

"A man is  
great by  
deeds, not by  
birth"

-Chanakya

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**Labour Stand: The face of precarious construction workers in India**

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## Abstract

As per India Labour and Employment Report, 2014<sup>1</sup> an overwhelmingly 92 per cent of workers in India are engaged in informal employment and a large majority of them have low earnings with limited or no social protection. India has 36.12 million workers working in construction sector. The state of Orissa in which the study was conducted employs 1.4 million of such employees who work in this informal construction sector. Lack of proper job availability, poor policy measures and minimal support from trade unions have led these labourers to flock together in a particular place on early morning every day in order to find a wage provider for them. It's a sale of labour for the day where the workers stand and make themselves available for a day to be hired by contractors or individual house owners. These places are known as 'labour stand', a stop for finding daily labourers which is new to the literature. Bhubaneswar, the capital city of Orissa houses the second largest labour stand of the country and supplies around 100,000 workers everyday as per the trade unions engaged in their welfare. While the registered workers are covered under the welfare scheme formed under the building and other construction workers (regulation of employment and condition of services) Act, 1996, the state data shows a registration of a mere two percentage of those workers<sup>2</sup>. Though the government is collecting cess at the rate of one percent of the total project cost as per the building and other construction workers welfare cess act, 1996, the expenditure of the fund for the benefit stands at a mere 0.01%<sup>3</sup>. The paper is based on a field study by analyzing the transcribed records of observation by researcher, field interaction with 84 respondents and 118 still photographs. The data was analyzed by using the atlas.ti qualitative analysis software by adopting open thematic coding and later developing categories and hierarchy and doing comparative analysis. While the labourers were found to be from different social background but from one particular region

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<sup>1</sup>India Labour and Employment Report, 2014, Institute for Human Development

<sup>2</sup>Standing committee on labour, 2013-14

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

which is frequently affected by natural disaster. They are challenged by non-availability of regular work, shortage of food, burden with larger family size, social evils of living in a slum and on and above harassed by goons as well as contractors with minimal support from trade union and government. Location of labour stand, skill level and possession of tool has helped in getting job for the labourers. The surprising similarity was found between workers and the contractors in terms of lack of awareness, financial difficulties, harassment by owners, and no support from trade union and government. Though the government has a law and various schemes it has failed to reach out to the beneficiaries. One among the four unions with a developmental approach was found to be taking few measures which are insufficient keeping the size of the labour force. The study analyses the existing policy and also proposes recommendations for the government and the trade union.

**Key Terms** labour stand, labour, construction, precarious work, trade union, government

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