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AN REVIEW OF EMPLOYMENT & INDIVIDUAL LIVELIHOODS DURING POST PANDEMIC PERIOD IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT:

The objective of this study is to analyze the implications and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for lives, livelihoods and the economy in India. The study focus on saving lives and preserving livelihoods are imperatives, since both taken together shape the well-being of people and it is for the government to reconcile these objectives instead of letting it be posed as an either-or choice creating a fake dilemma. In addition the study also deals with effect of lockdown

and burden on poor people. The response from government for recovery also found to be very difficult. India has hidden behind the pretext of diversity to cover socially sanctioned discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, and gender. The Covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdown have not only cast a spotlight on how vulnerable such a large share of India's population is, but also how much more susceptible it is when compared with others.

Keywords: Livelihoods, COVID-19, population, pandemic

Introduction:

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a dramatic loss of human life worldwide and presents an unprecedented challenge to public health, food systems and the world of work. The economic and social disruption caused by the pandemic is devastating: tens of millions of people are at risk of falling into extreme poverty, while the number of undernourished people, currently estimated at nearly 690 million, could increase by up to 132 million by the end of the year.

The pandemic has been affecting the entire food system and has laid bare its fragility. Border closures, trade restrictions and confinement measures have been preventing farmers from accessing markets, including for buying inputs and selling their produce, and agricultural workers from harvesting crops, thus disrupting domestic and international food supply chains and reducing access to healthy, safe and diverse diets. The pandemic has decimated jobs and placed millions of livelihoods at risk. As breadwinners lose jobs, fall ill and die, the food security and nutrition of millions of women and men are under threat, with those in low-income countries, particularly the most marginalized populations, which include small-scale farmers and indigenous peoples, being hardest hit.

ISSUES FACED BY PUBLIC

Millions of workers regularly face high levels of working poverty, malnutrition and poor health, and suffer from a lack of safety and labour protection as well as other types of abuse. With low and irregular incomes and a lack of social support, many of them are spurred to continue working, often in unsafe conditions, thus exposing themselves and their families to additional risks. Further, when experiencing income losses, they may resort to negative coping strategies, such as distress sale of assets, predatory loans or child labour. Migrant workers are particularly vulnerable, because they face risks in their transport, working and living conditions and struggle to access support measures put in place by governments. Guaranteeing the safety and health of workers from primary producers to those involved in processing, transport and retail, including street vendors as well as better incomes and protection, will be critical to saving lives and protecting public health, people's livelihoods and food security.

CRISIS DUE TO COVID-19

In the COVID-19 crisis food security, public health, and employment and labour issues, in particular workers' health and safety, converge. Adhering to workplace safety and health practices and ensuring access to decent work and the protection of labour rights in all industries will be crucial in addressing the human dimension of the crisis. Immediate and purposeful action to save lives and livelihoods should include extending social protection towards universal health coverage and income support for those most affected. These include workers in the informal economy and in poorly protected and low-paid jobs, including youth, older workers, and migrants. Particular

attention must be paid to the situation of women, who are over-represented in low-paid jobs and care roles. Different forms of support, including cash transfers, child allowances and healthy school meals, shelter and food relief initiatives, support for employment retention and recovery, and financial relief for businesses, including micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. In designing and implementing such measures it is essential that governments work closely with employers and workers.

Countries dealing with existing humanitarian crises or emergencies are particularly exposed to the effects of COVID-19. Responding swiftly to the pandemic, while ensuring that humanitarian and recovery assistance reaches those most in need, is critical.

Now is the time for global solidarity and support, especially with the most vulnerable in our societies, particularly in the emerging and developing world. Only together can we overcome the intertwined health and social and economic impacts of the pandemic and prevent its escalation into a protracted humanitarian and food security catastrophe, with the potential loss of already achieved development gains.

Priority should be given to addressing underlying food security and malnutrition challenges, tackling rural poverty, in particular through more and better jobs in the rural economy, extending social protection to all, facilitating safe migration pathways and promoting the formalization of the informal economy.

