

## Mains Master

### Designing social welfare systems for gig workers

#### Context

This article delves into the complexities and challenges of establishing a comprehensive social security system for gig workers, particularly in India. It highlights the limitations of designing exclusive social security systems for platform workers, emphasizing the need for a more universal approach to cover all workers. The piece discusses the Code on Social Security, 2020, which aims to provide broader coverage but faces hurdles in accommodating various work patterns, ensuring inclusivity, and determining the financial burden.

#### Platform Workers' Social Security:

- **Exclusive System Challenges:** Designing an exclusive social security system for platform workers faces hurdles due to the exclusion of non-platform gig workers, failing to account for diverse work patterns across sectors.

#### Concerns with a Platform-Specific Social Security System:

- **Excluding non-platform gig workers:** A separate system would leave out a significant portion of the workforce who need social security coverage, leading to inequities and gaps in protection.
- **Disregarding the realities of work:** The traditional employer-employee model fails to capture the fluidity and non-linear nature of modern work, where individuals may switch platforms, work part-time, or combine platform and non-platform gigs. This results in an inadequate safety net for many workers.
- **Limited outreach and potential for fragmentation:** Designing social security systems based on specific regions, types of workers, or income levels can be ineffective and lead to a patchwork of programs with limited reach, creating confusion and administrative complexities.

#### Arguments for a Universal Social Security System:

- **Broader coverage and inclusivity:** A universal system ensures that all workers, regardless of their platform use, work type, or location, have access to essential social security benefits, promoting fairness and leaving no one behind.
- **Adaptability to evolving work patterns:** A universal system can be more flexible and responsive to the changing nature of work, allowing for coverage of diverse work situations and non-linear career paths.
- **Greater outreach and impact:** By encompassing all workers, a universal system can potentially have a wider reach and a more significant impact on reducing poverty and improving overall well-being.

#### Addressing Current Limitations:

- **Expanding access for unorganized workers:** Existing universal systems in India often exclude or limit benefits for unorganized workers. This can be addressed by revising eligibility criteria and expanding programs like EPF and gratuity to cover all workers, regardless of their employment status.
- **Ensuring wider reach of maternity benefits:** Extending maternity benefits to all establishments, regardless of the number of employees, would provide crucial support to working mothers across all sectors.
- **Eliminating minimum worker thresholds:** Removing minimum worker requirements for programs like EPF and gratuity would ensure that even small enterprises and their employees can benefit from the social security system.

#### A Proposed Model for Universal Social Security:

- **Leveraging the e-Shram database:** Utilizing the existing e-Shram database for voluntary registration can create a comprehensive platform for identifying and enrolling all workers, regardless of their employment status or location, into the social security system.
- **Providing comprehensive health coverage:** A two-pronged approach combining health insurance for secondary and tertiary care with readily accessible urban walk-in clinics for primary care would offer complete and efficient healthcare coverage for all registered workers.
- **Introducing universal pensions:** Implementing a system of inflation-indexed minimum pensions for all workers, with the option for voluntary contributions to enhance benefits, can provide a crucial safety net and promote financial security in old age. Existing schemes for temporary workers could be integrated to create a unified system.
- **Offering unemployment support:** Providing optional unemployment benefits or opportunities for re-skilling and upskilling during periods of joblessness can empower workers and ease the transition to new employment.

#### Funding the System:

- **Employer contributions:** Requiring all registered companies to contribute a small percentage (1%) of their annual turnover to dedicated funds for health insurance, pensions, and unemployment benefits (or a combined 2% to a central social welfare body) would create a sustainable funding mechanism.
- **Government support:** The government can play a crucial role by providing additional financial support to the system, ensuring its long-term stability and effectiveness.
- **Worker contributions:** Encouraging voluntary contributions from e-Shram registrants who are able to pay can further strengthen the system and empower individuals to take control of their social security.



- **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) integration:** Allowing companies to contribute to these social welfare bodies in lieu of traditional CSR obligations can leverage existing resources and encourage corporate participation in supporting social security initiatives.

