

Weekly Livelihoods Update

17 January 2019

- ✚ **Where Will the 10% Be Employed?** – The central government’s employment-protection manoeuvres, especially its recent 10% quota politics, bear a striking resemblance to a walking device described in a 19th-century Bengali limerick. The device, strapped to its wearer’s shoulders, dangles “carrots” in front of them. It can make its wearer cover miles in minutes in pursuit of the bait that will always be at a constant distance from them no matter how fast they run towards it. Take for instance, the government’s latest stunt of reserving 10% of jobs and seats at academic institutions for the “economically” weak upper castes. Given the political ado about it, none can deny its effectiveness as an electoral strategy, but neither can one dismiss its spuriousness in providing employment opportunities. Just like the perpetual motion device in the limerick, which makes hunger satiation unattainable, the recent quota arrangements, too, are equally pointless for any worthwhile recruitment. [For further reading: <https://www.epw.in/journal/2019/2/editorials/where-will-10-be-employed.html>]
- ✚ **Solar Irrigation Pumps and India’s Energy–Irrigation Nexus** – India’s groundwater economy is stuck in a perverse nexus between electricity subsidies and groundwater depletion. From Punjab down to Tamil Nadu, free power to farmers has been the cause of rampant groundwater over-exploitation and deteriorating finances of electricity utilities (see for instance, Kumar 2005; Kumar and Singh 2007; Kumar et al 2011). The situation can be salvaged if irrigation tubewells are metered and farmers charged for power consumed in irrigation. But this will have political risks that leaders will be unwilling to accept for much time to come. Solar irrigation pumps (SIPs), considered unviable, are being aggressively promoted with high investment subsidies by governments and DISCOMs (electricity distribution companies of India) to reduce farm power subsidy burden. Since 2014, SIP numbers have grown at CAGR (compound annual growth rate) of 65% per year; at this rate, India will have 12 million SIPs by 2025. [For further reading: <https://www.epw.in/journal/2019/2/discussion/solar-irrigation-pumps-and-indias-energy.html>]
- ✚ **Climate Change and Rural Poverty Levels in India** – Although there is wide recognition of the adverse impacts of climate change and extreme weather events on poverty, there is hardly any empirical evidence to substantiate this. The trends and the role of agricultural growth and other factors on rural poverty in India—which has the largest concentration of the poor in the world—have been analysed, and the likely changes in rural poverty levels in India under alternative climate scenarios have

been assessed. Evidence presented here suggests that rural poverty trends in India, which witnessed a significant decline during the post-reform period beginning from 1991, may get reversed and may increase due to the likely adverse impacts of climate change on Indian agriculture, and other drivers of poverty. Not only will the proportion of poor population likely rise, but also the depth and severity of rural poverty measured through the poverty gap index and squared poverty gap index may aggravate sharply in response to warming temperatures and other climatic changes. [For further reading: <https://www.epw.in/journal/2019/2/special-articles/climate-change-and-rural-poverty-levels.html>]

✚ **Burden of Child Malnutrition in India** – In India, monitoring and surveillance of health and well-being indicators have been focused primarily on the state and district levels. Analysing population data at the level of parliamentary constituencies has the potential to bring political accountability to the data-driven policy discourse that is currently based on district-level estimates. Using data from the fourth National Family Health Survey 2016, two geographic information systems methodologies have been developed and applied to provide estimates of four child malnutrition indicators (stunting, underweight, wasting, and anemia) for the 543 parliamentary constituencies in India. The results indicate that several constituencies experience a multiple burden of child malnutrition that must be addressed concurrently and as a priority. [For further reading: <https://www.epw.in/journal/2019/2/special-articles/burden-child-malnutrition-india.html>]

✚ **Government Cuts Funding To National Crèche Scheme, Crippling Lifeline for Poor Working Mothers** – The 2006 National Crèche Scheme, previously known as the Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme, and its network of neighbourhood crèches were set up for parents like Aarti, unable to rely on family members or their employer's help for childcare. Aarti's employers are busy, "important-looking" people who often work from home in their smart Colaba apartment, near South Mumbai's art galleries. They like things to be quiet and wouldn't take too kindly to having a couple of kids running about the place, making noise, as children tend to do. "I have to bring them to work with me on Sundays, when the crèche is closed," Aarti Bhansore, 35, a domestic worker told IndiaSpend. "It definitely feels like an issue for my employers, so I'm glad a neighbour told me about the crèche in the neighbourhood." [For further reading: <https://www.indiaspend.com/government-cuts-funding-to-national-creche-scheme-crippling-lifeline-for-poor-working-mothers/>]

✚ **Why Rural Women Are Falling Out Of India's Workforce At Faster Rates Than Urban Women** – The number of women working in rural India is declining at a greater pace than that among women in the urban workforce, according to an

IndiaSpend analysis of government data. Sustained high economic growth since the early 1990s has led to improved education and health indicators among India's women. Yet, women accounted for no more than 25% of the labour force in 2011-12, declining from 33% in 2005, according to national sample survey report (2014) on employment, a rate worse than neighbouring Bangladesh (29%), Nepal (52%) and Sri Lanka (34%), IndiaSpend reported on May 4, 2017. [For further reading: <https://www.indiaspend.com/why-rural-women-are-falling-out-of-indias-workforce-at-faster-rates-than-urban-women/>]

- ✚ **After 4 Years of Swachh Bharat, Open Defecation Down 26 Percentage Points, But Toilet Use Does Not Match Construction Spree** – More Indians living in villages owned a latrine in 2018 than four years ago, yet 44% of them still defecate in the open, according to a survey covering Rajasthan, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh that was released on January 4, 2019. These four states together contain two-fifths of India's rural population and reported high open defecation rates, over 68% in 2016, as per this government report. Almost a quarter (23%) of those who own a latrine defecated in the open, a figure that has remained unchanged since 2014, researchers found. This can mostly be attributed to deeply entrenched beliefs about caste “impurity” associated with emptying latrine pits, the paper concluded. [For further reading: <https://www.indiaspend.com/after-4-years-of-swachh-bharat-open-defecation-down-26-percentage-points-but-toilet-use-does-not-match-construction-spree-false-claims-evident/>]
- ✚ **Is India Really 96% Open Defecation Free?** – The Census 2011 told us only 32% of India's rural households had toilets. Other studies showed that a fewer number of those households actually used those toilets. Under the Narendra Modi government's Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), much has changed. Firstly, commitment has come from the highest level of government, especially the prime minister. By all accounts, the secretary in charge of SBM is a remarkably driven man. Secondly, under SBM, for the first time, the government is focusing on changing behaviour on a large scale. In fact, India is implementing the world's largest collective behaviour movement for rural sanitation. [For further reading: <https://thewire.in/government/is-india-really-96-open-defecation-free>]