



Scheme based workers - the struggle for an identity

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Context

- The central government employs millions of regular and contract workers who are recognised as government employees and are in the pay spectrum of the government.
- The government also employs several types of workers such as **Anganwadi workers or AWWs (13,51,104 workers)** and **Anganwadi helpers or AWHs (9,22,522)**, **Accredited Social Health Activists or ASHAs (10,52,322 workers)**, and **Mid-Day-Meals workers or MDMWs (25,16,688)** under The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme since 1975, the National Rural Health Mission (NHRM) and the mid-day meals day scheme.
- Put together, around 60 million workers work in government schemes.
- These schemes are those which carry out **social and economic functions by taking care of children and lactating mothers and nutrition aspects**.
- They are also a bridge between the community and the public health system, **improving school enrolment and the nutritional health system**.
- Though there has been much recognition of their work (by the Prime Minister and even the World Health Organization), these workers face hardship — they have been **denied basic labour market rights such as workers' status, minimum wages and social security**.
- Three basic issues among others have affected scheme-based workers (SBW) — **an identity as “workers” just like any government employee, minimum wages and social security**.
- The **government is concerned with the huge cost implications** as the employment of Scheme Based Workers as government employees is set to grow as the population grows.
- It is **not “applause” that they seek but “worker” status**. It is an existential struggle. It is interesting to note that in both the traditional and modern (gig) sectors, workers are battling for their labour market **“identities” as “workers” and earn “wages and not “honorarium”**.
- It is **not charity that they seek but a legitimate demand for “workers” status** by dint of hard work over long hours.