



This photobook was created by Nikhil Shenai and Karthik Bhaskara.

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This photo book is curated from the larger ASSAR urban climate change research that focuses on differential vulnerability and adaptive capacity of marginalised communities in the city. The photographs have been taken during the Regional Research Phase especially during the field work from January 2015 till date.

Consent has been obtained from the subjects.

The Adaptation at Scale in Semi-Arid Regions (ASSAR) project is part of a larger research project, the Collaborative Adaptation Research Initiative in Africa and Asia (CARIAS) which is funded by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the UK's Department for International Development (DfID). ASSAR is a five year, multi county research project, which aims to deepen the understanding of the barriers and enablers for effective, medium-term adaptation within the dynamic and socially differentiated semi-arid regions of Africa and Asia. ASSAR will generate new knowledge about how adaptation processes – specially those linked to governance systems, policy and adaptation responses – can be modified or improved upon to achieve more widespread, equitable and sustained adaptation. We are particularly interested in understanding people's vulnerability and, in doing so, exploring the dynamic structural and relational aspects linking vulnerability to social difference, governance and ecosystem services.

For more information visit www.assaradapt.org

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Each breath, each step, each life

A drop

In this Ocean of Insanity

Yet within

Its Depths, lie a few pearls

Each a story

worth listening, worth understanding



"Globalisation is like a light which shines brighter and brighter on a few people and the rest are in darkness, wiped out.

They simply can't be seen.

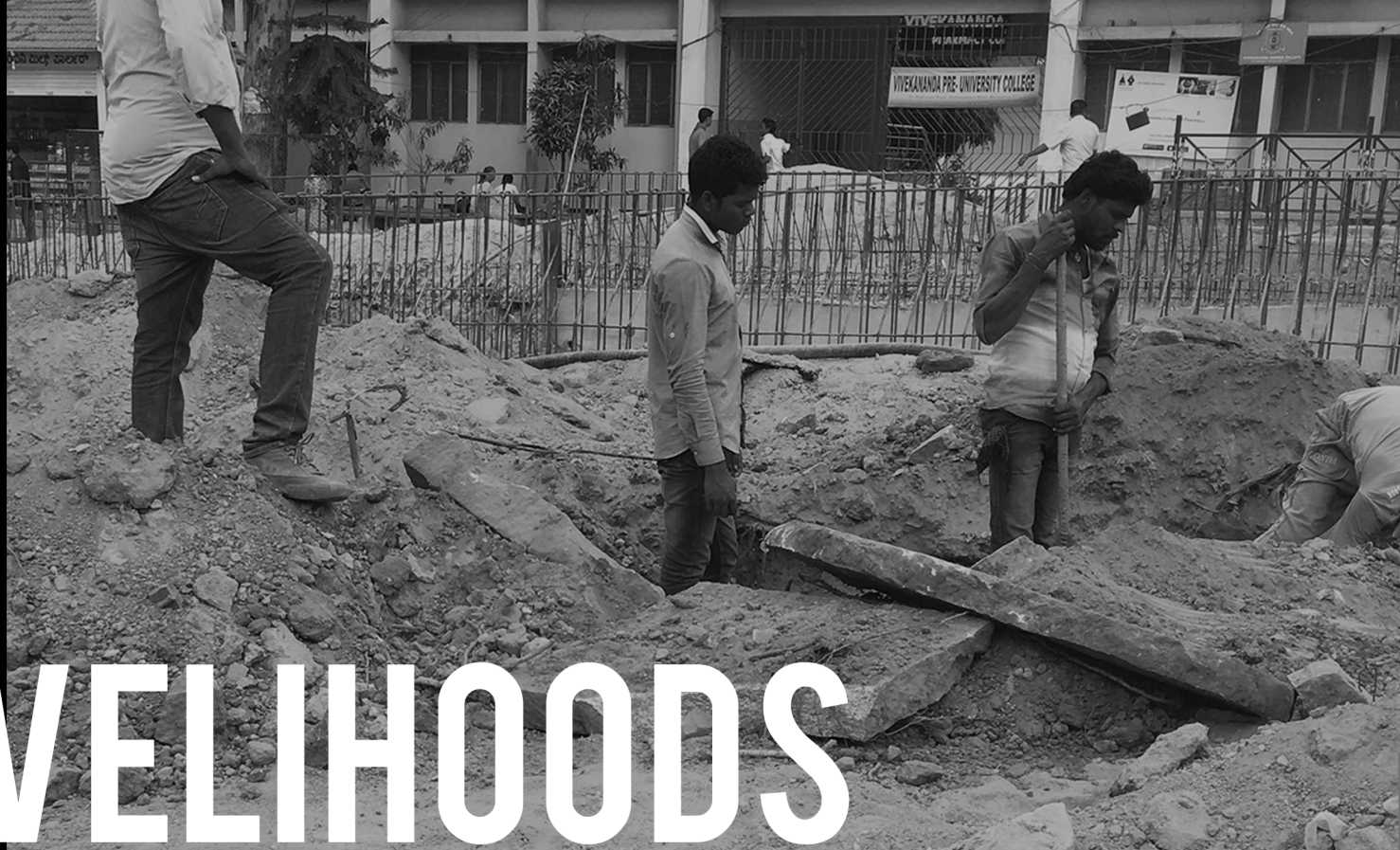
Once you get used to not seeing something, then, slowly, it's no longer possible to see it."

