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PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF MGNREGS: A CASE OF PUTHURANI PANCHAYAT OF SIVAGANGA DISTRICT (TAMIL NADU)

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ABSTRACT

The MGNREGS has widely covered the marginalized people in the rural areas, SC, ST and agricultural labourers, thus, helps in fostering social equity. Certain aspects like non-availability of basic facilities, lack of awareness on provisions of MGNREGS among workers, lack of rigorous planning and increase in labour wage rate and shortage of labour in agriculture are appeared to be weaknesses and problems of MGNREGS. To improve effectiveness and to achieve desired results of the scheme, planning of works must be based on, extensive discussion and consultation with community members and, holistic views and conditions obtained of the rural area that is village panchayat, concern, which may ensure hundred days of employment; workers need to be thoroughly oriented on all the provisions and rights entitled to them under the scheme; workers who are not members of any SHG may be brought under SHG fold so as to utilize the wage earnings from MGNREGS and other income properly and productively; and the number of days of employment may be enhanced.

KEYWORDS

MGNREGS, Puthurani panchayat, Shivganga District.

INTRODUCTION

Early one-third of the world poor are Indian (World Bank) and most of them inhabit in rural areas. As a part of its commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, the State has been introducing a number of interventions to reduce the poverty levels of 1990 to half by 2015. But the poverty level is still high and is largely a rural phenomenon. As per the official statistics, about 28.3 per cent of rural population is poor with per capita expenditure (individual expenses) of less than Rs.12 per day in 2004-2005 and in absolute terms the number of rural poor was 221 million. It is also observed that the **poverty elasticity of growth** has been declining, since the era of new economic reforms (1991). The high growth of GDP in the recent years coupled with incidence of unacceptable levels of poverty reveal the non-inclusive nature of the growth of the economy (Rao and Prasad, 2008). An employment intensive growth will ensure that poverty will decline and inequality does not increase. However, the employment elasticity of manufacturing has fallen sharply in the 1990s. The only reason employment has been growing as rapidly as the labour force is on account of growth in services. But that has left the majority of those dependent upon India's slow-growing agriculture behind – particularly as crop production growth has slowed in the nineties (Santhosh Mehrotra 2005). It is to be noted that the agriculture growth in many states is low and stagnant and below the targeted four percent to enhance livelihood security of the agriculture dependent population (Rao and Prasad, 2008). Most of the Indian poor are the working poor. Most poor families are in casual employment or self-employed. About 75 per cent of the poor in rural area are daily wagers, self-employed households and landless labourers. There are 40 crore people who fall under labourer category in India. More than 70 per cent of these labourers are residing in rural areas and among them 12.47 crore are being domestic industry labourers. Those with regular employment are least likely to be poor.

While about 25 per cent rural household (landless labourers and bonded labour), have either no income generating assets, 80 per cent farmers being small and marginal have inadequate and / or poor quality of assets with meager or no irrigation facilities, and rural artisans have no access to modern tools /equipment and marketing. Problem of perpetual and pernicious poverty more particularly in rural areas has been deeply rooted into the large-scale unemployment among rural households, particularly the asset-less or those endowed with inadequate and / or poor quality of assets during half of the year. Chronic (**constant**) unemployment for a large part of the year is prevalent in hilly, tribal, desert and drought prone areas. The situation becomes very pathetic when monsoon fails (Patel, 2006).

The economic fabric of rural India is changing with households consciously trying to reduce risk by diversifying their job profiles. Though farming continues to be the main profession, most male members of a typical rural family are taking up non-agriculture jobs while the women folk continue to focus on agriculture. Taking up non-agriculture jobs led to a significant rise in seasonal migration to the urban areas. However, they come only during the slack season to sustain the inflow of income" (Venkatesh, 2008). With 301.7 million poor people, constituting 27.5 per cent of the population, poverty reduction in India is clearly far slower than anticipated. As noted as earlier, most chronically poor are landless or near-landless, have a higher dependency burden and illiteracy level and depend on wages. In a rural agrarian labour surplus economy, sections of rural population depend on the wage they earn through unskilled, casual, manual labour. They are vulnerable to the possibility of sinking from transient to chronic poverty in the event of inadequate labour demand or in the face of unpredictable prices that may be general in nature, like natural disasters or personal, like ill-health, all of which adversely impact their employment opportunities.

