



CENJOWS

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH IN RURAL AREAS: RECIPE FOR REVERSE MIGRATION

By

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To start with, let us not restrict our outreach to poor rural youth to provide employment of existential variety as is the case in most of the government schemes. The concept in its construct is not innovative enough to see beyond human need of basic subsistence of two square meals and may be clothes. Shelter comes next in the priority, if not held at all. Little additional amount is diverted towards other social requirements as enunciated in the Maslow's need hierarchy, a universally accepted model of human behavior. It would be prudent to restrict the discussion to the first two segments of this pyramid as that's what the aspiration of an average poor rural household is.

The concept of 'opportunity' has no boundaries as it is a progressive in its approach and dynamic to the extent of pushing an individual to jump to the next social level. There is a motivational content in the opportunity which goes beyond achieving only bare essentials in life. Success of few pioneers amongst their lot would create a cascading effect motivating more and more people living on the margins. Therefore, creation of small opportunities for the rural youth appears to be a better mechanism to generate employment. **Idea being to initiate a chain reaction wherein from one opportunity many more such opportunities are created in the rural economic chain.**

The opportunity, per se, is a function of skill sets alongside a launch platform which can be converted into conveniences, goods and services. To

do that, it is necessary to identify the felt needs, generate idea and acquire skill sets for production, marketing and its management. Infrastructure, power, working hands, digital reach and finances are the fundamental requirements to give shape to the opportunities. The most important intangible ingredient prompting an individual to utilize the opportunity is the spirit of enterprise. That is something which needs utmost attention in case of first time entrepreneurs.

Schemes which do not require high level of skill sets, easy to manage and assured optimal income have potential to attract the rural youth. In absence of finances and business not being their traditional line, there is an obvious lack of confidence to venture out in a maiden field by these village folks. The focus of this discussion is to ingrain and promulgate **the idea to be an employer instead of simply being an employee**. At the end of the day running a small enterprise is also a job, albeit with little extra effort in the beginning. The results are more rewarding and have potential to lift up the individual one step higher in the social ladder. In order to start an enterprise the existing socio-economic environment and the cultural moorings cannot be ignored in such an exercise.

The social security is the uppermost in the mind of an individual before he can think of any other issue except home and hearth. The comfort of the home in the villages with optimum means of subsistence is the biggest social security in the rural India. These people from farmers' stock venture out from their villages as a compulsion to earn living due to ever shrinking land holding plus lack of avenues of employment locally. It has a cascading effect on landless skilled service providers in the villages forcing them also to migrate to the towns seeking small time jobs. Large numbers of them join the bands of seasonal labourers and industrial workers venturing out to distant lands across the country. It is this segment of 'Bharat' which is most deprived and neglected in the otherwise much acclaimed success story of 'India shinning'. They need to be given their rightful place, incomes and stature in the society sans any exploitation which happens to be the case as of now.

One of the ways to deal with this issue is **to bring about environmental shift by creating structures conducive for reverse migration**. The remedy lies in decreasing the physical distance of employment avenues from the catchment areas of the work force to the maximum possible extent. It warrants relocating part of the industry from urban to the rural areas, alongside making agriculture sector more lucrative to check the current migration trends. In present day scenario most of the interior areas are connected by roads along with access to power & digital linkages. Therefore, it should not be a major restricting factor anymore for shifting the selected industries away from urban areas.

Moreover, with spread of education and skill development structures, there exists a reservoir of talented and motivated youth that can be groomed to give their best to the industry. The apparent higher logistics costs would be more than compensated with the lower overheads and harmonious industrial environment. Conceptually, it is a win-win model for Indian socio-economic environment and should be encouraged to be implemented in national interests. . The **'Make in India'** mission of the government may well include **'Make in Interiors of India'** as one of its sub sets.

The government may consider restricting further proliferation of new industries in the urban areas unless there are compulsions of strategic import. The ongoing pandemic has highlighted the regional imbalance in industrial development. The Western and Southern regions are more industrialized with more than 60% of jobs whereas the North and Eastern regions are lesser developed. As a result, there is a migration of man power from North and East to the more prosperous regions. This mismatch needs to be leveled up to avoid the hardships faced by the migrant population.

The government may like to provide incentives in terms of improving existing infrastructure, uninterrupted power supply, tax holidays and subsidies to motivate the new entrepreneurs to establish industries in rural areas. The Industry will benefit immensely with more satisfied and secure work force instead of families living away from their homes in crammed up dwellings with existential insecurities of all kinds.

In the suggested format there is ample scope of creating opportunities for the rural youth to start their own small enterprises, besides direct employment. Some of the lower level logistics contents like transport, packaging, warehousing, supply chain support services may be entrusted to the local bodies. Later these trained people may be encouraged to organize themselves into packers and movers, security companies, cargo & container depots management, catering, provisional stores, hotels, sanitation and housekeeping services etc. In order to make it easy the government has to pitch in to provide training, finances and material support for such micro, small and medium scale ventures.

