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## Solving The Migrant Crisis Through Dynamism: National Volunteer Force

### Abstract

In the wake of this Covid-19 pandemic, the disadvantaged and poor were mostly affected. The migrant labourers who toil day after day without much securities and resources were the most affected in this process. They regularly encountered problems in housing facilities, financial resources, food security and relocation. The policies tackling these problems could be addressed by cooperative measures from both the states and the central governments.

Here the problem is approached by constituting a national body called the National Volunteer Force constituted by the President of India, by electing Chief Volunteer Commissioner and other Volunteer Commissioners. The main idea is to treat pandemic situations like an emergency but the states do not lose any authority and power but the population can be activated to work for optimizing the initiatives implemented by the government in that period. The migrant labourers should be integrated into this framework which can essentially solve all the basic problems faced by them. This framework also addresses rapid skilling processes according to the needs using information and communication technology, Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning technologies. As the skilling processes happen they can be implemented on ground and tackle the basic problems at hand. The main idea is that as the emergencies ensue for the time being the National Volunteer Force gets activated, the migrant labourers become government employees and as the emergencies end, the migrant labourers return to their normal lives with their skills. This is the dynamic approach addressed here in the later parts.

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## Problem Context

The main problems that the average unskilled or low-skilled labourer experiences are job security, payment assurance, livelihood distress and often depression. During the pandemic the problems have to be tackled almost in an immediate fashion. The state and union executive must address this with dynamism to optimize solutions in a way that multiple problems can be solved simultaneously. This first thing which the governments must do is to identify the interconnected links between many problems arising at hand.

For example, during the covid pandemic there was a severe shortage of necessary health kits, like masks, PPE kits, health volunteers who could record and screen population for covid infections. Now if there is a framework that can include these migrant workers into the system with training and necessary tools, more personnel can be employed in tackling these problems. More masks could have been produced which could have been exported if needed, more acute patients who cannot walk much can be reached by these volunteers with life saving medicines, more food could be distributed among the homeless and make implementation of government initiatives more effective and impactful. More the containment of this disease more the economy can bounce back. The migrant workers could be paid by cash, given housing protection and food protection. By this approach the policy not only addresses the migrant worker problem, it also addresses the economic, social and health problems of the society. This identification of interconnected links between problems is essential for resource management and utilisation in times of emergency.

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Another example could be extensive data collection. As the migrant workers could be uneducated in the first place, assurance of Artificial intelligence and machine learning based applications, devices could be handed over to these migrant workers, who go out after necessary training and collect data from the point to point and help the government in pursuing the emergency situations. This should be endorsed by the National Volunteer Framework and payments from the government should be assured to the migrant workers. Real time data and population sentiments must be understood extensively in such situations. There could be many old people who are living in distress in these times without any help from their own family, they can be effectively approached by these volunteers. Moreover when migrants are provided with facilities by the government, they do not have to relocate to their native villages in fear of housing security. This significantly reduces the disease spread in covid emergency and unorganised approaches after relocation, which can endanger lives.

Once the country recovers from the coronavirus the country regains pre-lockdown fluidity and the emergency services of the government stops and also the National Volunteer Force ceases to exist on the ground. The migrant workers return upskilled and could look for different jobs later.

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## Policy Alternatives

The current government policy approach was only restricted to welfare activities in the context of relocation, food security and housing security. Moreover they address the problem after migration to native villages has occurred. The moment there is some welfare approach to these problems, apprehensions over corruption and subsequent unavailability of rations get real. When these fears and apprehensions engulf these workers they look for protections and want to return home. This sense of protection does not come from welfare activities but from capacity building approaches which are self-sustaining and are able to express their capabilities by participating in the market, which grows a sense of identity in these times. Often welfare activities produce negative effects in the social set up by degrading an individual's identity by almost reducing their attitudes on par with begging and entitlement. These approaches only work short-term as the individual's sustaining capability is degraded and the government has to go on with bad expenditure to coax them up. In these periods of emergency the most important objectives have been preservation of national identity and trust in the government.

The Indian leadership's Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana which addresses the migrant labourers' plight by getting more job prospects and augment infrastructure developments into their livelihood, is a step in the right direction. The promised infrastructure developments seem to be a convergent effort of as much as 12 ministries of drinking water and sanitation, road transport, Panchayati Raj etc.

