



Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme for Public Distribution System: An Evaluation of COVID-19 Relief for Migrants

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Abstract: *The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent nationwide lockdown in India had a devastating impact on migrant workers, resulting in one of the largest humanitarian crises the country has faced. Migrant workers, constituting a significant and vulnerable segment of the population, were left stranded and without livelihoods due to the sudden and severe disruptions caused by the pandemic. This research paper evaluates the Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme (ANBS) for public distribution during the pandemic, focusing on its relief measures for migrant workers. The study examines the coverage, reach, and impact of the scheme, as well as the challenges faced during its implementation. Additionally, it proposes policy recommendations to enhance relief measures and strengthen the role of the Public Distribution System (PDS) in catering to the needs of migrant populations during crises.*

Keywords: *COVID-19, Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme, Public Distribution System, Migrant Workers, Relief Measures, Food Security, India.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on migrant workers in India, creating one of the most significant humanitarian crises the country has ever faced. Migrant workers, who constitute a large and vulnerable segment of the population, were severely affected by the lockdown measures and disruptions caused by the pandemic.¹

When the nationwide lockdown was announced in March 2020, millions of migrant workers, primarily employed in urban centers and industrial areas, were left with no option but to return to their hometowns.² With public transport suspended and borders sealed, many of them embarked on arduous journeys on foot, covering hundreds of kilometres to reach their native villages. The scenes of a mass exodus of desperate migrants walking back home became emblematic of the crisis.

The lockdown brought economic activities to a halt, resulting in the loss of jobs and livelihoods for a vast number of migrant workers. With industries closed and businesses shuttered, these workers, largely employed in the informal sector, were left with no income to support themselves and their families.³ Many were laid off without any social security or safety nets.

During their journeys back home, many migrants faced severe hardships, including hunger, thirst, and exhaustion. With limited resources and no access to food and water, their already precarious conditions worsened. Additionally, there were instances of migrant workers being subjected to police harassment and exploitation.

¹ Virendra Balaji Shahare, "COVID-19 lockdown: the neglected migrant workers in India" 31 *APJSD* 97-104 (2021).

² Nitya Rao, Nivedita Narain, *et.al.*, "Destinations Matter: Social Policy and Migrant Workers in the Times of Covid" 32 *EJDR* 1639-1661 (2020).

³ COVID-19: Examining the Impact of Lockdown in India after One Year, *available at: <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/covid-19-examining-impact-lockdown-india-after-one>* (Visited on July 5, 2023).



Upon reaching their hometowns, migrant workers faced new challenges in finding shelter and medical support. Many returned to remote villages where healthcare facilities were limited, making them vulnerable to health risks, including COVID-19.⁴

As the lockdown eased and economic activities gradually resumed, some migrants attempted to return to their places of work. However, the uncertainty of the situation made it difficult for them to secure employment, leading to prolonged unemployment and financial instability.

The entire experience of being stranded, facing loss of income, and living under the constant threat of the pandemic had severe psychological and emotional repercussions on migrant workers. Many experienced heightened anxiety, stress, and depression, adding to their already challenging circumstances.

The Public Distribution System, designed to provide subsidized food grains to vulnerable populations, faced unprecedented pressure during the pandemic. The surge in demand for food assistance and disruptions in supply chains highlighted the need for enhanced support to ensure food security for all.⁵

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerabilities of India's migrant workers and underscored the importance of robust social welfare measures to safeguard their rights and well-being during crises. The impact of the pandemic on migrant workers highlighted the urgent need for targeted interventions and policy measures to protect their rights and ensure a more inclusive and resilient society.

The Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme, also known as the Self-Reliant India Scheme, was launched by the Indian government in May 2020 in response to the economic challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶ This ambitious initiative aims to revitalize the Indian economy and strengthen its self-reliance by promoting domestic production, encouraging innovation, and supporting key sectors severely impacted by the pandemic. At its core, the Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme seeks to propel India towards becoming a self-sustaining and globally competitive economy.

Objectives of the Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme:

Economic Recovery and Growth: The primary objective of the Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme is to stimulate economic recovery and reignite growth in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns led to disruptions in economic activities, job losses, and a decline in consumption, severely affecting various sectors. Through targeted fiscal measures, policy reforms, and investment promotion, the government aims to restore economic stability and drive sustainable growth.

