hours, occupational safety, social health and social security for domestic workers. The Indian government's non-ratification of the convention – despite the huge presence of domestic workers in the country and the many problems compounding them – is indicative of the fact that the rights of domestic workers in India is simply not seen as a political priority.

INCIDENCE OF ABUSE

Because the political agenda does not make domestic workers' rights a high priority, their exploitation is conspicuous. In May 2012, news channels [reported](#) the merciless torture of a 14-year-old girl by her software engineer employers in Noida, in the National Capital Region of Delhi. It was alleged that the young girl was regularly beaten and not allowed to leave the premises of the household of her employers. Instances such as these, however, may well be only the tip of the iceberg. The lack of adequate alternative means of employment available in the labor market is worsened by the largely informal, and therefore unobservable, nature of most domestic work arrangements. Many times, poor women are left with no choice but to take up employment in unprotected, demeaning conditions.

Given that all work is performed within the largely private space of a household, domestic workers are vulnerable to abuse and harassment. Sexual abuse, in particular, has become widespread: sexual abuse of domestic workers has become so rife that it took protests by the [National Domestic Workers' Movement](#) before the [Protection of Women Against Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Bill](#) was updated in 2012 to include domestic workers as a category of employees under its protection.

DIGNIFYING DOMESTIC WORK

While regulation of domestic work is pivotal to reform, it is also true that socio-cultural codes have a significant impact on the quality of lives experienced by domestic workers. As long as domestic work and workers are perceived through a neo-feudal lens by the persons availing of these services, the problems shall continue to be trivialized. Like all informal labor, domestic work has historically lacked recognition and has been typically undervalued for its significant contribution to urban economies.

While several states in India today have independent domestic workers' unions, there is much ground to be covered with regard to inclusive coverage and cohesive mobilization. Mobilization, [according to a 2012 op-ed in *The Hindu*](#), may help neutralize the existing power imbalance and help boost the bargaining position of domestic workers. But in the absence of a formal means to identify and enlist domestic workers, formal mobilization remains a challenge.

The impending need is for a regulatory overhaul to be accompanied by an evolution in the way employing households treat domestic work. Domestic workers constitute a very large and especially vulnerable community amongst the Indian urban poor. The non-recognition and undervaluation of domestic work has only contributed to their socio-economic marginalization and, more disturbingly, the “normalization” of highly denigrating work conditions. While some efforts have been made by the government to address the issue, there is a need to rally the more voluble and politically influential urban middle classes – majority employers of domestic workers – for communal awareness and sensitivity. This is a vital, though not the only, step to prop up the prospects of the female domestic worker in the city.

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RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE

Revisiting Roles in Education

BY NISHA KUMAR KULKARNI

India's landmark [Right to Education \(RTE\) Act](#) was legislated in 2010, and since then, central and state governments have been working together and independently to support the cause of universal education. Over 220 million Indian children between the ages of six and 14 are recipients of a sub-par education. This is overwhelmingly due to issues regarding language barriers, poor literacy standards, teacher training and preparedness, and anti-inclusive practices. The challenges of any education sector are large hurdles, but India is making positive strides towards achieving the Millennium Development Goal of education for all.

The question of how to provide the best possible education to all of India's children has given rise to heated debate about the government's role in the education sector, as well as what role other stakeholders have to promote the ambitious goals of the RTE Act. Is education purely the domain of the government, or is there room for other players to make impact? With the general perception of private education seen as more positive and of higher quality than public education, the role non-government stakeholders play is critical, given the challenges India's education sector must confront and resolve.

RTE OVERSIGHT

By April 2013, all schools in India must be in compliance with specific stipulations outlined in the RTE Act. The Act has requirements regarding: infrastructure, the maximum pupil-teacher ratio, minimum teacher qualifications, teacher salaries and work conditions, standardized syllabi, special training for children who have been out of school, and recognized formal schools. How schools meet these stipulations vary based on school type (e.g. government, NGO, private budget, non-formal, home education), but all must obey or face shutdown.

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In the IDFC's latest [India Infrastructure Report](#), focused on education, it is posited that, "In effect, the Act means impending death for thousands of non-government schools around the country that do not meet these standards and are unlikely to be able to." According to the report, which discusses the current education landscape in India post-RTE, there are five non-state education providers that will be forced to shut down as a result of non-compliance to the Act. These providers are: NGO or community schools for the poor, alternative schools, non-formal education and private budget schools. Nearly 40 million children attending these non-government schools will be forced to enroll in government schools if their current education centers close – a grim prospect given that there is an undersupply of approximately one million teachers serving children already enrolled in government schools.