This combined effort will not only produce implementation efficiencies but also provide jobs inside the participating state itself. The augmentation of the National Volunteer Force can be done by providing easy access of the migrant labourers into these developments. They don't have to relocate as the central government directly employs them with state cooperation. The recruitments can be efficiently done by incorporating Artificial Intelligence platforms combined with human assistance on ground. Once the records and live location data of the migrant labourers are there in the data centers, they can be automatically enrolled into different sectors based on location. Comparatively varied labour skills are necessary in these scenarios and the government must address it through upskilling programmes as the National Volunteer Force comes into effect.

As the emergency of the pandemic hit India, the worst hit industries were Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) and the unorganised sector. Their cashes dried up and were unsustainable to continue. The government declared a stimulus for the MSMEs to back them up into action. As faster production in this sector is important for providing essential needs and export generation, the National Volunteer Force can come into effect. The government can dynamically address this situation by incorporating the National Volunteer Force by turning them into small temporary Public Sector Units on the basis of importance and keeping these industries alive. These temporary PSUs become organized sectors for the time being, as determined by the Union government. Similarly, these can also be done by the states with the help of the central government in their own state specific sectors.



In the agricultural sector there was a shortage in labour and machinery which impacted harvests and supply chains. This caused disruptions in procuring and warehousing activities. The central government promised the farmers more procurement to ensure that the farmers harvest and release more food grains which would largely help food distribution among the marginal income population. The Indian finance minister rolled out Rs 1 Lakh crore constituting the 'Agriculture Investment Fund' which would be targeted to smooth operations of aggregators, Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), Primary Agri Cooperative Societies and agri entrepreneurs. All this was good but labour shortage meant non utilisation of funds. The National Volunteer Force could be incorporated into mobilisation of resources, connecting them to the urban communities and labour integration. This requires some localisations according to the needs of the state initiatives and targets. Integration into these frameworks will not only help the government but also the people incorporated into it. These small temporary public sector units like the National Volunteer Force could be the key to control and manage targeted and important productivity and efficiency during emergency periods.

### Policy Recommendations

The main policy address must balance the protection of the migrant labourers and the national initiatives to effectively tackle these kinds of pandemic or any type of emergencies that might bring the country into a halt. There will be a need for protection by ensuring that politicisation of these matters do not happen. Whenever there is a talk of a lot of money and benefits, it gets politicised and gets riddled with corruption. One of the most important aspects of the operations of the country is that the people in power have a tendency to avoid 'change'.

For example, it is very much well known that many age old public sector companies are inefficient and drowned in debts but as the Indian government tries to disinvest this sector in favour of private business ownership and operations. The policies for the National Volunteer Force must ensure that dynamism is must for ensuring productivity and political interventions out of it. Technology integration and data frameworks with Artificial intelligence and Machine Learning must be incorporated into the system to understand and check the status of each and every labourer in action. It is very much possible that some labourers could be left out in this process and may be in trouble. The Data mining applications must ensure security of the personal data of these labourers during these actions. This is also necessary to track the movements of these labourers.

The main policy recommendations are the following,

### **1. National Volunteer Force :**

The National Volunteer Force is to be constituted as a statutory body. The need for constitutional legislation is in accordance with the State Directive principles, Article 43 of the constitution, to secure a living wage, a decent standard of life and social and cultural opportunities for all.

**2.** The body must be headed by the Chief Volunteer Commissioner, to be elected by the President. The President may also elect other Volunteer Commissioners who will be conducting the workings of the National Volunteer Force. The powers and function are to be drawn from the union executive. NITI Aayog must also be a part of the advisory team. This is needed as the Governing Council and the Regional Councils are important in making these decisions. There could also be nominated heads in the body who would be helping in advising the technicalities of the implementation.



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**3.** The National Volunteer Force is a dynamic body that is activated in cases of natural disasters, disease outbreak or war types of emergency. The decision of the President is subjected to the recommendation of the Prime minister and the cabinet ministers. Once the decision to activate the body is taken the President would elect necessary personnel .The decision to activate the body is subject to Parliamentary approval in the course of six months each.

**4.** The parliament must provide a new legislation under Disease emergency, under which the statutory legislation of the National Volunteer Force must come into being. The President's decision in activating the force on advice of Prime minister and cabinet minister is final but should need parliamentary approval within three months.

**5.** Adequate data collection and records of the migrant workers and technological integration must be done from time to time. There must be budgetary allocations for upgradation of the Artificial Intelligence technology, Machine Learning technologies, Big Data analytics etc. as soon as possible so that they can be integrated with the workings of the National Volunteer Force.