Strengthening Domestic Manufacturing and Production: A key focus of the Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme is to promote domestic manufacturing and production across sectors. By reducing dependence on imports and enhancing the capabilities of indigenous industries, the scheme aims to boost domestic production and create a robust ecosystem of locally manufactured goods. This self-reliance in manufacturing will not only enhance India's economic sovereignty but also lead to the creation of more job opportunities.⁷

Support to MSMEs and Startups: Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and startups play a crucial role in the Indian economy by contributing significantly to employment generation and innovation. The Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme aims to provide financial support, access to credit, and policy incentives to MSMEs and startups to help them navigate through the challenges posed by the pandemic and grow their businesses.

Infrastructure Development and Connectivity: The scheme recognizes the importance of robust infrastructure for economic growth. By investing in infrastructure projects such as roads, highways, railways, airports, and digital connectivity, the government aims to improve the ease of doing business, facilitate smoother movement of goods and services, and attract investments in various sectors.

⁴ Indian migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, available at: <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/covid-19-examining-impact-lockdown-india-after-one> (Visited on April 2, 2023).

⁵ Public Distribution System, available at: https://nfsa.gov.in/portal/PDS_page (Visited on April 20, 2023).

⁶ Virendra Balaji Shahare, "COVID-19 lockdown: the neglected migrant workers in India" 31 *APJSD* 97-104 (2021).

⁷ Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan Self-Reliant India, available at: <https://www.investindia.gov.in/atmanirbhar-bharat-abhiyaan> (Visited on April 22, 2023).



Promoting Digitalization and Technology Adoption: The Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme seeks to leverage technology and digitalization to drive efficiency and transparency across sectors. By promoting digital payment systems, e-governance, and the adoption of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, blockchain, and the Internet of Things (IoT), the government aims to propel India into the digital era and foster a technology-driven ecosystem.⁸

Strengthening Agriculture and Rural Economy: The scheme also focuses on revitalizing the agriculture and rural sectors, which are vital to India's economy and support a significant portion of its population. By investing in rural infrastructure, agricultural reforms, and value chain development, the government aims to enhance farmers' incomes and improve the overall standard of living in rural areas.

Health and Wellness: In light of the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme places special emphasis on strengthening India's healthcare infrastructure and promoting wellness. It aims to enhance access to quality healthcare services, invest in medical research and development, and prioritize public health and hygiene.

The Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme represents a comprehensive and ambitious effort by the Indian government to navigate the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and propel the nation towards self-reliance and sustainable growth. Through a multi-pronged approach encompassing economic reforms, policy incentives, and strategic investments, the scheme aims to build a resilient, competitive, and self-sustaining Indian economy capable of weathering global uncertainties.⁹

2. Objectives of the Study :

- To examine the specific relief measures introduced under the Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme for migrant workers.
- To analyze the coverage and reach of these relief measures in terms of the migrant population.
- To explore the challenges faced by migrants in accessing the relief and distribution mechanisms.
- To propose strategies for strengthening the role of the Public Distribution System in catering to the needs of migrant populations.

3. Review of Literature :

Ankan Barman (2021), in his work titled "Atmanirbhar Bharat Meets Digital India: An Evaluation of COVID-19 Relief for Migrants" delves into the impact of COVID-19 relief measures on migrant workers in India. It highlights the precarious situation of migrant workers who were largely invisible in discussions about workers' rights and were an afterthought during the implementation of the national lockdown. The study focuses on three host states—Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Haryana—and conducts 20 in-depth interviews with workers from various sectors who were in touch with the Migrant Workers Solidarity Network. The paper aims to shed light on the challenges faced by migrant workers and assess their access to welfare and social security during the pandemic.

This work provides important context and background information on the challenges faced by migrant workers during the pandemic and the government's response through the "Atmanirbhar Bharat" relief package. The paper's data collection methods and research approach can serve as a reference for present research design. Insights on welfare access, policy analysis, and recommendations from the reviewed literature can help assess the effectiveness of the "Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme" in addressing the welfare needs of migrants through the Public Distribution System.

