

NCEUS PRESCRIBES FOUR PACKAGES FOR UNORGANIZED SECTOR WORKERS

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The National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS) has advocated a "13 Point Action Programme" under four separate packages that should get "overriding and immediate priority", for the unorganized sector workers, in a report presented to the Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh yesterday.

Addressing a press conference here today, Dr. Arjun Sengupta, Chairman, NCEUS said that the "Commission's Action Programme seeks to address core issues of social security and work conditions, through separate Bills." The Commission has recommended additional measures to make a difference to the lives of "77% of the Indian population who are currently earning less than Rs.20 a day", Dr. Sengupta informed.

The first package of protective measures for unorganized workers includes National Minimum Social Security benefits like hospitalization benefit of Rs.15,000 per year; sickness allowance for 15 days @Rs.50/- per day and maternity benefit of Rs.1,000 to the worker/spouse.

It further advocates life cover for all unorganized workers; old age pension of Rs.200 per month to all BPL workers above 60 and Provident Fund for all other registered workers. The scheme is to be implemented within a period of five years. The projected outlay to cover all agricultural workers is estimated at Rs.19,400 crore and non-agricultural at Rs.12,950 crore, Dr. Sengupta explained.

The second package of measures for marginal and small farmers includes encouraging lending to small and marginal farmers by setting up a Credit Guarantee Fund in NABARD to provide cover against defaults on loans to this segment. Other actions for marginal and small farmers include accelerating land and water management programmes and setting up of Farmers' Debt Relief Commissions.

The third package of measures for the Non-Agricultural Sector includes creating a National Fund for the Unorganised Sector (with an initial corpus of Rs.5000 crore funded by the Central Government, public sector banks etc.) Other actions for non-farm sector include improving credit flow to the sector, giving incentive to Self Help Groups and adopting a 'Growth Pole' model for cluster development.

Finally, the fourth package of measures to expand Employment and improve Employability advocated strengthening self-employment programmes, expanding the National Rural Employment Programme to all districts and increasing employability through skill development, Dr. Sengupta added.