



## CASE STUDY

# The role of public-private partnerships in facilitating international migration of semi-skilled workers—A case study of Varanasi and nearby districts

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### Abstract

This study focuses on the role of public-private partnerships (PPPs) in addressing skill gaps and enhancing the labor mobility of semi-skilled workers in Varanasi, India. The research aims to explore the impact of PPPs on labor mobility, factors influencing migration decisions, and the role of private agencies in facilitating international mobility. The findings underscore the importance of collaboration between public and private sectors and suggest policy implications such as strengthening skill development, comprehensive information dissemination, pre-departure orientation, institutional support, monitoring recruitment agencies, financial inclusion, cross-cultural training, and promoting returnee entrepreneurship. This study provides insights for effective migration policies benefiting both origin and destination countries by empowering migrant workers.

**Keywords:** Public-private partnerships, Skill gaps, Labor mobility, Semi-skilled workers, Varanasi, India, Migration decisions, Private agencies.

### Introduction

In the contemporary landscape, the role of public-private partnerships (PPPs) in facilitating the international mobility of semi-skilled workers has gained prominence, particularly in regions like Varanasi and its adjoining districts in India. With a substantial youth population, India's demographic structure, comprising 62% within the productive age of 15 to 59 and over 54% below 25, presents both challenges and opportunities.

Over the next two decades, while industrialized nations anticipate a 4% decline in labor forces, India is set for a remarkable 32% workforce expansion. This demographic advantage underscores the need for skill development.

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Despite adding 12 million individuals annually to the workforce, only 3.05% receive formal skills training, leading to a projected gap of 109 million skilled workers by 2022.

Addressing this, the Skill India mission aims to train 400 million Indians by 2022. Yet, the growing demand for skilled labor exacerbates sectoral disparities. Challenges persist within the skill value chain, amplified by a lack of informed decision-making platforms.

This research examines the role of private institutions within PPPs in bridging skill gaps and enhancing employment potential, focusing on Varanasi and nearby districts. By analyzing the PPP model, the study sheds light on how private sector engagement facilitates the international mobility of semi-skilled workers, shaping India's evolving workforce dynamics.

### Problem Statement

The proliferation of challenges within the skill development landscape, compounded by a fragmented supply side and a dearth of communication channels, has led to critical skill gaps in India. The absence of synchronized efforts between public and private stakeholders further exacerbates the issue. The overarching problem centers on the need to foster a cohesive approach that effectively addresses skill gaps, facilitates effective skilling mechanisms and leverages the strengths of both public and private entities.

## Research Objectives

### **Aims**

Explore how Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) impact the international labor mobility of workers near Varanasi.

Analyze factors influencing migration decisions, particularly towards Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and others.

Investigate the role of Private Agencies in fulfilling the aspirations of potential migrants for international mobility.

### **Significance**

This research is crucial for understanding how PPPs bridge skill gaps and improve labor mobility. Exploring challenges and opportunities will inform effective policies and strategies, fostering a skilled workforce aligned with global labor market needs.

### **Scope and Limitations**

The research focuses on PPPs' role in workers' labor mobility but has limitations. It examines PPPs in labor mobility, specifically the role of private institutions. External factors like global geopolitics and macroeconomics are beyond scope. The study is centered on India and may not comprehensively cover skill development and labor mobility in other countries.

### **Literature Review**

The movement of individuals across borders for employment and improved livelihoods encompasses various migration forms. Factors such as wage disparities, labor demand, and skill shortages drive this mobility (Massey *et al.*, 1993). Migrant workers often contribute to both sending and receiving countries' economic growth, particularly in sectors requiring semi-skilled and unskilled labor (Ruhs & Palme, 2017).

### **Skill Development and Migration**

The PPPs are vital in skill development and migration, collaborating between government and private sectors. These partnerships address challenges in migrant workers' international mobility, providing industry-aligned training, pre-departure orientation, legal support, and social integration (Stalker & Cédelle, 2013).

### **Role of PPPs in International Mobility**

PPPs play a diverse role in international mobility. They identify skill gaps, offer targeted training, provide certification, and establish ethical recruitment practices. This enhances migrants' prospects and safeguards their rights (Boccagni & Lafleur, 2016; Ruhs & Palme, 2017).

