

Role of Social Security Scheme in the Management of Reverse Migration: A Study with Special Reference to Implementation MGNREGS in the State of Maharashtra

Dr. Chitralkha S. Rajuskar

Associate Professor, Karve Institute of Social Service, Pune, India

Abstract:

Poverty is an important issue in India, with rural poverty accounting for nearly 63 percent of poverty worldwide. It is more structural and rooted in caste, class, and religion. Migration is the geographic movement of people across a specified boundary to establish a new permanent or semi-permanent residence. According to the 2011 Census, there were 450 million internal migrants in India, with Maharashtra recording the highest internal migration. Migration is the geographic movement of people across a specified boundary to establish a new permanent or semi-permanent residence.

Migration within Maharashtra is more than five times that from other parts of the country. Migrants are forced to live under sub-human conditions in urban areas, but migration is helping them send remittance to rural areas. Social security schemes like wage employment and MGNREGS play a key role in sustaining the livelihood of the communities and coping with livelihood uncertainties. The COVID-19 pandemic has had multiple impacts on the unorganized sector, leading to the return of migrant workers and their families to rural areas. Social security schemes like MGNREGA play a key role in managing the livelihood of the communities.

Keywords:

Migrant Workers, Unorganized sector, MGNREGA, COVID 19, Poverty, Rural, Migration, Pandemic

Introduction:

Poverty is an important issue faced by our country. Poverty is not only a state of existence but also a process with many dimensions and complexities. Poverty can be persistent or transient, but transient poverty, if acute, can trap succeeding generations. The poor adopt all kinds of strategies to mitigate and cope with their poverty. 'According to an estimation, rural poverty accounts for nearly 63 percent of poverty worldwide, reaching 90 percent in some countries like Bangladesh and between 65 and 90 percent in sub-Saharan Africa (Khan, M.2011)'. India is not an exception to this. The causes of poverty are more complex and multidimensional, involving the forces of nature, market, and public policy (Khan, M.2011). In the Indian context, poverty is more structural and rooted in caste, class, and religion. The urban informal sector acts as a sponge for the labour that cannot find jobs in the formal sector and has strong rural links. Transient labour and remittances are a link between rural and urban poor households in many countries. (Khan, M.2011).

Migration is the geographic movement of people across a specified boundary to establish a new permanent or semi-permanent residence (Das, K. and Saha, S. 'nd'). Due to regional imbalances, rural

and tribal areas are prone to many challenges including poverty, unemployment, etc. Therefore rural to urban migration is taking place. There is no robust internal migration data, it makes it very difficult to track the migration of the unorganized sector. According to the Economic Survey of India (2018-19), in India, around 93 percent of the workforce is involved in the unorganized sector. However, it is estimated that more than 90% of working people in India are engaged in the informal economy, with states such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar accounting for more than 80% of workers in this sector (Patel, C. 2021), According to the 2011 Census, there were 450 million internal migrants in India by the 'Place of Last Residence' metric, thus accounting 37.7 percent of the total population (Registrar General of India 2011). Based on census trends, we estimate about 600 million internal migrants in 2020. Among these, one-third are interstate and inter-district migrants which accounts for 200 million, and within this 200 million, two-thirds are estimated to be migrant workers that roughly constitute 140 million (Gupta, S. 2020). Maharashtra records the highest internal migration. Migration within Maharashtra is more than five times that from other parts of the country (Chapia, H. 2019).

Migration in search of wage opportunities in the informal sector is called distress migration. With effect, migrants are forced to live under sub-human conditions in urban areas. Despite this, migration is helping migrants to send remittances to rural areas. To address those factors, creating employment opportunities in the rural area becomes an important strategy. Social security schemes like wage employment, and MGNREGS plays a crucial role in sustaining the livelihood of the communities and coping with livelihood uncertainties.