Arundhati Roy

THE GUARDIAN, 28 JULY 2001



Post 1991, the Indian economy opened up to the world. This resulted in an era that was defined by intensification of economic activity, with attendant challenges of managing inequality, poverty and skill-linked jobs. Urban areas have been important in the Indian growth story, but a quick look around urban locations like pockets of informal settlements, will remind us of many challenges that urban areas are still grappling with. One such challenge has been to manage in-migration, particularly if the urban center is a primate city in the region. In such a context, the distressed migrant usually finds it difficult to enter the formal job market due to their lack of skill and training, and because of the relatively limited formal livelihood opportunities in big cities. Hence, they are forced into the informal sector where they take up risky and uncertain livelihoods for sustenance for e.g. waste-picking. In such instances, they provide essential services to the city but lack recognition and are denied access to services. This photobook is a compilation of our interpretive interaction with these people, in the context of our primary research for the 'Adaptation at Scale in Semi-Arid Regions' project.



LIVELIHOODS



People in the shadow of the formal economy are mostly daily wage or sub-contracted workers. Accesses to social security instruments like insurance, pension and provident fund that are part of a salaried employment are nothing more than a far-off fantasy for them. Yet, they are in important roles that are crucial for the normal functioning of the city. This inability of the formal sector to be able to generate enough jobs to absorb a generation of job-seekers has been the defining characteristic of the first decade of the 21st century India. With no quality jobs, due to lack of formal education and skill, many job-seekers take up temporary jobs like construction work, waste picking, hawking, housekeeping and similar work; where no special skills are required. The inconsistency of livelihood sustenance often puts them in situations where they aren't sure if they will have a livelihood the next day. The only constant is hope, hope that their lives will improve and they will have stability...
it seldom does.





Construction is one such sector, where these informal-settlement dwellers try to eke out a living. Both men and women, actively participate across roles and alongside one another. Scale of projects can vary from large-scale infrastructure and residential or commercial spaces, to even small-scale housing.



However, due to the informality in the hiring process within the construction sector and the complexities of the informal labour market, there is a constant fear among the workers, leading them to be on their toes for the next pay-day.



Construction workers cutting steel rebar for the building foundation, all under the watchful eye of the foreman.





Waste-picking, like construction is another industry with low-entry barriers. It is not surprising to see entire communities being forged around this livelihood profile. This coexistence of “work” and “home” makes it very difficult; but not impossible, to leave such a line of work.





While in conversation with some belonging to these communities, the adage follows: *This is a job for the unemployed.*



Women, besides entering the construction sector, can also be seen in *agarbatti* (incense sticks) or *beedi* (tobacco leaf-wrapped cigarettes) production. Others; a rare few, do display entrepreneurial spirit running communal tuck-shops.



Other jobs such as craftsmanship, allied engineering work and services like haricutting are taken up but are not as popular as construction, or the other aforementioned industries.





People in these settlements are cramped into small houses and narrow streets. Only a few houses are made of bricks while most are just layers of tarpaulin. Electricity sometimes lights up their usually dark evenings. Water is usually collected from a community tap or water tankers. Blue drums storing water are seen in every nook and corner. They cannot safely dispose their waste so it is discarded around the vicinity. Closed drains are rarely seen and streams of grey water cut across the muddy roads. After a walk through these settlements one realizes all of this is symptomatic of the perils of unplanned and rapid urbanization.