### **Challenges and Opportunities in Mobility of Semi-skilled and Unskilled Workers**

Migrant workers in these categories face precarious conditions and wage disparities. PPPs can enhance skill

portability, safe migration, and informed decision-making. The demand for such labor creates economic opportunities and skill development avenues (Piore, 1979; Stalker & Cédelle, 2013).

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### *Defining Public-Private Partnerships in Migration*

The PPPs involve collaboration between government and private sector to achieve shared goals. In migration, this entails cooperation between government bodies (labor, immigration, skill development) and private actors (businesses, NGOs, training institutes) to leverage strengths for migrant worker mobility (Boccagni & Lafleur, 2016; Ruhs & Palme, 2017). PPPs operate throughout migration stages, enhancing policies, programs, and services for orderly migration (Stalker & Cédelle, 2013).

#### *Theoretical Perspectives on Skill Development and Mobility*

The study draws on theoretical frameworks explaining migration and skill roles. The New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM) highlights remittances and wage differentials as migration drivers. Rational decisions hinge on income contrasts between origin and destination (Massey *et al.*, 1993). Dual Labor Market Theory divides economies into high-paying skilled and low-paying unskilled sectors, with migrant workers often in the latter. It clarifies the demand for migrant labor in certain fields (Piore, 1979). Human Capital Theory asserts skills shape mobility and economic success. Migrants' qualifications impact job access and host nation's contribution (Schultz, 1961).

### **Methods**

This study employs a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to comprehensively address the research objectives. The aim is to delve into the role of PPPs in facilitating the international mobility of semi-skilled and unskilled migrant workers in India, with a specific focus on Varanasi and its nearby districts.

The data collection involves a synthesis of primary and secondary sources to ensure a well-rounded dataset. Secondary data, sourced from national and international research papers, policy reports, and government documents, form the foundational understanding of the subject. Primary data collection employed both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative data encompassed 300 face-to-face interviews conducted with youth and aspirants (Table 1). On the other hand, qualitative insights are derived from focus-group discussions involving returning migrants and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders representing private sectors (recruitment agents, community agents) and public sectors (ITI Karaundi, TVETs, UPSDM, Labor Department, Passport Office). Sample selection adheres to rigorous criteria and methods:

**Table 1:** Distribution of sampled and covered primary stakeholders

Sl. No.	Districts	Number of sampled youth/aspirants	Number of covered youth/aspirants	Number of sampled FGD	Number of covered FGD
1	Azamgarh	60	60	2	2
2	Bhadohi	60	60	2	2
3	Ghazipur	60	60	2	2
4	Jaunpur	60	60	2	2
5	Varanasi	60	60	2	2
Overall		300	300	10	10

**Table 2:** Socio-demographic profile of the study districts

Particulars	Azamgarh	Bhadohi	Ghazipur	Jaunpur	Varanasi
Geographical area (in sq. Km.)*	4054	1015	3377	4038	1535
Population (in lakhs)*	64.14	15.78	36.20	44.94	36.77
Population density (in persons per sq. Km.)*	1138	1555	1072	1113	2395
Sex ration (no. Of females per 1000 males)*	1019	955	952	1024	913
Average literacy*	71%	69%	72%	72%	76%
Male literacy*	81%	81%	83%	84%	84%
Female literacy*	61%	56%	60%	60%	67%

**Table 3:** Distribution of sampled and covered secondary stakeholders

Sl. No.	Districts	Number of sampled respondents	Number of covered respondents
1	Recruitment agents	3	3
2	Community agents	3	3
3	TVET (Private training partners)/PMKVY	3	3
4	ITI karaundi	3	3
5	Officials of UPSDM	3	3
6	Officials of labour department and passport office	3	0
Overall		18	15

Primary stakeholders (youths/aspirants and returnee migrants) are selected from Varanasi and adjacent districts such as Ghazipur, Jaunpur, Azamgarh, and Bhadohi, (Table 2) based on expert insights from the Academy of Management Studies (AMS).

Purposive and snowball sampling techniques ensure diverse perspectives among youths/aspirants.

