

Role of Mgnrega in The Times of Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract:

Covid-19 has ushered in a renewed focus on health, sanitisation and, in unexpected ways, on the need for productive employment opportunities in rural India. MGNREGA, the rural employment guarantee programme, has had a mixed track record in terms of providing adequate employment to those who need it the most, the quality of asset creation and adequacy of wages offered. This paper makes a case for reorienting a small portion of MGNREGA spending to create micro-entrepreneurs out of the 'reverse migrating' masons, electricians, plumbers and others in rural areas who can directly contribute to augmenting health and sanitization infrastructure in the likely new normal. This will provide relief to those whose livelihoods have been severely impacted and eventually lower dependence on public finances. We propose approval of a new work type for sanitization works without any hard asset creation under MGNREGA and roping in the private sector for its project management skills to quickly skill up the returning migrants as well as to match work with workers on an ongoing basis.

Keywords: Rural Areas, Unemployment, MGNREGA, COVID-19

1. Introduction

In rural areas, major livelihood activities are irregular mainly due to seasonal fluctuations in agriculture and allied activities. This leads to periodic withdrawal from labour force, especially by the marginal labourers, who shift back and forth between what is reported as domestic and gainful work. Many workers migrate to other parts of the country in search of work. Lack of alternate livelihoods and skill development are the primary causes of migration from rural areas.

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