

Rural Employment and Sustainable Livelihood Through Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act: An Analysis

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Abstract

The development of rural areas is not possible until the regular employment is provided to the rural people in order to maintain the minimum level of employment and livelihood. In India more than 75% people lives in the rural areas and these areas are underdeveloped. Research and development sector in the country implemented several policies and programmes to overcome with the problems faced by rural people in terms of employment, sustainable livelihood, opportunities, poverty and growth. The Government of India has made efforts in this direction by introducing rural employment scheme under MGNREGA. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) proposes to augment livelihood security by offering to the extent of one hundred day of guaranteed employment to the rural people of every household in a financial year. The scheme envisages certain objectives to improve rural life employment and livelihood. This scheme focuses on following areas - Conservation of water and it's harvesting, shielding the poor mass from

drought. Plantation and forestation are also on the agenda of MGNREGA. For the works under MGNREGA payment of workers are proposed to be made on piece rate basis in order to ensure that workers are paid for their labor. The present paper attempts to assess the rural employment and sustainable livelihood through MGNREGAs on the livelihood of the excluded population and its performance in creating durable and sustainable community assets in the rural areas.

Keywords: Rural Employment; Livelihood; Poverty; Growth; MGNREGA; Policies; Programmes Development

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The NREGA act was notified in September, 2005, renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGA) from 2010. The Act was notified in three phases, implemented in 200 rural districts, in its first phase of implementation (with effect from 2 February 2006), in Financial year 2007–08, it was extended to additional 130

rural districts and lastly all the remaining districts were notified under MGNREGA with effect from 1 April 2008. Since then MGNREGA has covered the all the districts with exception of districts that have hundred per cent urban population (MGNREGA Sameeksha, 2006-2012).

The MANREGA has become a powerful tool for social inclusion in rural India through livelihood, employment security and democratic governance. The Act has a mandate to provide 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year (FY) to every rural household whose adult members volunteer for unskilled manual work. It includes social protection for the most vulnerable and backward people living in rural India by providing employment opportunities, which help in the empowerment of the marginalized classes, especially women, Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs).

2.0 MGNREGA AND EXCLUDED GROUPS

The marginalized group's participation including SCs and STs in MGNREGA scheme is significantly high. Nationally, the share of SCs and STs in the work provided under the scheme has been 40–50 per cent across each of the years of the Scheme's implementation. In Financial Year 2011–12, 40 per cent of the total person-days of employment were provided to SCs and STs. The participation rate exceeds the total share of population of SCs and STs in the total population (MGNREGA Sameeksha, 2006-12).

MGNREGA is a powerful instrument for ensuring inclusive growth in rural India through its impact on social protection for the most vulnerable population living in the rural areas, livelihood security for the poor through creation of durable assets, improved water security, soil conservation and higher land productivity and democratic empowerment of socially disadvantaged groups especially women, SCs and STs through right based legislations. It give emphasis on the empowerment of the socially disadvantaged, especially women, Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), through the processes of a rights-based legislation (Rao R.k.m., 2013).

3.0 MGNREGA AND WOMEN EMPLOYMENT

Women participation in the workforce has surpassed the statutory minimum requirement of 33 percent to protect the women justice and rights for their sustainability and employment. MGNREGA provides support for child care and convenience to households. The guidelines mention the need for a crèche facilities at the worksite, for the works to be convenient for families, which ensures that single women can be recognized as a 'household' to access with a national participation rate of 47 per cent, evidence suggests that women are participating in the Scheme more actively than in other works. Research also indicates that MGNREGA is an important work opportunity for women who would have otherwise remained unemployed or underemployed.