Subsequently, having acquired on job training and exposure to the systems and processes of the industry, few of the high skilled persons may be encouraged to establish ancillary units and support services for the industry. It would be beneficial to the industry due to reduction in production and logistics costs leading to higher profitability. Such enterprises would act as catalyst for more such small units coming up involving the local youth. Each of new units would require a set of service providers to execute the

business cycle thereby increasing opportunities for the rural youth as talked about in the preamble of the discussion.

The format of agriculture based economy also needs a paradigm shift in its construct, in order to make it more attractive. In current system, other than food production, all other associated economic activities are handled by the businessmen making handsome profits leaving pittance to the farmers. This dynamics has to change. It is time to make the farmer as the lead partner of the agro products supply chain by minimizing primacy of non farmer constituents. The village cooperatives, if formed, would play an important role in increasing bargaining power thereby getting legitimate dues to the small farmers.

The traditional system of farmers selling their produce individually needs to be changed to a cooperative marketing at village level to avert exploitation by the wily middlemen. The onion growers' cooperative in Lasegoan in Maharashtra is one success story wherein the price of onions for major part of the country is decided with involvement of the farmers. The farm produce may even be sold directly by the village cooperative retail outlets increasing the profit as there will be minimal overheads. Such a movement would make the farming sector more attractive desuading the villagers to migrate to distant places.

The agro based industry has a large scope of shifting to the interiors due to lower logistics costs alongside availability of workers with firsthand knowledge of farm products related issues. Even in the towns the workforce involved in the food industry come from the village stock. Therefore, it is a better bet to provide them opportunities near their villages which in turn will check their migration to the towns and enjoy better quality of life. The enterprises involved in milk products, poultry, fruit preservation, canning, branded cereals, ready to eat foods, snacks & sweets, sauce, juices, pickles, condiments, etc may shift their production centres in the rural areas.

Besides above, other small and medium labour intensive industries like furniture, construction utilities, pottery, garments, ceramics, steel work, toys, dying & printing etc may be easily shifted to the rural industrial clusters. The erstwhile service providers in the villages who move out as migrant skilled workforce as carpenter, welders, tailors, cooks, waiters, drivers, plumbers, mechanics, electricians, sanitary workers etc would be absorbed in these industries. There is a scope of organizing these artisans in small teams of different skill sets that may be employed on contract basis.

Similarly, the village artisans may be organized into teams/ companies to undertake jobs in the construction industry on contract basis instead of working as individual. By bringing these casual workers into organized

companies, they would be assured of better remunerations, security and benefits of welfare schemes. Teams from same village or area would also have social security content as there will be mutual support available in emergent situations.

Similarly, the seasonal migrant farm labourers can also be organized into small village based companies to undertake activities like tilling, irrigation and harvesting etc on annual contract basis. The concept of minimum daily wages has to be made more humanitarian as the present compensation is too meager and exploitative in content. It needs to include reasonable allowances for essential social security factors at par with the organized sector to accord human dignity to individuals. Hence, there is a need of a statutory legislation by the government to provide fair deal to such a migrant manpower for the duration of their seasonal employment. In case there are organized companies such conditions can be included as part of the contract.

The government has number of schemes to encourage the youth to start their small enterprises. The prime minister employment generation programme (PMEGP) is one such schemes to start MSME by the youth who are class 8 pass and want to start their small business or manufacturing unit. The monetary limit of the manufacturing units is 25 lakhs and for business & service sector it is upto 10 lakhs. The individual contribution is 5 to 10% of the project cost and remainder amount would be available as bank loan. The government has made provision of providing subsidy from 25% to 35% to the rural youth to start their enterprises.

The aim behind this scheme is to provide opportunity to start new businesses on self help basis and generate jobs for the village artisans and skilled work force. As per the government data by the end of 12th plan a sum of Rs 4303 crore has been disbursed as the subsidy for 194648 enterprises which in turn have generated employment to 1442815 persons. The post pandemic stimulus for MSMEs and micro enterprises has also catered for additional loans and ease in repayment of the loans so as to revive these small businesses. There is a big problem of providing employment to the large number of migrants who have returned from other states. The governments of the states have to find innovative ways to absorb the talent of these hardy people, lest it creates socio-political inconsistencies later.

The dictum of 'God help those who help themselves' stands true in case of those who want to move on and achieve something better. The spirit of enterprise has to be encouraged and given a platform to survive and prosperous. The government as well the society has to equally participate in this national mission. Let us create opportunities for the youth in rural areas to bring about reverse migration through spirit of 'Atmanirbharta'. It will surely

restore dignity and bring smiles on the faces of the people living on the margins with enhanced socio-economic harmony in the country.

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