The wage dependence of those in chronic poverty makes recent initiatives under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) an important milestone in anti-poverty policies, since India's independence (CPRC). In a context of poverty and unemployment, work for welfare (workfare) programmes have been important interventions in developed as well as developing countries for many years. The programmes typically provide unskilled manual workers with short-term employment on public works such as irrigation, infrastructure, afforestation, soil conservations and road construction. The table 1 lists out the wage employment programmes implemented prior to NREGS in India. India has a long history of wage employment programmes, and various reviews of these programmes have revealed the weaknesses as follows: low programme coverage; more than 50 per cent beneficiaries not from most needy group; bureaucracy dominated planning and little participation of community in planning; work to women lower than stipulated norm of 30 per cent; only 16-29 days employment provided to households; assets created were not durable; and corruption: reports of false muster rolls; contractors persisted; payment often less than prescribed wages.

PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES

Based on the earlier experiences, the parliament of India passed a revolutionary law namely NREGA in 2005 so as to give birth to the new scheme of NREGS. The Act was amended in 2009 and the name of the Act was changed as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGS). The scheme was introduced in three phases in the country. A survey of literature available on MGNREGS shows that there are good numbers of studies, based on secondary data. **Of course**, there are studies based on primary evidences on the implementation and effects of MGNREGS from different parts of the country. However there are only a few field studies on MGNREGS in Tamil Nadu. The review of literature also reveals that studies so far made are with reference to villages covered in phase

I and phase II only. It is, exactly against this background, the present study is carried out with an objective to understand socio-economic conditions of the MGNREGS workers in the study area and to assess the performance of MGNREGS in the study area in the light of the main objectives of the scheme.

METHODOLOGY, SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The present study is analytical in nature as it aims to appraise the performance of MGNREGS in the light of objectives. The study is based on primary data collected from sample respondents and secondary data collected from village Panchayat records are used in the study. The Puthurani Panchayat of Kannangudi Block of Sivaganga District has been selected for the present study, purposively. It was decided to collect data from the MGNREGS workers in the study village Panchayat. The study relies mainly on the data collected from them. **Purposive sampling** method was used as respondents were purposively drawn from MGNREGS workers. As such 30 respondents from the Puthurani Panchayat were selected for the study, by employing simple random sampling. A pre-tested and well-administered interview schedule was used and confined to collect information on certain areas of impact of the scheme. The study was conducted during December 2010 – March 2011. Simple statistical tools such as percentages, ratios and averages were used in the analysis of data. The findings of the study would throw light on performance of MGNREGS in the study village Panchayat. Thus, the findings would add to existing knowledge in the field of rural employment generation programmes in general and in MGNREGS in particular. The application of findings is limited mostly to study village Panchayat rather than to other areas. **Social aspects such as social audit, transparency and accountability were not given treatment under the study.**

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The abridged inferences of the analysis and discussion of the study are presented below:

Socio-Economic Characteristics: Age of most of the MGNREGS workers (43.3 per cent) ranges more than 45 years. No one is below 20 years of age and in the age group of 60 years and above. Further, 63.4 per cent of them belong to Scheduled Tribes (ST) community; remaining 36.6 per cent belong to Scheduled Castes. The distribution of by their main occupation reveals that 76.6 per cent of the working population is wage labourers. More than one-fourth of the MGNREGS workers (26.6 per cent) are illiterates. Among those who are literate those who have studied up to primary and middle school level form the majority. Most of the MGNREGS workers (63.4 per cent) own less than one acre of land and 26.7 per cent own more than one acre. Only 6.6 per cent owned no land. Most likely (63.4 per cent) they have a family size of 3-5 members (each), followed by less than 3 members (30 per cent) and more than 5 members (6.6 per cent). Among the sample MGNREGS workers, 43.4 per cent of the households have a family income of Rs.10, 000/- to Rs.20, 000/-, followed by Rs.20, 000/- to Rs.30, 000/- annual income category (20 per cent). Ten percent of them fall in the annual income category of more than Rs.30, 000/- and only 2.6 per cent's annual family income is just less than Rs.10, 000/-.

Impact of MGNREGS: All the MGNREGS workers had debt before they take participation in the MGNREGS and 17 out of 30 respondents were from the burden of debt after the participation in the MGNREGS. Further, MGNREGS did not made any significant impact on the indicators of housing status and there is no change in their housing status.

Source of Information and Awareness: Gram Panchayat Head (GP Head) (93.3 per cent) and Gram Saba (90 per cent) are the prime sources of information about MGNREGS, followed by other popular medias such as television (73.3 per cent), newspaper (53.3 per cent) and radio (23.3 per cent). All the MGNREGS workers are aware about the minimum wage under MGNREGS, 96.6 per cent aware that minimum of 100 days of employment should be provided under MGNREGS, 83.3 per cent aware that work to be given within 15 days of application and only 36.6 per cent aware about the facilities to be availed in the worksite. Further, it is especially observed that only 6.6 per cent aware about the provision which assures one third of workers to be women.

