



Livelihoods in delivery and logistics in India: Identification of HMWs for UpJeevika

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August 2021**

1. Context and Landscape

Following an assessment by NSDC in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, logistics has emerged as the top employment-generating sector in India with tourism and hospitality, construction, information technology and telecom among the top five sectors (Choudhury 2020)¹.

Delivery

Tier II and beyond cities contribute around 66% of the e-commerce demand in India and this share is expected to rise in the coming years (Koshi 2020)². A fear of the Covid-19 pandemic, closure of many physical stores, coupled with non-availability of select items in neighbourhood corner stores, is leading to a shift in consumer buying patterns in Tier II and III cities, with an increased demand for online grocery delivery coupled with higher-value basket sizes (Kar and Shrivastava 2020)³. In addition to Big Basket and Grofers, even Amazon, Flipkart and Reliance are now experiencing an increasing number of online grocery orders (Chowdhury 2021)⁴.

¹ <https://www.logisticsinsider.in/logistics-is-one-of-the-most-employment-generating-sectors-in-the-covid-19-aftermath-nsdc/>

² <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/tier-2-cities-smaller-towns-now-contribute-66-e-commerce-demand-india-report-131315>

³ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/small-biz/startups/newsbuzz/bigbasket-grofers-other-e-grocery-firms-see-rise-in-non-metro-users/articleshow/76146969.cms>

⁴ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/services/retail/logistics-companies-ride-ecommerce-wave-as-covid-restrictions-force-consumers-to-move-online/articleshow/82096600.cms?from=mdr>

Transportation

The share of road transport in India's GDP is over 3.6 per cent, accounting for about two-thirds of the total transport contribution (to GDP). Roads handle about 65 percent of the freight and over 85 percent of the passenger traffic in India (IBEF)⁵. Infrastructure, skill development, regulatory hurdles, fragmentation, inefficiencies in meeting supply and demand, continue to be challenges for the sector (Deloitte 2019)⁶. The Indian trucking industry deploys more than 8 million drivers and 12 million helpers. Due to the pandemic, there has been a mismatch in the supply and demand for truck drivers. While '25% to 30% of India's trucks lie idle at any given point of time' due to a shortage of truck drivers, at the same time, 'those employed in the sector are overworked' (Dutta 2020)⁷. During the recurring pandemic waves, fear of the virus, no work and lack of sustenance in the cities and transportation hubs, most drivers returned to their hometowns or villages (Khan 2020)⁸. The shortage of truck drivers is leading to significant financial losses in the country.

2. Livelihoods for research

2a. The Delivery Executive (NSDC 2021)

2a.1	Sector	Delivery and Logistics
2a.2	Sub-Sector	e-commerce Last Mile Delivery
2a.3	Livelihood	Delivery Executive
2a.4	NSDC Role	Courier Delivery Executive (https://nsdcindia.org/courier-delivery-executive)
2a.5	Description (NSDC)	<p>Brief Job Description: Courier Delivery Executives are also known as Delivery Executives or Couriers. Individuals in this role are on-the-road staff who are responsible for collecting packages from the local office and delivering them to the customers at their doorstep. They are also responsible for verifying customer ID, collecting payment, if applicable and obtaining customer signature. They are a critical part of courier operations as shipment delivery is a crucial activity.</p> <p>Personal Attributes: This job requires the individual to work well with his/her team and achieve joint goals. The individual must be able to prioritize and execute tasks within scheduled time limits. The individual should be able to maintain high concentration levels throughout his/her shift.</p>

⁵ <https://www.ibef.org/pages/16539>

⁶ https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/in/Documents/consumer-business/Time%20of%20Reckoning_print.pdf

⁷ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/50-truckers-admit-to-driving-when-tired-fatigued-study/story-M5mgnV0NY9irefeqVbcPBJ.html>

⁸ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/small-biz/sme-sector/hit-hard-by-the-virus-and-lack-of-demand-indias-trucking-industry-now-battles-shortage-of-drivers/articleshow/75173949.cms?from=mdr>

2b. Commercial Vehicle Driver/ Truck Driver (NSDC 2021)