NON-GOVERNMENT EDUCATION PROVIDERS AT-RISK

NGOs have long provided the poor with a viable education option for their children. "NGOs have been particularly effective in penetrating remote or difficult areas or groups where cultural, social or geographical barriers keep children away from attending school." The impact that NGOs can play in education is no more apparent than in India's slum communities, where government failure to build schools has presented a distinct opportunity for other stakeholders. Slum communities are home to people from

Nearly 40 million children attending non-government schools will be forced to enroll in government schools if their current education centers close.

across India – they represent different languages, levels of literacy and cultures. An effective school would have to find a way to confront the diversity of classrooms head-on, but the government has not been the purveyor of such solutions; NGOs have.

There is little political will to build quality schools that serve slum children only because they are not seen as legal city residents. This disagreement over legal status has rendered urban poor children even more helpless in the scheme of securing a better future for themselves and their families. NGO schools, or schools that cater to poor communities, understand the local context and work within that framework to affect change. The NGOs that have been successful will then find themselves "edged out" because of the RTE Act's requirements.

Alternative, or "experimental," schools are also at-risk. Many of these schools target marginalized children with a more progressive vision of education. "Their approach involves non-competitive learning environments with a flexible learning pace, enriched curriculum and child-centered pedagogy, non-threatening continuous assessment, and welcoming of different learners' uniqueness and mother-tongues." Though alternative schools have traditionally devised their own policies and approach to education, they have been able to support innovation in government schools as well by imparting good classroom working models, for instance. The different approach of alternative schools, however, puts them in a vulnerable position.

Non-formal education is another category of education that the Act excludes from its credo. In 1986, the Government of India legislated the [National Policy on Education](#), which was a program targeting "deprived children, school drop-outs, children from habitations without formal schools, working children" and others. After completing Class V, these children were expected to continue their education in formal schools. NGOs have been encouraged to operate non-formal education centers to serve 15-25 children in each class. Though these centers are more common in rural

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continued

areas, they do exist in Indian cities. The RTE Act, however, has effectively “outlawed” such non-formal education centers.

Private budget schools are a category of schooling that includes “low-cost or unrecognized private” institutions. The 2011 edition of the Annual Status of Education Report notes that official figures puts the number of private budget schools at 26,377, which served 2.67 million students. In Bihar alone, for example, the capital Patna was found to have approximately 845 unrecognized private budget schools out of the city’s total 1,224. Though there may be concerns about education standards and quality at so-called unrecognized institutions, these schools are indispensable to local poor populations. Children *and* their parents can attend these schools, which may provide a more stable learning environment than government schools to learn English, for instance. Taking away this avenue of learning for children and their families because it does not comply with the RTE Act could deal a devastating blow to urban poor populations seeking accessible, affordable ways to educate themselves.

Homeschooling is the fifth and final category of non-government education provision that is at-risk because of the RTE Act. “There are a small but growing number of

Despite “inconclusive” evidence, it does not seem appropriate to shut down thousands of non-government schools; this is akin to penalizing schools that are doing well for the ones that are faring poorly for whatever reason.

Indian parents opting for home-schooling, often because they are dissatisfied with the mainstream system, or feel that rigid school structures don’t allow their children to pursue other interests.” Homeschooling in India currently does not require any registration and is completely unregulated. However, because of the RTE Act’s dismantling of the [Open Basic Education](#) scheme, which in the past allowed homeschooled students to sit for the same Class X exams as their peers who attend formal schools, will make it difficult for homeschooled children to participate in the same exams.

DEBUNKING COMMON ASSUMPTIONS

Though the RTE Act aims to increase the numbers of children that have access to school and improve the quality of education received, one cannot help but question if the shutting down of thousands of purported non-government or “non-formal” institutions will be best for school-aged children. The IDFC report addresses this question by looking at the arguments for RTE’s requirements.

The first assumption is that the government is the ultimate purveyor of education and that other stakeholders are not needed. It is a commonplace argument: the government is responsible for educating its country’s children. Education as a public service is a compelling argument, “However it is simply unrealistic to expect the government to achieve this on its own.” With the April 2013 deadline for RTE compliance looming on the near horizon, it is clear that the Indian government has a full plate. Education is not the sole issue on its agenda, and given the population of young people involved, it may in fact be unreasonable to expect the government to be the sole responsible stakeholder in the quest to reform India’s education sector.

The second assumption is that a majority of non-government or non-formal schools are of “low quality,” and therefore an Indian child’s right to a quality education is being denied. Though there is no unanimous consensus, there is

RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE
 continued

evidence that private schooling – or any school type that is not government-owned – “provide[s] better or at least comparable quality to government schools; so far none have indicated that they are any worse.” Despite “inconclusive” evidence, it does not seem appropriate to shut down thousands of non-government schools; this is akin to penalizing schools that are doing well for the ones that are faring poorly for whatever reason. More research, then, is needed to understand how these non-government schools are performing, how they compare to the average government school and what are the learning outcomes for the typical student who attends them. In the context of urban India, this research is especially important in that it will help education stakeholders evaluate the challenges and needs of its growing urban poor populations.

