



The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme – An Assessment

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Abstract : *The prosperity of India, therefore, depends upon the prosperity of our villages. Since independence, the Government has launched a series of rural development programmes to achieve overall and all-sided development of rural India. MGNREGA is a trail blazing Act to improve livelihood status and wage employment amongst the rural poor very specially marginalized and unorganized poor People.*

Key words: *Villages, Government, rural, development, employment etc..*

Introduction

The leaders of the Indian Independence movement understood the importance of productive and fairly compensated rural labour. They enshrined the right to work along with the right to health, in the Directive Principles of state Policy, the principles on which Indian law is fundamentally based. It was not until in 2005, however, that the right to work became codified as law.

Enacted by the Central Government as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act of 2005 and renamed as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on 2nd October 2009, came in to effect, on a pilot basis in February 2006 in 200 economically most disadvantaged districts of the country and later from April 1st 2008 onwards in intended to cover all the districts in the country. The act has been implemented in three phases since 2006, providing 448 billion days of employment over a period of three years. About Rs. 34,600 crore has been spent on wages, indicating the gigantic size of this programme intended to benefit the poor and the huge investment that has been made in it.

The MGNREGS unlike existing social welfare programmes is a law where by any adult willing to do unskilled manual labour at a statutory minimum wage is entitled to being employed on public works within 15 days of applying for work in rural areas. Each rural household is eligible for up to 100 days of employment in a financial year. It is thus a legally enforceable right with tremendous potential for providing food security and creating durable community assets for sustainable development of rural areas. It therefore proposes right based job – oriented way to growth and development rather than being a resource based employment scheme.

For the first time in Indian History employment has been made a legal right through an act of the Parliament. The Act is structured towards harnessing the rural workforce not as recipients of doles, but as productive partners in the economic process. This is the largest ever public employment programme visualized human history. Most evaluations official as well as non – official – show that the implementation of this scheme has been far more effective than any of its predecessor schemes in the country.



Coming against the backdrop of rural distress for over a decade the scheme was successful in providing much needed relief to the rural poor, apart from raising their awareness and bargaining power. Further the recent experience shows that the Right to Information Act being implemented in the country holds a great promise for improving the effectiveness of a scheme like this and similar schemes designed to improve the lot of poor people in the society.

Objectives

1. Strengthening drought- proofing and flood management in rural India.
2. To access and acquire new insights on development of MGNREGA as well as overall socio-economic impact on the lives of the rural people.
3. Aiding in the empowerment of the marginalized communities, especially women Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes through the processes of rights based legislation.
4. Deepening democracy at the grass-roots by strengthening the Panchayati Raj Institutions.
5. Effecting greater transparency and accountability in governance.

Methodology

This study is fully based on Secondary data. Secondary data was collected from magazines, Books, research articles, Journal, newspapers and websites.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme

In India out of total population of 121 crores 83.3 crores live in rural areas. Thus nearly 70 percent of the India populations live in rural areas. These rural populations can be characterized by mass poverty low levels of literacy and income high level of unemployment and

poor nutrition and health status. In order to tackle these specific problems, a number of rural development programmes are being implemented to create opportunities for improvement of the quality of life of these rural people. The term rural development is the overall development of rural areas to improve the quality of life of rural people. In this backdrop an attempt has been made to understand the development effort made by the Government to rebuild the rural life. The main purpose of the study is to investigate the improvement or changes poor brought by MGNREGA in the lives of the rural at the household level. This study focuses on rural development, rural development programmes and role of MGNREGA in the study on rural development rural development programmes and role MGNREGA in the case study.

The rural development programmes intend to reduce the poverty and unemployment to improve the health and educational status and to fulfil the basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing of the rural people, Government of India launched some schemes through the planning commission of India such "Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act".

MGNREGA has come after almost 56 years of experience of the rural employment programmes. This includes both Centrally Sponsored Schemes and these launched by State Governments. The comprise the:

- a) National Rural Employment Programme
- b) Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme
- c) Employment Assurance Scheme



- d) Jawahar Rojgar Yojana
- e) Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana
- f) Samppma Grameen Rojgar Yojana
- g) National Food for work Programme

Among these programme the SGRY and NFFW have been merged with NREGA in 2005. It aims to guarantee the right to work and ensure livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in the financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. This Act was introduced with an aim of improving the purchasing power of the rural people, primarily semi or unskilled work to people living in rural India. The Act has come into force with effect from February 2006 in districts initially and later on 130 districts was added in 2007-08 and after that its spread over 625 districts across the country.