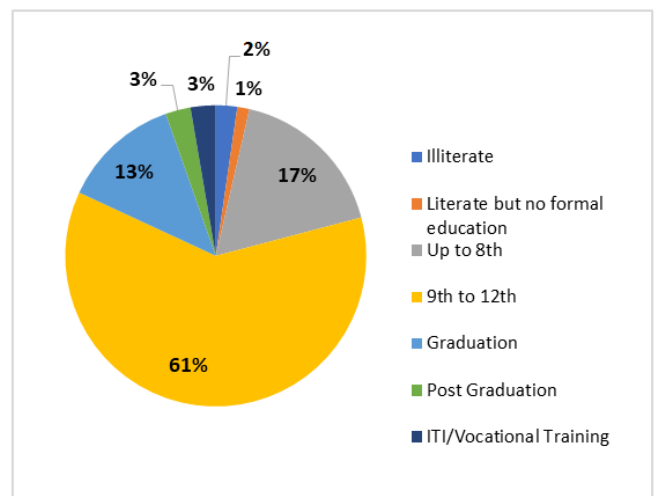
Secondary stakeholders are purposively chosen, comprising recruitment agents, community agents, ITI Karaundi officials, TVET representatives, UPSDM personnel, Labor Department representatives, and Passport Office officials.

Sample sizes are well-defined: 300 youths/aspirants, 10 focus group discussions, and 18 in-depth interviews with

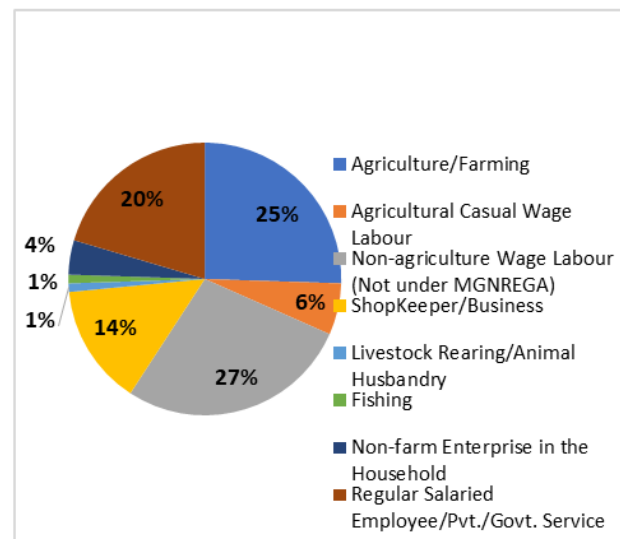
secondary stakeholders. The distribution of sampled and covered primary and secondary stakeholders guarantees comprehensive representation (Tables 3 and 4).

### Results and Discussion

The primary stakeholders in this study are migrant workers who travel abroad for work, constituting the core of international labor migration. In the context of Varanasi and its neighboring districts, international migration, especially to gulf countries, has been a longstanding phenomenon spanning multiple generations. This intergenerational aspect suggests the presence of robust social networks that facilitate migration and inspire younger generations to follow in their predecessors' footsteps. This study categorizes migrant workers into aspiring and returned groups, aiming to explore their aspirations and experiences, with a specific focus on the role of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs).



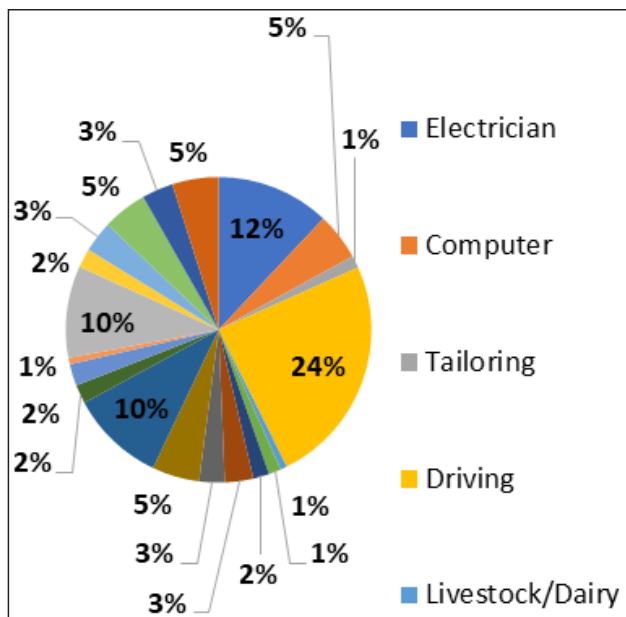
**Figure 1:** Distribution of respondents by educational qualification (N=300)



