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Livelihood Opportunity to Urban Poor through Guaranteed Employment Schemes during COVID-19 Pandemic in India: A Study of Himachal and Jharkhand

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Abstract

Economic shutdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic have had negative impacts on urban economy in general and on the livelihood of urban poor in particular. Informal workers represent 61% of all workers globally - a total of 2 billion workers worldwide. Of these, an estimated 1.6 billion which is 80% could see their livelihoods destroyed due to the lockdowns and related shelter-at-home restrictions in response to COVID-19. City dwellers particularly the poor informal sector workers have taken the maximum brunt of the pandemic. Lockdowns, social distancing norms, shutting down of markets, factories and allied activities have paralyzed the work opportunities for these sections of urban populations. Urban unemployment which was in stress, got sharpened further during the initial weeks of the pandemic. During the pandemic many states like Orissa, Jharkhand, Kerala and Himachal Pradesh took proactive action apart from the union government to minimise the distresses of the urban poor by introducing urban employment guarantee schemes in different names. The present paper is an effort to study the experiences of two states i.e., Himachal Pradesh and Jharkhand on the basis of secondary data collected from the departments of urban development.

Keywords: *Pandemic, mmsagy, msy, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, urban employment guarantee yojana*

Introduction

Long-term economic shutdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic have had negative impacts on the urban economy. According to a Centre for Monitoring

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Indian Economy (CMIE) report, India's lockdown order led to a jump in unemployment rate from 21 per cent to 26 per cent in mid-April and a weekly decline in labour market participation (*The Economic Times, 2020, April 29*). Using a section of the National Disaster Management Act (NDMA), 2005, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) issued a number of advisories to state governments, including order for restricting the movement of migrants along with the provisions that must be made for them (Minister of Home Affairs, March 29, April 3). State governments were tasked with providing temporary shelters with basic amenities for migrants who remained in destination areas, return migrants were to be kept in quarantine for 14 days in home states, landlords were asked to defer rents for migrants, and employers were asked to give them wages for the period of the lockdown. Historically, pandemics have hit minorities and people at the bottom of the socio-economic spectrum disproportionately (Wade, 2020; Duggal, 2020). They often suffer more from pre-existing conditions due to more exposure to risks, economic difficulties, and limited access to services (Wade, 2020). The rapid spread of COVID-19 has exposed some of these old problems and inequalities in a new light (Kihato and Landau, 2020).The plight of the poorest sections of society, particularly migrants who were trudging miles to be back home, had lost their daily wages and were dependent on either government support or private charity for food and shelter.

Response of the Government towards Urban Poor during Pandemic

As the pandemic began spreading its tentacles first in major cities and towns, both Centre and States were quick to announce a number of initiatives in the forms of cash transfers, food ration, temporary shelters apart from enlarging the existing flagship programs to lessen the hardship. The union government announced an immediate 1.7 lakh crore economic package (for both rural and urban populations) under the existing *Prime Minister Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY)* to ensure free food and a limited cash transfer support was extended to the most vulnerable citizens, many of whom were residing in urban areas. For instance, cash transfers included Rs.1000 to be provided to nearly 30 million poor pensioners, widows and disabled and a Rs.500 monthly deposit to be made to 200 million women holding *Jan Dhan* accounts (both components for a period of 3 months). Beyond cash, the government extended food rations to 800 million beneficiaries registered under the National Food Security Act. Further, to reach out to the urban poor, the government extended a free grain entitlement of 5kg rice/wheat per person and 1kg chickpeas per household to an estimated 80 million migrants (who were not covered under National Food Security Act or State Public Distribution System). In the second tranche of economic relief package announced in June, the Union government launched a number of tailor-made schemes to address the woes of urban poor. Among these was the easy

access to credit provision for street vendors who were to be provided with an initial working capital of up to Rs 10,000 to restart businesses that took the brunt of the lockdown. The intervention aimed at supporting 50 lakh such vendors and providing liquidity up to Rs 5000 crores. Given that access to housing remains a major concern for urban poor especially the migrant workers, affordable rental housing scheme was curated under the existing flagship program called the *Prime Minister Awas Yojana*. The idea was to convert government-funded housing in cities to rental complexes through public-private partnerships. Additionally, efforts were made to generate employment opportunities for the urban poor during the pandemic through Self Help Groups (SHGs) that can produce face masks and hand sanitizers. Beyond the Centre, most state governments have launched their programs and initiatives to lessen the hardships of urban poor and migrant workers. States like Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Telangana were far more proactive than the Centre on this. In this paper we are discussing about Himachal Pradesh and Jharkhand where their respective state governments announced Urban Wage Employment Initiative for urban informal labour to carry out the work identified by the Urban Local Bodies (Observer Research Foundation, 2020).

