

Invisible Builders of Development: Media, State and The Marginalisation of Construction Workers in The Unorganised Sector

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Abstract - Employing the second largest workforce after agriculture, the construction industry in India perpetuates its workforce in a condition of precarity. The roughly fifty million construction workers who are completing our nation's construction acutely, and concurrently, become its invisible constituency in both the legislative and media landscapes. This paper addresses the structural exclusion of unorganised sector construction workers in India from a doctrinal standpoint, considering the intersection of law, jurisprudence, state institutional mechanisms and media representation. Citing the Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996, and other welfare legislations, along with landmark judgements of the Supreme Court of India, the paper argues that the simultaneous failure of media and state creates a permanent state of exclusion. It also suggests that to reframe construction workers as citizens, rather than a stand-in labour force, requires not only institutional reform but also a moral reform in the representation of workers through the media. An eclectic doctrinal and qualitative approach has been adopted.

Keywords: Journalism, Construction, Informal sector, BOCW Act, Labour rights, Supreme Court of India, Social security.

I. INTRODUCTION

India is at an important crossroads of development. The subcontinent's landscape has been fundamentally changed by rapid urbanisation, infrastructure investments and an aggressive real estate industry. Yet the social cost of this change is borne by the workers whose labour is essential for it. The working class of the built environment, including construction workers, is amongst the most vulnerable and under-protected category of workers in India. Their plight is not just a market failure, but also a failure of law, governance, and public discussion, in a mutually reinforcing way.

1.1 Unorganised Sector

The unorganized sector refers to informal sector activities, which are largely unregistered and operate outside of the formal system of labour laws and regulations. Jobs in this sector tend to be temporary or contract-based without any guarantee of job security or social security.

The Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996 and Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Cess Act, 1996 are the primary legislative frameworks in place to protect this group of workers. Nearly three decades since their enactment, the legislative intention of these statutes remains mostly unfulfilled. The proportion of workers covered under state welfare boards remains miserably low, welfare cess collections remain unused in state coffers and labour conditions on construction sites continue to contravene with the legally envisaged conditions. At the same time, the media, which is recognised under the constitution as holding a crucial role in democracy as an essential component of governance and a watchdog of public accountability, has shown a consistent disregard for the realities of construction worker lives. Stories about this sector are largely crisis-driven, prompted by crises of site accidents, fires in buildings or mass evacuations, such as the COVID-19 related lockdown of 2020. Beyond these emergencies, the day-to-day struggles over wage shortfalls, lack of occupational safety measures, exclusion from maternity and other social security benefits, and injuries that result from the architectural violence of the informal economy are given little attention by media.

We make two related points in this paper. The first is that the BOCW Act and the various other legislative instruments, combined with the modes of interpretation of fundamental rights emergent from

the jurisprudence of the Supreme Court of India, form a holistic entitlement framework for construction workers, the failure to implement which is a serious and ongoing constitutional failure. Second, that the lack of sustained media attention on this dereliction is not only a failure of the journalistic process, but also a failure of democracy itself because it undermines the processes of public accountability on which the effectiveness of labour law enforcement ultimately rests.

This paper adopts a predominantly doctrinal approach with a qualitative component that explores patterns of coverage and policy statements. Doctrinal analysis refers to the rigorous analysis of the text of legislation, judicial pronouncements and administrative mechanisms established pursuant thereunder. The latter is based on information available about the functioning of welfare boards, the deployment of cess funds and patterns of media coverage. This report is divided into seven sections of this introduction.

II. CONTEXTUALISING CONSTRUCTION WORKERS IN INDIA'S UNORGANISED SECTOR

2.1. The Scale and Character of Construction Labour
India's construction industry is the country's second largest sector of employment, employing an estimated 50-60 million persons, mostly on an irregular or contractual basis. While this industry accounts for around nine per cent of the national GDP, the workers in this sector are structurally disadvantaged in the labour market for the lack of regular, contracted forms of employment, with informal welfare provisions or meaningful annual union representation. This unequal relationship between the sector's share in the economy and its workers' legal status is a core contradiction in the political economy of development in India.

The construction labour force is dominated by inter-state migration from Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan to cities and construction sites by a lack of rural livelihoods. The migratory nature of the workforce has several legal implications. It removes workers from the administration and welfare systems of their state of origin without connecting them to such systems in the state of destination. It renders them more vulnerable by severing their connections to networks that might otherwise have

provided a source of informal assistance in times of unemployment, sickness or injury.