2b.1	Sector	Delivery and Logistics
21b.2	Sub-Sector	Road Transportation/ Trucking
2b.3	Livelihood	Commercial Vehicle Driver/ Truck Driver
2b.4	NSDC Role	Commercial Vehicle Driver (https://www.nsdcindia.org/commercial-vehicle-driver-level-4)
2b.5	Description (NSDC)	<p>Brief Job Description: Individuals at this job need to drive safely on the assigned route. Individuals need to have a valid HMTV driving License and PSV badge. Individuals are expected to drive a commercial vehicle including LCV, pickup trucks, bus, maxi cab, school van, transport vehicles and ensure safety of passengers/goods as well as public on the road. This role requires the individual to possess relevant technical skills to handle most of the routine breakdowns that could likely be encountered while driving long distances and through difficult terrains. The individual is also expected to achieve other key performance parameters like fuel efficiency, on time delivery etc.</p> <p>Personal Attributes: This job requires the individual to drive for long hours under tiring and demanding physical and traffic conditions. [The] individual must be dependable and able to take responsibility for the assets (vehicle, goods) and passengers. The individual should be able to communicate effectively as he needs to deal with a variety of people every day.</p>

3. Research Questions: The Delivery Executive

Based on a review of the industry reports, existing scholarship on platform economies, as well as our own research with delivery workers, we defined our research questions as follows.

1. Delivery Executives’ key decisions including the choice of their livelihood, employers/ platforms worked for, employer/ platform switches, job and platform onboarding, resolution of task related issues are influenced by the communities of kinship that they are placed in. These kinship relations are formed based on ethnicity/ language and extended family or fictive kin relations. **And so, we ask as to how kinship amongst Delivery Executives is evidenced.** Are there lessons for how training programmes, incentives, and job aids might be designed for the Delivery Executive?
2. The on-the-job experiences of Delivery Executives are being increasingly controlled by algorithms, which manifest as automation in place of a social transaction. **How do these**

algorithms shape Delivery Executives' spatial and temporal realities as they go about their daily tasks? What inherent socio-cultural nuances and inequities (which need to be addressed to enable fair working conditions) are made visible by these algorithms?

3. **How is precarity and temporariness manifest in the everyday of the delivery workers?** What elements of their livelihood do they consider as being within their individual agency, and what are attributed to external factors outside their control or consideration?
4. **What are the underlying motivations for pursuing this livelihood?** Why is this livelihood chosen over others? What does this livelihood offer that other livelihood do not?
5. **What are the challenges or deterrents that the delivery workers have to negotiate in the everyday, as they pursue their livelihoods?** Are these inherent in the places and spaces that they work and live in? Or are these emergent manifestations of this livelihood or platform economy itself?

4. Emergent How-Might-Wes for the livelihoods challenge: Delivery Executives

1. How-Might-We **ensure income security and social protection for Delivery Executives** so that **the inherent risks and precarity associated with the livelihood are mitigated?**

Our research tells us that this livelihood entails job/task related risks such as failed deliveries during heavy traffic conditions, lockdowns (as witnessed over the last year), as well as products being damaged during the delivery. COVID19 has seen falling incomes, and where financial assistance has been made available, it has been cloaked in legalese and arbitrary conditions. Rents, mortgages, and loans have compounded the issue. Close to 90% of gig workers in India were reported to have [lost income](#) during the pandemic, with 44% having resorted to borrowing to meet their needs, 45% reducing consumption, 83% utilizing their savings, and 57% leveraging the loan moratorium to reduce or halt payments on their debts. 61% were concerned about their long-term financial needs such as 'saving for old age and paying off debt' (The Hindu, 2020).

There are also health-related risks associated with the livelihood, such as injuries, accidents, and illnesses (for example, in terms of exposure to COVID19 infection). Presently, insurance covers mostly address accidents instead of health. Even when health insurance is available, it only covers hospitalization and not the more plausible OPD treatments or testing which COVID19 sees. Much of health and safety related information has not been provided in the vernacular. Finally, for a Delivery Executive it is often a choice between using the time to earn on one hand and using that time to get themselves tested or going for medical consultations. As the second wave of the COVID19 pandemic demonstrated, testing itself is problematic as it translates to a form of gatekeeping where the test result is what determines access to treatments and healthcare.