### A Macro Perspective on Social Welfare:

- **Moving beyond the traditional model:** We need to shift from the outdated employer-employee model to a more flexible and inclusive vision of work that recognizes the diverse realities of the modern workforce.
- **Universal contribution and responsibility:** Establishing a system where everyone contributes to social welfare based on their individual capacity can foster a sense of shared responsibility and collective well-being.
- **Dynamic and interconnected policies:** Implementing well-coordinated and adaptable policies that address the various aspects of social security, such as health, income security, and unemployment, is essential for a comprehensive and effective system.
- **Leveraging technology for efficient implementation:** India's robust digital infrastructure can be harnessed to streamline the administration of the social security system, ensuring transparency, accountability, and efficient service delivery.

**Natural farming needs better prices, markets**

### Context

This article delves into the challenges faced by the agricultural sector despite the success of the Green Revolution. It highlights the emergence of natural farming (NF) as a sustainable alternative gaining traction. However, it emphasizes the obstacles hindering NF adoption, such as market limitations and lack of consumer awareness. The piece proposes solutions like certification systems, alternative market strategies, and cooperative initiatives to facilitate the shift towards NF and ensure its success.

### Challenges of Transitioning to Natural Farming (NF)

- **Limited differentiated markets and premium prices:** The absence of well-developed systems for identifying and rewarding NF products with higher prices discourages farmers from adopting these practices. While consumer interest in healthy, sustainable food is increasing, robust market mechanisms are lacking to connect them with genuine NF produce.
- **Knowledge gap among farmers and consumers:** Both farmers and consumers require education and awareness about the benefits of NF to fully understand its value and drive demand. Many farmers are still unfamiliar with the specific techniques and advantages of natural farming, while consumers may struggle to differentiate genuine NF products from conventional or organic ones, leading to uncertainty and hesitation.
- **Niche market growth with trust concerns:** Despite an encouraging rise in consumer interest, the current NF market remains relatively small. Furthermore, concerns about the authenticity of labeled NF products and the lack of reliable certification systems can erode consumer trust and hinder wider adoption.

### Existing Certification Systems for NF:

- **Participatory Guarantee System (PGS-India):** This community-driven approach emphasizes active participation of both producers and consumers in ensuring quality standards, operating outside traditional third-party certification processes. By fostering collaboration and transparency, PGS-India aims to build trust and empower local communities to manage their own NF certification.
- **Himachal Pradesh CETARA-NF:** This self-certification tool provides farmers in Himachal Pradesh with a platform to document their adherence to NF practices. This empowers farmers to take ownership of their sustainable efforts and potentially connect with consumers seeking locally-sourced NF products.
- **Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) Draft for NF Standards and Labeling:** This recent initiative aims to establish a common understanding of NF practices and differentiate them from organic farming. By outlining clear standards and labeling requirements, the BIS draft seeks to build trust in the market and facilitate easier identification of genuine NF products for consumers.

### Expanding Alternative Markets for NF:

- **Public Distribution System (PDS):** Integrating local NF produce into the PDS through decentralized production, procurement, and distribution systems could be a powerful driver of demand. This would not only offer consumers access to healthy, affordable food but also provide farmers with a stable market and incentivize their transition to NF practices.
- **Mid-day Meal Program:** Similar to the PDS, incorporating locally grown NF produce into the mid-day meal program could offer significant benefits. By sourcing food directly from FPOs engaged in NF practices, the program could support rural communities, promote healthy eating habits in children, and encourage wider adoption of sustainable agriculture.
- **Dedicated Haats and Farmers' Markets:** Establishing markets specifically dedicated to certified NF produce would provide a platform for farmers to connect directly with consumers seeking healthy and sustainable food options. This can help overcome trust concerns and build a loyal customer base for NF products.
- **Consumer Cooperatives:** Organizing consumer cooperatives in urban areas with easy access to nearby farmland could create direct links between farmers and consumers. This would allow consumers to purchase fresh, locally-grown NF produce while providing farmers with a dependable market and fair prices.
- **International Models:** Learning from successful examples like Familia de la Tierra in Colombia and the Maputo Earth Market in Mozambique can offer valuable insights for developing effective market mechanisms for NF in India. These initiatives demonstrate the power of collaboration between farmers' organizations, consumers, and other stakeholders in building thriving markets for sustainable agricultural products.

