Collaborative Design Project Progress report

Week 2

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Recap of week 1

In the first week of the project, we spent time exploring fields of interest and opportunities that rose during and after the pandemic. We narrowed down our scope to workers in the unorganised sector. We started to understand the importance of the sector, the system in place for them, the problems they may face and why they face them.

While we did identify a few system wide issues through our secondary research, we required grounded information about difficulties the workers are facing. We conducted some preliminary interviews to deepen our understanding of the issues in this sector.

What we had planned

We realised that we needed to narrow down our user group and focus on a small part of the unorganised sector, at least for scope of the current project, to identify problems on the ground.

We needed to do significantly more contextual research on the user group we choose and map the insights we get to identify what problems are common between them.

We would need to identify and prioritise these problems by the end of the research to create a check for ourselves while we move into ideating for solutions.

Selecting User Group

After numerous discussions and brainstorming sessions, we agreed to focus on wage workers employed in the unorganised sector. During the research and studying we did through the week, we realised that we needed to narrow the user group further to understand patterns and cross check if the problems we hear from users are unique to them or a result of system wide issues.

We got the chance to interview a couple of migrant workers who were part of the unorganised sector. Insights we received from these users were eye-opening and completely relatable to issues we read about when they were making headlines during the pandemic regarding difficulties and hardships they've had to endure.

Through our research, we were also able to identify aspects of migrant workers that categorised them into a broader sector within unorganised wage workers. A trend of contractors being a middle man between organisations and the workers was identified and used to narrow down our user group.

We narrowed down the user group to *Wage workers in the unorganised sector working under Contractors*. This category includes but is not limited to construction workers, stone masons, quarry workers.

Expert Insights

We spoke to experts in the field to develop an understanding of the system our target users are a part of. We were able to verify that the problems we identified on the ground are not outliers but common issues across the user base.

Prof. Chetan Solanki

Professor Solanki is well-known for his SoULS Project, where he was successful in making a self sustaining industry of LED lights across hundreds of villages in Uttar Pradesh, bringing a power revolution in rural areas. He gave us insight regarding our project, and how we need to expand our horizons and look at the bigger picture. He mentioned that the decentralisation of the society is required, as mentioned before by Mahatma Gandhi through his concept of Swaraj.

According to Professor Solanki:

- All of these systems are building differences in the society, which is causing unrest, and will result in violence in the coming future.
- Generation and consumption has to be localised to make sustainable communities.
- Mazdoor markets exist, where people can come up and pick up workers, which is an extremely unorganised process.
- We have to look at endpoints when looking for solutions.

Dr. G K Karanth:

Dr. Karanth is a Prof. of Sociology at Institute for Social and Economic Change and former Director at Institute for Social and Economic Change. His research interests include rural development, social change, urbanisation, public policies and more.

According to Dr Karanth:

- Most of the development taking place in India is a result of migration of labour, It's India's version of Industrialisation.

- People who have labour power with them move to other places, as a result of this those places have developed.
- Migrant workers migrate under a contractor who guarantees basic livelihood including food, water and shelter for them. They travel in groups (families and others from same village)
- Govt. has come up with laws and regulations to protect emotional and financial interests of the labour force
- Interstate migrant labour act:
  - Requires every worker who is coming from a different state to go through a registration process under labour welfare boards of respective host states. Including details such as wages, terms on which they were brought, their hometown and family.
  - Contractor or one who brings them in would bear the responsibilities of the registration process.
- Since Contractor has to bear time and expenses of registering the migrant workers, In order to not go through the effort, he bypasses the registration process, because of which the government can't record any data on the imported labor force.
- We have such huge labor force of which we have no data
  - A. If they are wage workers
  - B. If they are migrants, their hometown their social status
- Even if they were registered as wage workers/ construction workers in their respective home states, Neither govt. of home state nor host state has data on where they currently work and reside.
- As a result they are not recognised as workers or migrant workers, the government benefits won't reach them.
- During the lockdown

- The Karnataka state govt. tried to frame policies to help the migrant workers who were stuck here, but failed in reality because these workers were not recognised as migrants, and the government. didn't know where they resided.
- The workers were concerned about the health of their families at home state, and lacked knowledge on the pandemic. So they had to pack and move back to their home states.

- Ideally workers' identity such as labour cards which help them get benefits should be portable, in a sense should be valid and work in different states.
  - the system should also track location and wages to avoid underpayment and to help state governments. to recognise them.
  - The process should be integrated seamlessly into their lives, such as in wage payments.
  - Wage payments have to be legitimised by digitisation, so workers have proof of payment.