The livelihood source of the migrant workers has been devastated due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The livelihood of the migrant workers has been devastated and therefore it became a life-threatening and challenging event. Migrant workers have lost their jobs due to the pandemic, and the remittances have been stopped therefore rural households are in a financial crunch. In India, around 93 percent of the workforce is involved in the unorganized sector. Due to the informal work sector, this sector is prone to many calamities which result in the cut from the livelihood sustenance. The COVID-19 pandemic is worst affected by the unorganized sector, especially for people who migrated to urban areas in search of livelihood opportunities. Due to the pandemic, there have been multiple impacts of the loss of employment, depletion of savings, and fear of COVID-19 contamination and this has pushed unorganized sector people for reverse migration. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations report (2021) states that the migrant workers' return to rural areas has impacted the livelihoods of both migrant workers and their families in several ways, often resulting in the exacerbation of their vulnerability. Many returned migrants are now in a situation to find new livelihood opportunities to deal with the crisis. However, they often experience greater difficulties and additional constraints, including greater loss of earnings and stigmatization or discrimination related to migrants in general or potential carriers of the virus in the specific pandemic situation. In this context, social security schemes like MGNREGA plays a key role in managing the livelihood of the communities. Therefore it is important to explore how the social security schemes played an important role. The proposed study intends to understand the role of MGNREGA in managing reverse migration.

Migration, causes, impact

According to the Economic Survey of India (2018-19), almost 93 percent workforce is informal. This statistic is tremendously significant compared to formal sector employment at 6.5 percent only. In India, according to official data, over 10 million internal migrant workers were forced to leave urban areas and

return home by foot during the March – June 2020 period. (PTI, 2020). After massive migration to the rural areas, the rural employment guarantee helped to initiate steps to generate labour-intensive opportunities to give regular wages to the poor villagers.

Structural inequalities are forcing communities to get more exposure to poverty, especially during the COVID-19 period. Moreover, poverty is now rising due to the COVID-19 crisis. All evidence points to increasing inequality as well. The pandemic and subsequent lockdown measures have affected urban areas disproportionately but have had a substantial impact on rural residents. Travel and transport restrictions disrupt the livelihood of the rural poor, many of whom depend on mobility, seasonal and migrant workers, and remittances. In some countries, there has been a massive return of migrants to rural areas, largely due to job loss.

Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants:

The rapid spread of this highly contagious disease prompted the Government of India to implement a nationwide lockdown with strict restrictions on mobility and transportation links summarily cut off overnight. The rapid spread of the pandemic caught countries across the world off guard, resulting in widespread lockdowns that clamped down on mobility, commercial activities, and social interactions (Rajan, et. al 2020). COVID-19 has been one of the longest epidemics which has resulted in paralyzing the health sector, economic activities, and so on. The unplanned lockdown affected social interactions, life, livelihood, and the economy in general and has exposed structural inequalities in particular. It has created double vulnerabilities in the life of migrants throughout the country. The pandemic has had far-reaching impacts on the existence of the migrants. Migrants were stranded due to the sudden lockdown and later could reach their destination areas.

Reverse migration during COVID-19

Poverty is rising due to the COVID-19 crisis which is directly impacting the lives of the common masses. The pandemic and subsequent lockdown measures have affected urban areas disproportionately but have had a substantial impact on rural residents (Lee, Y. et al: 2011). Due to the strict COVID-19 lockdown, the unorganized sector has migrated to rural areas, therefore, the pressure increased on adequate rural resources resulting in massive hunger and distress.