EFFETS OF LOCKDOWN

The side effect of these measures has been a major supply shock, as workers are forced to stay home and many businesses are temporarily shut down. At the same time, demand for many goods and services has plummeted, as households and companies are no longer able, either physically or financially, to maintain their spending. In this unprecedented situation, as countries grapple to minimise the impact of the lockdown on the livelihoods of their citizens, the usual trade-offs between support and incentives, and between generosity and fiscal sustainability, have been temporarily laid aside. Concerns about undermining incentives to work appear secondary as workers have been asked to stay at home; worries of fiscal sustainability have been put on pause as policy makers move fast in attempts to avert a deeper social and economic crisis.

SUPPORTING THE PANDEMIC-RELATED EXPENDITURES

Beyond cash transfers, the most direct way governments can support households in the immediate term is to pay or delay their bills, or to provide direct in-kind support. Policies of this type have been announced in countries, ranging from support for health-related expenses arising from COVID-19 to moratoria on taxes.

Support for expenses arising directly from the pandemic, such as for health care, are well targeted with little leakage. In the United States, for example, where health insurance is very often employer-provided, rising job losses have meant increased numbers of uninsured people. The Government has announced that it will meet the hospital and testing charges incurred by uninsured COVID-19 patients.

Employees find themselves suddenly out of work, unable to pay rent or to feed themselves, hundreds of thousands of migrants and daily-wage labourers made a desperate attempt to go back from cities to their hometowns; some finding themselves rounded up in vain by authorities to be placed in makeshift shelters.

The ensuing severe labour shortage is disrupting agriculture and supply chains. Bottlenecks in obtaining e-passes and police aggression towards those leaving their homes, truckers abandoning their loads, a lack of workers for production, loading and unloading of vehicles, are further crippling the economy.

Employers are struggling to make payroll, either because they cannot physically deliver the payments to their workers and they are not set up to make electronic transfers, or because the slump in business means they don't have the funds. Many informal and formal micro and small businesses will inevitably fold. Most self-employed workers – many of them survivalist micro-entrepreneurs, hawkers and small vendors, domestic helps, or gig workers – have lost their incomes because they are locked in their homes and/or have seen demand dry up. Working remotely is not an option for the socio-economically disadvantaged relying on physical labour and the provision of location-based services for income.

COMING OUT OF CRISIS

First, an economic crisis such as this transforms the fiscal calculus. The government must loosen its fiscal restraint to help the economy stabilise, recover, and grow.

Second, businesses need funding to tide over the crisis. Not only should there be a moratorium on loans, but the government also needs to ensure the provision of working capital at low interest rates to start-ups, and small and medium businesses. The effect on bank capitalisation needs to be factored in. Once the pandemic is under control, the government must foster investments in infrastructure – this is one of the fastest and most direct ways to create jobs.

Third, reducing the tax compliance burden is critical; especially for small businesses, this is a good time to simplify payments and expand the net, even if no additional revenue is expected at this time.

Fourth, governments can support businesses by providing wage subsidies directly to workers through digital payments. This will ensure that the workforce is recorded and registered, enabling the government to reach out to them, now and in the future. It will assist businesses to retain workers at a time of stressed cash flow.

GOVERNMENT MEASURES

Fifth, the government must enable universal access to social safety nets, including healthcare, maternity, disability and pension benefits for all workers. Crises like this one not only underscore the need for healthcare, but such benefits can also help smooth consumption during times of distress and demand shocks.

Sixth, the harmonisation of the labyrinth of labour laws into four codes has gone some ways in clearing out the regulatory logjams that have plagued us for many years, but the rules for the codes have yet to be defined. Investors value certainty greatly. Leaving our labour codes vague undermines one the objectives, a clear, consistent and implementable labour code is good for business and investment as well as for workers.

CONCLUSION:

Finally, despite a deepening deficit, we cannot lose sight of the fact that our education and skill training systems are in desperate need of an overhaul. These will demand greater funds, but the first priority must be to improve access to good-quality education for children who are losing out right now. Children are not in school during the lockdown. While the middle- and upper-class have access to distance learning, those from disadvantaged households do not. So, this sets the children from disadvantaged backgrounds even further behind in their trajectories.

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