Shareen Joshi & Ors. (2021), in his work titled "Atman Nirbhar Bharat" - Economic Crises and Self-Reliance in the COVID-19 Pandemic" discusses the economic challenges India faced during Prime Minister Modi's term, with declining GDP growth and an unsteady economic record. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these issues, leading to a severe economic downturn and a strict lockdown that stranded millions of rural migrant workers and further affected the

⁸ View from India: Better infrastructure for inclusive growth, available at: <https://eandt.theiet.org/content/articles/2022/02/view-from-india-better-infrastructure-for-inclusive-growth/> (Visited on April 22, 2023).

⁹ Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan Self-Reliant India, available at: <https://www.investindia.gov.in/atmanirbhar-bharat-abhiyaan> (Visited on April 23, 2023).



economy. In response to the crisis, Prime Minister Modi shifted his economic platform and introduced the "Atman Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan," a self-reliance initiative aimed at reducing India's dependence on foreign markets and goods.

The article argues that the transition to self-reliance was influenced by several factors. Firstly, the economic crisis and declining productivity in India's agriculture sector necessitated reform and self-reliance. Secondly, the COVID-19 pandemic put immense strain on the country's economy, leading to a change in policy direction. Lastly, political factors, including the increasing influence of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu nationalist organization, played a role in shaping the government's agenda.

The article also highlights the dissonance between the government's promotion of self-reliance and the continuation of neoliberal policies, such as agricultural legislation proposing a dismantling of state support to the sector. The policies led to significant protests across the country, revealing a departure from traditional self-reliance values.

In conclusion, the article argues that India's shift to self-reliance during the COVID-19 pandemic was a response to economic challenges and political pressures. While the government promoted self-reliance, its policies reflected a mix of self-reliance and pro-market neoliberalism. This approach aimed to maintain national unity while prioritizing India's global standing in the face of an economic crisis.

Rekha & Ors. (2022), in his work titled "Atma Nirbhar Bharat through Economic Empowerment of Agricultural Women in India" discusses the concept of Atma Nirbhar Bharat (Self-reliant India) and its focus on empowering rural women in the agricultural sector. The study aims to examine the socio-economic conditions of agricultural women in India and evaluate the impact of self-help groups (SHGs) and bank linkage programs in empowering these women.

Shailendra Kumar & Ors. (2021), in the study titled "Migrant Workers and Human Rights: A Critical Study on India's COVID-19 Lockdown Policy" focuses on India's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly the implementation of a nationwide lockdown and its repercussions on domestic migrant workers. The research explores the reasons behind the failure of the lockdown strategy and the subsequent hardships faced by migrant laborers. It argues that the Indian government's policies during the lockdown exacerbated the plight of migrant workers and breached their fundamental and economic rights.

The literature extensively discusses the importance of universal human rights and how they should not discriminate based on nationality or location. It delves into the concept of migrants' rights, highlighting the special interests they hold in personal integrity, employment, political, and cultural rights. The study acknowledges the presence of laws in India meant to protect migrant workers, such as the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, the Trade Union Act, and others, but raises concerns about the implementation and enforcement of these laws.

The literature review also examines the influence of businesses on human rights, emphasizing the need for corporations to respect and adhere to international human rights standards. It discusses the "Protect, Respect, and Remedy" framework proposed by John Ruggie, which calls for states to protect against human rights abuses by non-state actors, including businesses, and for companies to respect human rights in their operations. The review points out that despite such frameworks, there are still gaps in integrating human rights into business practices.

Furthermore, the literature sheds light on the demographic and social conditions of migrant workers in India. It reveals that migration plays a significant role in alleviating poverty, but the migrant community faces numerous barriers, such as lack of access to healthcare, ration facilities, and social security. The majority of migrants engage in low-wage jobs and suffer from substandard living conditions due to the absence of formal hiring systems and documentation.

Wesley Wu-Yi Koo & Ors. (2020), in the work titled "Food Security in a Pandemic: Lessons from India's Lockdown" explores the challenges faced by migrant workers in India during the COVID-19 lockdown. With limited savings and restricted access to food and shelter, many migrants faced difficult choices, leading to long and risky journeys back home. The study examines the impact of ration card portability on reducing migrant movement. Intra-state portability showed a 10% reduction in mobility, while inter-state portability faced significant implementation hurdles. The paper emphasizes the need for better coordination and a lead time for effective implementation. The study underscores the importance of formal food security policies to aid vulnerable populations, particularly migrants, and advocates collaboration between local governments and charities to ensure essential support during crises.