Job Seeking and Wages: All the MGNREGS workers have their job cards, but, 66.6 per cent of them only have their job cards at their hands, 23.4 per cent of respondents lost the cards and 10 per cent kept their cards with someone else. Regarding the frequency of job provided under MGNREGS, 93.4 per cent got frequent jobs within 15 days of their application and remaining are not. In connection with the unemployment allowance, 73.4 per cent received unemployment allowance, according to MGNREGS provisions. With regard to get the job card, 73.4 per cent faced difficulties in getting the job card and remaining 26.6 per cent didn't face any difficulty. Over the period from 2006-07 to 2009-10, all the male workers received higher wages than the minimum wage provided under MGNREGS, in the agricultural sector, and in 2009-10, all females were also received higher wages than the minimum wage provided under MGNREGS, in the agricultural sector. All the respondents of the study have the individual bank / post office (PO) account. Prior to participating in MGNREGS, only 63.3 per cent of the respondents hold the bank / PO account and remaining 26.7 per cent opened their bank / PO account after they start participating in MGNREGS. Regarding the system of depositing their MGNREGS wages in bank / PO, 60 per cent are informed and others (40 per cent) noted that they were not informed. Loss of working hours / days (86.7 per cent), return without receiving the money (76.6 per cent), lack of knowledge on how to withdraw (66.7 per cent), non-cooperation bank / PO officials (50 per cent) and commission asked by the staff of bank / PO (20 per cent) are identified as limiting factors of receiving the MGNREGS wages through bank / PO.

Use Pattern of Earnings: All the MGNREGS workers spent more than Rs. 3, 000/- per annum for the expenditure on foodgrains and other consumable items from their MGNREGS annual earnings. Further, majority of them (86.7 per cent) spent Rs.1, 000/- - Rs.2, 000/- for health and education, and Rs.1, 000/- - Rs.2, 000/- for social ceremonies / marriages (70 per cent spent). For household durables, 90 per cent of the respondents spent less than Rs.1, 000/- and remaining 10 per cent spent Rs.1, 000/- - Rs.2, 000/-.

Participation in Social Auditing: Remarkable number of MGNREGS workers (80 per cent) participated in the MGNREGS related Gram Saba meetings, in contrast, majority of them (76.7 per cent) were not participated in the socio auditing of MGNREGS. But, 46.7 per cent participated in the SHGs / other organization formed for MGNREGS as members.

Perceptions and Aspirations: No one is disappointed with MGNREGS, which received vast greet from the sample MGNREGS workers. Though, they satisfied (60 per cent) with the minimum number of employment days, it is understood that they (40 per cent) wanted to increase the same. With regard to considering the household as a unit for MGNREGS, they (80 per cent) advocated that instead of household, individual may be considered as a unit for MGNREGS.

CONCLUSION

The MGNREGS has widely covered the marginalized people in the rural areas, SC, ST and agricultural labourers, thus, helps in fostering social equity. Certain aspects like non-availability of basic facilities, lack of awareness on provisions of MGNREGS among workers, lack of rigorous planning and increase in labour wage rate and shortage of labour in agriculture are appeared to be weaknesses and problems of MGNREGS. To improve effectiveness and to achieve desired results of the scheme, planning of works must be based on, extensive discussion and consultation with community members and, holistic views and conditions obtained of the rural area that is village panchayat, concern, which may ensure hundred days of employment; workers need to be thoroughly oriented on all the provisions and rights entitled to them under the scheme; workers who are not members of any SHG may be brought under SHG fold so as to utilize the wage earnings from MGNREGS and other income properly and productively; and the number of days of employment may be enhanced.

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APPENDIX

TABLE 1: WAGE EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES PRECEDING MGNREGA IN INDIA

Scheme	Year
Rural Man Power (RMP)	1960 – 61
Crash Rural Employment Programme (CREP)	1969 – 70
Small Framers Development Agency (SFDA)	1969-1970
Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labour Schemes (MFAL)	1969-1970
Pilot Intensive Rural Employment Programme (PIREP)	1972
Food for Work Programme (FWP)	1977
National Rural Employment Programme (NREP)	1980
Rural Landless Employment guarantee Programme (RLEGP)	1983
Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS)	1993
Jawahar Rojgar Yojna (JRY)	1993 – 94
Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojna (JGSY)	1999 – 2000
Sampoorn Grameen Rojgar Yojna (SGRY)	2001 – 02
National Food for Work (NFFWP)	2005