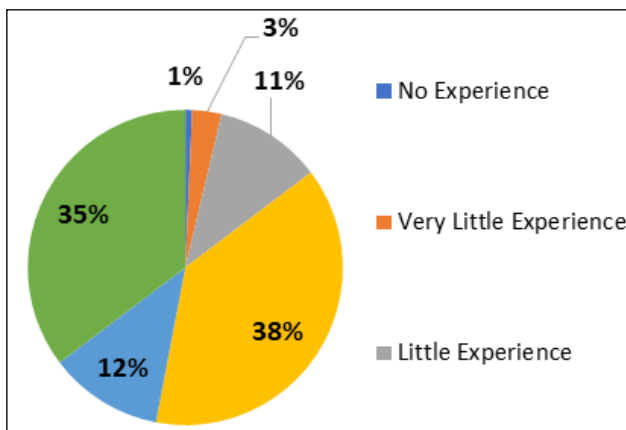
**Figure 2:** Distribution of respondents by primary income-generating activities (N=208)

**Table 4:** Details of the secondary stakeholders

Sl. No.	Secondary stakeholders category	Respondents
1	Recruitment agents	Three RAs from Varanasi
2	Community agents	Three village level community agents
3	TVET (Private Training Partner/PMKVY)	Three training centres from Varanasi
4	ITI Karaundi	ITI Karaundi Principal
		Placement Coordinator/ Instructor/Career Counsellor
		Skill India International Centre Officials
5	UP Skill Development Mission	Varanasi MIS Consultant
		Azamgarh Nodal Officer
		Director, UPSDM, Lucknow Office



**Figure 3:** Distribution of respondents by primary skill set (N = 300)



**Figure 4:** Distribution of respondents by proficiency of primary skill (N = 300)

**Demographic, Occupational, and Skill Profile**

Education significantly influences migration prospects, with 60% of respondents having completed secondary education and 3% having ITI/Vocational training. This highlights the necessity for improved industrial skill development (Figure 1). Notably, 69% were involved in income-generating activities, mainly agriculture/farming, non-agriculture wage labor, and regular salaried employment (Figure 2). However, the prevalence of low-income activities serves as a driving force behind aspirations for international migration, seeking better economic opportunities (Figures 3 and 4).

**Perceptions of International Mobility**

Migrant youths are motivated by several factors to seek opportunities abroad (Figure 5). These include the pursuit of better-paying jobs (78%), a desire for international work experience (64%), and the need to support family expenses (56%). This drive for a brighter future led to a preference for GCC countries, known for their strong economies. Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar are favored destinations due to better work opportunities, improved living conditions, and higher-paying prospects (Figure 6).

**Awareness of Requirements for International Migration**

Awareness of migration documents holds significant implications. While knowledge of essentials such as identity proofs and educational qualifications is high, understanding about other critical documents like skill certificates remains limited. This information gap necessitates effective PPP-driven information dissemination to equip aspiring migrants with comprehensive insights (Figures 7-9).

**Status of Preparation**

Around 57% of respondents expressed preparedness for migration, but obstacles were evident. Inadequacies in



**Figure 5:** Distribution of respondents by motivations for migration (N = 300)

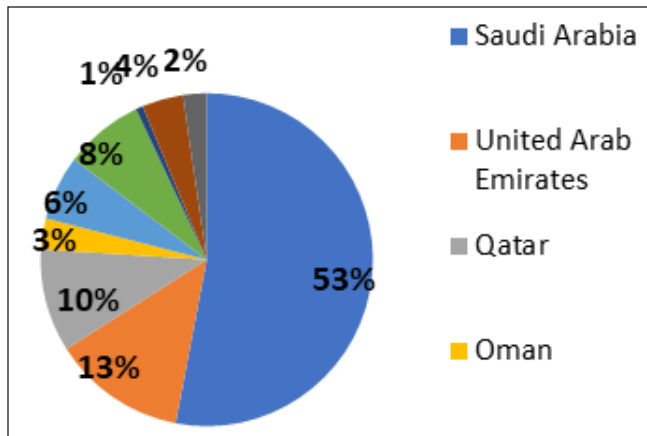


Figure 6: Distribution of respondents by their preferred destination (N = 300)

medical clearance, police certificates, and visa processes emerged as challenges. This highlights the need for robust PPP-driven guidance and facilitation throughout preparation (Figure 10).