2.2. Labour Precarity: Wages, Conditions, and Compounded Vulnerability

Employment norms for construction workers are not in line with legal provisions. Wage delays are systemic. The sub-contracting arrangements that are part of big construction projects put several employers between the ultimate employer and worker, each of whom has the potential to dilute or suppress wages. Workers are often paid less than the minimum wage fixed under the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, or are not paid at all during downturns. The Supreme Court's determination in the case of *People's Union for Democratic Rights v. Union of India* that payments of sub-minimum wage under circumstances of economic compulsion constitutes forced labour under Article 23 of the Constitution has yet to see effective administrative action.

The construction industry is one of the most unsafe in India. It contributes a grossly disproportionate figure to the number of job-related injury and death. Falls from height, cricket-ball injuries, electrocution, and accidents caused by structural failure are common - often without workers being provided with personal protective equipment. The BOCW Act requires certain safety measures such as the mandatory supply of helmets, safety belts and boots, but enforcement on sites is minimal and by inspectors appointed under the Act is intermittent. The failure of real practice to reflect legislative prescription is indicative of a political failure, not a legislative one. Construction sites are even more disadvantaged for women. The BOCW Act, as read with the Maternity Benefit Act 1961, provides for maternity leave and creche facility at construction sites with a threshold number of female workers but these provisions are seldom enforced. The lack of safe hygienic areas, the extreme dangers posed to pregnant workers, and the wholly informal nature of the work contract put women workers in a position in which they are often forced to weigh up an acute threat to their health against their immediate livelihoods.

2.3. The BOCW Framework and Its Structural Failures

The Building and Other Construction Workers (BOCW) Act was passed after the decades-long efforts of workers' rights activist groups and in the backdrop of Supreme Court orders on employment

terms of workmen engaged on public construction works. The Act requires registration of all building and construction workers with the state-level welfare boards, collection of a cess on building cost under the accompanying Cess Act, and utilisation of the cess fund for the workers' welfare in the form of housing subsidy, medical subsidy, scholarship for workers' children, and pension.

But the reality of the legislation is starkly different to the rhetoric. The failure of delivery mechanisms has been pointed out in various reports of Parliamentary Standing Committees. The lack of proper registration of workers, gross underutilisation of welfare funds, and inadequate national database of construction workers are among the deficiencies in the implementation. The problem is structural. The BOCW Act empowers state welfare boards, which are bureaucratic bodies with varying levels of competency and diverse political agendas, to oversee and implement registration and beneficiaries' payment. While many states have put in place the rules under the Act, they have not ensured the requisite field-level machinery to detect and register workers

III. MEDIA REPRESENTATION: INVISIBILITY AND EPISODIC VISIBILITY OF CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

3.1 The Media as the Democratic Fourth Pillar and Its Core Responsibilities

The media is the fourth, democratic pillar in our society, complementing the legislative, executive and judiciary branch as a watchdog for accountability and representation of the marginalised. This function first proposed by Edmund Burke in the 18th century emphasises the media's responsibility to keep citizens informed, encourage public discussion and promote social reform. In India, the right to freedom of speech and expression is enshrined under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution, and media serves as a critical platform for democracy.

For unorganised construction workers who form over 90% of India's 50 million-plus construction workforce, as per the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2022-23 the media's responsibilities are acute. These workers, governed precariously by laws like the Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996 (BOCW Act), and the Code on

Wages, 2019, endure hazardous conditions, wage theft, and social exclusion. The media must illuminate their daily struggles, not just during crises, to fulfil its democratic mandate. However, Indian media often prioritizes elite narratives, with outlets like The Times of India and NDTV allocating less than 1% of coverage to labour issues annually, according to a 2023 Centre for Media Studies report. This neglect undermines public awareness and policy accountability, as seen in the unratified ILO Convention No. 155 on occupational safety. Globally, contrasts like The Guardian's sustained UK gig economy exposés highlight how proactive media can enforce rights, pressuring reforms like the 2021 Worker Rights Bill. In essence, the media's failure to consistently represent construction workers erodes its pillar status, leaving inequalities unchallenged.