URBAN EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE SCHEMES BY HIMACHAL PRADESH: *Mukhya Mantri Shahri Ajeevika Guarantee Yojana (MMSAGY)*

The governor, Himachal Pradesh keeping in view the scenario of Covid-19 pandemic was pleased to notify the scheme known as *Mukhya Mantri Shahri Ajeevika Guarantee Yojana (MMSAGY)* to enhance livelihood security in urban areas by providing 120 days of guaranteed wage employment to every household in the financial year 2020-21.

Objective of the Scheme: The objective of the scheme is to enhance livelihood security in urban areas by providing 120 days of guaranteed wage employment to every household in a financial year.

Goals of *MMSAGY*: To ensure livelihood security to urban household by providing a guaranteed employment for 120 days; to facilitate skill enhancement of persons engaged in waged labour jobs; to provide them better livelihood opportunity; to set up their own enterprises by imparting entrepreneurship training as well as subsidy linked credit linkages; and to strengthen urban infrastructure and provisioning of quality civic amenities in the urban local bodies (ULB).

Eligibility Criteria for the *MMSAGY Yojana*: All adult members of the household who register under this scheme will be eligible to work. To register they

have to be: local resident of the ULB (they should be residing within the jurisdiction of the ULB either in their own house or on rent); willing to do unskilled work at projects being executed or in sanitation services being provided by the ULB; household must comprise of husband, wife and their minor children. However, only adult members of household shall be eligible to work. The upper age limit for providing work shall be 65 years.

Components of *MMSAGY*

Guaranteed Employment: It will aim to provide guaranteed 120 days employment to eligible beneficiaries in urban local bodies to ensure livelihood security. The ULBs shall not employ an eligible beneficiary for more than 120 days in any financial year.

Maximum Period of Employment: The maximum period for which employment will be provided to a household shall be 120 days.

Skill Training: The eligible beneficiaries under this scheme will also be provided skill training under *Deen Dyal Antodaya - National Urban Livelihood Mission (DAY-NULM),* to create further opportunities for better livelihood.

Bank Linkage: The eligible beneficiary skilled under this scheme will be facilitated to apply for loans under DAY-NULM.

Coverage and Duration: The scheme will be implemented in all ULBs and cantonment boards (CBs) in Himachal Pradesh. The scheme shall initially be operational till 31.03.2021.

Application Procedure: Any eligible beneficiary may apply to get registered with the ULB as per Annexure-B. Application can also be filled online at portal specified for the purpose. All eligible beneficiaries of a household will be registered through a single application only. No separate applications are required.

Permissible Activities: All eligible beneficiaries will be employed in the following permissible activities in ULBs. In any ongoing or new admissible work under any Government of H.P. /Government of India scheme for which funds are available with ULB. In any admissible work under 15th Finance Commission or 5th State Finance Commission for which grant-in-aid provided to the ULBs. Sanitation Work/Services as admissible under Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016 and *Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM).* The ULBs shall not start any muster-roll linked

work/activity under this scheme and shall get eligible beneficiary employed only in the works specified as per 7 (a). The ULBs shall make enabling provision in all new contracts to be awarded for engaging eligible beneficiaries under *MMSAGY* as unskilled workers by the implementing agency. For the works already awarded, the ULBs will coordinate with implementing agency to whom, the work has been awarded for engaging the registered eligible beneficiaries under *MMSAGY*.

Payment of Wages: Eligible beneficiary under the scheme will be entitled to a minimum wage notified by the state government. Equal wages are to be paid to both male and female workers. Wages will be directly deposited in the bank account of eligible beneficiaries by the ULBs on fortnightly basis, not later than 7 days after completion of 15 days employment. The payment of wages as prescribed will be made after due verification of the attendance by the junior engineer or any other officer/official authorized by the ULB. The payment made above will be adjusted/ deducted from the bills of the implementing agency before making its payment.