Interviews and Affinity

We interviewed around 10 stakeholders with different backgrounds who each shared with us unique experiences they faced in their field. We recorded the findings, analysed it as a group and drew insights from each of them. Here is a link to the sheet where we have documented all our primary research:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1bBzMhcnmnI1pHhUkKq46H2LsYlp4SMi_dezj448uiBA/edit?usp=sharing

| Contactsss!	Verbal Agreements. No contract	Contractors open to new labour. Paid by work done daily	Inefficient System	Workers away from home spend on family	Independent healthcare	Chits and small scale financial aid
Gets the job by friends'/ colleague refernce	No contract may result in irregular payment of wages	construction work doesnt require any special skills, its more like walk in get paid job	Applied for Labour card but don't know how to follow up or haven't gotten response yet	they are concerned about their family welfare, and usually spends their money on this	They rely on their own for their medical expenses	they would go to smaller local financial aid system, even while having bank accounts for loans and financial support
U2-06 | IN | Got this job because of his friend who knew about his skills and invited him.	U5-08 | IN | No verbal or written contract, he just trusts contractor	U6-12 | | The people working under contractor usually get more men, its just normal labor, no special skills required.	U6-08 | IN | Had applied for labor card at his friend in town, he hasnt replied yet. abt 3-4 months ago	U6-07 | US | recieves wages in cash, spends most of it on family	U6-19 | | In case of health emergency, usually lends money. From his houesewives' financial support (chit fund) group	U6-19 | | In case of health emergency, usually lends money. From his houesewives' financial support (chit fund) group
U5-03 | US | He came to know about the contractor (employer) from 3-4 others from his village	U2-07 | US | He was working there on an informal verbal contract.	U5-10 | US | some people have been working under this contractor for 5-6 years one guy just joined today	U6-21 | IN | Other 2 workers, had applied for labor cards as well, but hasnt recieved any updates	U4-10 | US | People living away from home have tension regarding family welfare and problems but no covid specific issues.	U4-04 | IN | All medical expenses and other expenses taken care by themselves. No aid from employer or government	U5-17 | IN | Participates in local chits (that how he gets loans)
U6-11 | US | Got to know about this contractor via friends	U6-10 | US | No regular payment of wages, sometimes it is postponed	U6-13 | IN | No special skills required, men come in daily if they have no work and take daily wages	U5-21 | IN | Just heard of labor card, doesnt know in detail	U6-05 | US | No savings, spends his money to pay chits and to look after his family		U6-14 | US | No work and money during lockdown, for about 3 months, had nothing to do, had got loan from local man to survive in lockdown
				U4-11 | IN | Tension of money and wellbeing at home when you're away. When money is not good or expenses become high, problems arise.		U5-09 | US | In case if he needs money for emergency, the contactor would give Rs. 200-300 in advance, that too taken from someone elses wage

Img 1. Affinity board

We then mapped our insights into affinities based on common findings between the users. We adopted a bottom up approach to minimise personal bias and media influence and focus primarily on the data we collected first hand. While we were aware that the interviews we conducted were not sufficient to capture the whole sector, we were still able to find trends.

We identified certain focus points through our affinity:

- **Contacts and Communication:** We identified that word-to-mouth is the dominant medium for transaction of information regarding jobs and wages.

- **Agreements:** Contracts are usually informal and verbal. As nothing is written on paper and binding, a lot of the contractors take advantage of the situation and not pay proper wages.

- **Unskilled Labour:** As there is no formal contract established, there is no job security for the workers. As unskilled labour is common to come by, contractors don't hesitate to hire new workers.

- **Inefficient System:** People are not aware about the welfare opportunities available to them, or are failed by the same opportunities due to lack of streamlines systems and general apathy.

- **Migration:** People have to travel to find work opportunities, which are usually far away from their home. This affects the workers' mental health, and they have to spend money on maintaining two residential places.

- **Small-scale Financial Aid:** Workers in this sector are not involved with banks and depend on secondary systems like collective funds and borrowing money from the contractors.

Secondary Research Findings

We were only motivated further when these patterns from users were backed up in the research papers we looked into.
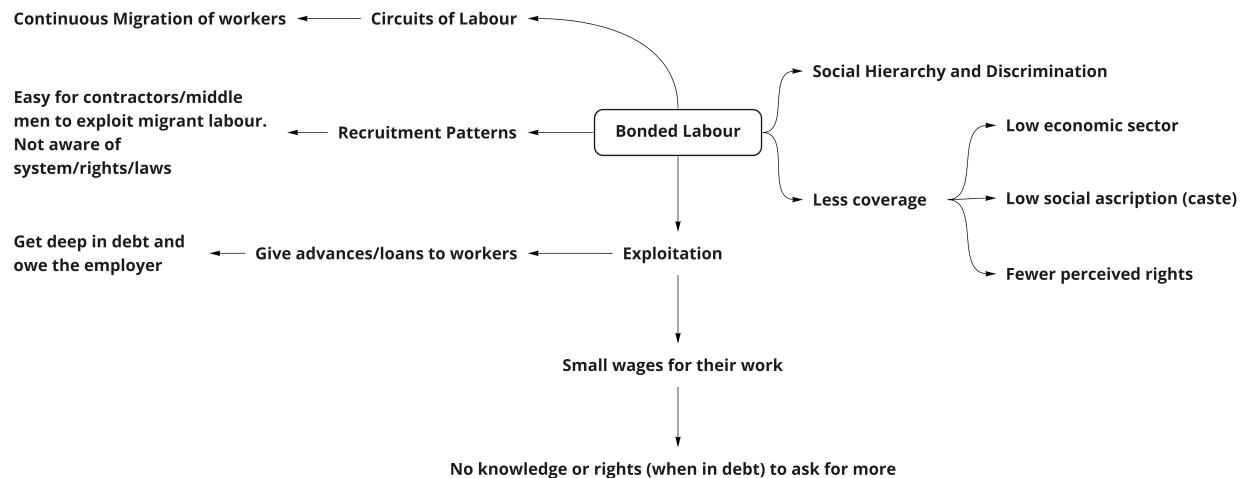

