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IMPLICATION OF MGNREGA IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

KHEM RAJ

RESEARCH SCHOLAR

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

HIMACHAL PRADESH UNIVERSITY

SHIMLA

ABSTRACT

Unemployment and poverty both have been the pest of India since long. Their alleviation has been one of the major goals of India's development planning since the beginning of the planning era and the planning process has been sensitive to the needs of rural poor. Poverty and unemployment both are vast threat in our country. The Government of India has launched various poverty alleviation programmes from time to time aimed to provide wage employment, reduction of poverty, and creating adequate livelihood opportunities for the rural household through provision of employment and public services. In India, Poverty is not merely an economic phenomenon but a social one as well. While, poverty is the outcome of multiple deprivations, its measurement has largely dealt with economic deprivation. The poverty alleviation programmes were aimed at tackling the problems of poverty and unemployment directly by helping the weaker sections to increase their income through self-employment and wage paid employment. India has an extensive history and experience in implementing wage employment programmes implemented by the State Governments with Central assistance but the success was not very encouraging. The Government has launched a new programme namely, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

KEYWORDS

MGNREGA, unemployment in India.

INTRODUCTION

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a flagship scheme of Government of India. The scheme was launched in 200 most backward districts of the country w.e.f. February 02, 2006 and subsequently extended to all the districts in 2008. The scheme aims at enhancing livelihood security of the rural poor by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The Act further aims at creating durable assets and strengthening the livelihood resource base of the rural household. The choice of works suggested in the Act address causes of chronic poverty like drought, deforestation, soil erosion, so that the process of employment generation is on a sustainable basis. The significance of MGNREGA lies in the fact that it creates a right-based framework for usage employment programmes and makes the government legally bound to provide employment to those who seek it.¹ In this way the legislation goes beyond providing a social safety net, and towards guaranteeing the right to employment. By prioritizing natural resources management and emphasizing the creation of durable assets, it holds the potential of becoming a growth engine for sustainable development of agriculture based economy.

SALIENT FEATURES OF MGNREGA

- To safeguard the right to work by providing 100 days guaranteed wage employment at the statutory minimum wage; in a financial year to each household who volunteers to do casual manual labour in rural areas.
- The project director, DRDA shall be responsible for the implementation of the programme in the district and in every block, the state Government shall appoint programme officer. The programme officer shall be answerable to the panchayat samiti and project director, DRDA.
- The state Government shall prepare an employment guarantee scheme for providing employment to all adults residing in the rural areas who volunteer to do casual manual work, within 6 months of the commencement of this Act.
- Only productive works shall be taken up under the programme. The state council shall prepare list of permissible works as well as a list of preferred works.
- Zila Parishad, Panchayat Samiti and Gram Panchayat will be the principal authorities for planning and implementation of the scheme. The Gram Panchayat will be responsible for identification of the scheme in the Gram Panchayat area to be taken up as per the recommendation of the Gram Sabha and for executing and supervising such works.
- The Gram Sabha shall monitor the execution of the works within the Gram Panchayat and conduct regular social audits of all the projects under the scheme taken up within the Gram Panchayats. The Gram Panchayat will make available all relevant documents including muster-rolls and other connected books of accounts and papers to the Gram Sabha for the purpose of conducting the social audit.
- Contractor shall not be used for execution of project taken up under the scheme.
- Every adult person who resides in rural areas and is willing to do manual work at the minimum wages may submit his/her name and address to the gram panchayat and apply for registration. The gram panchayat shall register his/her name and issue him/her job card indicating date and photograph. The registration will not be for less than five years and may be renewed from time to time. Different persons belonging to the same household shall share the same job card.
- It shall be the responsibility of the state government to provide employment of every such person within 15 days of receipt of an application. The application must be for at least 14 days of continuous work.
- Applicants who have been provided with work shall be so notified in writing, by means of letter sent to the address given in job card and of a public notice displayed at the Gram Panchayat notice board.
- The employment shall be provided within a radius of 5 k.m. of the village where the applicant resides. In case where employment is provided outside such radius, 10 percent extra wages will be paid.
- If applicant is not providing an employment within 15 days of applying he or she shall be entitled to a daily unemployment allowance, the unemployment allowance for first 30 days will be one fourth of the daily wage and after that the unemployment allowance will be 50 percent of the wage rate.
- The Gram Panchayat shall prepare and maintain registration and wage employment registers and issue job cards to the applicants.
- If any personal injury is caused to any person employment under the programme by accident arising out of and in the course of his employment, he shall be entitled, free hospitalization if necessary, the State Government shall arrange for hospitalization including accommodation, treatment, medicines and a daily allowance less than half of the minimum wages. In case of death or disability such a person, an ex-gratia payment of Rs. 25000/- shall be paid to his legal heirs in the manner as laid down in the workmen compensation Act.
- In case the number of children below the age of 6 years accompanying the women working at the site is 5 or more, one of such women workers will be deputed to look after such children.
- The liability of state government to pay unemployment allowance shall commence after the expiry of 15 days from the date of application (or 15 days from the date from which employment is sought, in the case of advance application). It shall cease as soon as (i) the applicant is directed by the Gram Panchayat or programme officer to report for work (ii) the period for which employment households has received 100 days of work, within the financial year.