Source: www.rural.nic.in

TABLE 2: SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Particular	No of Respondents	Percentage
1.Sex		
Male	17	56.6
Female	13	43.4
Total	30	100
2.Age		
< 35 years	8	26.7
35-45 years	9	30.0
>45 Years	13	43.3
Total	30	100
3. Community		
SC	19	63.4
BC	11	36.6
Total	30	100
4. Primary Occupation		
Self-Employment	3	10.0
Regular Wage Salaries	23	76.6
Attached Labour	3	10.0
Unpaid family Labour	1	3.4
Total	30	100
5. Education Qualification		
Illiterate	8	26.6
Primary	9	30.0
Middle	9	30.0
Secondary	4	13.4
Total	30	100
6. Land Ownership		
No Land	2	6.6
< Acres	20	66.7
> Acres	8	26.7
Total	30	100
7. Family Size		
< 3 members	9	30.0
3-5 members	19	63.4
>5 members	2	6.6
Total	30	100
8.No of earning members in the family		
One	11	36.7
Two	17	56.7
Three	2	6.6
Total	30	100

Source: Computed from Primary Data

TABLE 3: ANNUAL FAMILY INCOME OF THE RESPONDENTS BY SOURCES

Gross Income of the Respondents (in Rs)	No. of Respondents	Percentage
<10000	8	2.6
10000 - 20000	13	43.4
20000 - 30000	6	20.0
> 30000	3	10.0
Total	30	100

Source: Computed from Primary Data.

TABLE 4: IMPACT OF MNREGS ON INDEBTEDNESS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Incidents of Debt	Before MGNREGS	After MGNREGS
<25000	10 (33.3)	6 (20.0)
25000-50000	10 (33.3)	2 (6.6)
50000-100000	7 (23.4)	5 (16.6)
>100000	3 (10.0)	-
No debt	-	17 (56.8)
Total	30	30

Source: Computed from Primary Data.

Note: Figures the parenthesis represent Percentage.

TABLE 5: IMPACT OF MNREGS ON HOUSING STATUS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Particulars	Before MGNREGS	After MGNREGS
1. IAY House:		
Yes	7 (23.34)	7 (23.34)
No	23 (76.6)	23 (76.6)
Total	30	30
2. Types of House		
❖ Thatched /Kachaha	18 (60.0)	18 (60)
❖ Semi-pucca	6 (20.0)	6 (20)
❖ Pucca	6 (20.0)	6 (20)
Total	30	30
3. house in own land		
Yes	16 (53.3)	16 (53.3)
No	14 (46.7)	14 (46.7)
Total	30	30
4. No of Rooms		
1 rooms	8 (26.7)	8 (26.7)
2 rooms	11 (36.7)	11 (36.7)
3 rooms	6 (20.0)	6 (20.0)
4 rooms	5 (16.6)	5 (16.6)
Total	30	30
5. Access to Electricity		
Yes	22 (73.4)	20 (66.6)
No	8 (26.6)	10 (33.4)
Total	30	30
6. In house Toilet		
Yes	6 (20.0)	6 (20.0)
No	24 (80.0)	24(80.0)
Total	30	30
7. Access of safe drinking water within the pricewise		
Yes	10 (33.4)	10 (33.4)
No	20 (66.6)	20 (66.6)
Total	30	30

Source: Computed from Primary Data.

Note: Figures the parenthesis represent Percentage.

TABLE 6: MGNREGS AND JOB SEEKING

Particulars	No of Respondents	Percentage
1. Information about MGNREGS		
1. Radio	7	23.3
2. Television	22	73.3
3. Newspaper	16	53.3
4. Gram sabha	27	90.0
5. GP head	28	93.3
2. Awareness Provisions of MGNREGS		
❖ Minimum of 100 days of employment	29	96.6
❖ Minimum Wages	30	100.0
❖ Work to be given within 15 day of application	25	83.3
❖ One third of workers to be women	2	6.6
❖ Facilities at worksite	11	36.6
3. Possession of job card		
Yes	30	100.0
No	-	-
Total	30	100
4. Possession of job card at the moment		
❖ In possession	20	66.6
❖ Lost	7	23.4
❖ With someone else	3	10.0
Total	30	100
5. Paid for job card		
Yes	8	26.6
No	22	73.4
Total	30	100

Source: Computed from Primary Data.