There is a clear distinction in housing conditions across settlements. Some have clear recognition by the state government. This gives them better access to services, infrastructure and *pucca* (strong) housing materials (previous page).

However, among the unrecognised settlements, which dot the city, construction of the dwellings is done using a varied spectrum of material. Their predominant usage of blue tarpaulin sheets, gives them the moniker “Blue Tent”. Conditions are one of complete squalor but there is little awareness on such matters, when livelihood concerns are more paramount.





In the vicinity of their dwellings, few households partake in subsistence agriculture or animal husbandry. Some also engage in ornamental horticulture.



Most settlements have been electrified, although sufficiency is at times questionable. Some households, as a contingency, have battery-powered lamps or use solar power in such fluctuating scenarios.



Majority of households across the settlements use traditional source of fuels such as firewood and other biomass.



Common property water resources, especially potable water (top-left) at times lie in questionable proximity to sewage drains and/or garbage.





Water sources are primarily community borewells or private tankers. The blue drums used for water storage is a valuable piece of their personal infrastructure.





Sanitation structures are mostly for common use and “co-ed”. But it’s not surprising to see rampant open defecation in these settlements.





DAILY LIVES



For the people in the informal settlements, every day is a challenge to survive. Not only do they earn just enough wages to support themselves and their dependents for a day, but also every aspect of their daily life involves continued struggle. Water for daily use, needs to be gathered from taps or tankers and then carried till their homes. Using firewood to cook food is time consuming, laborious and it poses severe health implications. Their jobs involve hours of manual labor. Open defecation is prevalent among these settlements and it entails security and hygiene concerns. Things which are taken for granted by a modern individual living in a city are scarce in the lives of these informal settlers in the same city.





Men, after a day's work, choose to relax around the vicinity of the settlement. Their recreational hub is primarily the community's tuck-shop.





Women, while contributing on the financial front, also take on roles of a wife, a mother and a householder.





A montage of common household chores taken up by the womenfolk.





Cooking is usually limited to the women of the settlement.



Children with their indomitable spirit and energetic innocence are a welcome silver lining and provide a glimmer of hope for the future.

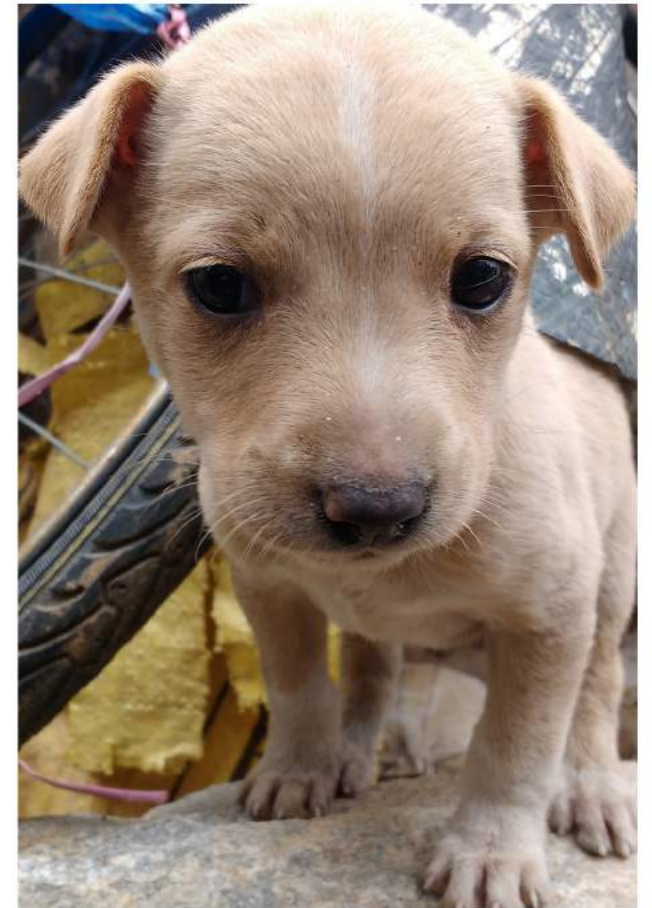








The imaginations of children run unhinged, using everyday objects and their surroundings to go on wild and crazy adventures.



Canine and feline companions round out the familial circle in these settlements.

Like the lynchpins
Of a well-oiled Machine
Holding
Vital Mechanisms

...

Everyday

...

Battling with perseverance
Wishing
For a silver lining
The unicorn of Hope

