

Covid-19 Wave-2 Dilemma of Migrant Workers and Policy Implementation Failure in Uttar Pradesh, the Lesson from the Wave-1 and from the most Populous State

April 2021

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Uttar Pradesh is reeling under severe second wave of Covid-19. Though number of new cases have declined steadily, the State is struggling to cope with the covid cases given the scant health infrastructure in the State. Exodus of migrants back to Native Place is not stopped despite the assurance of State Governments to provide all facilities at the Place of Migration. There are varying degree of Covid-19 cases and varying degree of decentralised lockdowns in the industrialized States. UP is unique migrant State as it its western part acts as industrialized State to provide livelihood to the migrants. A survey conducted by Inferential Survey Statistics and Research Foundation (ISS&RF) with ICRIER, finds most of the migrants from Uttar Pradesh are in Maharashtra (43.55%) and Gujarat (18.82%) followed by northern States of Delhi (8.25%), western part of Uttar Pradesh (7.82%), Haryana (7.19%) and Punjab (6.98%). In the first Wave, after national lockdown the migrants reversed to their native place, stayed there for around 7-9 months, did not have much employment, had food insecurity, exhausted their savings, and came back again to the cities for livelihood. However, they were cautious enough to have assured employment. This time the story is different. As per the CMIE report, stress has started mounting on the economy, labour force participation rate lowering to just 39.98%. Unemployment rate in urban India has increased considerably from 7.27% in March 2021 to 9.78% in April 2021.

Covid-19 this time in Wave-2 is affecting the migrants hard. Though the States are imposing lockdowns cautiously, the livelihoods of migrants have been affected. Fear of complete lockdown and possibility of third Wave and the problems they faced while reversing during first Wave has shaken them. They are in sheer confusion. This time Covid-19 has more dimensions, has not spared the youngers. Migrants due to their job conditions are often surrounded by other workers and at the home, live in poor conditions. They are more prone to getting affected with Covid-19. Extent of testing facilities, vaccination, and the laydown due to health reasons and quarantine have made their conditions measurable. The Virus too has started spreading to the small towns and villages. It has been found from the analysis of district database on Covid cases that between 11 Feb to 9 May 2021, Covid cases in the rural districts (having less than 25% urban population as per 2011 census) have increased from 49% to 65% in Uttar Pradesh. And above this, the fact remains that many cases are unreported and undetected in rural areas due to sheer lack of health infrastructure and the awareness amongst the people about symptoms of Covid. Migrants are not safe in their home native places too.

During the home return of Migrants in Wave-1 and just before and afterwards, Central and Uttar Pradesh Governments initiated number of schemes and programs viz. i) registration of migrants under UP Migrants Registration 2020 to track the movement of migrants, ii) demand driven skill development program under Prime Minister Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) for equipping them with skills to have work of their choice, iii) tweaking of MGNREGA to the demand of migrants so as to provide them fair livelihood, iv) financial assistance after quarantine to cope with Covid-19, v) free ration 5 kg wheat/ rice and 1 kg chana/dal per migrant family for five months under Prime Minister Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana (PMGKAY), vi) New job scheme to help migrant workers affected by lockdown under PM Garib Kalyan Rozgar Yojana (PMGKRY), vii) one nation one ration card (started in 2019) for food security to migrants under National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013 and viii) financial safety net to the informal workers under PM Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan

(PM-SYM). This time again the Prime Minister declared that the Govt will provide 5 Kg of food grains to the poor under NFSA due to economic disruption caused by Covid-19 Wave-2 outbreak in the country for the months of May and June under PMGKAY. PM talked about the nutritional support to poor, alas no provisions for dal under the scheme. Chief Minister directed all the District Magistrates to open quarantine centre and kitchen for migrant workers returnees. The issue is whether the State is prepared to provide such facilities to migrant returnees of Wave-2 without any implementation hitch and at all whether the migrants will be able to avail, at least the experience of migrants during Wave-1 either at Native Place or currently at the Place of Re-Migration, albeit four-five months before do not support.