In the face of these challenges, and as possible solutions, micro-insurance, micro-savings and credit platforms can enable access to quality financial and health services for Delivery Executives. We know that the design of these platforms and products needs to account for heuristics and considerations such as simplicity, ease of use, local language translation, voice-first features, and low battery usage amongst others. For analogous inspiration, please read [here](#) about how insurance solutions for low-income users in Africa have been developed by bundling insurance with products they already use. As a second example, please read [here](#) about why and how microinsurance for delivery staff is working in Vietnam. As a third example, please read [here](#) on how mobile delivered microinsurance and healthcare

services are being bundled together for emerging markets. These are reference case studies on how income security, social protection and health access is being enabled for developing regions/ low resource settings.

In addition, governments have to bring in minimum wage legislations sooner than later. In the United Kingdom, a recent ruling by the Supreme Court classified Uber drivers as 'workers' (and not self-employed) which has entitled them to the basic rights enjoyed by workers such as minimum wage and workplace pension. The Finance Minister, Nirmala Seetharaman, has also expressed a similar intent during the Union Budget 2021 with the [announcement](#) that 'Minimum wages will apply to all categories of workers, and they will all be covered by the Employees State Insurance Corporation'.

2. How-Might-We provide **meaningful careers to Delivery Executives** that go beyond daily tasks and transactions so that their **capacity to aspire is enhanced** through relevant career progressions/ pathways?

Our research tells us that while the choice of this career may be on account of the low entry barriers (such as minimum educational qualifications) and easy money, the Delivery Executives do harbor aspirations of a different future. At this point, we wish to guard against assuming any homogeneity in these aspirations, they are informed by social-cultural contexts as well as the access to information that an individual has. These aspirations can manifest variedly, such as a desire for higher education, dreams of setting up their own enterprise or taking on more specialized roles in the industry that they work in. **The Delivery Executives also aspire to create an identity beyond delivery, and here lies an opportunity for the platforms/ employers to build domain knowledge, and in the process, platform loyalty as well as customer engagement.** For example, a Delivery Executive working for a pharmacy was learning on the job by spending time with the staff working in the pharmacy store. This equipped him to answer basic customer queries, which impacted his job engagement as well as enhanced the experience of the households he delivered the medicines to.

Setting up these clusters of Learning Hubs, Delivery Executives and Customers (that they typically service) as micro communities will enhance the relationship between the platform and the customer, with the Delivery Executive being trained for and being rewarded for gaining domain/ industry knowledge (through on the job learning, certifications) as well as building long term customer engagement (beyond transactional ratings). We must remember that India is a collectivist society, and relationships built around *the social* will stand the test of time. For example, kirana stores are a classic example of such social relations, where the store owners through repeated interactions are able to understand the profiles and habits of regular customers in depth, and in doing so, establish [relationships](#) of familiarity and trust.

3. How might we **make the working conditions more inclusive** for **Delivery Executives** so that **they support diversity**?

We know that platform-based work has provided both alternative career options as well as at once financial emancipation and social identities to women (Raval 2019). Our research has highlighted how spousal support, as well as encouragement from family, friends, and children come to complement and also are in turn themselves reinforced by workplace policies and provisions which ensure and encourage safety and convenience, to make the job an attractive one for women. This also implies the need for a focused understanding of how women staff negotiate 'kinship ties' at the workplace (Lalvani 2019) as well as at work.

Thinking with the Fairwork Foundation (Graham et al. 2020), we underline **the need to adopt a holistic approach including but not limited to pay, working conditions and contracts, management support, and representation.** As an [example](#), Zomato has announced a push

to increase the participation of women in the workforce to 10% by the end of 2021, enabled through 'access to safety-related education and tools; contactless deliveries by default; extended support from restaurant partners; and SOS button and dedicated support' (ET HR World 2021). Our own research with women delivery staff with BigBasket in Ahmedabad and Baroda during the time of the first lockdown in 2020 revealed how they were provided with emergency electronic safety alert devices worn around their necks, pepper spray cans, as well as the freedom to choose the shifts they wanted to work in, even as their supervisors made certain of the fact that they were provided with deliveries within a limited radius of their homes. Finally, and in a separate if sobering [example](#), by turning to communities and networks, women delivery staff in Bristol have formed a WhatsApp support group to share and help each other in the face of endemic harassment and intimidation by customers and strangers alike while making deliveries.

