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A ground plan for sustainable mass employment

(The Hindu, 21-08-24)

What are the main challenges in creating sustainable mass employment with dignity in India?

- Low wages for unskilled workers
- Short-duration skill programs but with low long-term placements
- Lack of robust higher secondary/higher/vocational opportunities in some states
- Low public employment per unit of population compared to developed countries

What are the key policy initiatives suggested for creating sustainable mass employment?

- Decentralized community action to identify skilling needs
- Convergence of initiatives for education, health, skills, nutrition, livelihoods, and employment
- Introduction of need-based vocational courses alongside undergraduate programs
- Standardization of nursing and allied health-care professional courses
- Creation of community cadres of care-givers for universal crèches
- Investment in Industrial Training Institutes (ITI) and polytechnics as skill development hubs
- Introduction of enterprise and start-up skills in high schools
- Co-sharing model of apprenticeships with industry
- Streamlining working capital loans for women-led and first-generation enterprises
- Universal skill accreditation program for skill-providing institutions
- Focused use of MGNREGA funds in water-scarce and high-deprivation blocks
- Scaling up apprenticeships with a focus on skill acquisition

How does the article suggest improving the effectiveness of existing programs?

- Community ownership of state programs through direct community action
- Convergence of initiatives at the local government level with women's collectives
- Making vocational courses compulsory in every college
- Using ITIs and polytechnics as hubs for feeder schools
- Introducing technology and enterprise subjects in schools
- Improving the implementation of MGNREGA with a focus on the poorest families

What role does the article suggest for different stakeholders in creating employment?

- Local communities: Identifying skilling needs and ensuring accountability
- Private sector: Creating jobs and participating in apprenticeship programs
- Government: Determining floor wage rates, assuring high-quality public goods, and providing resources for experimentation
- Educational institutions: Introducing vocational courses and enterprise skills
- Banks: Providing working capital loans to women-led and first-generation enterprises
- Industry: Co-sharing apprenticeship costs and sponsoring candidates for skill courses

Can you answer the following question?

Critically examine the challenges in creating sustainable mass employment with dignity in India. Discuss the key policy measures in addressing the same.

On Ethanol Blending

(The Hindu, 21-08-24)

What is the current status of India's ethanol blending program?

- India is on track to achieve 20% ethanol blending with petrol by 2025-26
- Current blending levels are between 13% to 15%, up from 8% in 2021
- Total ethanol production capacity has increased to 1,380 crore litres
- 875 crore litres capacity from sugarcane and 505 crore from foodgrains

What are the main challenges and concerns regarding the ethanol blending program?

- Food vs. fuel debate: Increased use of foodgrains for ethanol production
- Water usage: Expanding sugarcane production requires significant water resources
- Impact on other sectors: Diversion of maize to ethanol affects poultry and livestock feed industries
- Fuel efficiency: Ethanol blending can reduce fuel efficiency in vehicles not suited for it
- State-specific issues: Different approaches and priorities across states

How is the ethanol production capacity being expanded?

- Government interest subvention programs for establishing new distilleries
- Sugar industry has invested ₹40,000 crore in capacity expansion
- Diversification of feedstock: Using sugarcane juice, molasses, and grains
- Multi-fuel distilleries capable of processing both sugarcane and grain-based feedstock

What are the potential benefits and drawbacks of the ethanol blending program?

Benefits:

- Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions
- Estimated foreign exchange savings of \$4 billion per year
- Bolstering the rural economy through assured market for crops

Drawbacks:

- Potential impact on food security
- Increased water usage for sugarcane cultivation
- Need for vehicle modifications to accommodate higher ethanol blends
- Varying profitability across states due to different pricing structures for ethanol and ENA

Can you answer the following question?

Critically analyze India's ethanol blending program, discussing its potential benefits and challenges.