



The shape of an urban employment guarantee

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Such a programme will not only improve worker incomes but also have multiplier effects on the economy

- India is in the midst of a massive jobs crisis.
- The unemployment rate has reached a 45-year high (6.1%) in 2017-18 as per leaked data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) report of the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO).
- According to the PLFS report, the unemployment problem is especially aggravated in India's cities and towns.
- Aside from unemployment, low wages and precarity continue to be widespread.
- In urban India the majority of the population continues to work in the informal sector.

Reviving India's towns

- Both State and Central governments tend to treat towns as "engines of growth" for the economy rather than spaces where thousands toil to make a living.
- Programmes such as the Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana (1997) that included an urban wage employment component have made way for those focussed on skilling and entrepreneurship.
- India's small and medium towns are particularly ignored in the State's urban imagination.
- However, national-level urban programmes such as the Smart Cities Mission and the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) only benefit a fraction of them.
- Further, with untrammelled urbanisation, they are facing more challenges due to the degradation of urban ecological commons.
- Hence, we need new ways to promote the sustainable development of

India's small and medium towns.

- In the context of the present employment crises, it is worthwhile considering to introduce an employment guarantee programme in urban areas.
- Along with addressing the concerns of underemployment and unemployment, such a programme can bring in much-needed public investment in towns to improve the quality of urban infrastructure and services, restoring urban commons, skilling urban youth and increasing the capacity of Urban Local Bodies.
- The idea of an urban employment programme is gaining traction in political and policy debates.
- In Madhya Pradesh, the new State government has launched the "Yuva Swabhiman Yojana" which provides employment for both skilled and unskilled workers among urban youth.
- Urban informal workers with limited formal education would benefit from this programme.
- We have also proposed a new set of "green jobs" which include the creation, restoration/rejuvenation, and maintenance of urban commons such as green spaces and parks, forested or woody areas, degraded or waste land, and water bodies.
- Further, a set of jobs that will cater to the "care deficit" in towns by providing child-care as well as care for the elderly and the disabled to the urban working class have been included.

Skilling and apprenticeship

- Another novel aspect is the creation of a skilling and apprenticeship programme for unemployed youth with higher education who can sign up for a contiguous period of 150 days (five months), at Rs.13,000 a month for five months to assist with administrative functions in municipal offices, government schools, or public health centres, and for the monitoring, measurement, or evaluation of environmental parameters.
- While the first category of work is aimed at providing additional employment opportunities and raising incomes for those in low-wage informal work, the second category is to provide educated youth experience and skills that they can build-on further. We estimate that such a programme will cost between 1.7-2.7% of GDP per year depending on design, and can provide work opportunities to around

30-50 million workers.

- In light of the 74th Amendment, this programme should be administered by the ULB in a participatory manner by involving ward committees.
- An urban employment guarantee programme not only improves incomes of workers but also has multiplier effects on the economy.

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