Img 3. Flow chart of insights from paper by Prof. Ravi S Srivastava titled 'Bonded Labour in India: It's incidence and pattern'

A paper by Prof. Ravi S Srivastava titled 'Bonded Labour in India: It's incidence and pattern', gave us insights and historic patterns on the system that exists around unorganised labour and their exploitation.

Bonded Labour is a broad term used to describe a relationship between the employer and employee that is characterised as a creditor and debtor. The common factor among multiple categories that fall under this definition is the idea of dominance and dependence. We noticed a similar association between the users we interviewed and their employers where they reluctantly told us about terms they had with their employers they were not satisfied with. A pattern of keeping the contractor or recruiter pleased was noticed as their contract relied heavily on the relationship they upheld with them.

The recruitment pattern outlined in the paper showed us how it was easy for contractors to exploit migrant workers who travelled across the country to secure their income. Being in a new state, contractors are required by the state to register workers and educate them about their rights within an employer-employee relationship. This step is taken advantage of. Contractors do not register their workers and hence denying them access to the schemes put in place by the government to help them.

Underpaying their workers makes it almost impossible for them not to ask for financial aid. Users we interviewed usually avoided taking loans from banks and preferred contacting local community members or people they share an existing relationship with. Contractors are one of the many people who end up loaning out money to them in times of crises. This creates a debt with their employer that they are required to fulfil and makes it easier for them to be taken advantage of.
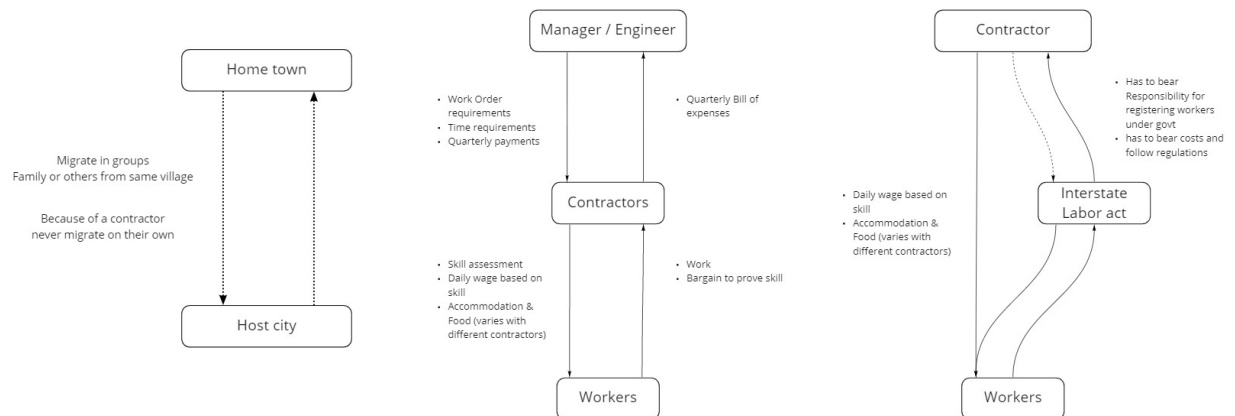
Img 2. Work Flow models of Contractors and Workers

Problem Areas Identified

- Employers or contractors that recruit migrant workers are expected to report and register them at their workplace. They end up taking advantage of this responsibility and exploit the workers for their own financial benefits.

- Government aid schemes are inefficient and incomplete. Almost impossible for workers to sign up without help and do not cater to employees whose work and home are in different states. No system to keep track of migrating workers or their home and host governments through the year.

- Migrant workers continue to sacrifice at their workplace to send as much money back home to their families. A constant worry of the situation.

- Workers prefer to take loans in times of need from members of the community or people they know rather than banks. They overlook the need to sign or officialise the agreement and end up getting exploited.

Road Ahead

- More interviews and affinity mapping

- Creating a check and prioritising the problems

- Ideating on possible solutions

- Visualising concepts and User feedback

References

Bonded Labour in India: Its incidence and pattern
https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_081967.pdf

Measuring Informaility: A statistical manual
http://www.mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/wcms_182300.pdf

Organising the Unorganised
https://www.livemint.com/Politics/pNrLhFkWPLeQaFS3v5c31M/Organizing-the-unorganized.html