



## **MGNREAG and Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan**

### **What is the issue?**

- With the lockdown in place, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is proving to be a lifeline for the working poor in rural India.
- In this regard, the attempt at diluting it in the name of the Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan should be reconsidered.

### **What is the post-lockdown role of MGNREGA?**

- In April and part of May 2020, it was the absence of MGNREGA which accentuated rural distress.
- The Central government revised lockdown guidelines to allow MGNREGA work only from April 20, 2020.
- This was nearly a month after the nationwide lockdown was imposed.
- The governments released funds for it belatedly.
- But once the money reached the States, the results became evident.
- The number of households who got work under MGNREGA in April 2020 was the lowest in several years at 95 lakh.
- However, in May 2020, the number went up to 3.05 crore.
- Till the third week of June 2020, 2.84 crore households had got work.
- This is much higher when compared to the same months last year.
- With an average 23 days of work and a daily wage of Rs. 200, households who got work earned an average of Rs. 1,500 a month.
- Even though this is meagre, it shows the potential of MGNREGA to bring work and relief, provided it is further expanded.

### **How will the future of MGNREGA utilisation be?**

- The Central government released Rs. 38,000 crore for MGNREGA work, of which 70% has already been utilised.
- Most of the migrant workers have returned to their home States.
- Also, substantial numbers among them have completed the quarantine period.

- So, the demand for work under MGNREGA is bound to increase.

### **Is enough work being provided?**

- In the post-lockdown phase, as many as 1.82 crore workers who demanded work were turned back.
- Of the 8.07 crore workers who demanded work, work was provided only to 6.25 crore workers.
- In particular, in U.P., one third of the over 1 crore workers who had applied for work under MGNREGA were turned back.
- Bihar is another state that also has a large number of returning migrant workers.
- There, 12 lakh workers of the 41 lakh workers who applied were turned back.
- In spite of a legal provision of unemployment allowance, not a single rupee in compensation has been paid.
- Now that the summer monsoons have set in, this issue becomes all the more relevant.
- During the rainy season, even though demand is high, work provision is low.
- It is thus essential for the Centre to ensure that States are provided with the funds to pay unemployment allowance to all workers demanding work.

### **What is Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan and what are the concerns with it?**

- In the context of the need to strengthen MGNREGA, the Central government has announced a “new” scheme, the Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan.
- This is to provide work to migrant workers in 116 selected districts.
- The criteria for selection are unclear.
- E.g. the States of West Bengal and Chhattisgarh are omitted when reverse migration is particularly high in these States
- Of the Rs. 4,794 crore spent between June 20 and June 28, 2020, Bihar received more than 50% of the fund.
- But, Bihar has had a poor record of implementation of MGNREGA.
- [The elections are round the corner in Bihar and this fact cannot be totally ignored.]
- Secondly, the new scheme has listed 25 kinds of work.
- But it is clear that almost every single one of them is already covered under the convergence programmes of MGNREGA.
- Also, there is no new “skill mapping” required for this as stated, since this work is already covered under MGNREGA.
- The nature of the work is manual, mainly construction and earth work including laying cables for Internet connections in rural areas.
- It is unstated but clear that this will benefit private telecom companies.

- Most importantly, there are apprehensions about the new scheme's impact on the MGNREGA work in these selected districts.
- There is no clarity on this critical issue in the set of guidelines issued by the Ministry of Rural Development, the nodal Ministry for this scheme.
- Last year, under MGNREGA, in these 116 districts taken together, an average of just 43.7 workdays were created.
- This was lower than the national average of 50 days.
- This poor record of provision of work may have been one of the reasons for the higher rates of migration from these districts.
- So, instead of new schemes, MGNREGA could be expanded to give work to all workers.
- This is a legal right, whereas the Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan has no such legal binding on the administration.
- Also, the scheme is primarily meant for migrant workers in those districts where their numbers are 25,000 or more.
- That means in these selected districts women who comprise a smaller percentage of migrant workers will be largely excluded.
- However, women in these districts had a high demand for work.
- This is reflected in the fact that the average of women working in MGNREGA in these districts last year was 53.5%.
- This was higher than the average for the rest of India.
- So unless this work in 116 districts is in addition to MGNREGA, women will suffer.

### **What should the future measures be?**

- MGNREGA should not be diluted in the name of the Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan.
- The potential for MGNREGA to provide relief to the suffering of rural India should be utilised to its fullest capacity.
- This will also require a removal of the restriction of only one person per household to make every individual eligible.
- The cap of 100 days should be removed to expand it to at least 200 days.
- Unemployment allowance should be guaranteed for all those turned away from work.
- The Rs. 8,000 crore fund available to the States is clearly insufficient.
- It is therefore essential for the Central government to release the next set of funds without delay.

**Source: The Hindu**



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