4.0 INCLUSION OF WOMEN

NREGS is gender sensitive scheme that ensures that at least one-third of the workers should be women and also ensures enabling environment for the same in the worksite. NREGA also provides for childcare facilities at the worksite when more than five children under six years of age are present at the worksite which is an important provision given that, in large parts of the country, there are no childcare arrangements (e.g. functional anganwadis) for working women. Regarding the proportion of women participation in NREGS Tripura precede its neighbouring states as it is seen that a total of 189 lakhs employment were generated for women in 2011-12 whereas it was only 88 lakhs in Assam, 69 lakhs in Manipur, 67 lakhs in Meghalaya, 58 lakhs in Nagaland, 29 lakhs in Mizoram and only 0.2 lakhs in Arunachal Pradesh¹⁵. Though the proportion of employment generation is increasing gradually from 2006-07 to 2011-12 yet records also depicts a variant picture regarding the proportion of women participation as shown in the below figure.

5.0 MGNREGA: EMPOWERING PEOPLE

Probably, the title of the scheme in the name of 'Mahatma Gandhi' exhibits the soul of scheme with an aim to develop rural people. The increase in earning and guarantee of earning are amongst the best strategies to empower the rural people. Central Government formulated the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in 2005. With its

legal framework and rights-based approach, MGNREGA provides employment to those who demand it and is a paradigm shift from earlier programmes. Notified on September 7, 2005, MGNREGA aims at enhancing livelihood security by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The Act was implemented on February 2, 2006 covering 200 districts in its first phase and was extended to 130 additional districts in 2007-2008. All the remaining rural areas have been notified with effect from April 1, 2008

6.0 FACT ABOUT MGNREGA

The fact feature of the scheme is to provide the employment, the in absence of employment, minimum amount is ensured. This feature is not only helpful in converting uncertainty of employment into certainty, but also maintaining a minimum level of earning and enhancing living standard on regular pattern. The employment and employee data is properly maintained in a format under the supervision of local gram panchayat. This process includes the maintenance of job card of each family member. Hence, the family earning can easily be calculated.

The delivery system is through local gram panchayat. Since the gram panchayat in constitution, is considered as a lower constitutional unit, hence, the local verification is done at local level. The employment creation process includes the role of local gram panchayat. Under the scheme, the employment

is ensured within stipulated time period of registration. If employment is not offered within stipulated time, everyday lack of employment allocation, in money has to be salaried. A positive side of the scheme is to ensure equal opportunity to females also. At least one-third of individuals to whom perform is allocated must be females.

Wages are to be compensated according to lowest income as recommended under the Minimum Wages Act 1948 for farming laborers in the condition. Disbursement of income has to be done on every week base and not beyond a couple weeks. Local Panchayat Raj Institutions, also known as PRI's have a major part in preparing and execution. Each region has to get ready a display of tasks. The chosen performs (laborers) to offer career (job) is to be chosen from the record of allowable performs.

Impact of MGNREGA on society

In a short span of 8 years, MGNREGA scheme has been pivotal in turning around the employment scenario in rural area with fewer time frames. Its impact is visible in form of retained laborers, improved income, social empowerment and agricultural productivity, employment generation, sustainable livelihood.

6.1 RURAL EMPLOYMENT AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD

The scheme has to some extent provided the employment and sustainable livelihood security to rural class by converting the uncertain situation of income and employment into certainty. MGNREGA has provided around Rs 1,10,700 crore (66 per cent of the total

expenditure of around Rs 1,66,000 crore) as worker wages from Financial Year 2006 up to Financial Year 2011–12. The studies indicates that impact of this transfer on household income, monthly per capita expenditure, food security and health of the beneficiaries has been positive. It has not only certain the livelihood but also contributed to poverty alleviation and rural employment, that can be realized.

6.2 GENDER AND SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

The research implies that the women participation in MGNREGA is increasing fast. It has been 47 percent women participation in the scheme in year 2012. This reveals that the social imbalance in gender based income is shifting its balance and more and more females are becoming financially sound empowering them financially as well as socially

6.3 AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY

Preliminary findings indicate that MGNREGA works have led to strengthen the sustainable livelihood and rural employment security in all aspects including resources like water etc. for agriculture produce. A rise in groundwater, improvement in soil quality and reduction in vulnerability of production systems to climate variability is a result of the secure resources under MGNREGA. This has also a positive impact on agriculture productivity.