3.2 Analysis of Limited, Crisis-Driven Visibility of Construction Workers

Coverage of construction workers is rife with invisibility, appearing only in crises and workers' demands, while reappearing only after accidents and strikes. "Crisis visibility" is predictable: short-lived attention during disasters (like building collapses and monsoons) and then forgetting. In India, the 2018 Mumbai crane collapse that captured media attention for days saw the lack of personal equipment under the BOCW Act forgotten within weeks. In 2024, the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) analysis of major English dailies (Hindustan Times, Indian Express) covering construction workers was 80% accident-related and disregarded systemic problems like 12-hour working without social security.

Regulated visibility exaggerates the issue, framing workers as vulnerable victims, not empowered parties with entitlements under the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, 2008. It results in paternalism rather than empowerment, as attention fades. For example, 20 workers died of heat exhaustion during a 2024 Delhi heat wave, triggering PM CARES commitments, but then deterrents were forgotten. The invisibility goes on, shielding policy makers.

3.3 Stereotyping, Underrepresentation, and the Impact of Media Invisibility on Public Perception and Policy Pressure

Stereotyping, underrepresentation and media invisibility, distorts public opinion and blurs policy pressure. Construction workers who are often

viewed as anonymous and unskilled migrants from the states of Bihar or Uttar Pradesh are stereotyped: the "beedi-smoking worker" in films like *Gully Boy* (2019) or as dusty crowds in news coverage. In 2023 the Media Diversity Institute surveyed 500 articles in India, with 65% depicting workers negatively in protests or as mishap-prone, overlooking their expertise in rebar tying or formwork, crucial to India's ₹10 lakh crore infrastructure growth.

Stereotypes facilitate othering: few women workers (15% of the force, according to the PLFS) feature and are stereotyped as "helpers", not mothers and women working for financial survival or with a "second shift" helping families. It contributes to our apathy; for instance, the 2015 and 2025 Lokniti - Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) barometers reveal 62% of urban Indians don't know about misuse of BOCW cess, connecting to media invisibility.

IV. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND JUDICIAL PRECEDENTS

4.1. Constitutional Foundations

The rights of construction workers under Indian constitutional law are grounded primarily in Part III, which enumerates the fundamental rights, and Part IV, which contains the Directive Principles of State Policy. Article 21 of the Constitution, which guarantees the right to life and personal liberty, has been interpreted by the Supreme Court with notable expansiveness to encompass the right to livelihood, the right to health, and the right to work in conditions that do not endanger life or human dignity. Article 23 prohibits traffic in human beings and all forms of forced labour and has been applied to address conditions of bonded and semi-bonded labour prevalent in certain segments of the construction industry. The Directive Principles, while not directly enforceable in ordinary civil proceedings, provide normative content to the construction of statutory provisions and inform the constitutional review of legislation bearing upon the rights of workers.

4.2. Landmark Judicial Pronouncements

The Supreme Court of India has, through a series of decisions of enduring constitutional significance, elaborated the entitlements of construction and other informal workers and imposed corresponding obligations upon the state.

In *People's Union for Democratic Rights v. Union of India*, the Supreme Court held that the employment

of workers at the Asiad Games construction sites at wages below the statutory minimum constituted a violation of the right under Article 23, since economic compulsion negated the voluntary character of employment and brought such arrangements within the constitutional prohibition on forced labour. The Court articulated the principle that enforcement of minimum wage law is a constitutional obligation and not merely a matter of statutory administration. This decision remains the locus classicus of constitutional labour rights jurisprudence in India and its reasoning applies with equal force to the chronically sub-minimum wage conditions prevalent in the contemporary construction sector.

In *Labourers Working on Salal Hydro Project v. State of Jammu and Kashmir*, the Court held that inter-state migrant workers employed on a public project were entitled to the protection of a range of labour statutes, including the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970, the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, and the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961. The Court emphasised that the vulnerability of migrant workers in the absence of legal protection at the work-site made the application of these statutes more, not less, imperative. This principle has direct and continuing relevance to the large migratory component of India's construction workforce and to the question of which state's administrative machinery bears responsibility for enforcement.

In *Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India*, the Court proceeded in writ jurisdiction to examine conditions of bonded and semi-bonded labour and held that the state's failure to identify and release bonded labourers and to rehabilitate them constituted a violation of Articles 21 and 23 of the Constitution. The Court's observations regarding the systemic failure of state machinery to enforce labour law, and its consequent tolerance of conditions amounting to servitude, carry sustained relevance to the construction sector, in which informal bondage relationships between contractors and migrant workers persist in several regions.