- The scheme will be implemented on 90:10 cost sharing basis between central and state governments. But 100 percent expenditure on unemployment allowance will be borne by the state government.²

FUNDING OF THE PROGRAMME

The central Government bears the costs on the following items:

1. The entire cost of wages of unskilled manual workers.
2. Administrative expenses as may be determined by the Central Government, which will include inter-alia, the salary and the allowances of the programmes officer and his supporting staff, work site facilities.
3. 75 percent of the cost of material, wages of skilled and semi-skilled workers. Expenses of the National Employment Guarantee Councils.

The State Government bears the costs on the following items:

1. 25 percent of the cost of material, wages of skilled and semi-skilled workers (As a ratio of 60:40 is to be maintained for wages of the unskilled manual workers and the material, skilled /semi-skilled worker's wages, the State Government has to bear only 25 percent of the 40 percent component, which means a contribution of 10 percent of the expenditure).
2. Unemployment allowance payable in case the state government cannot provide wage employment on time.
3. Administrative expenses of the State Employment Guarantee Council.³

OTHER PROCESSES OF MGNREGA

A. RIGHT-BASED FRAMEWORK

1. Adult members of a rural household who are willing to do unskilled manual work may apply for registration to the local Gram Panchayat, in writing, or orally.
2. Gram Panchayat after due verification will issue a job card, the job card will bear the photograph of all adult members of the household and is free cost.
3. A job card holding household may submit a written application for employment to the Gram Panchayat, stating the time and duration for which work is sought.⁴

B. TIME –BOUND GUARANTEE

1. Gram Panchayat will issue a dated receipt of the written application for employment, against which the guarantee of providing employment within 15 days operates. If employment is not provided within 15 days operates. If employment is not provided within 15 days, daily unemployment allowance in cash has to be paid. Liability of payment of unemployment allowance is of the states.
2. Work should ordinarily be provided within 5 km. radius of the village of else extra wages of 10 percent are payable.
3. Wages are to be paid according to minimum wages. Disbursement of wages has to be done on weekly basis and beyond a fortnight.

C. WORK SITE FACILITIES

Work site facilities such as crèche, drinking water, and shade have to be provided.

D. LABOUR-INTENSIVE WORKS

A 60:40 wages and material ratio has to be maintained. Contractors and use of labour displacing machinery is prohibited.

E. PERMISSIBLE WORKS

1. Water conservation
2. Drought proofing (including plantation and afforestation)
3. Irrigation canals
4. Minor irrigation, horticulture and land development on the land of SC/ST/BPL/IAV and land reform beneficiaries
5. Renovation of traditional water bodies.
6. Flood protection
7. Land development
8. Rural connectivity
9. Any other work that may be notified by the central government in consultation with the state government.⁵

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Review of literature is a part of text which provides an approach to review the critical points of current acquaintance as well as substantive answer and hypothetical and methodological assistance to a particular topic. Approach to existence and upto date relevant literature pertaining to the studies and their critical and comprehensive review guides a researcher to devise research project on scientific lines. It assists the researcher to severe there researchable issues of the study. Review of literature acts as a searchlight to guide the course of prospective research activity. Hence, here an effort has been made to make an investigative review of the pertinent literature.