Skill Training under *DAY-NULM*: The eligible beneficiary will be provided skill training with entitlement to minimum wage as notified by the government up to a maximum of four weeks, only after doing wage employment of 30 days under *MMSAGY*.

Bank Linkage: The eligible beneficiary provided skill training above, willing to start their own enterprise will be linked to the banks under Self-Employment Programme (SEP) of *DAY-NULM*.

Power to Review: The state government may review and amend these guidelines at any time for its smooth implementation in the ULBs.

URBAN EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE SCHEMES BY JHARKHAND: *Mukhyamantri Shramik (Shahri Rozgar Manjuri for Kamgar)*

Jharkhand government has launched a new *Mukhyamantri Shramik (Shahri Rozgar Manjuri for Kamgar) Yojana* job card for poor people in urban areas. Under this scheme, the Jharkhand government will provide employment to urban unskilled labourers. If the government is unable to provide employment, they will be given unemployment allowance. Under this scheme, labourers will be provided work for at least 100 days, just like Mahatma Gandhi Employment Guarantee Scheme. Amid the coronavirus lockdown, a large number of migrant labourers had lost their jobs and returned to their native states. Now it is the responsibility of the respective state governments to ensure that these migrant workers get employment in their own states.

Eligibility Criteria for (MSY) *Shramik Yojana* Jharkhand: The person should be of 18 years and above. He/she should be staying in urban areas since April 1, 2015. Applicant shouldn't have the *MNREGA* card in rural areas. Daily wage workers, staying in government shelters, for the last three years would be eligible for the new scheme.

Major Benefits: Employment will be given to the migrant labourers returned to Jharkhand, through the scheme. In this, both skilled and unskilled labourers will be provided equal employment opportunities. Employment will be given for at least 100 days. Applicants will be given employment cards and information will be written about what work they will do and for how long they will stay employed. Any person older than 18 years will be able to avail the benefit of the scheme, only if he is a resident of the state. Online and offline applications can be made under the scheme.

Key Features of Scheme: The new Jharkhand CM Job Guarantee Scheme for Urban Poor will help the migrant workers who returned to urban Jharkhand after the corona outbreak. More than 5 lakh migrant workers stuck outside the state returned to Jharkhand since May 1 during the coronavirus pandemic spread. The Jharkhand state rural development department has done a skill mapping of 2.5 lakh workers. It was revealed that 30% of workers who returned from different states were unskilled labourers.

Objectives of *Mukhyamantri Shramik* Scheme: The main objective of *Mukhyamantri Shramik* is to enhance livelihood security in Jharkhand State by providing a guaranteed 100 days wage employment in a financial year.

***Mukhyamantri Shramik Yojana*:** Jharkhand government has launched a job guarantee scheme called *Mukhyamantri Shramik Yojana*. Under the Yojana, urban workers are able to demand a maximum of 100 days of work.

Features of the Scheme

Wages: The wages under Yojana are likely to be at least 40 percent higher than Rs. 194 a day provided under the *MGNREGA* program in the state. The minimum wage per day in Jharkhand ranges from Rs 274.81 to Rs 438.39 based on the skill of the workers. The wages will be credited to the bank account of workers, either after work or within seven days of the completion of work. In any situation, the payment has to be made within 15 days of the completion of work.

Nature of Work: The work will be demand-based and divided into categories like cleanliness, water harvesting, tree plantation, public works construction or repair and managing shelter homes, etc. Workers will be paid the minimum wage as notified by the state government.

Unemployment Allowance: The scheme will also have a provision for unemployment allowance, where a person who has asked for work does not get it within 15 days will be liable to be paid one-fourth of the minimum wage as an allowance for the first month, half the wage in the second month, and the full minimum wage amount in the third month of no work.

Job Cards: Urban workers will also be registered and they would be provided job cards. A special website is also being designed, similar to the website functions of *MGNREGS*.

Implementation: The scheme will be implemented by the urban development and housing department through the state urban livelihood mission. Municipal commissioners, executive offices, or special officers of municipal bodies will be the nodal officer of the scheme (https://msy.jharkhand.gov.in/).