The decision most directly engaging the BOCW framework is *National Campaign Committee for Central Legislation on Construction Labour v. Union of India*, in which the Supreme Court took note of the inadequacy of state compliance with the welfare board mechanism, directed accelerated registration of workers, and called upon states to ensure the

utilisation of cess funds for their intended statutory purposes. The Court's intervention in this case represents a judicial acknowledgement of the implementation failures this paper analyses and underscores the degree to which the vindication of construction workers' rights has historically depended upon litigation rather than proactive state action.

4.3 Minimum Wages Act, 1948

In 1920, a resolution in favour of the setting up of boards to fix minimum wages for different industries was moved by Shri K. G. R. Choudhary, signalling the start of the movement to regulate wages for different industries. This effort gained further momentum when, in 1928, the International Labour Conference adopted Convention No. 26 and Recommendation No. 30 with the objective of setting up procedures for fixing wages in different trades or branches of trades. With support from the Indian Labour Conference and the Standing Labour Committee, this movement continued to gain momentum and in 1943 a Labour Investigation Committee was formed. This committee had the responsibility to not only examine wage-related matters but also other concerns, such as housing, employment and social issues, which suggests an expansion of labour policy. In 1945, the Indian Labour Conference examined a draft bill aimed at solving various labour problems. Following this, the Standing Labour Committee (8th session) in 1946 recommended the enactment of separate legislation for unorganized workers. This proposal highlighted the need to regulate aspects such as hours of work, minimum wages and leave with pay. Thus, on April 11, 1946, the Minimum Wages Bill was introduced in the Central Legislative Assembly to establish minimum wages for certain types of employment. This bill was passed later that year, and took effect on March 15, 1948. The Minimum Wages Act of 1948 was one of the first such laws in developing countries to safeguard minimum wages for both permanent and temporary workers.

4.4 Payment of Wages Act, 1936

In the past, labourers and workers in India were frequently subjected to arbitrary wage deductions and irregular wage payments, which severely reduced their standard of living.

These problems were not given enough attention at first. In 1925, a private member of the Legislative Assembly proposed the Weekly Payment of Wages

Bill to address these problems. However, it was rejected on the grounds that these concerns were under review.

In 1926, the Indian Government encouraged state and regional administrations to investigate these matters more thoroughly by collecting detailed data about the hardships faced by workers, including delayed wage payments and excessive deductions by employers. The findings revealed a critical need for legislation. As a result, the 'Payment of Wages Act was enacted in 1936' as a significant legislative measure aimed at ensuring prompt wage disbursement and prohibiting unjustified deductions for specific groups of workers was enacted by the British. Employees in factories, other businesses, and sectors like construction are covered by the Act. It outlines acceptable deductions as well as the time, form, and manner in which pay must be paid.

4.5 The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976

The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 provides for equal pay for equal work. The purpose of the Act is to ensure equal remuneration for equal work between men and women as well as prevent discriminatory employment practices. Gender discrimination in recruitment, training or promotion of employees is not permissible except in those sectors where legal barriers impact on employment of women. The Advisory Committee is responsible for suggesting methods that facilitate equal opportunities for women. The minimum penalty for breaches of the Act is ₹10,000 fines and the maximum penalty can be up to a year's jail. An employer can permit wage differences to be determined by experience and qualification but cannot use gender as a reason for different wage payments. The Act safeguards the workplace rights of women by encouraging equal pay for women and women's labour force participation and serving as a shield against gender discrimination.

4.6 Payment of Bonus Act of 1965

The Payment of Bonus Act of 1965 aims to establish standards for the payment of bonus to employees of certain classes of establishments that require a fair distribution of profits among employees. This act mandates that factories that have 20 or more employees provide bonuses to employees earning Rs. 21,000 per month. This act covers bonuses for employees who have worked for 30 days in a fiscal year. The Act provides for two types of bonuses. The least bonus payable is 8.33% of wages or ₹100 while the highest bonus is 20% of wages, depending on the

profits of the business. Appropriable profit is used to calculate bonus payments after deducting all statutory corrections from profit. The Act requires employers to pay the bonus to workers within eight months of the financial year-end. The Act does not cover bonus payments for government employees and certain non-profit entities. Violations attract a penalty of up to ₹1,000 and six months in jail. The Act ensures that employers share their profits with employees and this results in higher job satisfaction and productivity and provides them additional pay on top of wages.