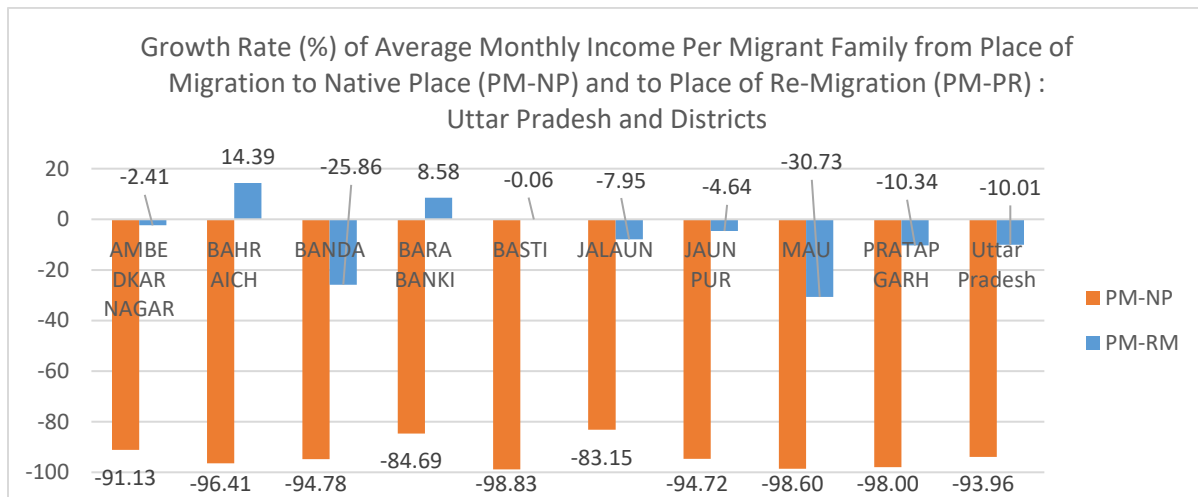
ISS&RF, in collaboration with ICRIER conducted a survey of 795 migrant families in 9 districts of eastern Uttar Pradesh Viz, Ambedkar Nagar, Baharaich, Banda, Barabanki, Basti, Jalaun, Jaunpur, Mau and Pratapgarh to study the livelihoods and impact of Covid-19 on the migrants. Districts were selected, one each from the nine Commissionerate on sample basis, 20 village panchayats randomly from each of the districts and five migrants from the selected village panchayats. Selected districts truly represent migrants' status of Uttar Pradesh. Survey was conducted in three phases, first during July-August, second in November-December 2020 and the third, in the last week of February 2021. They were part of the bigger survey conducted in six States. Details available on <http://www.issrf.org.in>.

As per the Survey in Uttar Pradesh, 43.86% migrants returned to Place of Migration in Phase-2 and further 21.38% in Phase-3. As large as 96.8% migrants remigrated to the earlier place of migration. Many of them are still at the Place of remigration. It is learnt that corporates in the large metros are taking care of Corona hit employees, but the migrants have different stories. As per the survey we find that the occupation they are involved is largely informal with no facilities of pension and gratuity, only 3.05% migrants have PF/EPF, 6.87% health benefits and ESI and just 15.65%, paid leaves. On social security front, only 3.77% migrants have ration cards, 3.447% migrants have Jna-dhan account and 25.48%, any type of other bank account. Migrants from Uttar Pradesh in Wave-2 have income reduced by 10% in comparison to what they had before lockdown in Wave-1, district wise income reduction differs widely, Mau with more than 30% followed by Banda at 25.86%. Amongst 9 districts only Barabanki migrants have enhanced income by 8.58%. With this data on income, Covid effects, health deterioration and sword of lockdown on them require State Govts to act, in their own benefits too for their economy to sustain. One policy which has not been attempted seriously is One Nation One Card making the mockery of PM GKAY for providing 5Kg of Rice/ wheat to poor and the migrants.

In the Native Place, when they returned their income declined by 93.96% (see chart below) from what they had at Place of Migration before Wave-1 lockdown. Migrants from all the districts suffered, the most by the migrants from Basti, Mau and Pratapgarh by more than 98% and the least from Jalaun and even that at 83.15%. Study of livelihood at Native Place reveals that In Phase-1, 32.08% migrants were involved as self-employed in agriculture and 45.95% as with no economic activity. The situation did change after 9 months who stayed back as in Phase-2, migrants with no economic activity drastically reduced to 4.91% and self-employed in agriculture massively increased to 77.40%. This was not the purpose of PMGKRY. Still more than 84% migrants are either unnecessarily involved in family farms or were unemployed. Strangely the employment under MGNREGA in Uttar Pradesh has reduced from 7.86% to paltry 2.21%. Share of migrants as agriculture labour remains around 10%. Rock bottom level of employment under MGNREGA specially tweaked for the migrants and shift of such casual labour to agriculture presents the failure of implementation of the scheme in Uttar Pradesh. Salaried and wagger migrants are still less than 2%, self-employed in non-agriculture almost nill and casuals in non-agriculture less than 4%, complete the

story of Govt implementation hitch for the schemes initiated for migrants in Uttar Pradesh. And above to that only 2.52% re-migrants from Uttar Pradesh had availed skill training and only 1.47% of those at Native Place. Of course, number of migrants with ration card to the extent of 85.01%, Jan Dhan account at 8.85% and other bank accounts as 95.33% are the pluses of the Government efforts.

State Government in Uttar Pradesh must provide smooth comeback of the migrants to the Native Place if they desire to return and facilitate them with decent livelihood and the protection from the Covid-19 Wave-2, firstly through proper testing, vaccination and quarantine and kitchen during quarantine as declared by the Government after their return to curtail the spread of Virus in rural areas, secondly through creation of livelihood under PMGKRY to reduce the burden on agriculture sector, thirdly through MGNREGA by making it truly demand driven to the choice of jobs of the migrants. Fourthly It must utilize registration data for tracking the migrants to provide livelihood to them and to protect them from the miseries wherever they are. Finally, they must make registration data public for research to panel study the socio-economic conditions, livelihood, and pattern of migration. It will help in concretizing the national migrant policy attempted by Niti Aayog. State Govt. in industrialized States too have the responsibilities towards implementation of One Nation One Ration card, to provide ration and food security to migrants and the financial safety net to the informal workers under PM-SYM as announced in the last year budget.



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