TABLE 7: APPLICATION FOR THE JOB UNDER MGNREGS

Particulars	No of Respondents	Percentage
1. Source of Application for the job		
❖ GP head	5	16.6
❖ GP office	25	83.4
Total	30	100
2. Receipt of Application		
Yes	0	-
No	30	100
Total	30	100
3. Frequency of job within 15 days of Application		
Yes	28	93.4
No	2	6.6
Total	30	100
4. Applied too unemployment allowance		
Yes	24	80
No	6	20
Total	30	100
5. Received unemployment allowance		
Yes	22	73.4
No	8	26.6
Total	30	100
6. Existence of difficulty in getting the job card		
Yes	22	73.4
No	8	26.6
Total	30	100

Source: Computed from primary data.

TABLE 8 (A): MGNREGS WAGE AND PREVALENT WAGE IN AGRICULTURE-MALE

Year	MGNREGS Minimum Wage	Prevalent a Wage Agriculture		Total
		Higher	Lower	
2006-07	80	17	-	17
2007-08	80	17	-	17
2008-09	80	17	-	17
2009-10	80	17	-	17

Source: Computed from Primary Data.

TABLE 8 (B): MGNREGS WAGE AND PREVALENT WAGE IN AGRICULTURE-FEMALE

Year	MGNREGS Minimum Wage	Prevalent a Wage Agriculture			Total
		Higher	Lower	Actual	
2006-07	80	-	9	4	13
2007-08	80	4	-	9	13
2007-09	80	7	-	6	13
2009-10	80	13	-	-	13

Source: Computed from Primary Data.

TABLE 9: MODES PAYMENT OF MGNREGS WAGES AND ITS COMPONENTS

Particulars	No of Respondents	Percentage
Mode of payment		
GP office	13	43.3
GP Head	17	56.6
Total	30	100
Bank / post office Account		
Have	30	100
Haven't	-	-
Total	30	
Type of Account		
Individual Account	30	100
joint Account	-	-
Total	30	100
Bank / Post office Account Prior to MGNREGS		
Yes	19	63.3
No	11	36.7
Total	30	100
Proximity of Bank / Post office from Home		
Up to 7 Km	10	33.3
>10 Km	20	66.7
Total	30	100
Information about deposit of wage in Bank /PO account		
Yes	18	60.0
No	12	40.0
Total	30	100
Difficulties in getting payment of wages through Bank /PO		
Loss of working hours /days	26	86.7
Had to return without money	23	76.6
Non-cooperation of bank Po	15	50.0
Commission asked by Staff	6	20.0
Do not know how to withdraw	20	66.7

Source: Computed from primary data.

TABLE 10: USE OF MGNRES EARNINGS BY THE RESPONDENTS

Items of Expenditure	< Rs.1000	Rs.1000-Rs.2000	Rs.2000-Rs.3000	> Rs.3,000	Total
Food grains and other Consumable items	-	-	-	30 (100.0)	30
Education and Health	3 (10.0)	26 (86.7)	1 (3.3)		30
Festivals Social Ceremonies / Marriages	7 (23.3)	21 (70.0)	2 (6.7)	-	30
House hold Durables	27 (90.0)	3 (10.0)	-	-	30

Source: Computed from Primary Data.

Note: Figures the parenthesis represent Percentage.

TABLE 11: PARTICIPATION OF THE RESPONDENTS IN MGNREGS PROCEDURAL ASPECTS

Particular	Participated	Not Participated	Total
Participation in MGNREGS related Gramasaba Meeting	24 (80.0)	6 (20.0)	30
Participation of female members in MGNREGS related Gramasaba Meeting	21 (70.0)	9 (30.0)	30
Participation in question House of Gramasaba Meeting	10 (33.3)	20 (66.7)	30
Participation of female members in question House of Gramasaba Meeting	15 (50.0)	15 (50.0)	30
Participation in social Auditing of MGNREGS	7 (23.3)	23 (76.7)	30
Participation of female members in social Auditing of MGNREGS	9 (30.0)	21 (70.0)	30
Membership in Self-Help Groups/ other organization formed for MGNREGS	14 (46.7)	16 (53.3)	30

Source: Computed from Primary Data.

Note: Figures the parenthesis represent Percentage.

TABLE 12: PERCEPTIONS AND ASPIRATIONS ON MGNREGS

Particulars	No of Respondents	Percentage
Usefulness of MGNREGS		
Very useful	5	16.7
Useful	25	83.3
Total	30	100
Is the minimum number of employment days under MGNREGS Sufficient?		
Yes	18	60.0
No	12	40.0
Total	30	100
Expected minimum employment days for you & family		
150 days	15	50.0
200 days	11	36.7
250 days	4	13.3
Total	30	100
Is individual should be the unit for providing job guarantee?		
Yes	24	80.0
No	6	20.0
Total	30	100

Source: Computed from Primary Data.

Note: Figures the parenthesis represent Percentage.

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