S. Irudaya Rajan & Ors. (2020), in the paper titled “The COVID-19 Pandemic and Internal Labour Migration in India: A ‘Crisis of Mobility’” focuses on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the nationwide lockdown on internal migrants in India. The introduction provides a context for the study, with statistics on COVID-19 cases and deaths in India. It highlights the suddenness of the lockdown and how it caused panic among migrants, leading to mass attempts to return to rural hometowns with limited resources. The paper is divided into five sections: an overview of internal migration in India, gendered aspects of COVID-19 on migrants, mental health issues, limitations of social security provisions, and a roadmap for inclusive migrant policies. The sections aim to analyse the effects of the pandemic on migrants from various perspectives and identify areas for policy improvement.

The above reviews serve as a foundation, guiding for present research approach and enabling informed evaluations of the "Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme" in providing relief for migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic through the Public Distribution System. literature review is a crucial element of any research project. It helps to understand what has been done before, where the gaps lie, and how the present work can contribute to the existing knowledge. It informs present research design and methodology and ultimately strengthens the findings and conclusions. In conclusion, the reviewed literature provides a comprehensive understanding of India's COVID-19 lockdown and its implications on domestic migrant workers. It emphasizes the importance of upholding universal human rights and the need for a more inclusive approach to policymaking. The research points to the mistreatment and violations faced by migrant workers during the pandemic, highlighting the urgency for policy changes and better protection of vulnerable populations in times of crisis.

4. Research Methodology :

The research design will be a doctrinal approach, which relies on the examination of existing legal and policy literature, government reports, and relevant case laws. The focus will be on analyzing the Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme's provisions related to the PDS, its objectives, and the measures taken specifically for migrant relief during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The data collection for this research will involve accessing and reviewing primary and secondary sources, which include legal texts, official government documents, policy papers, and academic literature. Key documents to be analyzed will include the Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme guidelines, notifications, circulars, executive orders, and relevant laws related to the PDS and COVID-19 relief measures.

Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme and PDS

During the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis in India, the Government of India introduced the Atma Nirbhar Bharat Package (ANBP) in May 2020 to address the economic challenges faced by migrant workers across the country. The Department of Food & Public Distribution played a crucial role in implementing one of the measures under this package to ensure food security for migrant and stranded workers.

As part of the ANBP, the Department of Food & Public Distribution allocated a total of approximately 8 Lakh Metric Tons (MT) of food grains to all States and Union Territories (UTs) in the country. This allocation was communicated to all States and UTs on 15th May 2020 under the "ANBS" (Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme). The primary aim of this scheme was to mitigate the food-security requirements of migrant and stranded workers who were adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The unique aspect of the Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme was that it specifically targeted individuals who were not covered under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) or any other State Public Distribution System (PDS) scheme. It aimed to provide assistance to those who were unable to access PDS food grains through any existing government-sponsored schemes due to various reasons during the unprecedented and challenging COVID-19 situation.

The allocation of 8 Lakh MT of food grains was a significant step taken by the government to ensure that migrant and stranded workers, who were among the most vulnerable populations during the pandemic, had access to essential food supplies. The distribution of food grains through this scheme helped to address the immediate food security needs of



these individuals, many of whom were facing financial hardships and disruptions in their livelihoods due to the lockdown measures.¹⁰

By providing food grains to those not covered by the regular PDS schemes, the Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme aimed to bridge the gap and extend support to those who were in dire need during the crisis. It was a strategic measure to ensure that vulnerable populations did not face hunger and malnutrition amidst the pandemic's economic challenges and restrictions.

The implementation of the ANBS required coordination between the Department of Food & Public Distribution at the central level and the respective State and UT governments. Timely and efficient distribution was essential to reach the intended beneficiaries effectively. By providing food security to migrant and stranded workers, the government attempted to alleviate their hardships and ensure their well-being during this critical period.