**Self-Awareness**

Proficiency in the English language, vital for international mobility, reflects an important aspect. Around 40% understood English but struggled to converse fluently. Migrant workers recognized the value of skill verification certificates and experience credentials. However, comprehensive preparation remained a challenge for many, warranting PPP-backed interventions.

**Expectations from Institutions**

Aspirants sought assistance from institutions, accentuating the role of PPPs in this context. Beyond the existing support of community and recruitment agents, respondents anticipated support in documentation processes, grievance resolution, and training in essential soft skills. Effective PPP collaborations can bridge gaps in institutional guidance and enhance aspirants' preparedness (Figure 11).

**Experiences of Returned Migrant Workers**

A series of focus group discussions (FGDs) were organized with returnee migrant workers, offering insights into their overseas work experiences from the perspective of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs). The participants' ages ranged between 25 and 45 years, with work experience spanning 2 to 15 years in various trades. Among the diverse trades represented, the most prevalent was that of drivers, transcending different districts. These migrant workers had worked in various countries, with Saudi Arabia being the primary destination, followed by Kuwait, Qatar, and notably, Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Figure 12).

The participants in these FGDs encompassed both sole earners and non-sole earners within their families. The number of dependents in the families of these migrant

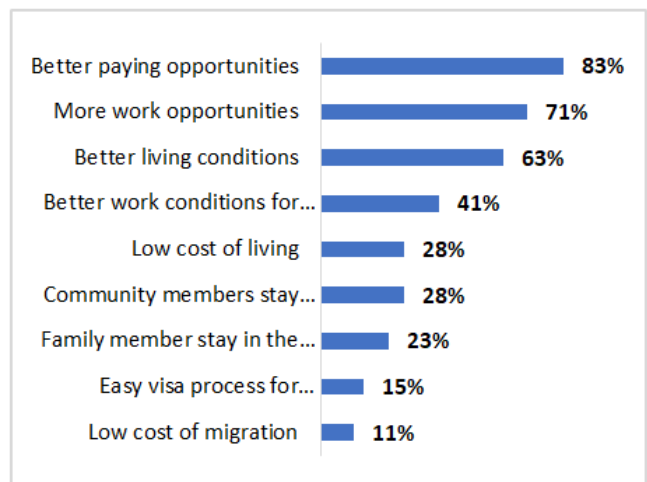


Figure 7: Distribution of respondents by reasons for choosing destination country (N = 300)

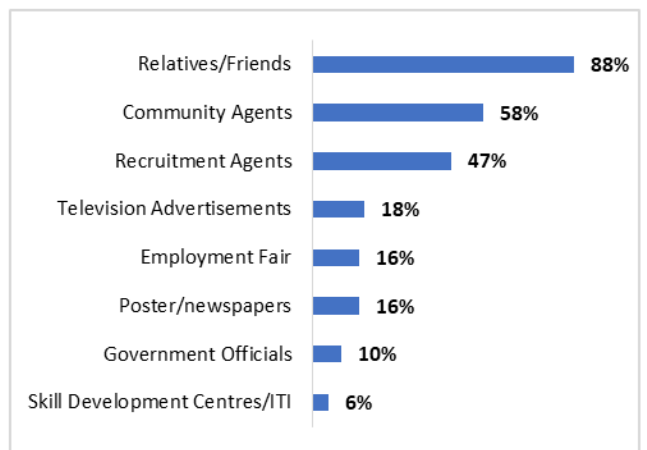


Figure 8: Distribution of respondents by source of information about abroad employment opportunities (N = 300)

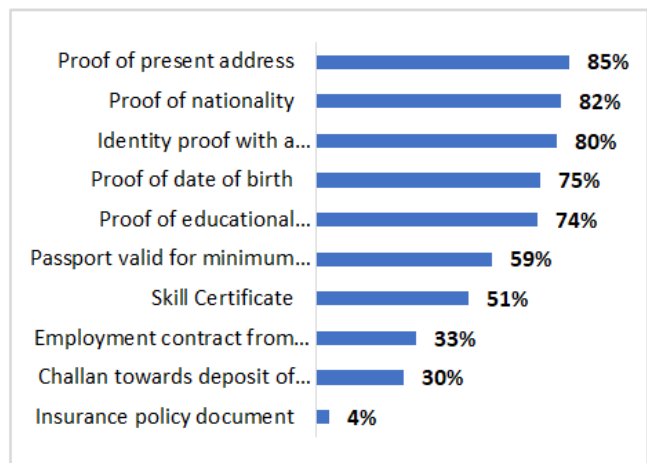


Figure 9: Distribution of respondents by awareness about documents required for migration (N = 300)

workers ranged from 4 to 12 members. This diverse group of returnee migrant workers provided valuable insights into the realities of their work abroad, within the context