Salient Features of The Act

- **Right based Framework:** For adult members of a rural household willing to do unskilled manual work.
 - **Time bound Guarantee:** 15 days for provision of employment, else unemployment allowance up to 100 days in a financial year per household, depending on the actual demand.
 - **Labour Intensive Works:** 60:40 wage and material ratio for permissible works; no contractors/machinery.
 - **Decentralized Planning.**
 - Gram Sabhas to recommend works.
 - At least 50% of works by Gram Panchayats for execution,
 - Principal role of PRIs in planning, monitoring and implementation.
 - **Work site facilities:** Crèche, drinking water, first aid and shade provided at worksites.
- **Women empowerment:** At least one-third of beneficiaries should be women.
 - **Transparency & Accountability:** Proactive disclosure through Social Audits, Grievance Redressed Mechanism.

Implementation

Under Sec 3, States are responsible for providing work in accordance with the Scheme. Under Sec 4, every state government is required to make a scheme for providing not less than 100 days of guaranteed employment in a financial year, to those who demand work.

Achievements

- a) Evidence suggests that MGNREGA is succeeding as a self-targeting programme, with high participation from marginalized groups including the SC's and ST's. At the national level, the share of SC's and ST's in the work provided under MGNREGA has been high at 40-50 per cent across each of the years of the Scheme's implementation.
- b) 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. However the significant inter-state variation in participation of women requires further research and analysis.
- c) Preliminary findings suggest that the increased access to paid work due to MGNREGA has had a positive impact on women's socio-economic status and general well-being.
- d) MGNREGA wages provide an alternative source of income for rural



labourers, raising the reservations wage and implicitly offering labourers bargaining powers in an otherwise inequitable rural labour market.

- e) The Scheme has also provided labourers with a dignified choice of work. Thus the diversion of labour in places may reflect an active choice made by the workers.
- f) MGNREGA works have led to a rise in groundwater improvement in soil quality and reduction in vulnerability of production systems to climate variability.
- g) MGNREGA positive impact of this transfer on household income, monthly per capita expenditure, food security and health of the beneficiaries. Overall while there is server indications of the significant impact of the Scheme it has even greater potential in terms of poverty alleviation at scale that can be realised.

Challenges

- (1) There is low awareness among potential beneficiaries about certain provisions of the MGNREGA. This limits their ability to fully benefit under the Act. Infrequent meetings and low participation at the Gram Sabhas convened for planning MGNREGA works further limit the implementation of the Scheme at the village level in many places.
- (2) MGNREGA has received serious criticism on account of perceived is appropriations and leakages under the scheme.
- (3) MGNREGA has inbuilt transparency and accountability mechanisms in its design, viz. proactive disclosure and social audits. However evidence from the field indicates that the frequency

of social audits and their quality is a major constraint ineffective implementation of the Scheme.

Suggestions

- a) The minimum days of employment should be increased from 100 days to 200 days.
- b) The minimum wages paid under MGNREGS in Kerala is very lows as even an ordinary casual labour gets more than Rs. 500 per day for his work. So the minimum wages of Rs. 125 should be increased.
- c) The wage is linked to the consumer price index and that it should be done in compliance with the Minimum Wages Act.
- d) Reduction of the working hours from nine to seven hours.

Conclusion

To conclude if this type of scheme is implemented effectively by involving the women in the rural areas, it would help apart from improving the rural economic empowerment of women in enhancing their social status to the best positive extent. MGNREGS has facilitated women's empowerment by providing them opportunities for enhanced participation and cash earnings, which seem to be complimenting another revolutionary programme for offering micro credit across India.

In his famous talisman, Mahatma Gandhi urged in our moments of doubt to recall the face of the poorest person we may have been and ask ourselves whether the step we are contemplating is likely to be any use to him or her. It is in this spirit that the MGNREGA needs to be evaluated.



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