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Petition Demanding Wages for MGNREGA Workers

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Why in News

- A **Public Interest Litigation (PIL) petition** has been filed in the **Supreme Court** demanding that the **government pay full wages** to all active job card holders of MGNREGA during lockdown.
- According to data, employment under the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)** declined to just over 1% of the usual rate in April, 2020 due to the **Covid-19** lockdown.

Key Points

- **Less than 1.9 lakh families** have been provided work under the scheme in April 2020, in comparison to almost 1.6 crore households which were provided work in March, 2020 and the 1.8 crore households employed under the scheme in February, 2020 before the lockdown began.
- **Chhattisgarh was the highest employment generator** under the scheme in April, providing work to more than 70,000 families. It was followed by Andhra Pradesh with more than 53,000 households given work.
- **Concerns**
 - The decline in employment rates under the scheme is despite the fact that **migrant workers returning to villages** should have increased demand in rural areas.
 - **No exceptions from restrictions** were provided for the MGNREGA under the lockdown.

This was despite States being asked to continue implementing the scheme while following social distancing guidelines.
 - The Ministry of Finance had said MGNREGA daily wages would be increased by ₹20, and would support the 13.6 crore families who hold job cards.

This relief is meaningless when most States have closed down MGNREGA worksites to curb the spread of Covid-19.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005

- The Act aims at **enhancing the livelihood security of people in rural areas** by guaranteeing **hundred days of wage employment in a financial year** to a rural household whose adult members (at least 18 years of age) volunteer to do unskilled work.
- The central government bears the **full cost of unskilled labour, and 75% of the cost of material** (the rest is borne by the states).
- It is a demand-driven, social security and labour law that aims to enforce the 'right to work'.
- **The Ministry of Rural Development (MRD)**, Government of India in association with state governments, monitors the implementation of the scheme.
- **Agriculture and allied activities constitute more than 65%** of the works taken up under the programme.
- Social inclusion, gender parity, social security and equitable growth are the founding pillars of MGNREGA.
- Overall, 7.6 crore families hold active job cards under the scheme, and almost 5.5 crore families found work under the scheme in 2019.

Source : TH