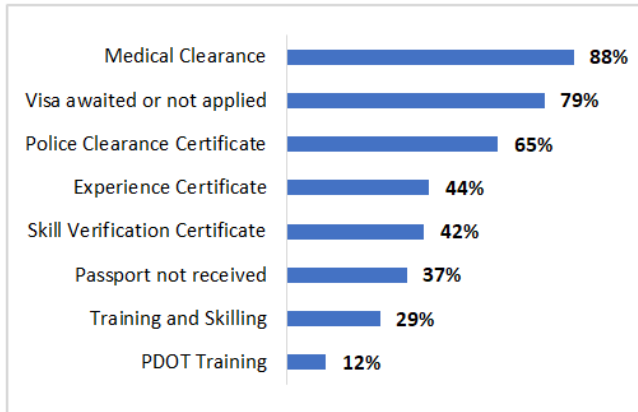


Figure 10: Distribution of respondents by aspects of inadequate preparation (N = 300)

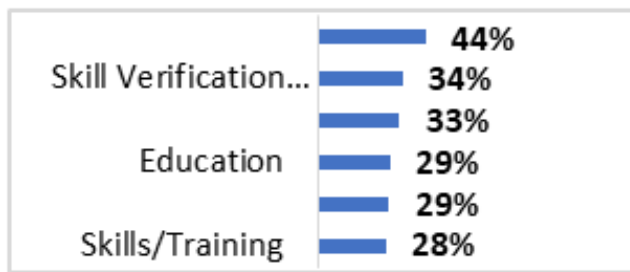


Figure 11: Distribution of respondents by lacks at the personal end (N = 300)

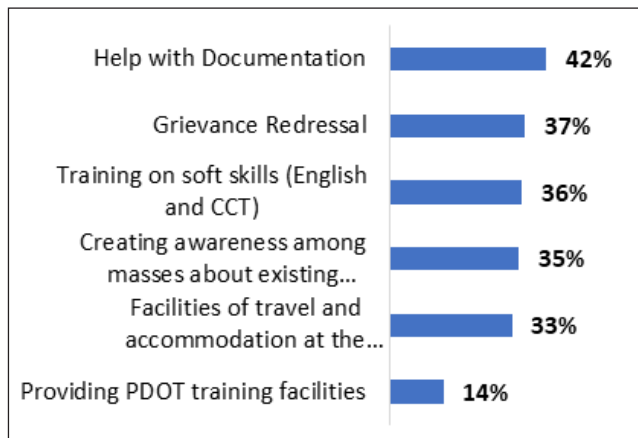


Figure 12: Experiences of returned migrant workers

of PPPs. Key takeaways from the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with migrant workers emphasize several aspects of their experiences, particularly highlighting the significance of PPPs in various stages of the migration process.

Local agents and relatives abroad are key information sources for aspiring migrants. The migration process involves obtaining passports, emigration clearance, and recruitment agency assistance. Workers rely on relatives, with limited institutional support, including skill certification but insufficient legal aid and orientation programs. Work conditions vary by sector, with defined hours and health benefits for formal sector workers, contrasting with

domestic sector challenges like undefined hours, language barriers, and lack of machinery training. Returnee workers plan to go back abroad, recommending skill training and jobs with better wages and benefits. The Indian diaspora in destination countries supports newer migrants, emphasizing the need for robust support systems involving local partners, authorities, and PPPs to address challenges and facilitate smoother migration.

**Perspective of Secondary Stakeholders**

The perspectives of secondary stakeholders, particularly recruitment agents, highlight the nuanced role of PPP in the international migration process. Recruitment agents, both government-empanelled and local community agents, act as crucial intermediaries between potential employees and employers, facilitating various migration aspects. While government agencies are primarily located in Mumbai and Delhi, local agents in areas like Varanasi directly connect aspiring migrants with private agencies and employers seeking migrant workers. This collaboration underscores the importance of PPP in addressing the demand for a skilled workforce in destination countries. Challenges, including practical knowledge gaps and manpower shortages, call for support in terms of funding, infrastructure, and coordinated efforts involving government agencies such as passport offices to enhance the effectiveness of the migration process through this partnership.

