

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act: with special reference to empowerment of Marginalized Community

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Abstract

The provisions of voting rights, reservation in education and jobs and in the political fields, are the steps which have been in existence since the adoption of the Constitution. Government is taking initiatives so that marginalized section of people can uplift their standard of living and able to remove problems such as poverty, differentiation on basis of caste, gender and creeds which has troubled millions of our people for centuries. In order to accelerate the growth rate of India government has launched the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural employment Guarantee act in 2005 it can be termed as unique safety net because its beneficiaries are not passive recipients of monetary benefits, but will become active participants in the creation of rural assets. The schemes is not merely a wage employment programme but it also focus on the regeneration of village economy in the long term.

In this paper there will be discussion about

the present scenario of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee act and its contribution towards empowering marginalized section of society as well as rural development of the country, the second section describes the policies and strategies adopted by government to achieve rural development. And finally after analyzing the present scenario of MNREGA and practices of government towards rural development we will conclude the research paper with some suggestions and recommendations.

Key Words: Marginalized, MNREGA, Government, quality of life

Introduction:

According to Census of India 2001, the total population of SC account for 16.2% of Indian population, ST account for 8.1% of the total. Though there is no official head count for the OBCs the National Surveys suggest that the population of OBCs form 41% of the population. Over the generations

one section of the society had enjoyed the fruits of the education and remaining majority of Indian communities' particularly marginalized sections like Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC), Religious Minorities and Women were denied the opportunity. Right since the days of Jotirao Phule, Narayan Guru, early education movements to the present day, education campaigns all are non-Brahmin in origin and they strongly believe that 'education is enlightenment and enlightenment is empowerment'. It is believed that the hierarchical caste systems with its many attendant evils were brought into India by the Brahmins in the early years of India's history. It helps to make for a better future society. Empowering the marginalized reveals the power of demand-side approaches in enhancing governance through the concepts of citizen's voice, accountability, and responsiveness. It seeks to provide lessons on the establishment of social accountability mechanisms, thereby empowering the marginalized, who represent a majority of society not only in Asian countries, but in most developing countries worldwide Marginalization is a process denying opportunities and outcomes

to those 'living on the margins' and enhancing the opportunities and outcomes of those who are 'at the centre'. People are the main actors in development process and only their empowerment in socio-economic and political fields can bring about the desired results (Khanal 2005, p.9). Local government is operating as an agent of political, economic and social development. This article is designed to evaluate the role of local government to empower the marginalized.

A fair measure of public analysis identified MNREGA as a critical factor in the return of Congress to power with greater strength, underscoring the fact that public policy focusing on vulnerable groups through social protection programmes stimulates equitable development and political gains.

Economic empowerment underpins equity – and vice versa – as well as pro poor growth. Equity has its roots in the theory of moral equality, which states that all people should be treated as equals. At societal level, this translates into three core principles which should govern the distribution of goods and services and the way in which opportunities are awarded (Jones, 2009):

- Equal life chances;

- Equal concern for people's needs; and
- Meritocracy.

In reality, an individual's life chances are largely determined by factors outside their control such as their place of birth, the wealth and education level of their parents, their gender and race. Goods and services are distributed preferentially to some groups over others, and political influence and social status tend to accrue to the wealthy, well connected and well-educated in society. Equity is about levelling the playing field to achieve equality of opportunity, and relates to the social contract between a state and its citizens. While equity is often cast in economic and social terms, it also has important civil and political dimensions which relate to access to justice, political opportunity and redistribution of wealth. Empowerment is key to the achievement of greater equity, and to enable poor and marginalized people to break out of traps of poverty and inequality and play greater political, economic and cultural roles in society. Empowerment is something that comes from within, and cannot be achieved solely by the actions of outsiders.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze MNREGA is helping in wage employment opportunities of Marginalized Society?
2. To study MNREGA is creating sustainable rural livelihoods for Marginalized Society through regeneration of the natural resource base, i.e., augmenting productivity and supporting the creation of durable assets?
3. To measure Strengthen rural governance through decentralization and processes of transparency and accountability which ultimately benefits the Marginalized Society.

