

Minutes of the Video Conference held on 17th April, 2020 under the Chairmanship of Shri Rajesh Bhushan, Secretary, Department of Rural Development, Government of India to review Schemes of the Rural Development Ministry in the context of Covid19 Pandemic.

A review meeting through Video Conference was held on 17th April, 2020 under the Chairmanship of Shri Rajesh Bhushan, Secretary, Rural Development, Govt. of India to review Schemes of Rural Development in the context of Covid-19 Pandemic. The list of participants is given at annexure.

2. At the outset, Secretary informed that on 15th April, 2020, Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has issued detailed guidelines on measures to be taken by Ministries/Departments of Government of India for containment of COVID-19 in the country. He stated that Department of Rural Development has issued four letters pertaining to implementation of NRLM, PMGSY, MGNREGA and PMAYG with respect to the guidelines of MHA for containing the spread of Covid-19. He added that it is a challenging time so life, safety, security and livelihoods of the workers are of paramount importance. The department can set an example while implementing the schemes of Rural Development in these challenging times. Secretary (RD) emphasised the following five critical elements on which immediate action should be initiated by all States/UTs:

1. Proper planning for initiating MGNREGS, PMGSY, PMAY(G) and DAY-NRLM works in Non Containment Zones as demarcated by States/UTs/District Administrations. It is important for all States/UTs to develop standard planning template for each work site (social distancing to be maintained, protective face covers to be used, provision of washing of hands multiple times by water and soap be provided, no smoking, no tobacco chewing, no spitting, personal hygiene to be maintained, etc) as well as develop standard planning template for District Level (law and order issues, safe movement of workers, prompt identification of persons showing ILI symptoms and rushing them to the nearest health care facilities, etc.), well before 20.04.2020.
2. Since activities under Rural Development programmes are permissible only in Non Containment Zones as demarcated by States/UTs/District Administrations, hence Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Departments of the States must remain in constant touch with their respective counterparts in Health and Home Departments to keep track of the dynamically changing Containment Zones and take action accordingly.
3. Under MGNREGS focus should be on water conservation and irrigation works as well as works to arrest surface run-offs. This would not only help in soil conservation and water recharge but would also create individual and community assets of good quality and durability.

4. The gravity of Covid 19 epidemic should be kept in focus while attempting to strengthen rural livelihoods. Therefore, intense IEC activities regarding personal hygiene and Dos & Don'ts are required to be conducted at all levels starting from the State level to the work site level. In creating this widespread awareness through IEC, officers of PRIs, ASHAs, ANMs, women of SHGs, etc., must be optimally utilised. Video and Audio Clips of one minute duration are being developed by DoRD and would be made available to all States/UTs. They must be widely disseminated and their compliance ensured.
5. There are existing provisions for uploading geotagged photos of the various stages of physical progress of Rural Development programmes on concerned programme websites. Such geotagged photos must now clearly depict social distancing being maintained and protective face covers being used at all work sites.

It was pointed out by all State/UTs that they are in continuous dialogue with their respective Health and Home Departments and would take all necessary measures to ensure safety and security of workers/beneficiaries of Rural Development programmes. Most of the States also indicated that the money released in the first month of the current financial year has already been received by them. In a few instances where Central releases are more than Rs.200 crores, it was pointed out that crediting would be between April 21-30, 2020.

It was pointed out on behalf of Kerala and Uttar Pradesh that specific steps are being considered by them to ensure that persons above 65 years of age and persons with co- morbidities are not engaged in rural development works. Other States/UTs may follow suit. It was pointed out by Gujarat, Haryana, Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha that women SHGs under DAY-NRLM have risen to the challenge posed by Covid 19 and have made protective face covers, sanitisers, liquid and solid soaps on a large scale, which have been procured by the State Governments, thereby strengthening their livelihoods. It was also pointed out that woman SHGs are also engaged in successfully operating community kitchens to feed vulnerable sections as well as migrant labour.

Secretary (RD) thanked all States/UTs and reiterated that all activities under Rural Development Programmes as mentioned above shall be implemented only after making all arrangements necessary for strict implementation of MHA guidelines dated 15.04.2020.