**Policy Implications**

Strengthening skill development programs: Given the prevalence of low-income activities among aspiring migrant youths, policy interventions should prioritize skill development programs that align with the demand for skilled labor in destination countries. Collaborative efforts between government institutions and private training centers can enhance the skill sets of potential migrants, increasing their employability and income prospects.

Effective information dissemination is crucial. Policy measures should focus on enhancing the accessibility and quality of information about job opportunities, visa processes, legal requirements, and potential risks associated with migration. Collaborative initiatives involving government agencies, recruitment agents, and community networks can ensure accurate and comprehensive information reaches aspiring migrants.

The awareness gap about migration-related aspects necessitates the implementation of PDOT programs. In collaboration with PPPs, governments should establish mandatory orientation programs to educate migrants about destination country norms, labor rights, cultural nuances, and legal provisions. Such programs ensure migrants are better prepared for their international journey.

PPP-driven initiatives can bolster institutional support mechanisms. Policy efforts should focus on establishing

transparent and accessible grievance redressal mechanisms for migrant workers. This includes addressing concerns related to documentation, work conditions, and wage disputes. Collaborations between government bodies, NGOs, and private agencies can provide a safety net for migrants' rights.

Recognizing the challenges arising from cultural differences, governments and PPPs should introduce CCT programs. These initiatives can equip migrants with essential cross-cultural communication skills, ensuring smoother integration into host communities and workplaces. Collaborative efforts can offer CCT sessions through training centers and online platforms.

Regulation of recruitment agencies is essential to curb fraudulent practices. Policy frameworks should include stringent licensing and oversight mechanisms for recruitment agents. Collaboration between government regulatory bodies and private sector associations can ensure ethical practices, minimize exploitation, and protect migrants' interests.

PPPs can facilitate financial literacy programs for migrants, enabling them to manage remittances effectively. Governments, financial institutions, and NGOs should collaborate to create accessible banking services, financial education, and investment opportunities for migrants, thereby maximizing the positive impact of remittances on their families and communities.

Governments should engage in diplomatic efforts to ensure the protection and rights of migrant workers in destination countries. Bilateral agreements and collaborations can lead to improved working conditions, fair wages, and legal protection for migrants. PPPs can play a pivotal role in advocating for these measures.

Returned migrant workers bring back valuable skills and experiences. Policy initiatives can encourage entrepreneurship among returnees by providing financial support, training, and mentorship through PPP-driven initiatives. This can foster economic development at the local level and mitigate the pressure to migrate.

Continuous research and data collection are crucial for evidence-based policy formulation. Governments, in partnership with academic institutions and private sector entities, should conduct regular studies to monitor the impact of policies, understand evolving migration trends, and identify areas for improvement.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, this study highlights valuable insights into migrant worker aspirations and experiences, with a focus on the role of PPPs. The intergenerational migration in the region emphasizes strong social networks and skill development. Aspiring migrant youths possess diverse skill sets but are often engaged in low-income activities, driving their interest in better-paying opportunities

abroad. However, limited awareness about documentation processes and legal provisions indicates the need for improved information dissemination and pre-departure orientation.

Returned migrant workers emphasize the importance of family, community support, and improved working conditions. The varying receptions by host communities and challenges in different migrant worker sectors underscore the necessity for cross-cultural training and robust institutional support.

PPPs play a crucial role in addressing migrant worker challenges. Collaborations among government institutions, recruitment agencies, training centers, and NGOs can lead to comprehensive support systems, transparent grievance redressal, and skill enhancement initiatives.

Policy implications include prioritizing skill development, implementing pre-departure orientation programs, enhancing institutional assistance, monitoring recruitment agencies, fostering financial inclusion, and promoting returnee entrepreneurship. Ongoing research, data collection, and diplomatic efforts are necessary to safeguard migrant worker rights and maximize their contributions.

A multi-stakeholder approach involving governments, private sectors, and communities is essential for establishing a favorable environment for secure and productive migration. This approach ensures migrant worker well-being while harnessing their potential for the mutual benefit of both origin and destination countries.

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