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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. Discuss the role that rural centric policies can play in reaping India's demographic dividend.

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Approach

- Briefly explain the demographic dividend concept and state of India's demographic dividend with focus on rural areas.
- Highlight how rural India's demographic dividend can be reaped by specifically focusing on certain areas with help of government programmes.
- Also highlight challenges that these areas face.
- Highlight other measures that will remove barriers in development of such areas

Introduction

Demographic Dividend is a stage in demographic transition of a country where the working age population is more than the dependency ratio. India's average age at 28 years and such a demographic dividend is expected to last for nearly 35 years. Approximately two-third of India's population resides in rural areas. In this context, it becomes important to focus on rural areas for reaping such dividends.

Body

- **Better health status leads to increased productivity of labour leading to an efficient economy.**
 - Rural India faces challenges of malnutrition, skewed female health indicators like maternal mortality, anemia etc. This lowers labour's productivity.
 - Programmes like **Ayushman Bharat, Poshan Abhiyan**, focus on female health will increase their productivity and labour force participation ratio.
- **Better education and skills leads to ability to find work in the market.**
 - Rural India has skewed schooling outcomes highlighted in the **ASER report**.
 - The skills needed to work in the secondary and tertiary sector are also lacking leading to over dependence on the primary sector.
 - Programmes like **Skill India**, reforms in schooling system as highlighted by Kasturirangan Committee would lead to labour moving out of agriculture and development of the manufacturing and service sector.
- **Good infrastructure leads to better ability to utilise resources and transmission of information.**
 - Rural India shows contrast in terms of development as compared to urban areas as a result labour have limited mobility, opportunity and know-how of newer economic opportunities.
 - Programmes like PM-Gram Sadak Yojana, PURA, Bharatnet etc. can overcome these challenges and increased opportunity for labour.

- **Investment in Agriculture leads to generation of growth poles and increase of quality opportunities in rural areas.**

Although agriculture is not seen as a remunerative occupation, through advances in innovation, capacity-building, partnership and participatory approaches, better market linkages and, most importantly, by developing a synergy with other sectors of the economy, many employment and entrepreneurial opportunities can be created.

- **In order to develop rural areas, there is a need for a convergent approach.**

For example:

- Strengthening local governance and decentralised decision making by way of more powers and funds to Panchayats. Special grant can be given to areas covered under PESA and scheduled areas.
- Sensitizing the governance process at central and state level by incorporating rural specific ramifications in every decision making like that of Gender Budgeting.
- Bringing an urban ecosystem and experience like the culture of startups to rural areas.

Conclusion

India's demographic dividend cannot work without including its working population in remunerative activities. This would need actions based on the pull factor as discussed above to help labour move towards newer opportunities along with push factors that lowers dependency of agriculture like mechanisation, land pooling policy etc.