Maharashtra is one of the states to start the MGNREGS scheme immediately after the lockdown, this helped rural people to get employment security to some extent. MGNREGS' role in addressing COVID-19 reversed migration. MGNREGS scheme immediately after the lockdown, helped rural people to get employment security to some extent. In Maharashtra, which has been the worst hit in the pandemic with the highest number of Covid-19 cases, less than one-third of the gram panchayats have participated in MGNREGA (Sharma, N, 2021). A total of 3.82 lakh workers, the highest in the state, have enrolled under the MGNREGA in the backward Vidarbha region till the third week of May (Khapre, 2020). While the highest number of labourers were enrolled under MGNREGA from the 11 districts of Vidarbha region, a total of 76,651 workers have been enrolled in the coastal Konkan region (excluding the two districts of Mumbai City and Mumbai Suburbs). The response in five districts of the North Maharashtra region, meanwhile, was moderate at 54,708, with higher demand for jobs in tribal belts. In the five prosperous sugar belt districts of Western Maharashtra, enrolment has been the lowest at 16,082 (Khapre, 2020).

Role of MGNREGA to address poverty and reduce rural to urban migration:

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGA) is the largest flagship program of the central government. This program aims to provide 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to undertake unskilled manual work. This scheme is on one hand demand-driven and on the other, treats employment as a right of rural households. Thus, the scheme provides income directly to unskilled workers in rural areas (Ahuja, U et al., 2011). The MGNREGA is most beneficial to the rural poor people as they have fewer resources to fulfil their livelihood needs. The key objective of this program is to stop migration from rural areas to urban areas. Studies have found that there are large leakages amidst large unmet demand for work. In particular, the failure of MGNREGA is attributed to poor administrative capacity to implement the scheme (Datta A., 2016). Though it is considered as a right, implementation of the same is interlinked with many factors.

This program helps rural masses to enhance their livelihood securities. This program helps rural unskilled people get guaranteed employment opportunities during distress. The MGNREGS has shown a significant improvement in different aspects. The number of households associated with MGNREGA works has been increasing consistently, and the number of days for which employment has been provided has also increased. Another important aspect of MGNREGS is the increasing participation of women in it. It not only employs them but by giving a wage rate equal to that of a man, it has empowered the women economically as well as socially (Ahuja, U et al., 2011).

Role of MGNREGS in COVID 19:

In India, the pandemic precipitated a severe 'crisis of mobility, with migrant labourers in many major cities seeking to return to their hometowns. Their desperate attempts to return home by any means available rendered the lockdown ineffective in several areas, prompting clashes with authorities, last-minute policy relief, and, eventually, the arrangement of transport measures (Rajan, et. al 2020). After returning home, the migrants had to search for work opportunities for their survival. MGNREGS played a crucial role in providing employment and livelihood opportunities to the rural people and unorganized sector people who migrated from urban areas during the lockdown.

India has been largely successful in eradicating poverty by expanding social security nets targeting the rural poor. It was possible by providing basic income via the PM KISAN Yojana or access to food subsidies through PDS or health coverage through Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana and access to employment through MGNREGA (Rajan, et. al 2020). Most of the unorganized sector people migrated to rural areas to protect themselves from COVID-19, at the same time, they were jobless as industries were shut down. During this severe crisis, the MGNREGS provides employment opportunities to protect the lives of people from the unorganized sector.

For return migrants, social security provisions such as the MGNREGA scheme, which guarantees rural employment, are integral. The pressure on the government to create income-generation opportunities for migrants at the source will be enormous. Between April 1 and May 20, 3.5 million workers registered for work under the scheme, indicating the sudden increase in dependence on vital social security schemes (Chauhan, C. 2020). 'Out of 7.18 crore households that availed of work under the rural job guarantee scheme from April 1, 2020, to March 26, 2021, over 60.80 lakh households had

completed 100 days of employment (Singh, S. 2020). Despite these expenses, it is important to explore the contribution of MGNREGS in the management of reverse migration in the state of Maharashtra.

The state of Maharashtra has implemented the MGNREGS scheme successfully during the COVID-19 pandemic. But it is important to explore and understand the kind of contribution and role it has played to manage the reverse migration during COVID-19 to manage the COVID-19 situation in terms of providing livelihood securities. Therefore, this proposed research tries to explore this phenomenon from the field perspective.

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