The third assumption is possibly the most controversial: it is the idea that a quality education can only be delivered by “high infrastructure, teacher qualifications and salaries.” The IDFC report makes a critical point regarding this assumption: “A more fundamental issue is how the Act defines quality education. [The RTE Act] states that the government’s obligation is to ‘ensure good quality elementary education conforming to the standards and norms specified in the Schedule’ – a Schedule that talks almost entirely about infrastructure, numbers and inputs but mentions nothing about learning processes or outcomes for children.” Given the parameters of the government’s definition of a quality education, there does seem to be a very narrow scope for how education can and should be delivered. The report

A national agenda is important, but state-level and district-level implementation requires a different mindset than “one-size-fits-all.”

goes on to say, “At its essence, quality education is one that enables students to learn with understanding, to learn how to learn, to think for themselves, to realize their full potential, and to develop an open mind committed to values of equality, freedom and service.” These are lofty goals for any education system, but since the RTE Act does have an aspirational tone as well as a practical one, the assumption of what constitutes a quality education must be re-examined.

The fourth and final assumption is that the private sector, unlike the government, is driven purely by profit and “will invariably deepen inequality and exploitation.” As can be seen in the aforementioned section on non-government school types, the so-called private sector in this context is much greater than profit-seeking organizations. NGOs, alternative, non-formal and other private initiatives have been established to achieve social impact by reaching poor and vulnerable populations. The scope of what is “private,” then, must be clarified before the assumption of profiteering is made and the value of private education dismissed.

Interestingly, this latter assumption is loaded with a mistrust of what free markets are capable of. In a country like India where the population is significant and its needs are great, relying on non-government sources for education cannot be construed as a weakness or as settling for lesser quality. If a competitive environment is encouraged and monitored, great strides can be made. But this can only occur if government policy does not “strangle” the sector with bureaucratic processes that really stagnate reform. Kerala state, in India’s south, is a prime example of what the market can accomplish: it “...has a unique model of choice and competition with among the highest percentage of private schools in the country, and also among the highest quality government schools.”

RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE
continued

STRESS ON PPPS

With different education models being enacted around the world, the Government of India does not have to look farther than within its own national borders to see what meaningful innovation can accomplish in the education sector. States like Gujarat and Kerala are proving that it can be done. Achieving universal education is a chief priority on any country’s agenda, but are all of RTE’s requirements really the best way to fulfill that goal?

It is for this reason that public-private partnerships (PPPs), once again, proves to be a viable, sustainable solution for meeting India’s needs. The experience and expertise of non-government players should not be ignored: since schools have been operating – irrespective of their “recognized” or “unrecognized” status – they have insight into the challenges and needs of various communities, and this is valuable information that the government cannot afford to overlook. A national agenda is important, but state-level and district-level implementation requires a different mindset than “one-size-fits-all.”

The government’s reach and resources are great, but so are those of the private sector. Since the government cannot be expected to enforce the goals of RTE on its own, partnerships with local partners can be what make all the difference. The IDFC report notes some interesting recommendations from education stakeholders, such as: private partners can run their own “parallel schools” to government schools in neglected areas; the government-NGO relationship should be institutionalized for maximum impact; and all alternative schools become formal “resource centers” to support – and even help run – nearby government schools. There needs to be a climate of more flexibility and openness for all education stakeholders to work together and find productive partnerships for impact.

This flexibility, however, cannot be allowed to persist without appropriate monitoring. The progress and outcomes of existing schools must be evaluated to better understand how beneficial they are to local communities. There may well be key lessons that can be imparted by non-government schools to help encourage the mission outlined by the RTE Act.

CONCLUSION

Education is an easy issue to rally behind, but when there are so many voices in the crowd, it may be difficult to detect the soundest solutions. The RTE Act is a significant piece of legislation, but how its requirements affect on-the-ground efforts towards universal education is unknown. The IDFC report states a singularly valid question when it asks whether the requirements of the Act are necessarily in the best interest of *all* children.

What is apparent, though, is that PPPs offer the most amenable, current solution to the education sector’s needs. There seems to be a fundamental issue of non-coordination and non-utilization of all resources available to the Indian government – central, state and local – and to the sector as a whole. Instead of a discussion about removing non-compliant, non-recognized institutions, it may be more worthwhile to discuss the roles they can play in pushing forward the mission of universal education. Though the government is a powerful entity, it can use all the help it can get to make the RTE a success for its current, and future, students.

