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Editorial

Agricultural wages constitute one of the most significant indicators of rural livelihoods, labour productivity, and socio-economic development in India. Despite remarkable progress in agricultural modernization, employment generation, and poverty reduction, substantial disparities in agricultural wage rates continue to persist across Indian states. These inter-state differences reflect variations in agricultural productivity, labour market dynamics, infrastructure, institutional arrangements, climatic conditions, and the pace of economic transformation. While states such as Punjab, Haryana, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu generally offer comparatively higher agricultural wages owing to better mechanization, higher cropping intensity, and stronger labour demand, several eastern and central states continue to experience relatively low wage levels, perpetuating rural poverty and seasonal migration. Such persistent disparities highlight the urgent need for region-specific policy interventions aimed at achieving equitable rural development. The dispersion in agricultural wages is influenced by multiple structural and institutional factors. Agricultural productivity, irrigation coverage, access to modern technology, landholding patterns, labour scarcity, educational attainment, and rural non-farm employment opportunities collectively determine wage formation. Government interventions such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), minimum wage legislation, direct income support programmes, and investments in rural infrastructure have contributed to raising wage levels in many regions. Nevertheless, unequal implementation, variations in labour market institutions, and differences in state-level economic performance continue to generate significant wage gaps. Climate variability, recurrent droughts, and declining profitability in agriculture further exacerbate these regional inequalities by reducing labour demand in vulnerable states. Reducing inter-state agricultural wage disparities requires a comprehensive and integrated development strategy that extends beyond periodic wage revisions. Enhancing agricultural productivity through irrigation expansion, climate-resilient farming, mechanization, digital agriculture, and improved market access can substantially increase labour demand and rural incomes. Simultaneously, strengthening rural education, vocational skill development, women's workforce participation, and diversification into allied agricultural activities and rural enterprises can create sustainable employment opportunities. Greater coordination between the Union and State Governments is essential to ensure effective enforcement of minimum wage provisions, expansion of social security coverage, and targeted investments in economically lagging regions. Policies promoting balanced regional development will not only narrow wage differentials but also reduce distress migration and foster inclusive economic growth. As India advances towards the vision of a developed economy, reducing inter-state disparities in agricultural wages must remain a national priority.

Agricultural workers continue to constitute a significant proportion of the country's workforce, and equitable remuneration is fundamental to improving living standards, enhancing food security, and strengthening rural resilience. Future research should focus on longitudinal analyses of wage convergence, the impact of technological adoption on rural labour markets, gender-based wage differentials, and the role of institutional reforms in promoting equitable wage growth. A more balanced agricultural labour market will contribute significantly to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, promoting social justice, and ensuring that the benefits of India's economic progress are shared across all regions and communities.

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