6.4 LABOR MARKET AND MIGRATION RATE UNDER MGNREGA

The migration of laborer due to non availability of employment during lean season from rural to urban has been reduced to a greater extent. This

has creates a positive impact on labor market leading to more feasible labor market. The study suggests that the employment creation in lean season has been more than season leaving misconception a side.

7.0 MGNREGA PERFORMANCE

MGNREGA is a landmark for guarantee employment generation to poor and weaker sections of our country (Kanungo, 2012). Its aim is to provide source of income and security to marginalized sections to create equality and equilibrium in the society at large. In our country 75% of the people belong to rural area and these areas need to be developed for overall growth and development of the country. The Government of India has initiated number of schemes to overcome with the problem of employment and poverty.

7.1 INITIATIVES TAKEN TO STRENGTHEN MGNREGA

The government of India at, on regular basis, keeps on monitoring, analyzing and reviewing the implantation of MGNREGA scheme. The government, at many instances, also provided some measures to rectify the issues in implementation. Some of the key initiatives to strengthen the scheme are discussed below.

7.2 EMPLOYMENT AS PER DEMAND OF LABOR

It is seen that all the employees those have applied for the work in the scheme get work as per their skills and talents, under the scenario of failing to do so the people must get

unemployment allowances for their livelihood and security.

7.3 MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM OF MGNREGA

The Gram Panchayat should maintain an MIS system to keep track of all the records and files in reference to the applications received from the people, work provided and also the buffer of people who can be called in case of emergencies, details of job cards issued etc. This system would help in the effective utilization of manpower resource and increase the moral and accountability of the people.

7.4 TIMELY PAYMENTS TO THE LABOR

Wages under MGNREGA are related to the volume of work done by the people means piece rate system is considered. The delay in payment can defeat the purpose of scheme. Hence, wage payment must be done as earlier as possible after the proper verification of muster roles. Wage cycle should be smooth to ensure proper and timely payment of the wages to the people.

7.5 SAFETY MEASURES TO THE WORKERS

When the workers work, certain types of safety measures are required such as first aid box for working people and it has to be ensured that all type of safety equipments should be provided to the workers to avoid any accident with the workers. The government must ensure the safety measures on priority level to avoid accident.

7.6 EQUAL OPPORTUNITY TO HELPLESS GROUPS

The equal opportunity is provided under MGNREGA to those who are handicap, unable to influence, weaker section must be ensured under the scheme to balance the social imbalance in rural area.

8.0 CONCLUSION

MGNREGA talks about rural employment sustainable livelihood allowance which implies that the people those who are registered in the scheme if they do not get employment within 15 days then they would be given unemployment allowances, this will lead to a tendency of laziness among the people. When the people will get allowance they might use the money in unhealthy and non social activities and be a cause of anti social activities hence providing unemployment allowance is an unhealthy practice that the government should not promote. With MGNREGA in the picture, the rural employee was usually going to their village only during season of crop or agriculture season. Government is giving crore's of rupees for the development of rural area with a vision of providing employment opportunities in the rural areas so that the people earn enough money and live the life of an honest and satisfied citizen of independent India, but the corruption is so deep rooted that gram pradhan's make fake muster rolls in the name of people who do not exist and make money in their name and the actual purpose of government of rural development goes down the drain.

Rural development depends upon the development of the marginalized and women groups in the rural areas. It has improved the

person-day generated by marginalized group to enhance the standard of living of the society as a whole. Rajasthan has registered higher growth in women participation as compared to other states. It emphasized upon socio-economic uplifting of the rural women in the society. This scheme has spent maximum amount for land development in Uttar Pradesh among all the selected states. Hence, MGNREGA schemes have been effectively implemented in the country and supported to the rural people for their self-development through employment generation and assets creation through rural connectivity, land development and water related activities for sustainable livelihood and rural employment.

This study has brought some of the most pertinent factors related to Empowerment of Marginalized section of people working under MNREGA. It started from the history of Indian development and women's empowerment and then attempted to capture the grass root realities of MGNREGA.

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