**6.** The states have to maintain records of data of the migrants and their locations. This should be regularly exchanged with the central government. The National Volunteer Force is to be constituted of the migrant workers only during emergency periods.

**7.** The centre and the states have to ensure security of data collected and stored in the data centers. The maintenance costs of these data centers have to be accommodated in each year's budget. The cost of maintenance and upgradation must be borne by both centre and states, in 70:30 ratio.

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The central government has complete jurisdiction of the data and the states would only assist in this effort. The data must be collected in a bottom-up approach from collection and registrations in municipalities and panchayats before going for migration. The municipalities and panchayats must load this data into different designated servers and the state and centre would then incorporate them into their data centers. Aadhar, voter id and ration cards must be connected to this database. In case of mobile number changes, the labourer must approach the sub divisional officer or collector's office for Aadhar and ration card verification to make changes to the data or if possible the government must try to integrate online verification of Aadhar and ration card verification procedures to make changes in the data.

**8.** Once the National Volunteer Force is activated, the centre might decide along with the states where these volunteers would be incorporated. They can also be incorporated in private sector companies, according to the needs of the sector. The governments would strive to provide equal opportunity to the people in the forces. As the members of the force are migrant labourers from another state, it can help in building harmony between the states, facilitated by the central government.

**9.** The volunteers should be assured health benefits, food security and housing facilities or costs exclusively from the central packages. The packages could be released as schemes as per need of the hour for payment. The areas where the National Volunteer Force is activated work as temporary Public Sector Units till the union executive decides to withdraw.

**10.** On withdrawal, the volunteers would return to their normal jobs and all the facilities from the central government would stop till the situation normalises. The National Volunteer Force also dissolves. Although with new skills the volunteers can have choice to continue in these sectors, given the employer selects them and pay their salaries.

**11.** Throughout the time when the National Volunteer Force is active, the volunteers should be provided necessary skilling and upskilling programmes. This is necessary as the jobs where they are employed are subjected to varied skill sets and requirements. Necessary technological infrastructure is necessary for efficient implementation.

**12.** The state government with the help of the central government has to provide protection to the workers by providing adequate humane conditions of work and ensure security and protection of life. The volunteers should not be subjected to unusual long hours of work but they can be employed in shifts. There must be a cap on the hours of work per day.

**13.** The volunteers are not entitled to any provident funds or pension schemes of the central government.

**14.** The central government would be permitted to track the movements of the National Volunteer Force during the whole time when the force remains active. The activities of the force would be supervised under the cadres of the All India Services. The cadres would then formulate necessary recommendations and the performance reports to the Volunteer commissioners. Decentralisation of control over the force along with amenities are necessary for proper implementation.



Inputs from local governments are highly important in order to successfully implement this. The necessary evaluations of the work done by these workers are to be done in the supervision of the cadres from the All India Services with the help of the facilities as deemed necessary.

**15.** The governments must strive to restrict political interventions inside the operations of the National Volunteer Force. The political interventions might draw in corrupt practices in the workings.

### Recommended Resources

In my effort to address the situation I have taken help from various resources. The policy's idea is framed from the basic idea of dynamic approaches of emergency relations between the state and centre. The idea of interchangeableness of the policy approaches provide flexibility in the operations of the government executive wings in times of distress. There were some ideas taken from different sources available online and subsequent additions were made to accommodate the policy. The following links have been used for supplementing the idea :

1. Prime Minister launches employment schemes :

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/policy/pm-launches-employment-scheme-for-migrant-workers/articleshow/76479291.cms?from=mdr#:~:text=The%20Mahatma%20Gandhi%20National%20Rural,per%20household%20in%20a%20year.&text=Whereas%20the%20Garib%20Kalyan%20Rozgar,the%20lockdown%20near%20their%20villages.>

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2. Finance Minister's economic packages :

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

Economic\_impact\_of\_the\_COVID-19\_pandemic\_in\_India#Economic\_package

3. Covid-19 Indian Government measures.

[https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2020/04/india-](https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2020/04/india-government-and-institution-measures-in-response-to-covid.html)

government-and-institution-measures-in-response-to-covid.html

4. <https://www.ifpri.org/blog/how-indias-agrifood-supply-chains-fared-during-covid-19-lockdown-farm-fork>

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