• **TTD Initiative:** The recent initiative by Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) to source pesticide-free produce from Self-Help Groups serves as a promising model for integrating NF into existing market structures. This demonstrates the potential for large institutions to play a significant role in supporting local farmers and promoting sustainable food systems.

### Is India 'losing' South Asia? That's not the question

#### Context

The article examines India's position in a shifting South Asian context, stressing the importance of adapting to evolving regional realities instead of lamenting perceived losses. It delves into historical legacies, geopolitical changes, and existing challenges while urging India to discard outdated perspectives and strategically navigate the evolving landscape to safeguard its interests effectively.

#### India's Nostalgic Hegemony:

- India's South Asia debate is rooted in a sentimental yearning for the British Raj's era of regional dominance.
- The partition of the Subcontinent shattered its unity, creating unresolved territorial disputes that continue to hinder cooperation.
- Pakistan views the Kashmir issue as unfinished business from the partition, making it difficult to develop a positive relationship with India and facilitate regional integration under the auspices of SAARC.

#### Economic Disconnect:

- India and its neighbors, in their pursuit of self-sufficiency, made economic choices that impeded regional economic integration.
- Heavily fortified borders, meant to enhance security, have turned into commercial barriers, despite recent efforts towards globalization.
- Pakistan's geopolitical considerations prevent it from engaging in economic cooperation with India.

#### Shifting Power Dynamics:

- The regional elites no longer automatically defer to Delhi as they did during the Raj.
- India cannot simply bully or cajole its neighbors into accepting its regional vision.
- Both the "Akhand Bharat" concept of a unified Greater India and the liberal vision of an integrated Subcontinent are met with deep suspicion by neighboring countries.

#### Domestic Politics and External Interference:

- India's presence looms large in the domestic politics of its neighbors.
- Different factions within these countries exploit India's involvement to further their own agendas.
- The notion of an exclusive Indian sphere of influence in the region is an illusion

#### Emerging Challenges:

- China's growing economic and military presence poses new strategic challenges for India.
- The rising influence of Middle Eastern powers adds another layer of complexity to the region.

- Ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan and Myanmar create further instability.

#### The Way Forward:

- India needs to move beyond its sentimental attachment to a bygone era and adapt to the changing realities of the region.
- Instead of dwelling on a lost past, India should focus on preserving its interests and expanding its influence through effective engagement with its neighbors.
- Discarding outdated notions of dominance and embracing a more cooperative approach will be crucial for India's success in navigating the evolving South Asian landscape.

**In conclusion,** India's path forward lies not in clinging to the ghosts of the Raj, but in developing a new strategy for engaging with a dynamic and evolving region.

## Prelims Booster

### How PM JANMAN can help Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups

- 🗺️ Formerly PTGs, now renamed PVTGs, include 75 groups residing in 22,544 villages across 18 states.
- 🌐 These groups possess pre-agricultural lifestyles, limited literacy, small populations, and face subsistence economy challenges.
- 🇮🇳 Varying significantly in size, some groups have less than 1,000 individuals (e.g., Great Andamanese), while others exceed 1 lakh (e.g., Maria Gond).
- 🚫 Marginalization: Isolation, low population, and unique socio-economic characteristics marginalize these groups.
- 🚫 Limited Access: They lack access to basic services, face social discrimination, and are vulnerable to displacement.
- 🏠 Government Initiatives: Focus on education, healthcare, and preserving traditional knowledge.
- 📄 Uniqueness of PM-JANMAN: Addresses concerns over outdated criteria, overlapping names, and inadequate recognition of PVTGs.

### Jio working on 'Bharat GPT' with IIT Bombay

- 📧 Reliance Jio Infocomm is advancing its 'Bharat GPT' program in collaboration with the Indian Institute of Technology-Bombay, aiming to build an expansive "ecosystem of development" for the evolution of "Jio 2.0."
- 📺 Additionally, there are hints at the potential development of an operating system tailored specifically for televisions.