

Minutes of IIPS-IRB meeting held on October 29, 2020

An online meeting of IIPS-IRB was held on October 29, 2020, from 2.00 to 4.00 pm under the chairmanship of Prof. Vibhuti Patel to discuss the ethical issues in the project proposal entitled **Protection of Children Affected by Seasonal Migration: A study of Jalana District of Maharashtra, India**. The following six members of IIPS-IRB attended the online meeting and participated in the discussion:

1. Prof. Vibhuti Patel (Chairperson)
2. Prof. S.K. Singh (Convener)
3. Prof. Gajanan D. Velhal
4. Prof. Lalita Savardekar
5. Prof. R. Nagarajan
6. Mr. Raju Chauhan

The convener of the meeting welcomed the chairperson and all the members and requested the Chairperson to start the proceeding. Principal Investigators of the project were invited to make a brief presentation of the research proposal, focusing on objectives, methodology, and strategies of human subject protection. The research team highlighted that this study would provide crucial evidence to build a deeper understanding of policy and programming imperatives for children affected by seasonal migration in a drought-prone district of Jalana in Maharashtra. It also focuses on studying the situation of the most vulnerable children and identifying solutions for preventing and addressing the adverse effects of seasonal migration. This study seeks to provide information on the status of child migrants in the district of Jalana, focusing on children engaged in labor (i.e., most vulnerable populations) and identifying ways to make social services, such as health and education, more accessible to them.

Additionally, the research aims to comprehensively examine the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic and resultant lockdown on the lives of seasonal migrants and their children, to provide recommendations for future policies and interventions that uphold the rights and promote the wellbeing of migrant children and their families. The specific objectives of the study are 1. To understand the situation of children affected by seasonal migration in Jalna, including who they are, where they come from, their living conditions, and daily activities, 2. To identify the challenges faced by seasonal child migrants and their needs, 3. To ascertain the consequences of seasonal migration on children, including their psychological wellbeing, 4. To understand the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown on the lives of children affected by seasonal migration, 4. To identify gaps in existing strategies and solutions for children affected by seasonal migration in general and in the context of COVID 19 pandemic and lockdown in particular and find sustainable solutions and 6. To develop recommendations for strengthening policy and programs for children affected by seasonal migration.

As part of the methodology, the PIs outlined that the study will be located in the district of Jalna, Maharashtra. Data will be collected using the mixed method approach from four groups of children over 10 but below 18 years, including children affected by migration and non-migration. They would be the children from Jalana who stay at home when their parents migrate. Children from Jalna migrate with their parents, In-migrant children (from other parts of the state and country) at worksites in Jalana, accompanied by adults. The fourth group would comprise children from non-migrant households in the

villages to compare indicators related to child protection, health, nutrition, and education and ascertain the impact of seasonal migration on children.

All the members of IIPS-IRB appreciated the proposal and put some queries and concerns about the plan for survey implementation during the COVID-19 situation. The chairperson suggested that the gender dimensions should be strengthened as *the Jodhi system* is prevalent in the area and has been responsible for most crimes, forced marriages, and violations of sexual rights. She also highlighted incorporating the *micro-credit program* and *Bachat Gatt* working in this area as part of their qualitative explorations. Another suggestion was to include the child helpline as one of the vital sources of information on protecting child rights.

Prof. Velhal observed that the proposed study includes children age 15-17 years, and hence this becomes a group of adolescents, and therefore the title of the study should be carefully decided. The members also raised street children's issue and the mechanism that included street children as part of this study. But the PIs opined that UNICEF has already been working in this area under the names of children, and hence the proposed research will follow the same pattern. There is no evidence of street children in Jalana, as it has been a phenomenon in larger cities and metropolitan centers.

Prof. Singh raised the issue of expanding the study domain to find the effect of COVID-19 on children has not been integrated carefully in the study design. Still, it seems to be a secondary phenomenon adopted at the later stage of the proposal development, especially in the context of emerging epidemiological situation. The study did not have any mechanism to protect subjects or research team members from COVID-19 infection. PIs were also cautioned to spell out their strategy to adopt a protective mechanism from COVID-19 and canvassing of self-declaration form to be filled by research staff daily. Prof. Singh also raised the issue of consent and ascents from parents and subjects (minors). PIs categorically mentioned that they will develop Ascent forms for the subjects below age 18 and will ensure that ascents of minors along with parental consent are canvassed at the time of the quotatives survey.

Prof. Nagarajan raised the validity and reliability of responses from children aged 10-12 who are not expected to articulate their responses during the quantitative interview. PIs clarified that UNICEF has already been conducting surveys among this age group of children, and hence it may not be a problem with a short interview schedule. The PIs were also advised to develop well-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria for the subjects to be interviewed using quantitative and qualitative tools. Prof. Savardekar opined that the safety of the interviewer, as well as the interviewee, should be highlighted as part of the project. Hence, PIs should come back to the IIPS-IRB after completing the ethnographic phase of data collection from December 2020 - Jan 2021 and before moving ahead to implement the quantitative survey. It was also decided that PIs will submit a report to the Convener of IIPS-IRB, who will share it with all the members by circulation. With the consent of all the members, the chairperson announced the proposal to be approved. The certificate of approval of the project proposal will be issued with a soft copy of the signature of the chairperson. The meeting ended with the vote of thanks to the chairperson and all the members of IIPS-IRB.