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NEWS DEEP DIVE

Affordable Transportation for the Poor

BY NOOPUR DESAI

In January 2013, the Indian Railways Ministry announced a fare hike – the first after almost a decade – across India. The fares of Ordinary Second Class (suburban) trains went up by [INR0.02 \(<US\\$0.01\) per kilometer](#), while non-suburban travel will increase by INR0.03 per kilometer. In fact, by the end of January, Mumbai suburban train travellers already went through their [second round](#) of fare hikes in just three weeks.

There have been mixed reactions about the fare hikes, but lower-income groups, such as the famed Mumbai *dabbawallas*, have expressed their incapacity to pay the rising prices of living in a city, including transportation. The rise in public transportation fares, combined with the steady increase in gas prices, makes public and private mobility affordable only to the middle and upper classes of urban society. Affordable transportation dominates as the call of the hour to combat growing poverty in cities.

THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF MASS TRANSIT

Urban transportation systems across India, and most of South Asia for that matter, have become indispensable, but resulting issues are overwhelming cities. With the increase in the number of motor vehicles on roads, cities are facing big problems like high levels of air and noise pollution, pervasive traffic jams and a decline in pedestrian safety. Another big problem is the associated expense of transportation, particularly for the urban poor. With the geographic boundaries of cities expanding outwards, it is more affordable for the urban poor to live farther away from city centers, the hubs of economic activity and numerous livelihood opportunities.

NEWS DEEP DIVE continued

In developing countries, poor families spend **upto 20%** of their income on transportation. Most poor people must commute to their place of employment, or in the case of children, to school. In India alone, this accounts for **90%** of the urban poor population's transportation needs. The growing expense of transportation results in low mobility amongst the poor, and in turn, reduces their livelihood prospects, as well as access to education and healthcare.

PRIVATE VERSUS PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

According to a 2011 article written by Aysha Faiz, the number of motor vehicles in India is likely to grow by **7-8% per year** over the next two decades. Because of the rise in income across urban middle classes, the privately-owned vehicle population has also substantially increased. The rise of private transportation is a key cause for escalating urban congestion, environment degradation and reduced public transportation use.

The growth in privately-owned motor transportation has caused a decline in the overall use of public transport. However, the urban poor are still public transportation customers, and a majority of the lower-income populations cannot afford private modes of transportation. They must therefore rely on public transit or non-motorized transportation (i.e., bicycles). In Delhi, **a 2005 study** shows that lower-income groups made more than 50% of their trips by foot, about 33% by bus and about 9% by bicycle.

Traditionally, bicycles have been the prime, most affordable mode of transportation for the poor. In some Indian cities, there are even **low-interest loans to purchase bicycles** available to the poor. Bangladesh's cities, on the other hand, do not have a similar model to India's cities, making bicycles unaffordable for the poor. This is due to the **lack of significant domestic bicycle industries**, and heavy import duties put these non-motorized

Most poor people must commute to their place of employment, or in the case of children, to school. In India alone, this accounts for 90% of the urban poor population's transportation needs.

means beyond the reach of the poor, both urban and rural. There are loans available in Bangladesh, but they are typically used to purchase tricycles so that the new vehicle owners can become rickshaw-pullers and earn an income.

Today, however, the overall incidence of bicycle and tricycle usage has reduced. Growing traffic and a lack of available space restricts non-motorized methods to bylanes and city outskirts. For the poor, non-motorized transportation options have become increasingly inconvenient given the far distances they must travel from their homes to their place of employ. Municipal authorities have less incentive to develop adequate walking or bicycle lanes since high rates of motorization require greater infrastructure capacity, resulting in the transformation of cities from "car-optional" to "car-necessary" domains.

BUS RAPID TRANSPORT

Buses account for over **90% of public transportation** in Indian cities and are relatively more accessible and affordable than other forms of transportation. The current bus systems have not been able to meet the growing demand for public transportation, thereby leading to overcrowding in buses and traffic congestion. City buses usually travel shorter distances, making a change to another bus or another transportation mode necessary, thereby adding to the overall cost and time to travel.

NEWS DEEP DIVE continued

The conditions of bus services have also deteriorated. Most buses are old, not properly maintained and do not meet the latest environmental standards. To affect a makeover in India's city bus systems, there are efforts by the government under the [Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission](#) (JNNURM) to improve their quality and services.

