

» TODAY'S PAPER » TAMIL NADU

Tiruvannamalai, November 17, 2016

Farm labourers banking on MGNREGS wages

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They are struggling without work due to drought-like situation

With the monsoon playing truant, the countryside of Tiruvannamalai district has little job to offer for its farm labourers.

Slump in the provision of work under MGNREGS, coupled with the onslaught of drought-like situation, has affected their livelihood. They were all looking at the possibility of getting the outstanding payment for the work they did under MGNREGS months ago.

A month ago, the outstanding was about Rs.120 crore, as per official sources. However, due to the concerted efforts taken by District Collector Prashant M. Wadnere and DRDA Project Director G.Loganayagi the major part of the outstanding was disbursed before Deepavali. Now, the wage outstanding stands at Rs.30 crore, sources said.

Speaking to *The Hindu* on the state of agricultural labourers whose MGNREGS wages are pending, M. Prakalanathan, District Secretary, All India Agricultural Labours Association, said “since neither agricultural work nor MGNREGS jobs are easily available these days the agricultural workers are looking for the whatever little amount they would be getting from the government towards their pending wages.”

In addition, the demonetisation situation had caused them anxiety, he said. They feared that it might take longer time before they could get their money.

Government should take into account their condition and give priority in disbursing money for the MGNREGS workers. It should also give them some job regularly in order to help them manage at this time, he added.

Agricultural labourers of Kiliyapattu village near here said demonetisation had nothing to do with them, as they had no notes of higher denomination. Gopal (65), a landless agricultural labourer, said he could not get work as there was no water in wells.

He had no currency in higher denomination, but was worried about the development because it might further delay disbursement of their wages under MGNREGS.

When asked how they managed their lives without work, Thayamma, another landless worker showed bag of rice she bought from Public Distribution System shop, under free rice scheme. “This only saves us,” she said.