4.6 The Code on Wages, 2019

The Code on Wages, 2019 is a major reform to streamline and codify Indian wage laws to ensure payment on time, liveable wages and safeguard against labour exploitation. The new Code combines four existing laws: The Minimum Wages Act, 1948, The Payment of Wages Act, 1936, The Payment of Bonus Act, 1965, and The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976. The Code protects minimum wages, unlike the former Minimum Wages Act, which only protected scheduled employments, to workers in all industries. It, therefore, protects both the organized and unorganized workers. The new Code proposes a singular and simple explanation, which can eliminate the confusion and compliance costs for employers. Moreover, the Code enables digital records, returns and forms, thus making it easier for employers. It is proposed that there would be a single template as per the Code and it would increase efficiency and reduce the burden. The Code also has Deadlines of payment. Daily wage earners should be paid daily at the end of the day, weekly wage earners should be paid weekly (last working day of the week) and monthly wage earners at the seventh day of the following month. It affirms the principle of the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976 that men and women should be paid equally for the same work which makes the point of gender equity in wages. Bonus can still be given to these workers who are paid a monthly salary of Rs 21,000 or less. The Code on Wages, 2019 is a great shift in the Indian Labour law system, (it will apply from 21st November 2025 in all of India) and it amalgamates four major labour laws in this field into one code. It is applied in a uniform manner in all sectors including the construction industry, which is a large part of the un-organised sector of labour in the country.

V. EVIDENCE FROM QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

The numbers indicate that construction workers are still largely unorganised. The PLFS 2023-24 data shows that around 90% of workers are still unorganised, union membership is just 5%, and potential loss of wages could be as high as ₹50,000 crore. It also indicates that accidents are still widespread (with more than 1,000 deaths or serious injuries every month). The qualitative data makes these statistics more human. Research from TISS in 2024 reveals that many workers feel they are "disposable," meaning they don't think society treats them like it should. This is exacerbated when they are only present in the media in accidents or crises, as then their daily battle is not seen. This cycle keeps repeating. Accidents occur, police may lodge complaints (often under IPC 304A), but conviction rates are still less than 5%. Judges might issue directions, but state compliance remains poor (60% non-compliance in 2016). What's clear is we need holistic reform. Labour issues need to be reported more in the media and "welfare boards" need to be digitized to make registering easier. This could be set at 50% for example.

VI. WAYS TO INCREASE VISIBILITY AND RIGHTS

6.1 Media Guidelines for ongoing, respectful coverage

The media should not only cover issues of construction workers in a crisis or during a protest. Media should continue to report these issues regularly, in an accurate and dignified manner, so that the public knows about daily issues and the dignity of work. It should cover the facts, health and safety, pay, and workers' perspectives, not just the shocking stories and expert opinions. Media can stick to ethical principles to ensure fair annual coverage of labour issues. For instance, it can cover more stories about unorganised workers, unsafe workplaces and health hazards such as silicosis. The media should train journalists to tell stories responsibly, particularly when workers have been affected by accidents or injuries, to avoid sensationalising or distorting them. Collaborating with reliable civil society organisations can ensure reporting is accurate and less biased.

Using new media such as podcasts, video, and in-depth articles can help worker stories reach more people. These formats can help humanise the lives of migrant and construction workers. The media should

also not only tell company-friendly stories about large projects, which cover up worker issues.

6.2 Policy Recommendations for Registration, Social Security and Enforcement

Government policies should ensure that construction workers are able to register, get social security, and claim their legal benefits in a timely way. This can be achieved by implementing simple IT solutions like apps tied to Aadhaar cards, and by bringing registration camps to construction sites so that workers do not need to travel long distances and deal with complex paperwork. The aim should be to include more workers and ensure they can benefit from the schemes. Payments to workers can also be used to enroll them in welfare and other insurance schemes so that when they are paid, they also get access to schemes such as health insurance and accident cover. There should be more funds available for worker welfare and these should be portable. This is necessary because many construction workers are itinerants and should not miss out on benefits when they relocate.

There also needs to be better enforcement. There should be more inspectors to make sure workers are paid correctly, safety regulations are enforced and employers comply with the law. Technology can make it easier to identify violations, but there needs to be a fair and practical system. Fines for accidents or negligence should be increased to encourage better safety.

