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IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON RURAL & URBAN LIFE IN INDIA

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Abstract

In a survey conducted across India in April and May 2020, approximately 87 percent of self employed respondents in urban areas claimed to have lost their employment due to the corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic. This was highest among casual workers in rural parts of the country. In general, employment loss in urban India was higher than in rural areas during the survey period.

Rural incidence

Before assessing the impact of the lockdown, let's look at the prevailing incidence of Covid-19 in rural areas, as can be discerned from official sources. The top five Covid-19 cities of Mumbai, Delhi, Ahmadabad, Pune and Chennai alone account for nearly 53 per cent of India's cases. If the other towns/cities from elsewhere are clubbed with these, urban areas would account for an overwhelming proportion of Covid-19 so far.

With regard to rural areas specifically, the official data of States like Maharashtra and Karnataka give some clues. In Maharashtra, the leading Covid-19 State with over one-third of the cases, 27 municipal corporations contributed about 94 per cent of the cases. Villages and small towns put together accounted for only 6 per cent. Similarly, in Karnataka, all cities and towns contributed 92 per cent of the State's cases, with rural areas showing a share of 8 per cent.

The story seems to be similar across other States, with rural areas accounting for only a small share in the number of Covid-19 cases reported. We should note here that the number of tests done so far is relatively low in rural areas, which may be partly concealing the true incidence. With relaxation in the lockdown and the return of migrants, there could be some reversal of the scenario.

With over 60,000 fresh Covid-19 cases every day for 3-4 days now, India has the highest number of fresh infections in the world; it is number three in terms of total cases. But what is even more worrying is that the infections are fast moving towards rural and semi-urban areas. On August 10, rural and semi-urban centers accounted for 47% of fresh infections, or almost double their share as compared to a month ago.

Introduction

In the case of agriculture, to reinstating the supply chain mechanism with due transport mechanism are inadequate, but due to the high toll of COVID positive cases, it's a challenge before states to promote inter-state transportation. This is the peak time of Rabi harvesting in North India and the harvested goods should reach the market in time. Several states are assisting to collect products from farmers to revive the supply chain. As promised by the government's moratorium for three months will not help to mitigate financial threats from COVID-19. Government of India data shows that monthly Indian families have a surplus of only 1413 rupees and they still owing debts.

In the education sector in rural India, the case of education from lower to higher education is at crossroads. The connectivity issues create problems for states in digitalizing education. And this connectivity has also affected in delivering proper information to people in rural areas.

In summary, the current state investment by government in rural areas are limited as compared to urban settings. The government of India is providing proactive measures to contain the virus but fails to accommodate concerns of migrant workers and farmers. The cases of perishable



goods and products should be transported properly only when the government should affirm to avoid disruptions in supply chains. Rural areas are highly sensitive to virus spread so local governance should regulate effective service delivery for a considerable section of the population.

When infections were growing at a relatively slower pace, most of India's COVID-19 cases were confined to urban districts. In subsequent stages, not only have the cases grown at a relatively quicker pace but the locus too has shifted to rural areas where the health infrastructure is fragile.

"IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON RURAL & URBAN LIFE IN INDIA"

1. Estimated impact from COVID-19 on India's GDP 2020

India's quarterly GDP was estimated to a decline of over nine percent between April and June 2020. This was a decrease from a five percent growth in the beginning of 2020. The country went into lockdown on March 25, 2020, the largest in the world, restricting 1.3 billion people. This was extended until May 3, 2020. India's government estimated its financial, real estate and professional services sector to be hardest hit during the period of the lockdown.

2. Covid-19 impact: challenges faced by students of rural & Urban India

When it comes to Online Education or E-Learning, rural population is not completely equipped with utilities like fast internet, uninterrupted power supply and electronic devices. There have been improvements regarding basic infrastructural facilities but many rural areas in India are still grappling with these challenges to make education completely digital or online

Lack of Familiarity with Digital Technology

While Smart Classrooms and Digital Learning have already made a way in urban educational setups, some rural countries still rely on traditional teaching methods for their lessons. Therefore, shifting from traditional pedagogical methods to the digital one cannot happen overnight. Teachers as well as students require proper training and more user-friendly platforms to make them familiar with digital technology so that they can be comfortable teaching/learning using them.

Digital Literacy and Infrastructural Support

These are prominent hurdles that come in the way of enabling online education in the rural regions of India. Though the power and network infrastructure have improved leaps and bounds in the remote areas of the country, there is still a room for improvement. Teachers and students in villages are becoming more accepting towards digital means of learning, but the infrastructural facilities there have not developed fully to become at par with what online learning require. Steady flow of electricity and lack of high speed internet still pose major problems for the rural population.