Under this scheme, food grains were distributed to eligible families consisting of Wheat or Atta (10 kg./Family/Month), Sugar (1 kg./Family/Month), and Pulses (10 kg./Family/Month). Fair Price Shops, also known as ration shops, were one of the primary distribution points. These shops are authorized by the government to sell food grains and other essential commodities to eligible families at subsidized rates. Migrant and stranded workers could collect their allocated food grains from these FPS. To facilitate easier access for vulnerable individuals, especially those who were unable to visit FPS, home delivery of food grains was arranged. Volunteers and local authorities delivered the allocated food grains directly to the doorstep of eligible families. In some areas, community centers were used as distribution centers. This approach allowed for centralized distribution, making it more convenient for migrants and stranded workers to collect their allotted food grains. In certain places, distribution points were set up at crossroads or other accessible locations. This method aimed to ensure that even those without easy access to FPS or community centers could receive their entitled food grains.

The distribution under the ANBS was meticulously planned and coordinated by the Department of Food & Public Distribution in collaboration with state governments and local authorities. The eligible beneficiaries were identified based on their unique identification details, and the allocated quantities of food grains were communicated to the respective distribution centers.

Beneficiary identification relied on various records, and efforts were made to ensure that genuine beneficiaries received the benefits without any discrimination or exclusions. Proper documentation and verification were conducted to prevent any misuse or duplication of benefits. Additionally, awareness campaigns were conducted to inform eligible families about the distribution process, their entitlements, and the designated distribution centers. This helped ensure that the intended beneficiaries were well-informed and could avail of the scheme without confusion. The timely and efficient distribution of food grains was crucial to meeting the immediate food security needs of migrant and stranded workers during the pandemic. The involvement of local authorities, volunteers, and community leaders played a pivotal role in successfully implementing the distribution process.¹¹

Successful implementation of the ANBS required close coordination and collaboration between the Central Government and state governments. The Central Government provided guidance, financial support, and food grain allocations, while state governments executed the distribution and ensured it reached the intended beneficiaries.

5. Implementation Challenges

The implementation of the Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme (ANBS) for food distribution faced several challenges and bottlenecks, particularly concerning the identification of migrant beneficiaries. One of the key issues was the lack of a centralized database containing comprehensive information about the migrant population. Without accurate data, it was challenging for authorities to identify and reach out to the exact number of beneficiaries in need. This resulted in difficulties in effectively targeting and providing assistance to all deserving migrants, leaving some without the necessary support during the crisis.

Another significant challenge was related to logistics and distribution. Migrant populations are often highly mobile, and their movements can be unpredictable, making it difficult to locate and reach them for food grain distribution. Many

¹⁰ Reports on Concurrent Evaluation, available at: https://nfsa.gov.in/portal/Concurrent_Evaluation (Visited on June 11, 2023).

¹¹ Ibid.



migrants had returned to their hometowns or villages, which were often located in remote or inaccessible areas. Ensuring the timely and efficient delivery of food grains to these dispersed populations was a complex task that required coordination between various government agencies and stakeholders.

The lack of a standardized process for registration and verification of beneficiaries also posed challenges. Different states adopted varying methods for registration, which sometimes led to discrepancies and delays in receiving assistance. In some cases, migrants faced bureaucratic hurdles or were required to submit extensive documentation, causing further delays in accessing the benefits under the ANBS.

Furthermore, the sudden increase in demand for food grains due to the pandemic led to supply chain disruptions and shortages in some regions. The distribution infrastructure, including Fair Price Shops (FPS) and community centers, was strained, making it difficult to ensure an adequate and timely supply of food grains to all distribution points.

To overcome these challenges, it became crucial for the Central and state governments to collaborate and streamline the implementation process. Improved data collection and sharing mechanisms could have enhanced beneficiary identification and tracking, ensuring that the right support reached the right people. Utilizing technology and mobile applications could have facilitated real-time data updates and improved the efficiency of distribution.

Moreover, establishing dedicated helplines or support centers could have assisted migrants in the registration process, addressing their queries, and expediting the delivery of food grains. Additionally, coordination with local NGOs and community leaders could have played a significant role in locating and reaching out to migrants in remote areas.

In conclusion, the ANBS for food distribution demonstrated the importance of comprehensive planning, effective coordination, and adaptive strategies to overcome implementation challenges and ensure that the scheme effectively reached and supported the vulnerable migrant populations during the pandemic.

6. Policy Recommendations :

Based on the findings and experiences during the implementation of the Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme (ANBS) for food distribution to migrant workers during crises, several policy recommendations can be proposed to enhance relief measures and strengthen the role of the Public Distribution System (PDS) in catering to the needs of migrants.