Bharat S. Santakki and Laxman M. Ahire (2011)⁶ In their paper entitled "Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme: Boon or Bane to Indian Agriculture," studied the impact of MGNREGA. Authors stated that, the MGNREGA has no doubt impacted the poor. Large households have made the effort to come forward to register, migration level has reduced in several villages of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Rajasthan, wages were raised in many states and the participation of the women increased significantly. These are really great achievements due to MGNREGA. Authors further stated that, but what happened to agricultural sector? The real impact is over here which is highly unnoticed or pretending to be unnoticed by the government. It is true that, MGNREGA experiences vary from state to state, but the reality is that farmers than most of the states had similes experiences because of the implementation of MGNREGA.

Bamra (2011)⁷ In his article entitled "Community Development under MGNREGA in Dalaghat," clearly stated that, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is successfully implemented in Balaghat district of Madhya Pradesh. Author observed that, mobilizing the available human resources and the funds available in the scheme in an effective manner has led to the successful implementation. MGNREGA brought a massive improvement in rural connectivity and other basic infrastructure in the district. Besides, it led to increase in self-confidence and socio-economic development of the poor households. Author presented Balaghat district as a successful example of implementation of MGNREGA in a Naxal effective area through involvement of the community and coordination with the various departments and schemes.

Gundet Ramesh (2011)⁸ has conducted "A study in Karimnagar district of Andhra Pradesh," to assess the impact of MGNREGA as a fact of inclusive growth. The study found that MGNREGA has become beacon of light in rural areas, and contributed substantially for the increased living and economic conditions by reducing the income imbalances in the rural areas and also helped in reduction of wages differences in various works by creating equal wages to male and female workers. According to the study, MGNREGA has helped to overcome the uncertainty in the employment, reduced the migration level to others areas and ushered to meet the raising prices in the market. The study suggested that, wages should be paid to workers in time, social audit should be made effective to eliminate bogus beneficiaries and government should take measures to provide 100 days of employment to all the workers. Further, in spite of few shortfalls in the programme, the programme is successful but it requires more transparency in the implementation of this programme in future.

P.N. Sankaran (2011)⁹ In his article entitled "Poverty Reduction: Towards Cash Transfer in lieu of subsidies," has discussed that, cash transfer as an instrument of poverty reduction and accumulation of human capital holds attraction for countries like India, the apprehension aired on total abdication of essential goods to the poor point to the need for continuation of state provision, complemented by Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) till the economy can manage sustainably demand and supply dimensions of the intervention. Author further stated that, before venturing into a full-fledged CT regime, replacing the current subsidy system, we have to address the supply-side bottlenecks, concerns of high inflation, gaps in the methods of identification of the poor, issues in financial inclusion, apprehensions on the technology implications of the unique identification mechanism, etc. A section of the poor consuming public seems to prefer PDS to cash receipt for fear of inflation, artificially steered supply constraints, and possible neglected that they may have to face in the process of open market purchase.

N. Chatterjee and Mohd. Ashraf Dar (2011)¹⁰ In their paper entitled "Role of NGOs in Rural Development," has discussed the role of NGOs in the rural development and affirmed that CAPART, the council for advancement of people's action and rural technology, has played an important role in facilitating the process of development in rural India through Non-Government Organizations (NGOs). CAPART is an autonomous body registered in 1986 under the aegis of the ministry of rural development, Government of India. The vision of CAPART is to play a catalytic role so as to strengthen the voluntary movement in the country and to facilitate the promotion of innovative rural technologies. CAPART has been implementing many innovative development projects under different schemes through a strong network of government and non-government organizations to reach all rural areas specially the backward area, of rural India.

