

Urban Employment Guarantee Programme

What is the issue?

- India is in the midst of a massive jobs crisis. Click [here](#) to know more.
- In this backdrop, the idea of an urban employment guarantee programme could help improve worker incomes and have multiplier effects on the economy.

What are the shortfalls in current approach?

- State and Central governments tend to treat towns as “engines of growth” for the economy.
- But beyond this, these are also the spaces where thousands work hard to make a living.
- Programmes such as the Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana (1997) included an urban wage employment component.
- But these have made way for only those focussed on skilling and entrepreneurship, and left out the unskilled, informal sector.
- Moreover, India’s small and medium towns are particularly ignored in the State’s urban imagination.
- As per Census 2011, India has around 4,000 cities and towns with an urban local body (ULB) - Municipal Corporation/Municipal Council/Nagar Panchayat.
- However, national-level urban programmes such as the Smart Cities Mission, Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) only benefit a fraction of them.
- Most ULBs are struggling to carry out basic functions because of a lack of financial and human capacity.
- Further, with uncontrolled urbanisation, they are facing more challenges due to the degradation of urban ecological commons.

What is the need now?

- The unemployment rate in India has reached a 45-year high (6.1%) in 2017-18.
- Reportedly, the unemployment problem is more aggravated in India’s cities and towns.
- Aside from unemployment, low wages and uncertainty with job prospects

continue to be widespread.

- In urban India, the majority of the population continues to work in the informal sector.
- Finding new ways to promote the sustainable development of India's small and medium towns has become inevitable.
- Hence, India cannot ignore the crisis of urban employment and there is an urgent need to formulate a programme.

How will an urban employment programme help?

- In the context of the present employment crises, an employment guarantee programme in urban areas sounds as a feasible option.
- It gives urban residents a statutory right to work and thereby ensures the right to life (Art 21) guaranteed under the Constitution.
- E.g. in Madhya Pradesh, the new State government has launched the "Yuva Swabhiman Yojana"
- It provides employment for skilled and unskilled workers among urban youth and addresses the concerns of underemployment and unemployment.
- But besides this, such a programme can bring in much-needed public investment in towns, which, in turn, could
 - i. boost local demand
 - ii. improve the quality of urban infrastructure and services
 - iii. restore urban commons
 - iv. skill urban youth
 - v. increase the capacity of ULBs

How could it be designed?

- Since it is an urban programme, it should have a wider scope than the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.
- This would provide employment for a variety of works for people with a range of skills and education levels.
- It would not come at the expense of MGNREGA but rather the two would go hand-in-hand.
- It could include a new set of "green jobs" like creation, restoration/rejuvenation and maintenance of urban commons.
- E.g. 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 can be a part of it.
- This might provide child-care as well as care for the elderly and the disabled to the urban working class.
- Wages could be disbursed in a decentralised manner at the local ULB.

- Another novel aspect is the creation of a skilling and apprenticeship programme for unemployed youth with higher education.
- They can assist with administrative functions in municipal offices, government schools, or public health centres.
- They could also be involved in monitoring, measurement, or evaluation of environmental parameters.
- If implemented this way, the programme is scopeful of providing work opportunities to around 30-50 million workers.
- In the light of local governance, this could be administered by the ULB in a participatory manner by involving ward committees.

Source: The Hindu