3. COVID-19 crisis underlines false urban-rural binary, neglect of urban areas

It is more vital today to talk about urban policy than ever before since the COVID-19 pandemic is most active in cities. The congestion that plagues large cities has turned out to be their worst enemy during this crisis.

This congestion is most evident in slums in large cities and poses a grave health and environmental challenge. The risk of contagious diseases is more potent in these areas as residents also suffer from a lack of basic services such as safe drinking water and sanitation. To ask them to navigate congestion and practice social distancing seems most ironic. It is no surprise then that many slums in Mumbai and Delhi have become COVID-19 containment zones. Unfortunately, the Swatch Bharat Mission has disregarded the gravity of the sanitation and hygiene crisis in cities the Centre's allocation for the rural component of the Mission is about seven times more than for urban areas.

4. How COVID-19 can change urban planning in India

Over the last two months, COVID-19 has put into question the fundamentals of this urban model. Cities have been the worst hit with high infection rates. Dense developments such as slums have proved to be very difficult to contain. People challenged with congested spaces



have questioned the advantages and viability of cities in their current format. Social distancing, work from home and large scale adoption of e-commerce are now a part of our life and are likely to impact how people live going ahead. The lockdown has highlighted the challenges of living in small homes in dense developments.

Here are some of the key pointers on how it could unfold in the coming days:

Instead of conventional cities with a city centre, urban agglomerations with multiple satellite cities could be the norm.

With work from home becoming a reality for a substantial part of the population—the preference could shift towards bigger and better suburban homes.

Preference for private transport could undo years of efforts by governments and environmentalists, this could be offset by fast-forwarding of electric vehicles in infrastructure.

Commercial, retail and entertainment would have to completely rethink their business models. Commercial space forms the backbone for any urban development and with the business models of a lot of companies in this space becoming obsolete, a complete breakdown in the market cannot be ruled out.

5. Urban planning reforms and public health: Any linkages?

In history, the aspect of public health evolved in high-density urban areas over a period of time. The link between public health and urban planning is not complex as the intention is common: To provide safe and healthy environments in which citizens can live, work and play (characteristics of an ideal, happy city).

This also includes the role of land use and built environment (public buildings, mixed land uses, pedestrian walkways open spaces and water bodies) and its impacts on the health of population

6. How covid-19 is impacting the rural market

The first visible impact of COVID-19 in the rural sector is on the agricultural supply-chain. While the government has issued permits to trucks allowing them to carry groceries, fruits, and cereals, a large number of transporters are yet to receive their permits. This has increased the time taken for the farm produce to reach the market. On the other hand, there is a slight impact on the demand side as the restaurants have been ordered to shut down for the interim period. This is causing a sizeable revenue loss to many farmers across states. As per a published report, the railway ministry suggests that freight loading has dipped from a usual 10,000 cargo rakes per day to just about 3-4,000 now. As a result, the farmer has to sell his crop at a cheaper price, settle with a lower profit.

The second impact of COVID-19 is the delay in sowing and harvesting of crops due to the unavailability of products such as seeds, tractors, ancillary support, medicines for crop protection. Traditionally, this is the best time for brands from the above-mentioned sectors to market their products to the farmers. Even the e-commerce brands in agriculture have been impacted as the transportation of these products have stopped .

7. School dropouts in rural areas are already high. Post-lockdown, they may go up further

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected the entire world. Laths of people are infected and many people have even died. The figure of infections and death is increasing all over the world. Despite continuous research by doctors and scientists, no panacea for the disease has been found so far.

As corona infection cases are rising in countries across the world, varied research findings are constantly coming up. The infection rate, mortality rate, percentage of people recovering are varying from country to country. The pandemic has taken over the entire world. The whole world has been brought to its knees on the economic front. Apart from the economy, health, education, employment have suffered huge losses in every aspect.

Volunteers need to come forward

Many people have returned to their villages following the lockdown. Many of these are young people who were working in other cities after doing professional courses like engineering, MBA and



MCA. They face a job crisis, but at the moment there is no option for them but to stay put in their villages. There are very few people who would return to the cities, that too with great hesitation. These professionals should come forward and help the school children with their studies.

While familiarizing teachers and children in their village with use of technology, they can also prepare video lectures for them. Our institution Abhikalp Foundation is working in this direction. We are training some of the youth of the villages by choosing them as volunteers. Since such youth are able to use technology, computers and mobiles run on the internet, there is no difficulty in training them.

After completing their training, they are then devoting the time in helping the students of the village. The project has been launched in 10 villages at present. Overcoming the initial obstacles, a model will be created to launch the scheme in the other parts of the state. Abhikalp Foundation is active since the past many years in the field of rural education and literature and is completely based upon voluntary efforts. While there is a general atmosphere of negativity, fear and distress due to the cases arising out of the pandemic, we hope that our volunteers would offer a ray of hope by providing a solution to the problems of education.

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