Firstly, it is essential to strengthen the PDS system itself, ensuring its robustness and flexibility to adapt during emergencies. This could involve increasing the network of Fair Price Shops (FPS) and community centers to cover a wider geographical area, especially in regions with a significant migrant population. Additionally, investing in technology and digitization would streamline the distribution process, making it more efficient and transparent.

To cater specifically to migrant workers during crises, the government should consider implementing a dedicated and portable ration card system. Such a system would enable migrants to access PDS benefits across state borders, ensuring they receive the necessary food grains even if they are away from their home states. This inter-state portability can be facilitated through coordination between the Central and state governments, and by linking ration cards with a national identification system like Aadhaar.

To improve the targeting and distribution mechanisms, it is crucial to establish a comprehensive and up-to-date database of migrant workers. This database should include information about their current locations, occupations, and family details to enable accurate identification and timely assistance during crises. Collaborating with technology companies and using data analytics could aid in maintaining this database and providing real-time updates.

Furthermore, the government should explore options to provide cash transfers or food coupons to migrants in need. Cash transfers can empower migrants with the flexibility to buy food and other essentials based on their requirements, while food coupons can be used to redeem food grains from authorized outlets, thus reducing logistical challenges.

Engaging with local community leaders, NGOs, and civil society organizations is essential for effective outreach and distribution in remote or inaccessible areas. These organizations can play a pivotal role in identifying vulnerable migrant populations and ensuring that relief measures reach them promptly.



Lastly, there is a need for coordination and cooperation between different government departments and agencies at the central, state, and local levels. This would facilitate efficient planning, resource allocation, and timely execution of relief measures during emergencies.

By implementing these policy recommendations, the government can strengthen the PDS system, improve targeting and distribution mechanisms, and enhance the effectiveness of relief measures during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Ensuring adequate support and food security for migrant workers will not only alleviate their hardships but also contribute to a more resilient and inclusive social welfare system in the country.

In conclusion, the Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme under the ANBP was a significant initiative taken by the Government of India to address the food security needs of migrant and stranded workers during the COVID-19 crisis. The allocation of 8 Lakh MT of food grains to all States and UTs helped support those who were not covered under regular PDS schemes, ensuring that they had access to essential food supplies during these challenging times. This measure aimed to provide relief and assistance to the most vulnerable sections of society and reflected the government's commitment to mitigating the impact of the pandemic on the country's population.

7. Conclusion :

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerabilities of India's migrant workers, necessitating targeted interventions and policy measures to protect their rights and well-being during crises. The Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme (ANBS) was introduced as a response to the economic challenges posed by the pandemic and aimed to provide relief for migrant workers. The scheme's allocation of food grains to eligible families, particularly those outside the National Food Security Act (NFSA) or existing State PDS schemes, was a strategic step to mitigate food insecurity among migrants. However, the implementation of the ANBS faced challenges in identifying beneficiaries, addressing logistic issues, and ensuring timely distribution.

To enhance relief measures, policy recommendations have been proposed. Strengthening the PDS system through increased coverage and technology integration would improve efficiency and transparency. Implementing a portable ration card system could enable migrants to access food grains across state borders, ensuring their food security during mobility. The establishment of a comprehensive database and collaboration with technology companies would aid in identifying and assisting vulnerable migrant populations. Additionally, considering cash transfers or food coupons as alternative relief mechanisms would alleviate logistical challenges.

The distribution of food grains under the Atma Nirbhar Bharat Scheme was different in various states of India, with each state government implementing the scheme based on its specific needs and circumstances. However, the Central Government played a vital role in providing equal quantities of food grains for distribution across the country, emphasizing its commitment to providing equitable relief measures to address the challenges faced by migrant and stranded workers during the COVID-19 crisis.

Engaging local community leaders, NGOs, and civil society organizations would facilitate outreach and distribution to remote or inaccessible areas. Lastly, fostering coordination between different government levels and departments is crucial for efficient planning and resource allocation during emergencies.

The research underscores the need for comprehensive measures and collaborative efforts to address the welfare of migrant workers during crises. By implementing the proposed policy recommendations, the government can fortify the PDS system and enhance the effectiveness of relief measures, ensuring a more resilient and inclusive approach to safeguarding migrant workers' rights and well-being in times of crisis.

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