Dr. S.M. Jawed, Akhtar and N.P. Abdul Azeez (2012)¹¹ In their article "Rural Employment Guarantee Programme and Migration," has stated that, one of the significant feature of MGNREGA is to arrest out-migration of unskilled, landless labour force from the rural areas to urban areas by ensuring up to 100 days of wage employment within of their native jurisdiction so that these guaranteed wage employment can be judiciously and rationally utilized by the landless peasants during lean and distress seasons. As far as possible, the work site is to be within a five k.m. radius of the applicant's village. In case it is not, it must be provided within block and the labourers must be paid 10 per cent of their wages as extra wages to meet the additional travel and living expenses. MGNREGA, too, could become a predictable source of local employment and therefore reduces distress migration.

R. Kurinjimular (2012)¹² In his paper entitled, "MGNREGA and Woman employment," has tried to analyze the real impact of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (MGNREGA) on women employment in Tiruvurur district of Tamilnadu. The author observed that, from the MGNREGA, the people were not getting sufficient employment opportunities. There was an existence of unemployment in Tiruvurur district in agriculture during summer season. Even though they could not control the effects of poverty fully, there was a considerable reduction in the level of poverty in this area. In addition, MGNREGA has created a considerable effect among the rural poor illiterate and unskilled workers.

Puja & Dutta (2012)¹³ In their article entitled, "Does India's Employment Guarantee Scheme Guarantee Employment," examined the performance of the MGNREGA in meeting the demand for work across states. Authors used household level data from the National Sample Survey for 2009-10 to understand who gets rationed and how this affects the scheme's ability to reach India's rural poor and other identity based groups, notably backward castes, tribes and women. They found considerable unmet demand for work in the scheme in all states, and more so in the poorest ones, where the scheme is needed most. Authors observed that, the actual participation rates in the scheme are not higher in poorer states where it is needed the most. They found a significant negative rationing correlation between the extent of rationing and the wage rate in the casual labour market relative to the wage rate on the scheme. The study concluded that, the scheme is reaching the rural poor and backwardness classes and is attracting poor women into the workforce.

Dr. S.M. Jawed, Akhtar (2012)¹⁴ In his article entitled, "MGNREGA: A tool for Sustainable Environment", has discuss the ecological perspective of MGNREGA and stated that, MGNREGA provides for the enhancement of livelihood security of the households in rural areas of the country by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work with the auxiliary objective being: Generating productive assets and protecting the environment. Author stated that, this act designed to provide an ecological perspective to the implementation of the programme. Under the MGNREGA, in order to achieve long term livelihood sustainability, the ecological perspective is needed to work for the improvement of the natural resource base and for sustaining the ecological systems on which large number of people depend for their livelihood.

Dr. Jitendra Ahirao (2012)¹⁵ In his paper, "A Brief Scanning of MGNREGA," has discussed the importance of MGNREGA for the upliftment of rural poor and stated that MGNREGA makes the government legally accountable for providing employment to those who ask for it and thereby goes beyond providing a social safety net towards guaranteeing the right of employment. A very significant feature of this act that, if a worker who has applied for work under MGNREGA is not provide employment within 15 days from the date on which work is requested, an unemployment allowance shall be payable by the State Government at the rate prescribe in the Act. MGNREGA is a unique weapon to activate and empower the Panchayats. It is a revolutionary step for India's rural poor.

Prof. Akshey Kumar & Dr. Amiya K. Mohapatra (2013)¹⁶ In their article entitled "Is it Incremental or Transformative," has discussed about rural development budget 2013-14. Authors stated that, India lives in villages, so ample significance is assigned to the rural sector and its development in the present budget. It is one of the major strategies which is focusing on rural development and upliftment of the poor people. Rural development lot a lion share in the present budgetary allocation. Authors stated that, present provisional ₹ 80, 194 crores for rural development signifies its own importance. MGNREGA which is being considered as a support and protection of rural life revitalized itself by getting a budget provision of ₹ 30,000 crore. This is a strategic move to reduce unemployment, inequality and poverty in rural sector. This also helps in building community assets in rural areas and thereby benefits people at large.

