



PRADHAN MANTRI GARIB KALYAN YOJANA (PMGKY): IMPLEMENTATION IS THE KEY

Globally, the situation is alarming as the number of Corona Virus infected persons and the death toll is gradually increasing. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecasted a global economic recession due to the Covid-19 outbreak. India is not an exception given its growth slowdown in major sectors. The IMF managing director Kristalina Georgieva said that the “economic impact is, and will be, severe, but the faster the virus stops, the quicker and stronger the recovery will be” during the video conference of G-20 finance ministers and central bank governors. In this backdrop, on 26th March, 2020 the Union Finance & Corporate Affairs Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced Rs. 1.70 lakh crore, an economic package for the poor to overcome the crisis situation during the lockdown period. The scheme is called as Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) aiming to address the food and financial related difficulties of the poor people.

The PMGKY covers a wide variety of poor sections of the population, such as farmers, poor people, women, low wage earners, senior citizens, widows, *Divyang* people, MNREGA workers, women of Self-Help Groups (SHGs), families of Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) and welfare fund for the building and construction workers in the organized sector. No doubt, the package is a comprehensive one; the question is whether it is sufficient to meet the food and other requirements, especially the medical and health essentials. Let us understand and discern the adequacy of the government's economic package and its implications for the welfare of the poor and marginalized sections of the society.

The foremost basic human need is the food. The Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana (PMGKAY) supplies 5kg of rice or wheat every month; the government announced this will be doubled in the next three months which means, a person from a poor family now gets 12kg of rice/wheat per month. That is 5kg of food grains from PMGKY and 7kg from the subsidised rates in the ration shops under the ongoing National Food Security Act (NFSA) of 2013. As per the statistics of the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution and Census 2011, there is a total of 23 crore people who have ration cards. How does the government ensure that the foodgrains reach the remaining poor people without the ration cards? The biggest missing link is that the PMGKY does not mention about the migrant workers who suffer the most due to the lockdown. As per the Census 2011 figures, the migrant workers constitute more than one tenth of the total population in the country i.e., 14 crore.

The government should have added another provision exclusively meant for the migrant workers through direct cash transfer method during this disruption period. The states such as Bihar, Delhi and North eastern states to which large scale migrants belong and work in other parts of the nation get most affected. In addition to this, these are states where the electronic point of sale devices for the purchase of food grains is weak. The identification of migrant worker's location is an administrative challenge. In certain states, we are already witnessing high handedness by some of the police officials towards the migrant workers. There is a need for sensible and humane approach in addressing the concerns and needs of the migrant workers by avoiding the arbitrariness in treating the same.

The ex-gratia amount of Rs. 500 for the 20.5 crore PMJDY women account holders is too less to meet the food and other basic requirements. This would have at least a thousand rupees given the exorbitant rates of essential commodities. The free distribution of the LPG cylinder for the 8 crore poor people under the Ujjwala scheme is a welcome step. The money saved from this can be utilised for meeting other basic essentials. The increase of Rs. 20 wages for the MGNREGA workers is little and this increase would have happened naturally given the scarcity of the labour in the agriculture and non-agriculture areas. Similarly, the amount of Rs. 1000 to the senior citizens, widows and *Divyang* people is less. The amount would have been more for the *Divyang* people and widows. Insurance coverage for the health workers is an essential and much needed and the allocated amount (Rs.50lakh) is not worthy of a life of the health worker during this pandemic crisis. Other provisions are noteworthy enough, however the question is the implementation of the scheme.

One of the biggest missing links of the PMGKY is the informal sector. Most of the benefits are provisioned only for the poor people working in the organised sectors. There is a need for another fiscal stimulus package intended for the welfare of the workforce in unorganised sectors.

Effective Implementation is the key

The state governments must engage the Local Government Institutions (LGIs) in an effective way. Being proximate to the citizens and having a uniform system through the country the LGIs are uniquely equipped to deliver the essential civic amenities in these critical times. The LGIs have a responsibility to educate and communicate the public with the right kind of information about the Corona Virus pandemic and its symptoms. The LGIs can also play an effective role in containing the spread of misinformation or false rumours about the virus and its spread. This is especially vital in the rural areas where the communication between the local communities and health workers like ANM (Auxiliary Nurse Midwifery) is poor.

The success of the PMGKY depends upon its effective implementation on the ground. The corruption in the Public Distribution System (PDS), fake ration cards, nexus between the local administration and contractors, updating the labour migrants details, challenges in the linkage of ration card with that of Aadhar, fake Jan Dhan Accounts and the misappropriation of funds in MGNREGA works are some of the issues of implementation. The Union and State governments must take all the necessary steps to see that the benefits of the PMGKY reach the needy poor people only. ■

(The article was exclusively prepared for the IIPA Digest, IIPA New Delhi. The views expressed are personal.)



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