In addition to existing bus systems, the Bus Rapid Transport (BRT) system has emerged as a low-cost and sustainable mode of public transportation. BRT is a low-carbon mass transit system that runs along special corridors with detour services and high-speed transfer stations at key city locations. Latin American cities like Sao Paulo, Mexico City and Curitiba are success stories that have adapted BRTs to their respective cities. On average, BRT systems can be built in a fraction of the time of light rail, and can cost **30 times less** to construct and three times less to operate. Organizations like the [Institute for Transportation and Development Policy](#) and [Embarq](#) have been working with governments worldwide to promote BRT systems.

If implemented, BRT systems can prove to be an important step in creating pro-poor and pro-environment public transportation. Especially in smaller cities, public transportation, such as buses and metro railways, new infrastructure needs can be prohibitively expensive, yet BRT systems may prove to be a viable, sustainable option. Some Indian cities like Delhi, Jaipur, Pune and Ahmedabad, amongst others, have already implemented BRT systems. Ahmedabad's BRT system is considered to be the most developed and advanced in the country. Within seven months of opening, **34% of private vehicle** users shifted to using the BRT system. While the Ahmedabad BRT is deemed a great success, a [study](#) shows that only 13.7% of low-income households use it.

On average, BRT systems can be built in a fraction of the time of light rail, and can cost 30 times less to construct and three times less to operate.

Across the country, there have been debates on the inclusion of BRT systems in the national urban transport plans. The opposition has mainly come from the middle and upper classes with [arguments](#) like: "Those who travel in their own cars are the decision-makers; therefore, they should get a priority over buses. He believes that bus users can wait because they are engaged in less important jobs. The Army chief cannot be kept waiting. You cannot keep a commander-in-chief waiting in traffic while his army is waiting for his orders. How does it matter if a peon reaches office five minute before time?" There have been counter-arguments as well, but the fact that debates like these surface and have credibility show a major social bias that exists in the Indian context.

THE METRO DRAMA

Major Indian cities like Mumbai and Hyderabad are going through large infrastructural changes to build a metro railway that connect different parts of the city. Delhi has already witnessed a successfully functioning metro railway line. Though it has been a boon for the middle and upper classes, it has been at the expense of the poor who find themselves paying fares at least **three times costlier** than that of buses. Even if the poor make use of metro railway transportation, oftentimes, a second, connecting mode of transportation is needed to reach a final destination. This thereby increases the overall expense – financial and time-wise – of metro railway travel. Interestingly, the effect of this has been a [positive impact](#) on Delhi's rickshaw-pullers, members of the urban poor class themselves, by increasing the demand for their services to and from stations.

NEWS DEEP DIVE continued

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CALL OF THE HOUR

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) call for cutting the number of people living in poverty by half by 2015. While the MDGs do not include transportation interventions, they may be a critical component to meeting **anti-poverty goals**. Affordable transportation and urban poverty are interrelated. The smallest fare hike could substantially reduce the mobility of the poor. Another related issue is that of accessibility given the expanding, ever-changing borders of India's – and South Asia's – cities.

There are two clear signals that must be heeded to improve the quality of life for all in cities: non-motorized transportation needs to be promoted, and infrastructure should be developed. In India, both the central government and for-profit organizations have been pushing for sustainable bike sharing models. **Cycle Chalao** ("Ride a Cycle" in English), the flagship program of Impact Carbocuts Private Limited, is one such intervention in the city of Pune that aimed to build affordable public transportation. The program was successful in making an impact: it resulted in the **Ministry of Urban Development** releasing a bicycle-sharing toolkit and additional similar bicycle-sharing contracts being formed.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of urban transport plans need to take into account the affordability and accessibility needs of the poor. While transportation may have once been perceived a luxury, it certainly has become a necessity and an important tool in the fight against poverty. It becomes important for initiatives, like BRT systems, to be socially inclusive and expand their reach to lower-income groups. Each city needs to find an amenable solution to its public transportation woes and adapt it so that it may suit the needs of the city. For instance, there is a lost opportunity with the Ahmedabad BRT system to reach a greater number of the urban poor because of the lack of **walking and cycling facilities along the BRT corridors**, which may have made it a more plausible transportation solution for the urban poor.

With an eye on the "bigger picture," the perception of public transportation systems needs to drastically change in India. There needs to be an appreciation of public transportation as a service for all city residents, regardless of socio-economic status. This change in perception will also make way for a reduction in traffic congestion, additional expensive infrastructure that caters to private transportation modes and pollution. Extending public transportation to the urban poor would help in furthering their inclusion in economic and social activities, and perhaps even narrow the rich-poor divide. As Enrique Penalosa, former Mayor of Bogotá, **said**: "A developed country is not a place where poor have cars. It is where the rich use public transport."

Regional News Summaries

Development & the Economy

India is witnessing a drop in its female labor force. There are calls for greater participation of the poor in India's urban development, while a new loan to an Indian state will fund urban development. A training program for women in Pakistan has seen huge success.