L. C. Goyal (2014)¹⁷ In his article "Removal of Rural Poverty," has stated that, to realize the vision of inclusive growth, the ministry is credited with mainly four flagships programmes that comprise a multi-pronged anti-poverty architecture and strategy of (i) increasing livelihood opportunities, (ii) developing infrastructure for socio-economic growth (iii) improvement of quality of life, and (iv) providing social safety net to as many household as possible. These consist of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojna (PMGSY), Indira Awas Yojna (IAY) and National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP). Author further stated that MGNREGA has become a powerful instrument of inclusive growth, it has enabled both livelihood security and social development.

Dr. Birendra Prasad Yadav (2014)¹⁸ In this article, "Changing Rural Landscape through Rural Development Schemes," has discussed the significance of Rural Development Schemes. Author stated that, rural development schemes namely, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Swarnajayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojana (SGSY), National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojna (PMGSY), and National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) have made a professional impact on the lines of the people in rural India. With these programmes, the government is trying to bring about overall improvement in the quality of life of the people in rural areas through employment generation, reduction in poverty by enabling poor households to access gainful self-employment ensuring minimum national standard for social assistance and provision of other basic amenities.

Sampti Saha (2015)¹⁹ In his article "MGNREGS and Economic Status of Rural Women: A field study," an attempt has been made to examine the effects of MGNREGS on lives of women. Author conducted the field survey on two Panchayat Madhupur and Takagach Rajarput in cooch Behar-II block in Cooch Behar district of West Bengal. From each Gram Panchayat 65 job card holders were selected randomly. Thus, total number of households surveyed was (65×2) = 130. Cooch Behar is a rural district town in West Bengal where about 50.11 per cent people belong to SC community. The district carries multiple characters. As per 2011 census, 89.73 per cent of population in this district lives in rural areas and 10.27 per cent population lives in urban areas. Author observed that overall development of Cooch Bihar district depends on its rural areas development. From this survey author has observed that job card holders mainly belong to vulnerable groups of society i.e. their main source of income is daily labour, and van puller, money from family states or neighboring country for daily labour work, building construction and small business. From this occupational status, it is clear that they are in dire need to earn money where MGNREGS plays an important role in their lives. Women members of these households are equally ready to do work under MGNREGS.

Dr. Mahi Pal (2015)²⁰ In his article entitled "Innovations and Rural Development Concept and Application," an attempt has been made to demonstrate as to how the application of innovation the implementation of various programmes have become useful in term of employment generation, infrastructural development, access to basic facilities in rural areas. The Ministry of Rural Development has been implementing various schemes for employment generation, infrastructures development, access to basic facilities and social assistance in rural areas. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is also a right based wage employment programme implemented in rural areas of the country. It aims at enhancing livelihood security to provide up to 100 days of generated wage-employment in financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

CONCLUSION

MGNREGA is a landmark legislation, as it ensures livelihood security in rural areas by providing employment opportunities, boosting the purchasing capacity of the rural people, and empowering village communities and creating useful assets in rural areas. Removal of food insecurity and starvation, environment protection, empowerment to rural women and reduction of rural-urban migration are possible through this legislation. This apart, it also fosters social equity among others and reduces distress migration.

From the above review, we can come on the conclusion that MGNREGA is providing a significant employment providing programme being initiated by the Govt. of India as it has increased the rate of employment, level of income of the rural poor and helped in increase in living standard and formation of assets. MGNREGA also helped the poor farmers to build assets, power to purchase good quality seeds and fertilizers and increase in income as now they are able to work in the off-seasons. MGNREGA is an important step towards realization of the right to work. It opens up tremendous possibilities of creating a livelihood resource base of the rural poor. This programme helps a lot in reducing the seasonal and disguised unemployment in the agriculture sector. It is not supply driven but demand driven. But still this scheme lacks in various issues like corruption, irregular availability of work, non-payment of wages at proper time and lack of planning of starting of new work. Many authors have given their views to cover the loopholes in this which can be taken into consideration by Government for further increase in its progress.

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