Gender inclusivity as not necessarily only limited to women, in food and grocery delivery might still be low, while examples of initiatives and efforts to include them are few and far between. **Yet at a time when COVID19 and its attendant (reverse) migratory flows have challenged the availability of Delivery Executives relative to demand, a focus on gender diversity is both socially and economically desirable. At the same time, it is promising that organizations have started focusing on other marginalized groups as well.** Ekart, the logistics arm of Flipkart, supports an 'eKartians with Different Abilities' program where delivery executives are equipped with SOS-enabled smartphones, special badges as well as flashcards to communicate with customers. There is a need for solutions that can enable these inclusivity focused aids and practices at scale and across varied organizations to create more opportunities for different segments.

4. In what ways might we **leverage the networks and communities** which **Delivery Executives** are a part of, to **design livelihoods which are sustainable, inclusive, and relatable**?

Our research points to how the decision to both join and continue in their work as Delivery Executives is a social one, influenced by friends and family in similar jobs or even ancillary trades. Once in the job, seniors who can provide moral and affective guidance play a crucial role in 'sustaining their future in this work as well as the future of this work' (Lalvani 2019). Support while performing the work itself, often assumes the form of 'tacit knowledge' imparted through these networks, such as 'knowledge about the rules of the company' as well as how they can 'find a way around the rules' (Gray et al. 2016). There is thus, an organically derived sense of relatability, belonging, and 'relatedness' (Lalvani 2019).

In turn, what this suggests is that **hiring and training programmes, incentives, work spaces, and job aids might be designed for Delivery Executives keeping in mind how fictive kin relations at work are formed and sustained, as well as the broader communities to which they belong.** The scope for innovation and enterprise is significant, as it remains a powerful yet under leveraged space for collaboration and inclusion. As an example [here](#), at the start of the first COVID19 lockdown, grocery delivery companies in India chose to address a shortfall in Delivery Executives by turning to and hiring from networks of retail workers and restaurant staff who were idle at the time, thus recognizing that workers' social networks mirror the extensions and relatednesses of their fields of work and trade. Designing and enabling 'inclusive and accessible spaces for dialogue and negotiation with informal-worker networks' ([C40 2020](#)), has been suggested as an integrative approach which follows and traces 'how different communities already meet, and what will work best in their community context'. Separately, the [Bharat Inclusion Initiative](#) proposes skill, health, and wellbeing based community platforms which gig workers join after validation and vetting by the communities themselves, and the membership of which in turn allows access to financial and wellbeing benefits. And as a final example [here](#), *Chamas* or rotating micro savings groups amongst informal urban workers in Kenya leverage social networks to both improve workers' savings, and also help them prepare for unforeseen emergencies.

5. Research Questions: Commercial Vehicle Drivers

Based on a review of the industry reports, existing scholarship on the mobility sector, as well as our own analysis of public culture artefacts, we defined our research questions as follows.

1. The road logistics sector constitutes a fickle ecosystem⁹ with multiple actors involved, such as 'truckers, transporters, retailers, and mechanics' with information largely controlled by 'a network of middlemen and small operators'. **How can the issue of trust deficit be addressed through a more seamless and on demand flow of information and validation that does not privilege one group of actors, but instead enables all parties in the ecosystem to validate each other?**
2. The truck driving profession has been viewed by society as one of the worst in the country, and is characterized by low pay, no career growth opportunities and long periods of time away from home. This is also accentuating the shortage of truck drivers in the country, as the profession is not seen as aspirational among the youth. At the same time, varied **opportunities for entrepreneurship are opening, especially in semi-urban / rural areas in India** and the more aspirational and enterprising youth are likely to choose this route¹⁰. Even within the industrial and service industry, the opportunities for the unskilled segment are increasing, and the **working conditions are far more comfortable than driving trucks**. While those getting into the truck driving profession often aspire to segue into alternate careers such as entrepreneurs, the capacity to aspire diminishes with time and age with middle aged truck drivers finding their social reputation unattractive¹¹. The truck driving **profession inherently entails various kinds of absences** - of family and intimacy, of access to good food, of rest, of medical facilities and of upward social mobility. **Considering these changes, what absences need to be addressed in order to position truck driving as an aspirational and sustainable livelihood?**
3. **The livelihood and identity of truck drivers is rooted in mobility and spatial kinship.** The demanding profession entails a blurring of boundaries between the individual identify and professional identity, with the spaces they inhabit at work, such as the roads and the truck cabins, creating "sensations of familiarity and homeliness"¹². It is said that the truck drivers form an "organic highway economy that includes dhabas (no-frills eateries adjoining highways), repair shops, brothels, roadside bars, tolls and informal road taxes"¹³. On an average, a truck driver in India spends ten months a year and eighteen months a day on the road, with the "narrow quarters that diametrically stretch from the backrest of his seat to the protruding steering wheel" as much his home as it is his workplace.¹⁴