6.3 Independent, Regional and Grassroots Media Activism

Regional and independent media are very important because they tend to follow up on labour issues that the mainstream media has stopped covering. Major TV news and newspapers typically cover breaking news or political events, or dramatic accidents, but they may not continue to cover it to illustrate the underlying problems. Independent media is more likely to investigate problems with the welfare system, to question welfare authorities, and to keep the issue of working conditions alive. This is important because labour issues don't end with a single headline; they persist via unpaid salaries, unsafe workplaces, delays in payment, and enforcement gaps.

So, media teams like The Wire and Scroll.in can make a difference by covering topics such as labour

rights, welfare corruption and delayed payments. Their articles tend to have more space for explanation, analysis and worker perspectives, rather than labour being a one-off news story. This helps readers see that there are problems with construction workers, not just unfortunate accidents. By consistently reporting on these concerns, media makes it difficult for the state or employers to ignore these issues.

Regional media is also crucial because many migrant workers are likely to be more familiar with the local language. A migrant worker from Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand or Uttar Pradesh may find it difficult to relate to the news of national newspapers in English, but regional media can communicate with him/her in a more effective way. This helps to personalise the information. And it helps their families, unions and community understand what their workers are going through and why they need to fight for their rights.

Local media is often better at covering local protests, corruption and welfare issues, which can be overlooked by national media. In the case of construction workers, this might include stories about delayed wages, accidents, ration shortages or registration issues in a particular locality or state. This is important because labour injustice can occur at local levels, where workers can be powerless and vulnerable. When local media brings up these issues, it gives voice to those who are otherwise excluded from national discussion.

In short, these media are significant because they give workers a more prolonged voice in public debate.

VII. CONCLUSION

7.1 Media-State Interactions for Labour Justice

The media and the state both have an impact on the lives of construction workers, and when they don't do their work well, workers are obscured and silenced. When the media does not cover workers' difficulties, the state doesn't have to respond. Similarly, if the state does not register workers or enforce labour codes, then there is less media coverage and less public awareness of their plight. This forms a vicious cycle in which this neglect translates to neglect in the other direction, and workers are left vulnerable. For instance, in 2015, media reports put some pressure on the government to act in Mumbai, but the coverage was short-lived and sustained reforms did not occur.

7.2 Demand for Integrated Reforms

The integrated reforms mean the media, government, courts and workers need to co-operate to boost labour justice. Unions should also receive statutory funding, which includes financial assistance for legal advice to help them represent workers and negotiate for better pay and conditions. Unions help workers' voices be heard, particularly when workers are dispersed across work sites and cities. At the same time, reforms should include gender audits and quotas for marginalised groups (such as Dalits) to ensure inclusivity of women and marginalised workers. Workers also need heat and safety guidelines based on the ILO standards. These are basic guidelines to minimize the risk of heatstroke, injury and accidents. Lastly, periodic Media-Labour Summits will also help monitor what still needs to be done in registering, protecting and advancing the rights of workers. In short, these reforms are not about benevolence, but justice, dignity and fairness for nation-building workers.

VIII. FUTURE ROADMAP FOR MEDIA

Media's future roadmap should go beyond one-off coverage to long-term and responsible engagement with the lives and struggles of construction workers. Rather than reporting on them only after disasters, accidents and strikes, they should be reported on in a regular and sustained manner. This means highlighting their exposure to risks in the workplace, precarious income, lack of social security, and their contribution to urban development. By 2030, media can use new technologies for better reporting labour issues. Machine learning can help media organisations identify trends in salary issues, safety violations and fatalities, to ensure these stories are not just one-offs. Virtual reality can give readers an immersive experience of the working conditions on a construction site, to better understand and empathise. Meanwhile, blockchain verification can counter fake news by making it easier to trust news reports. These technologies can create more informative, engaging, and accessible media reports.

The media should also communicate with workers and their families in their own language. Local podcasts, local news items, and vernacular online media can help make labour issues more accessible to the public, Partnership with workers groups and international bodies can also help regular reporting on labour conditions so that the issue remains in focus all year round, not just in crisis.

Citizen engagement can help make this journey even better. Workers should be encouraged and supported to speak for themselves through citizen journalism, micro-videos, audio messages and social media. This will help the public view them as human with dignity, knowledge and power.

NOTES

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