An overview about MNREGA

MNREGA, in its four years of rapid expansion from 200 to 619 districts, has provided employment to more than 52 million households, which has increased their income; given economic opportunities to disadvantaged groups; decreased out-migration from villages; impacted positively on the geographical ecological environment; and improved the connectivity of rural areas (better roads, information and communication infrastructure, etc.). MNREGA is designed to allow women equity in access to work and in wage

payment. The participation rate of the women's workforce surpassed the statutory minimum 33 per cent every year, reaching 48 per cent in the financial year 2009-2010 at the national level. MNREGA is an example of the quantitative and qualitative difference experienced in a household because of the source through which the income flows in. If it is through the women, it enhances opportunities for their children, in turn positively affecting intergenerational change. The workforce participation of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes was 49 per cent in fiscal year 2009-2010. Independent professional studies corroborate that the marginalized groups have high workforce participation. In current financial year 2011-12, (upto December, 2011) 3.77 crore households were provided employment and 120.88 crore person-days of employment were generated. The enhanced wage earnings have led to a strengthening of the livelihood resource base of the rural poor in India; 72 percent of funds utilized were in the form of wages paid to the workers. Self targeting in nature, the programme has high work participation for marginalized groups like SC/STs (40%) and Women (49%) in 2011-12 (upto December, 2011). Total works undertaken

were 62.72 lakh in the same period, of which 53 percent relates to Water Conservation, 12 percent for the provision of Irrigation facility to lands owned by SC/ST/BPL/S&M Farmers and IAY beneficiaries, 22 percent for Rural Connectivity, 9 percent for Land Development, 4 percent for Any other activity approved by MoRD and 0.37 percent for Bharat Nirman Rajiv Gandhi Seva Kendra.

Related Literature

Women participation in current financial year upto December, 2011 was 49% and the participation of SC & ST in current financial year upto December, 2011 is 40%. Desai and Dubey 2011, Caste also plays an important role in determining that who has the access to positive migration opportunities, largely because of the strong correlation, up to this day, between poverty and social exclusion on the one hand, and belonging to a Scheduled Caste (SC) or Scheduled Tribe (ST). Molj, 2005; Sridhar, 2005, has stated that The MNREGAs is a Government of India sponsored scheme to enhance the livelihood security in the rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed employment in a financial year

to every household which volunteers to do unskilled manual labour at the minimum wage rate notified for agricultural labour by the representative state governments (Sharma et al., 2011).

The MNREGA has been more or less successful in energizing, mobilizing, empowering and delivering to India's poorest and most marginalized rural people. It has also been somewhat successful in providing the rural poor a measure of dignity, tangible economic benefit and a motivation to participate in local action. The NREGA stands apart from the employment and poverty alleviation programmes in many significant ways. It is the first national programme of consequence which has woven transparency and accountability into the mundane fabric of daily interaction of people with the government. It also gives an opportunity to break the feudally enforced silence of its victims. Through transparency and social audit measures, NREGA allows anyone, anywhere, to be a part of the monitoring of the delivery system. It also gives the poor an opportunity to realize the constitutional sovereignty, the power of the people, considering India is the largest democracy in the world. The basic objective

of a social audit is to ensure public accountability in the implementation of projects, laws and policies. Initially envisaged as only post implementation exercises, they have actually now emerged as a way to empower poor and transform social-political structures in the villages. It has become a powerful medium to provide the most vulnerable with a "voice" to assert their "rights", hold the village and local administration accountable, also assume collective responsibility of the program. But this does not translate naturally. The poor are constrained by unequal socio-economic political structures, illiteracy and unawareness- lacking the capability to demand their rights and hold the government accountable. Social protection should not only help poor escape poverty but should also promote their participation in social and political life and contribute to growth and development (Kabeer and Cook 2010). Empowerment should be viewed as a continuous process occurring over successive stages of empowerment where each stage is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the next stage. In other words, the stages occur sequentially indicating different levels of empowerment but it is not necessary that all four stages take place

every time. I propose that empowerment process consists of three Primary successive stages: Focus, information and integration.