"For most truck drivers, work is the only means through which they can affirm themselves. The more time they spend on the road, the more they identify with

⁹ https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/in/Documents/consumer-business/Time%20of%20Reckoning_print.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.iru.org/resources/newsroom/driver-shortage-trucking-industry-india-perspective>

¹¹ <https://savelifefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/design-single-page-27th-feb-2020.pdf>

¹² <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/23323256.2015.1048811?needAccess=true&journalCode=rasa20>

¹³ <https://roadsandkingdoms.com/2017/truckin-on-in-india/>

¹⁴ <https://numadic.com/blog/why-do-indian-truck-drivers-decorate-their-trucks/>

their truck driver identities and the more they come to see the road as a surrogate home. Instead of being part of a sedentary community, truck drivers experience a sense of belonging and even camaraderie in the presence of one another and the other vast networks of acquaintances they have developed on the road. Although these relations tend to be shallow and mostly based on common experiences, being part of a mobile non-localized community transforms their solitary experiences on the road into a kind of social act (Kozak 2012; Marshall 2013, 62). Despite the superficiality of these relations, the road — their workplace — becomes more like a home than their homes itself. The result is that many truck drivers start attaching more value to their lives on the road than to their lives at home”¹⁵

How do truck drivers experience or regain a sense of home and identity while on the road?

- 4. The experience of mobility also comes with many challenges and bottlenecks.** These include being overburdened with assignments leading to fatigue and sleepiness, needing to speed or drive at night to deliver consignments in time, overloading of trucks, payment of bribes to “traffic/highway police, RTO, tax officials or paid extortion to local groups”¹⁶. **How do these challenges impact the physical and mental wellbeing of the truck drivers?**

6. Emergent How-Might-We for the livelihoods challenge: Commercial Vehicle Drivers

- 1. How-Might-We create mutually beneficial information exchanges that enable real time decision making, as well as cement transparency and reciprocity among the actors in the ecosystem?**

Our research tells us that this sector is highly fragmented with a number of actors that influence truck driving as a livelihood. These networks retain an element of informality, with knowledge/power concentrated among small operators and middlemen. Also, there is potential for further consolidation and related economies of scale as the average fleet size is 20. “59% of fleet owners have a single-firm entity and the remaining 41% have multiple establishments across India. Further, 55% of fleet owners are sole proprietors of their firms while 36% have private limited firms. Each fleet owner employs about 23 drivers, out of which, 16 are permanent while 7 are temporary drivers”¹⁷ This hinders the fleet owner’s ability to provide for either social security benefits or wellbeing facilities. We know that “93.6% truck drivers drive fleet operators’/ company trucks”, on other words, “only a few truck drivers (6.4%) drive their own trucks”¹⁸

The rise of the freight matching platforms has led to aggregation of and increased access to user/ stakeholder data across “vehicle use, maintenance patterns, and behavioral data”. The trucker can thus be viewed as a data body, as a body of composites (Douglas-Jones 2021). Startups and unicorns such as Blackbuck leverage this data and information to provide products and services such as fuel cards, tyres and spare parts, toll tags as well as vehicle insurance. **There is scope to enhance this bouquet of offerings, including user data-**

¹⁵ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/23323256.2015.1048811?needAccess=true>

¹⁶ <https://savelifefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/design-single-page-27th-feb-2020.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://savelifefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/design-single-page-27th-feb-2020.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://savelifefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/design-single-page-27th-feb-2020.pdf>

based access to credit and lending. This may also enhance the capacity of the truck drivers to own their trucks, and hence have a greater control over their choices of relevant products and services.