Implementation of Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme in Himachal Pradesh

The implementation and performance of urban employment guarantee schemes namely *MMSAGY* in the ten districts in the state of Himachal Pradesh is as under: -

Table 1
Registration and Issued Job Cards under *MMSAGY*

Sr. No.	District	Urban poor/BPL	Total registered	No. of applicants issued job card
1.	Shimla	3348	518 (15.4%)	398 (76.8%)
2.	Una	1951	557 (28.5%)	460 (82.5%)
3.	Hamirpur	915	68 (7.4%)	53 (77.3%)
4.	Bilaspur	1062	377(35.4%)	377(100%)
5.	Solan	1137	22 (1.9%)	22 (100%)
6.	Sirmour	1550	396 (25.5%)	392(98.9%)
7.	Mandi	2095	747 (35.6%)	555 (74.2%)
8.	Kangra	2267	924 (40.7%)	739 (79.9%)
9.	Kullu	470	102 (21.7%)	35 (34.3%)
10.	Chamba	1180	360 (30.5%)	289(80.2%)
Total		**15975**	**4071 (25.4%)**	**3320(81.5%)**

Source: Department of Urban Development, Himachal Pradesh, November, 2020

There are 15975 urban poor as per the records of state urban development

department out which 25.4 per cent have registered for this scheme. Out of 4071 total registered applicants, various municipal bodies issued the job cards to 3320 applicants which constitute 81.5 per cent. The highest applications for the registration were received in district Kangra (40.7 percent) followed by Mandi (35.6 percent), Bilaspur (35.4 percent) and Chamba (30.5 percent). The district Bilaspur and Solan were the two districts that issued the job cards to all their registered applicants, followed by Sirmaur (98.9 percent), Una (82.5 percent), Chamba (80.2 percent). However, the applications for the registration under this scheme were very less.

Table 2
Assigned Work and Types of Work under *MMSAGY*

Sr. No.	District	No. of applicants assigned work	No. of beneficiaries accepted/refused		Work type	
			Denied	Agreed	Infrastructure	Sanitation
1.	Shimla	398	157(39.4%)	241(60.5%)	52(21.5%)	189(78.4%)
2.	Una	450	364(80.8%)	86(19.1%)	19(22%)	67(78%)
3.	Hamirpur	40	0	40(100%)	30(75%)	10(25%)
4.	Bilaspur	337	0	337(100%)	156(46.2%)	181(53.7%)
5.	Solan	22	10(45.4%)	12(54.5%)	0	12(100%)
6.	Sirmour	392	94(23.9%)	298(76%)	272(91.2%)	26(8.7%)
7.	Mandi	550	14(2.5%)	536(97.4%)	355(66.2%)	181(33.7%)
8.	Kangra	567	91(16%)	476(83.9%)	79(16.5%)	397(83.4%)
9.	Kullu	5	1(2%)	4(8%)	0	4(100%)
10.	Chamba	102	0	102(100%)	3534.3%)	67(65.6%)
Total		**2863**	**731(25.5%)**	**2132(74.4%)**	**998(46.8%)**	**1134(53.1%)**

Source: Urban Development Department, Government of HP, 2020

The previous table showed that there were of total 3320 applicants who received job cards from their respective urban local bodies. The applicants to whom the job cards were issued, 86.2 percent of them were assigned the work under the *MMSAGY* and the card holders who agreed to work under this scheme was 74.4 percent. However, about one fourth card holders denied the assignments.

The work type which was offered to the applicants of *MMSAGY* - 53.1 per cent was related to sanitation and 46.8 per cent was related to infrastructure development.

Implementation of Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme in Jharkhand

The implementation and performance of *Mukhyamantri Shramik Yojana*, the urban employment guarantee scheme in Jharkhand is as under:

Table 3
District Wise Performance of *MSY* in Jharkhand

Sr. No.	District	Job card applications received	Issued job card	Demand for work application received	No. of job card holders' assigned work
1.	Bokaro	353	140(39.6%)	24	20 (83.3%)
2.	Chatra	127	65 (51.1%)	11	11 (100%)
3.	Deoghar	2681	1916(71.4%)	14	13(92.8%)
4.	Dhanbad	3703	1827 (49.9%)	132	117(88.6%)
5.	Dumka	152	92 (60.5%)	9	0
6.	East Sanghbhum	629	451(71.7%)	55	40(72.7%)
7.	Garhwa	1170	981 (83.8%)	3	0
8.	Giridih	245	77 (31.4%)	5	5(100%)
9.	Godda	323	128(39.6%)	11	9 (81.8%)
10.	Gumla	162	122 (51.8%)	0	0
11.	Hazaribagh	231	106 (45.8%)	34	34(100%)
12.	Jamtara	342	105 (30.7%)	4	1 (25%)
13.	Khunti	88	77 (87.5%)	20	20(100%)
14.	Kodarma	199	146(73.3%)	12	11(91.6%)
15.	Latehar	83	59 (71%)	11	11 (100%)
16.	Lohardaga	74	53 (71.6%)	30	24 (80%)
17.	Pakur	84	49 (58.3%)	6	6 (100%)
18.	Palamu	636	475(74.6%)	55	48(87.2%)
19.	PashchimiSinghbhum	102	65 (63.7%)	6	0
20.	Ramgarh	373	118(31.6%)	19	19(100%)
21.	Ranchi	2058	1263(61.3%)	44	14(31.8%)
22.	Sahibganj	697	523 (77%)	28	22(78.5%)
23.	SaraikelaKharsawan	234	147 (62.8%)	32	32 (100%)
24.	Simdega	157	143 (91%)	66	41 (62.1%)
Total		**14,903**	**9,245 (62%)**	**631(6.82%)**	**498 (78.9%)**

Source: Department of Urban Development, Himachal Pradesh, 2020

The application received for job card of *MSY* was 14903 and till November, 2020 the urban development of the state issued the same cards to 62 per cent applicants. However, very few job card holders demanded work under this scheme which constitute to 6.82 per cent. The work was assigned to 78.9 per cent job holders who applied for the same. Among 24 districts Gumla was the district where 122 applicants received job cards under *MSY* out of total 162 applicants, but not even single card holder applied for the job or work assignments. There were three districts Dumka, Garhah, and PashchimiSighbhum where the respective ULBs were not able to assign the work under *MSY* to even a single applicant.

Conclusion

The experience of implementation and performance of urban employment guarantee schemes reveals that these schemes have been launched by the respective

state governments in response to the COVID-19 crises for compensating urban poor in the jurisdiction of related urban local bodies. Data of selected two states shows, that the people in Himachal Pradesh and Jharkhand have shown interest in the scheme as they have been applied for the issue of job cards. After applying and getting job cards, very less card holders showed interest to demand or apply for work. Registration under urban employment scheme by urban poor is only one forth in both the states. This shows less involvement of people under urban employment guarantee programme which was an initiative to overcome the problem of unemployment during the time of Covid-19. Less people are registered under the schemes and benefits of the scheme have not fully reached maximum number of people in the urban areas. So, in this matter government should take necessary steps to increase the registration under these schemes. Job cards issued to registered applicants by the Himachal Pradesh government, is more in number as compared to Jharkhand. The work assigned to job card holders is also more in Himachal as compared to Jharkhand. Work assigned to job card holders under urban employment schemes is related to sanitation and infrastructure. Although the performance of Himachal is better than Jharkhand, still a large group of people in both the states are not getting benefits of the scheme as expected. Therefore, the government should ensure that the work is assigned to all the applicants who have applied for work and this can be achieved through effective management of different urban local bodies of the states towards urban employment guarantee scheme. The implementing agencies i.e., department of urban development in the selected states have been able to provide jobs to the applicants related to sanitation and infrastructure, moreover the share of sanitation is big.

The employment guarantee schemes would be highly beneficial to job providers and applicants if the possibilities are explored as are in *MGNREGA*. Many skilled or semi-skilled people have been in trouble due to COVID-19 situation in the urban area, therefore the possibility is to be explored to cover such probable applicants under this scheme instead of just unskilled persons. This scheme is an initiative by the state government on temporary basis in response to unemployment during Covid-19. Right now, no separate fund is provided to this scheme. After looking at the application received for registration under this scheme in Himachal and Jharkhand, it is suggested that such type of schemes should be introduced in the Parliament too, so that these can be launched at the national level as has been in the case of *MGNREGA*.

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