These stages of the empowerment process are displayed in figure 1.



Stages of Empowerment

The first stage of empowerment is **Focus**. It means our focus should be to include that section of people who are neglected from a long time. For those who may have been initially marginalized and not included in the decision making process, empowerment would mean bringing them on board. This could mean access to political structures, formal decision making or effective targeting strategy to ensure a representative participation. However this is not sufficient, as mere inclusion may not increase the ability of the marginalized group if they do not know what to do. They cannot contribute or participate if there are not aware of the provisions in the law and the entitlements that accrue to them. Thus, the second step in empowerment involves access to **information** by spreading awareness and

knowledge exchange. But even this second stage of empowerment may not be considered sufficient in itself. People may be empowered by becoming aware or having knowledge and then feel the need to take action. Creating awareness does not mean that people are actually in position or capacity or have the skills to occupy a decision making space or influence the decision making process. Laverack and Wallerstein (2001) view empowerment as a process of building capacity, competence, cohesiveness and (social) capital. Capacity building should also be economic, social and political. Economic improvement may provide greater access and better options but does not necessarily ensure that poor can take charge of creating for themselves the options from which they can choose. The third step however, still lacks the dimension of **integration** of social influence and

transformation in power relations. This leads us to the final stage of empowerment integration. Even with the economic and social capability and competence, people need a conducive or enabling environment for them to assert their voice. Often this cannot be done individually and people/groups need to organize themselves to represent their views and integrate with higher levels. Productive employment and decent work are the main routes out of poverty. Well-functioning labour markets and an enabling environment for local entrepreneurship are essential to increase employment opportunities for the poor. Policies that recognise and improve conditions in the informal economy, where most poor women and men earn their livelihoods, are critical to poverty reduction. Increasing the employability of poor people, especially for women and youth, unlocks their potential to contribute to growth. The Central and the State Governments have introduced several schemes for facilitating finance to the Women, Minorities and SC/ST/OBCs. Besides specific schemes, the Government also provides special concessions to them under various other schemes. Our society consists of different categories of people having different economic and social status and strength.

Neglected sections which remained away from the main stream of development are termed as weaker sections. Central and State Governments are providing special attention to these sections to enhance their socio-economic status.

Research Methodology

As in this Research paper we will explore the existing facts present in the environment or universe. It discusses the role of MNREGA in the Empowerment of Marginalized Section of people present in society so that overall developmental phase can be achieved. So we will take exploratory Research Design in our research project. Collection of data is done by survey method.

Conclusion

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. Employment at NREGA worksites seems to have raised both enthusiasm and expectations among women workers. Members of Scheduled Castes (SC) and Schedules Tribes (ST)

communities can take up work in their own fields and get paid for it. MNREGA plays a vital role in increasing the purchasing power of the Marginalized community. Independent India has to acknowledge the critical role the MNREGA has played in providing a measure of inclusive growth. It has given people a right to work, to re-establish the dignity of labour, to ensure people's economic and democratic rights and entitlements, to create labour intensive infrastructure and assets, and to build the human resource base of our country.

Suggestions

For the first time, the power elite have recognized the people's right to fight endemic hunger and poverty with dignity, accepting that their labour will be the foundation for infrastructure and economic growth. MNREGA has been changing the social fabric of rural India as well. MNREGA states that at least one-third workforce be women and paid equal to men. Seen as nothing less than social revolution, the unprecedented women participation under MREGA has been "re-gendering" roles in a rural household across the country along with the women society people, the belonging to marginalized sections who were deprived of all benefits, also benefitted

with the help of MNREGA. Keeping in mind the immense potential of MNREGA and the findings from our study, below are some suggestions that could help improve the functioning of the MNREGA. MNREGA must aim at creation of productive employment so that the empowerment of marginalized sections of people can be done.

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