Even for addressing the shortage of truck drivers in the short term, digital enablement is key to facilitate a smooth flow of information. Raj Saxena, CEO of the logistics intelligence platform LogisticsNow, recommends that “all logistics companies should be given electronic passes (transferable on a mobile phone) for their drivers to use and travel back/ report back to duty, go pick up loads/directly deploy where they are most needed”¹⁹

2. **How-Might-We provide career pathways to truck drivers for them (and their communities and families) to consider the profession aspirational?**

Our research tells us there is minimal social capital derived from the profession. **While the profession allows for an easy entry, the lack of specialized skills becomes a constraint thereafter** for the truck drivers to pursue more specialized careers in the logistics industry within India. The lack of education is not compensated by an augmentation of skills (for upward mobility) across the time spent in the profession. “Even drivers who have more than 15 years of experience claim that there is no upward mobility for them, since they have limited experience in anything other than driving. Additionally, drivers claimed that there is no job security”²⁰ (SaveLIFE Foundation 2020)

Viewing [Meel Pathar](#) (Netflix 2021) as a cultural artefact, we also note that career aspirations have been traditionally transnational, as for example the aspiration for 'driving a truck in Kuwait'. At the same time, there is an acknowledgement of alternatively **the truck and the act of driving as coming to constitute personhood**, and the resultant notion of being on the move being a self-identical construction of livelihood.

The youth, in semi-urban and rural belts, are demonstrating aspirations of accessing and consuming hitherto urban forms of living and consumption. **We then note that opportunities for career progression include not only entrepreneurship avenues (which in turn will require increased access to credit, market linkages, and aggregator platforms), but also existing and emergent roles in the industry such as pitstop executives, medical supply chain executives and truck maintenance technicians.** To foster this ecosystem, social security, access to credit and ensuring income stability (for the truck driver and family) is key, especially to build respect for the truck driving profession. Increased capacity to own (and maintain) trucks will also augment the pride in the profession, **with the truck and the act of driving closely linked to identity and personhood.**

[Blowhorn](#) is an example where micro-entrepreneurship is being enabled by providing their “partner drivers” a platform to access work orders through their mobile phones and follow the most optimal routes for their destinations. The platform has reported a 20 to 25 per cent increase in driver incomes²¹. Also, through skilling measures such as customer services training, upward mobility (and augmented income opportunities) such as a move from product transportation to product delivery are being created. **At the same time, sustenance of this livelihood will need policy support and solutions for ensuring a minimum income guarantee, access to credit and finances, provision of social security benefits as well as crowdsourcing and dissemination of impact stories to build pride in the profession.**

¹⁹ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/small-biz/sme-sector/hit-hard-by-the-virus-and-lack-of-demand-indias-trucking-industry-now-battles-shortage-of-drivers/articleshow/75173949.cms?from=mdr>

²⁰ <https://savelifefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/design-single-page-27th-feb-2020.pdf>

²¹ <https://www.dell.org/story/blowhorn-enhancing-indian-truck-driver-income-micro-entrepreneurs/>

Did You Know? A truck driver, Malcolm Mclean, is credited for inventing container shipping, which is regarded as instrumental for enabling global trade.

“Malcolm P. McLean, a truck driver, fundamentally transformed the centuries-old shipping industry, an industry that had long decided that it had no incentive to change. By developing the first safe, reliable, and cost-effective approach to transporting containerized cargo, McLean made a contribution to maritime trade so phenomenal that he has been compared to the father of the steam engine, Robert Fulton”²² (Mayo and Nohria 2005)

3. How-Might-We **augment the physical, mental, emotional, and financial wellbeing of truck drivers (and their family members) to enhance their productivity and longevity in the profession?**

Our research indicates that personal health and safety are grave concerns for those who pursue this profession. Drivers suffer from fatigue from the long working hours (as well as night driving). “On an average, each driver drives for about 11.9 hours in a day. In terms of average distance covered, a truck driver covers about 417 km daily”²³ (SaveLIFE Foundation 2020). The health issues include backaches, joint pains, muscular pains as well as gastro-intestinal infections (as truck drivers often do not get access to hygienic and healthy food across their driving routes). Mental health concerns include stress, sleep disorders, use of drugs and stimulants amongst others. Emotional wellbeing is also affected as truck drivers stay away from families for long periods, leading to an absence of intimacy, closeness and succor. It is not only the individual health that is a concern. “Poor access to good medical health for self, family and education for children are huge contributors to the increasing lack of the truck drivers’ availability”²⁴ (Neelakanta 2018). In addition, the lack of safety on the road is a problem.

