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Decent Work for All

The agenda of “Decent Work for All” was brought into the centre stage of the global development agenda with its inclusion in Goal 8 of the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by all member states, including India, at the United General Assembly in 2015. This goal mandates all countries in the world to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth that will generate quality employment and ensure decent work for all men and women workers by 2030.

The concept of ‘decent work’ first emerged at the 87th Session of the International Labour Conference in Geneva in 1999 with the goal of promoting “opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equality, security and human dignity”. The notion of ‘decent work’ comprises of four components, namely employment, social protection, workers’ rights and social dialogue. Employment covers all qualitative and quantitative dimensions of all kinds of work, formal, casual, self-employed or home workers. It also refers to adequate opportunities for work, just remuneration in cash and in kind, safety measures at work and healthy working conditions. Social protection is a component includes social security and income security of the workers according to each society’s economic capacity and level of development. The component of workers’ rights include the fundamental rights of workers according to the legal framework of every nation such as freedom of association, non-discrimination at work, absence of forced labour and child labour, etc. Finally, the component of social dialogue envisions the right of workers to express their views, defend their interests and engage in a healthy dialogue to negotiate with their employers and concerned authorities. This implies putting in place credible conflict resolution mechanisms, social equity and effective labour policy implementation. The first two components largely depend on the economic resources and level of economic development of a country while the latter two components are influenced by ethics, values, legislation and administration.

Decent work practices in different countries depend on the level of their GDP, the Government expenditure as a proportion of their GDP, expenditure

incurred by the government on social security as a percentage of GDP and the percentage of regular workers with wage employment in the labour force. India is classified as a developing country belonging to lower middle income group of countries with GDP per capita income in purchasing power parity equal to \$4,000. Government expenditure accounts for 12.8 per cent of GDP, while public expenditure on social security is a meager 2.39 per cent of GDP. Wage employment to regular workers is 18 per cent of the total labour force. As far as employment is concerned, according to the 68th round of NSSO data for 2011-12 in the principal status, the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in India was 36.4 per cent, worker-to-population ratio was 35.4 per cent and unemployment rate was 2.7 per cent. However, there is a huge gender gap. While male LFPR was over 50 per cent in rural and urban areas, the female LFPR was a mere 18.1 per cent in rural areas and 13.4 per cent in urban areas. The Indian labour market is also characterised by a high unemployment among youth, especially educated youth. Besides, there is a lot of under-employment. The proportion of wage employment in urban areas is about 44 per cent compared to less than 10 per cent in rural areas. Most of the workers are either self-employed or casual labourers. This is due to the fact that 92.5 per cent of the employment is in the informal sector with poor job security, income security and social security. Consequently, a large proportion of workers live below the poverty line or are earning less than \$ 2 a day. India has a poor social protection system with less than 2.4 per cent of its GDP spent on social protection. There continues to be practices like child labour, though there are attempts to eradicate it through legislations and law enforcement. The rights of workers are hardly guaranteed due to large numbers of workers not being covered by labour legislations and many of those workers who are covered by labour legislations do not benefit due to poor regulation and enforcement of legislations. Finally, there is a decline in the number of workers in trade unions resulting in a decline in the bargaining power of workers and social dialogue.

On many of the indicators of decent work, India is lagging behind and this is reflected in the articles published in this issue of Social Action. The article on “Contractualization of Public Employment: The Case of Delhi Metro Contract Workers” uses the illustration of the public enterprise of Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC), which is reported to be a shining example of efficiency in public transport, to highlight the growing trend of contractualization of public employment in India and the plight of contractual workers in a public enterprise. Remya Ramakrishnan T. and

R.R. Patil focuses on the State initiatives in the development fisheries and its impact on the fisherfolk engaged in fishing in the coastal regions of India in their article on “Fisheries Development Processes and Fisherfolk in India: An Impact Analysis”. The article of S. Jagadees Pandi titled “Employment Dynamics and Household Participation in Rural Non-Farm Sector” is a research article based on a study of 480 rural non-farm workers in the Districts of Dindigul, Karur and Tiruchirapalli in Tamil Nadu. The study points out to rural distress with agriculture not being able to sustain livelihoods and non-farm activities are being undertaken for survival in spite of the low income and poor returns. The article by Farhat Hossain on the “Effectiveness of Health Workforce and manpower Deployment in Healthcare Institutions in North-East India” explores the availability of health care institutions as per Indian Public Health Standards (IPHS) norms and the nature of shortfall and surplus of the healthcare workforce and its impact on the access to healthcare services to the people of North East India. Abdul Hanan has argued that Tea Producing Societies - Self Help Groups (SHGs) registered with the Tea Board of India (TBI) is a good alternative model for the development for Small Tea Growers (STGs) in his article on “Tea Producing Societies (SHGs) in India: An Alternative Model for Sustenance”. It is found that better organization of STGs increases their bargaining strength giving a ray of hope for a better deal in the tea industry. The article titled “Bargaining for Survival: The Untold Story of Maharashtra Navnirman Sena and Migrants in Mumbai” by Swapnil Dhanaraj is a study of the political workers of Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) and the relationship their politics of nativism and between migrant workers in Mumbai. The study suggests that the threat of violence based on nativism strategically controlled the flow of migrants and employment opportunities to them in Mumbai. Pradeep Kerketta and H.K. Singh highlights the symbiotic relationship of the tribals with the forest in the tribal economy and forest economy in their article “The Impact of Forest Policies, Acts and Programmes on Tribal Life in the Pre and Post-Independence Era”. He argues that laws in the colonial era and post-Independence era have eroded tribal rights and efforts must be made to ensure tribal rights over their forest in forest policies and legislations. In the last article by K. Koteswara Rao on “Land Acquisition in Telangana and its Fallout in Mallanna Sagar”, the author argues that the Government of Telangana has been undermining the new Land Acquisition Act of 2013 with controversial Government Orders depriving the project affected persons of Mallanna Sagar project adequate compensation, resettlement and rehabilitation.

The wide range of articles highlight the plight of workers in different sectors of the Indian economy and the need to bring to the attention of the policy makers the need to focus of the global agenda for ‘decent work for all’ so that the millions of youth entering the Indian labour force every year will get gainful and quality employment for a better future for themselves and for the country.

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