

Workshop

on

‘Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Construction Workers’

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Curtain Raiser

By

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Introduction

- Building and construction work covers a wide field of activities and therefore, provides employment of workers at various levels of skills.
- It is defined in a list provided in Section 2(d) of the Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Condition of Service) Act, 1996. The list can be further added by the appropriate Government,
- Much of the work is also carried in inhospitable areas and under stressed conditions, which impact Occupational safety and Health (OSH).
- Leaving aside agriculture, building and other construction workers constitute a large segment of unorganized workers in India. There are about 50 million construction workers in the country. NCL had observed that about 70% of such workers are unskilled and only 30% skilled.
- They account for substantial rural-urban migration. Many of them are distress

Characteristics

- Building and other construction workers are economically vulnerable while belonging to the lowest segment of Indian society. They mostly earn daily wages which help in their own and family members' survival.
- As other means of livelihood (especially cultivable land) are absent, continuous employment either directly by the employer or through contractor and payment of wages are the key to survival.
- In the place of work their accommodation is unhygienic, being very often in work sites, camps, crowded rooms and sometimes in the open. Such workers and their migrant families, therefore, are prone to be affected by coronavirus.
- Their food intake is also sub-standard. Other creature comforts are absent. They do not have access to various welfare and social security schemes and health facilities.

Characteristics (Contd.)

- Even many migrant construction workers are not registered with the State Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Boards, which deprives them of the benefits offered by the Board. Besides, welfare schemes of these Boards are always not portable.
- Because of lockouts/shutdowns/curfews their livelihood in terms of employment, wages, shelter, food and health is entirely lost. When public transport is shut down, their return to native place is almost impossible or cost prohibitive. So they become dependent on charities – both public and private for survival, which are also uncertain. In some cases, they have taken the extreme step of walking or cycling hundreds of kilometers to reach their native places.
- Even after reaching there, they are subjected to social and official quarantines to prevent spread of COVID-19. They are not sure of either getting any employment in their native place or return back to their earlier place of work. As a result, without

Ameliorative Steps

- Following ameliorative steps are contemplated:
 - Ensure payment of minimum wages and provision of minimum creature comforts.
 - Provide social security benefits by making them portable.
 - Operationalize the Labour Codes at the earliest.
 - Try to convert distress into benign migration through vocational training.
 - Make OSH, like providing protective equipments, medical services etc., including vaccination, a priority intervention.

Ameliorative Steps (Contd.)

- Following ameliorative steps are contemplated:
 - Generate awareness and provide conducive environment for covid-appropriate behaviour.
 - State Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board should become more pro-active. It should undertake welfare measures like building rest sheds with amenities etc. and make its benefits portable.
 - Prepare a data base for building and other construction workers, with focus on migrant workers.
 - Implement one-nation-one-ration card scheme urgently.
 - As a long term measure, facilitating right to vote to migrant workers, including those engaged in building and construction sector, will be a step forward.

Specific Covid Intervention Required

- During abnormal times when unforeseen COVID-19 like situation arises, the main issues which require priority attention are food, shelter, health and livelihood.
- Distribution of both cooked food, ration and potable water; maintaining their steady supply.
- Arrangement of accommodation with reasonable staying and resting facilities.
- Medical and health check-up facilities with supply of medicines, vaccination, admission to hospitals and provision for insurance if necessary.

Specific Covid Intervention Required (Contd.)

- Payment of wages.
- Restarting of work at the earliest, no loss of jobs, allowing workers who have left the place of work to rejoin.
- Developing Standard Operating procedure (SOP) for concerned agencies.
- Enlisting support of civil society.
- Ensuring communication with family and friends.
- Arrange re-training and re-deployment facilities where ever necessary.
- Providing transport facilities if the migrant workers desire to return back.

Specific Covid Intervention Required (Contd.)

- Ensuring rehabilitation and providing employment facilities (MGNREGA helps) to the reverse migrants.
- Hence the role of Government becomes very crucial. It essentially means fighting out the problem under disaster management mode.

Thank You