

Co-Solve Brief:

Shelters for Migrant Workers

PROBLEM:

- **70+ million migrant workers in India's construction sector**

In spite of rapid automation in the construction industry, India will continue to employ over 70 million workers to build roads, railways, buildings, and industrial complexes. The workers will need to live close to the worksite, and they will require decent shelters that can be moved elsewhere.

- **Woeful shelters**

Many large employers provide shipping containers or structures built of tin metal sheets for their skilled workers. However, these shelters are woefully inadequate and can even be downright dangerous in the hot days of summer. And smaller employers typically do not provide any housing to their migrant workers *at all*, as they usually obtain their workers through intermediaries who skirt labor laws.

Many workers are left to find fields, sidewalks, railroad tracks, river banks, or vacant lands where they can build make-shift shelter out of a tarp, rags, or cardboard to provide cover over their heads. A large percentage of these inadequately sheltered workers are women and children. These workers are completely exposed to weather, harassment, assaults, pests (rodents etc.). They face the constant threat of expulsion from their temporary shelters. And in their shelters, they have little access to sanitation services, water, energy, cooking fuel, safety or protection.

- **Persistent Tragedy of the commons**

The root of the problem is that neither municipality agencies nor employers have the capacity or the full responsibility to address this issue.

SOLUTION:

- **Integrated Multi-stakeholder Participation**

We believe that a break-through can come only from a collective of champions from civil society organizations, NGOs, the commercial construction industry, academic institutions, social investors, technology partners, and public service agencies. They must work together to remove obstacles and tap into promising opportunities while engaging the workers and the employers at every stage.

- **Our Strategies:**

1. **Shelter Typologies & Contextual Solutions:** The work-site (urban, peri-urban, development with land available or not), the geographical region (urban, remote rural, coastal), the type of work (industrial or construction, long-term or short-term, hired by the same employer or different employers), the types of employers (large builders and contractors or medium and small), and other factors dictate the shelter solutions in terms of the land availability, design, stakeholder engagement, advocacy, policy, financing. Co-Solve is handling multiple typologies of shelters.
2. **Participatory Design:** Whether is a short-term movable shelter type or a long-term permanent labour colony, Co-Solve engages a cohort of users as well as employers to participate in the design of various shelter modules in order to identify user experience preferences and optimal design. This addresses the chronic sub-optimal results of community-facing development solutions that fail to engage the end-users at critical stages of design and implementation.
3. **Product and Service Innovation:** Use of scalable, modular building materials, sustainability, resource efficiency and so on enable a high level of customization and leverage existing market innovations to meet the specific needs of users while also supporting site-specific considerations. This addresses the common limitations faced by projects that offer one-size-fits-all solutions.

4. **Robust Business Model:** Provision of portable shelter through a social enterprise that will recover operating and depreciation costs. Traditionally, provisioning of basic services to low-income or vulnerable segments of the population is done through a fully subsidized welfare approach. This subsidized welfare approach has proven to have a very limited impact.

5. **Ecosystem of Partners:** We have five thematic categories of partners (Institutional and Professionals). The thematic categories are 1) Sustainability, 2) Architecture and Construction, 3) Social Organizing, 4) Technology, Products, Other Services, 5) Cultural and Civic Society.

Conclusion:

Scalability with some contextual customization within each typology of shelter is possible. Engaging right types of partners is critical first step to get the particular collective off the ground.