“Two-third of the drivers feel the profession is unattractive due to the lack of security and safety on the road. 49% of the respondent drivers said they drive vehicles even if they are feeling fatigued or sleepy. Overall, about 51% of the drivers stated that they rarely drive when they feel fatigued or sleepy. Overall, more than two-third (67.1%) of respondent truck drivers stated that they are overburdened with assignments, and thus resort to speeding to deliver their assignments on time”²⁵ (SaveLIFE Foundation 2020)

Initiatives to provide support have been underway, but solutions are required to provide and institutionalize these at scale. BPCL launched an in-house platform called FleetGenie in 2018, where in access to telemedicine and collateral - free working capital was enabled amongst other services. [Rivigo](#) has created an innovative relay model, where drivers change over from one pit stop to the next, so that their driving distances and hours per day are capped and they are able to return to their homes at the end of each day. [HumSafer Driver Safety Foundation](#) has created an “asset-light free AI-based Road safety solution” that uses gamification in the form of rewards and “gentle driving nudges” to drive better safety behaviors and reduce accidents²⁶. Technology startups are also focusing on enabling truck drivers and their helpers with information on “places where food and water is available and which repair shop is open”²⁷ (Dash 2020).

In addition to individual focused solutions, greater support for families and trucking communities is also the need of the hour. And this is an area of opportunity to strengthen

²² <https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/the-truck-driver-who-reinvented-shipping>

²³ <https://savelifefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/design-single-page-27th-feb-2020.pdf>

²⁴ <https://www.iru.org/resources/newsroom/driver-shortage-trucking-industry-india-perspective>

²⁵ <https://savelifefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/design-single-page-27th-feb-2020.pdf>

²⁶ <https://humsafer.ngo/programme/humsafer-app/>

²⁷ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/mobile-apps-come-to-help-of-truck-drivers-to-find-food-repair-shops-resting-places/articleshow/75362834.cms>

the ecosystem. Corporates have demonstrated intent to invest in this space. Mahindra has been focusing on the education of drivers' children through its Nanhi Kali programme. The Agarwal Movers Group has set up a 500-truck capacity Driver Seva Kendra in Rajasthan, thus providing drivers a place to bathe, sleep comfortably and be assured that their trucks and consignments are safe. Shriram Transport Finance has been providing finance to drivers to help them become truck owners, they have also utilised their CSR budgets to provide scholarships for the education of the children of the truck drivers.

As a priority in the short term, community focused interventions (including vaccination efforts) should focus on “key driver clusters, that is villages or districts which are home to several thousand drivers such as Mewat in the north and Anantapur in the south”²⁸, that can help the local governments and fleet owners facilitate return arrangements for the truck drivers. Efforts are already underway. Apollo Tyres and Ashok Leyland have jointly launched ‘Saarhi’, a COVID helpline that supports truck drivers, helpers and their family members by the provision of COVID19 consultation, vaccination guidance as well as consultation for other diseases²⁹ (Sen Gupta 2021). Similarly, HumSafer Driver Safety Foundation has launched “#DriveForOxygen ...whose proceeds will help elevate [truckers] to essential workers and provide them with incentives, healthcare, vaccinations and COVID-19 insurance coverage for them and their families”³⁰ (Wangchuk 2021).

Did You Know? Olympian Mirabai Chanu expressed her gratitude to truck drivers who helped her travel for training. In her early training days, truck drivers in Imphal gave her lifts from home to the sports academy. “What a wonderful gesture. We need more such stories to come out for people to appreciate the effort our athletes and sports people put in with support from common citizens to rise to the top. With such challenges to qualify and then win a medal is remarkable,” wrote a Twitter user (Sengupta 2021).³¹

²⁸ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/small-biz/sme-sector/hit-hard-by-the-virus-and-lack-of-demand-indias-trucking-industry-now-battles-shortage-of-drivers/articleshow/75173949.cms?from=mdr>

²⁹ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/covid-helpline-launched-for-truck-drivers-others/articleshow/83745887.cms>

³⁰ <https://www.thebetterindia.com/255209/oxygen-cylinders-supply-hyderabad-truck-drivers-humsafer-driver-safety-app-india-nor41/>

³¹ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/trending/olympian-mirabai-chanu-rewards-truck-drivers-who-helped-her-travel-for-training-101628253313845.html>