US\$100M ADB LOAN FOR UTTARAKHAND

February 1, 2013

[India] The Government of India has signed an agreement with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for a US\$100m loan. The funds will be used for the second phase of the Uttarakhand Urban Sector Development Investment Program to support the rehabilitation and expansion of basic urban infrastructure in five major urban centers in the state. The first phase of the project has already launched in Dehradun, Haridwar and Nainital, and will be expanded to cover the towns of Haldwani, Roorkee and Ramnagar.

http://www.igovernment.in/site/100-million-adb-loan-uttarakhand?utm_source=newsletter-core&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=20130201

WHY IS WOMEN'S LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION DROPPING?

February 15, 2013

[India] In South Asia, 80% of men are either employed or actively seeking a job, the same can be said for only 32% of women. According to the 2013 International Labor Organization's Global Employment Trends Report, women's participation in the labor force has dropped from approximately 37% in 2004-2005 to 29% in 2009-2010. The report notes that India ranks 120th out of 131 countries in female labor force participation. This drop in Indian female labor numbers can be attributed to the fact that the number of working age women are going back to school to complete their secondary school education. Other factors may include understated measurement, general decline in opportunities for women and increased competition with men for "scarce" jobs.

<http://southasia.oneworld.net/features/india-why-is-women2019s-labour-force-participation-dropping#.UUDQWqXycmR>

PROGRAM TO TRAIN WOMEN FLOURISHES IN PAKISTAN

February 20, 2013

[Pakistan] Since its launch in 2008, the Benazir Income Support Program has helped 25 million Pakistani women from the country's poorest regions. This is quite a feat given that the Government of Pakistan expected it to take approximately 15 years to reach the same number of women. Enrolled families receive assistance of PKR1,000 (US\$10.21) per month, in addition to benefits like long-term interest-free loans, vocational and technical training, and health and life insurance coverage. The Program has also recently initiated a primary education program for children aged five-to-12, where beneficiary families will receive PKR200 (US\$2.04) per child per month for up to three children.

<http://southasia.oneworld.net/news/programme-to-train-women-flourishes-in-pakistan#.USZaXaUycWF>

NEWS SUMMARIES continued

INCLUDE POOR IN URBAN DEVELOPMENT: AJAY MAKEN

February 20, 2013

[India] Ajay Maken, Minister for Housing and Poverty Alleviation, has called for the inclusion of the poor in the planning of healthier, sustainable cities. At a two-day event, Maken said, “We would want all cities to follow these guiding principles to ensure that our cities would be fully inclusive and participatory in nature which is missing.” Comparing the track record of India to Brazil on urban development expenditures, Maken cited that Brazil spends 3.69% of its GDP while India spends just 0.9%.

http://www.igovernment.in/site/include-poor-urban-development-ajay-maken?utm_source=newsletter-extended&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=20130220

Education & Health

Healthcare corruption is hurting the urban poor in Bangladesh. National health insurance schemes in India have gained ground, just as healthcare provider fraud increasingly puts women at risk. Inadequate access to sanitary hygiene products is putting menstruating girls and women in danger in India. Pakistan finds funding to fight polio at home.

PAKISTAN TO GET US\$251M IDB LOAN TO FIGHT POLIO

February 5, 2013

[Pakistan] The Islamic Development Bank (IDB) has approved a US\$251 loan for Pakistan’s polio eradication program, following the refusal of donor agencies’ funding. The program, valued at US\$300m, seeks to vaccinate all children by 2015. Officials say that Pakistan has been missing its vaccination targets and changing its strategies, much to the chagrin of foreign donors. And the most recent violence against foreign healthcare workers in the country has further discouraged funding. The IDB loan will be used to also help UNICEF and the WHO to support the government’s polio eradication efforts.

<http://dawn.com/2013/02/05/pakistan-to-get-250m-idb-loan-to-fight-polio/>

WOMEN’S LIVES PUT AT RISK IN INDIA BY PRIVATE HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

February 7, 2013

[India] There are reports from India that thousands of women are being given unnecessary caesareans and hysterectomies by doctors and hospitals that can significantly profit from the operations. Victims are usually poor women with limited education or who are completely illiterate. These women are then left “in pain, infirm, unable to work to earn a living and in horrendous debt.” The private sector accounts for 93% of hospitals and 85% of doctors, a huge jump from just 8% representation in 1949.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/sarah-boseley-global-health/2013/feb/07/india-healthcare>

BANGLADESHI HEALTH SECTOR CORRUPTION HITS POOR HARDEST

February 12, 2013

[Bangladesh] Healthcare activists in Bangladesh are calling for stronger action against rising levels of corruption in the country’s public healthcare system. Nitai Kanti Das, member secretary of the Health Rights Movement, said, “The government must strengthen its monitoring system to check corruption in public hospitals to ensure health access to under-privileged people.” According to Transparency International Bangladesh, 40.2% of surveyed people were victim to “various irregularities” and corruption, compared to 33.2% in 2010.

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report/97454/Bangladeshi-health-sector-corruption-hits-poor-hardest>

NEWS SUMMARIES continued

MENSTRUATION TABOO PUTS 300 MILLION WOMEN IN INDIA AT RISK

February 20, 2013

[India] According to Geneva-based Water Supply & Sanitation Collaborative Council, more than 300 million women and girls in India do not have access to safe menstrual hygiene product, thereby endangering their health. Many girls and women are forced to use old rags, husks, dried leaves, grass, ash, sand or newspapers because they do not have access to sanitary products. At least 23% of girls leave school when they start menses and the rest miss an average of five days each month.

<http://southasia.oneworld.net/news/menstruation-taboo-puts-300mn-women-in-india-at-risk#.UTaeZKVe9a8>

HEALTH INSURANCE TO REACH 630 MILLION INDIANS BY 2015

February 21, 2013

[India] A new World Bank report, entitled *Government-Sponsored Health Insurance in India: Are you Covered?*, states that the Government of India's efforts to increase health coverage has "yielded encouraging results." Over the last five years, government schemes have contributed to a "significant increase in the population covered by health insurance in the country." More than 25% of India's total population, or 300 million people, has gained access to some form of health insurance by 2010, up from just 55 million people in 2003-2004. The report projects that more than 630 million people – or half of the country – will be covered by health insurance by 2015.

<http://southasia.oneworld.net/news/health-insurance-to-reach-630-million-indians-by-2015#.UTaeaqVe9a8>

Energy & the Environment

India and Bangladesh discuss plans for a new dam. Bangladesh continues to top climate science's list of very vulnerable to climate change. Nepal will build a new hydropower plant.

INDIA AND BANGLADESH HOLD TALKS ON WATER ISSUES

February 1, 2013

[South Asia] India and Bangladesh are reviewing approaches to study the impact and modeling of India's proposed cross-border hydroelectric Tipaimukh Dam. Sajjad Hossain, a member of the Joint Rivers Commission of Bangladesh and India, said, "We are discussing the inception reports by the two consultants outlining the approaches they took to study the water modeling and the impact of the mega project on the other side of our northeastern borders." India announced plans for the Dam in 2011, but Bangladesh was concerned about how it would affect its land.

http://zeenews.india.com/news/nation/india-and-bangladesh-hold-talks-on-water-issues_826421.html

HOW BAD CAN CLIMATE CHANGE GET?

February 9, 2013

[Bangladesh] According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, rising sea levels could flood 17% of Bangladesh, or cause devastating land erosion, resulting in 20-30 million refugees by 2050. The country has been susceptible to changing, fierce weather patterns, such as shorter, stronger monsoon seasons and longer droughts.

http://www.thestar.com/news/world/2013/02/09/bangladesh_faces_mass_migration_loss_of_land_from_climate_change.html

NEWS SUMMARIES continued

ADB LENDS NEPAL US\$150M FOR HYDROPOWER PLANT

February 26, 2013

[Nepal] The ADB will issue a US\$150m loan to Nepal towards a US\$500m project dedicated to building a 140MW hydropower plant. Demand for electricity in Nepal is growing at an average of 10% per year, yet the country is only able to meet a fraction of current demand. Yongping Zhai, director of the energy division at ADB's South Asia department, said, "Nepal has an energy crisis, and this is affecting badly economic prospects. This energy project is a means to stop that crisis."

<http://southasia.oneworld.net/news/adb-lends-nepal-150-million-for-hydropower-plant#.UUDnbqYxcmS>

Government & Policy

India launches a new volunteer program via social media channels, and one of its states will distribute free laptops to high school graduates.

GOVERNMENT LAUNCHES 'MY INDIA INITIATIVE'

February 8, 2013

[India] Manish Tewari, Minister of Information and Broadcasting, launched the 'My India Initiative,' a volunteer program that disseminates development messages across social media channels. Citizens can register as volunteers to contribute towards nation building. Tewari called upon Indian youth to be part of the Digital Volunteer Family that would enable the government to have more personal interactions with everyday people.

http://www.igovernment.in/site/government-launches-'my-india-initiative'?utm_source=newsletter-core&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=20130208

UTTAR PRADESH TO DISTRIBUTE FREE LAPTOPS TO SCHOOL PASSOUTS

February 20, 2013

[India] The State Government of Uttar Pradesh will distribute free laptops to students who have passed the 12th standard in 2011-2012. The budget of INR2,800 crore (~US\$517.18m) will be allocated to 1.5 million recipients.

http://www.igovernment.in/site/distribute-free-laptops-school-passouts?utm_source=newsletter-extended&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=20130220

People & Poverty

India's homeless children continue to be overlooked and marginalized. Human rights groups criticize Nepal for its oversight in 2012, while local organizations demand rights for domestic workers. Nearly 50% of missing children in Nepal disappear without a trace.

HRW CENSURES NEPAL ON HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

February 1, 2013

[Nepal] Human Rights Watch (HRW) has criticized the Government of Nepal for failing to protect the human rights of its citizens in 2012. A new HRW report shows that women, children and Tibetan refugees' rights have been overwhelmingly neglected. Brad Adams, Asia Director for HRW, said, "2012 was a sorry replay of Nepal's past seven years of impunity and government unwillingness or inability to deliver on its commitments to human rights. There appears to be collective amnesia among Nepal's policymakers about the inequalities and injustice that helped fuel the conflict in the first place."

<http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=HRW+raps+Nepal+on+human+rights+abuses+&NewsID=364366>

NEWS SUMMARIES continued**HALF OF THE MISSING CHILDREN GO UNTRACED**

February 2, 2013

[Nepal] Nearly 50% of all missing children in Nepal go untraced. Between mid-July 2012 and January 2013, 788 children went missing (397 boys and 391 girls). According to Deputy Inspector General Keshav Adhikari, 398 of the missing were found and reunited with their families; one-third of this number was boys. "More girls go missing for good in comparison to boys." On average, 2,000-3,000 children have gone missing in the last few years, but there is no formal mechanism in place to track them.

http://www.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news_details&news_id=49244

HOME-BASED WORKERS UNITE FOR RIGHTS

February 4, 2013

[Nepal] About 70 member-based organizations of the informal sector in Nepal have collectively launched a campaign to ratify the ILO Convention 177 and Give Justice to Domestic Workers. There are an estimated 2.2 million domestic workers contributing to the Nepalese economy, but there is no official accounting being done. Bindu Shrestha, president of the Nepal Home-Based Workers' Association, said, "We have launched the campaign to make people aware about the informal sector and get policymakers to include them in labor laws."

<http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=Home-based+workers+unite+for+rights+&NewsID=364757>

'SLUMDOG' CHILDREN OF INDIA FIGHTING LONELY BATTLE TO MAKE £3.50 A DAY

February 8, 2013

[India] In New Delhi, there are 100,000 homeless children, and 33% of them are between the ages of six and 10. Police officers tend to treat homeless children like criminals and not as a vulnerable population that needs looking after. These children have to somehow survive the bitter cold of this winter, which has already seen some of the coldest days experienced in 44 years. The All India Institute of Medical Sciences has received 26 unclaimed child bodies in the wake of the winter.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2275730/Slumdog-children-India-fight-just-make-just-3-50-A-DAY-Heartbreaking-images-boys-girls-fighting-survival-shadow-booming-economy.html>

Events

1ST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON BUSINESS INNOVATION AND MANAGEMENT

April 27-28, 2013
Abbottabad, Pakistan

<http://isurs.org/viewjc.php?id=c6>

GLOBAL VISION 2020

May 3-4, 2013
Palayamkottai, India

<http://www.eastrust.org>

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MANAGEMENT, BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS 2013

June 7-8, 2013
Vijayawada, India

<http://www.imrf.in/icmbe2013.html>

6TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON GLOBAL STUDIES

September 5-7, 2013
New Delhi, India

<http://onglobalisation.com/the-conference/call-for-papers>

EDUCATION FOR ACHIEVING MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

November 16-18, 2013
Varanasi, India

<http://www.aebhu.com/FIRST%20CIRCULAR2013.pdf>

Editorial Team

EDITORS

Nisha Kumar Kulkarni
Shree Ravindranath
Usha Ganesh

CONTRIBUTORS

Noopur Desai
Uthara Ganesh

DESIGN

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About Intellecap

Intellecap is a pioneer in providing innovative business solutions that help build and scale profitable and sustainable enterprises dedicated to social and environmental change.

We seek to build institutional capacity and channel investments in the development sector through Knowledge Services, Consulting, and Investment Banking Services. Intellecap hosts Sankalp Social Enterprise and Investment Forum, Asia's largest social enterprise forum that brings together over 700 investors, innovative social enterprises, policy makers, funders and other key stakeholders from across the world.

Intellecap also promotes I³N, India's first angel investment network that makes early stage investments in double bottom line for-profit enterprises.

NOTE Uthara Ganesh's name was missing from the February issue's credits. We regret the omission.