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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

OBJECTIVES

HYPOTHESES

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

RECOMMENDATIONS/SUGGESTIONS

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REFLECTIONS ON VILLAGE PEOPLE'S SOCIO - ECONOMIC CONDITIONS BEFORE AND AFTER NREGS: A DETAILED STUDY OF ARIYALUR DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU

DR. P. ILANGO
PROFESSOR & HEAD
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK
BHARATHIDASAN UNIVERSITY
TIRUCHIRAPPALLI

G. SUNDHARAMOORTHY
GUEST LECTURER
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK
BHARATHIDASAN UNIVERSITY CONSTITUENT COLLEGE
KURUMBALUR

ABSTRACT

Background: "India lives in its villages" - Mahatma Gandhi. Researchers have discussed that the choices village people make are based on their beliefs. The decisions of government can influence their village peoples and have a significant effect on their employment experiences. **Aim:** The aim of the research is to study the impact of National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) on the social and economic conditions of the rural people. **Methods:** Descriptive Research Design has been used for the present study. An attempt has been made, initially, to describe the background socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Ariyalur district from the total number of 6 unions, one union was selected by lottery method. There were 20 such panchayats that came under the study. This had 107 families that completed 100 days of employment. **Results:** The results indicate Majority of the respondents 33.6 per cent were in the age group between 41 and 50 years. Majority of 78 respondents had 12,000-14,000 per year as their annual income before NREGS and majority of 71 respondents had 14,000 – 16,000 per year as their income after the implementation of the scheme. **Conclusions:** The present study is a humble attempt to describe the important variables such employment opportunities created by the scheme differences between the NREGS works and its relation to the agricultural works, the benefits as against the drawbacks and some valuable suggestions.

KEYWORDS

Employment, income.

INTRODUCTION

India lives in its villages.

Literally and from the social, economic and political perspectives the statement is valid even today. Around 65% of the State's population is living in rural areas. People in rural areas should have the same quality of life as is enjoyed by people living in sub urban and urban areas. The present strategy of rural development mainly focuses on poverty alleviation, better livelihood opportunities, provision of basic amenities and infrastructure facilities through innovative programmes of wage and self-employment. The Village Panchayat will issue job cards to every registered individual. Payment of the statutory minimum wage and equal wages for men and women are the notable features of the scheme. From 01.04.2008 onwards, the Scheme has been extended to all the remaining 20 districts (Phase III) of Tamil Nadu one of Ariyalur district.

Mahatma Gandhi

A HISTORY OF PROGRAMMES UNDER NREGA

India has three decades of experience in implementing employment generation programmes. The first set of programmes, the National Rural Employment Programme and the Rural Landless Employment Programme, began in the 1970s as clones of the Maharashtra EGS In 1989, the Rajiv Gandhi government. In 1990, when prime minister V P Singh ambushed the Rajiv Gandhi government in 1993, the Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) was launched. The final change came in December 2004, when the National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill was tabled in Parliament. The Parliament enacted an Act No. 42 of 2005 called the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. The Act provides a guarantee for rural employment to households whose adult members volunteer to do un-skilled manual work not less than 100 days of such work in a financial year in accordance with the scheme made under the Act.

NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE SCHEME (NREGS)

I) CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

- ✓ Rural development ministry nodal ministry
- ✓ Ensure fund flow
- ✓ Set up employment guarantee council for advisory
- ✓ Independent monitoring and evaluation

II) STATE GOVERNMENT

- ✓ Evolve regulations
- ✓ Set up Employment Guarantee Council
- ✓ Facilitating resource flow

III) DISTRICT PANCHAYAT

- ✓ Prepare district annual plan
- ✓ Prepare five-year perspective plan based on village plans
- ✓ Implement works (not mandatory)
- ✓ District level coordination of activities

IV) BLOCK PANCHAYAT

- ✓ Coordinate block level plans
- ✓ Identify possible works based on village plan
- ✓ Design and implement works (not mandatory)
- ✓ Monitoring

V) VILLAGE PANCHAYAT

- ✓ Prepare village plan
- ✓ Identify, design and implement 50% works
- ✓ Set up local institutions to facilitate implementation
- ✓ Evaluate and monitor implementation

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to **Sharma (2006)**, the people were happy about getting the job opportunities in their own villages which the findings prove to be true. The author further states that the participation of women has not been found encouraging. The findings of our survey show that a majority of 51.5 per cent women participate in the NREGS works.

Tamil Nadu – A Report (2008), published in YOJANA and **Sudha Narayan (2008)** who carried out a survey in Villupuram district conclude that provision of effective childcare facilities like the creches at worksites should be provided. The findings in the Ariyalur district shows that 100 per cent of the respondents have agreed that water facilities, shed and crèches were provided at the worksite. A few 6 among 107 of them have stated that first aid was not given properly.

Mamidipally Rajanna (2009), who studied the impact of NREGS in Andhra Pradesh States that social audits and accurate records are to be concentrated while the findings from the panchayat presidents and beneficiaries more than half 55 per cent have expressed that social audits were done regularly every half year and 100 per cent of them have stated that records were maintained properly.

Singh (2008) conducted a study in Uttar Pradesh. He came to a conclusion that there is a need for spreading awareness among the people. **Rao (2007)** who made a study of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh has also stated the same. The findings in Ariyalur district, Tamil Nadu (2009) shows that the awareness on the scheme is better when compared to other states and previous years. 100 per cent of the respondents are aware of the scheme and the benefits they would get from it.

Rao (2008) and the findings of this survey conclude that the scheme has reduced migration of rural area to the urban locations.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

This research becomes significant since it studies the effects of the NREGS on the individual, society and economic status of the rural people, both directly and indirectly. The study also helps in identifying the defects of the scheme and suggests ways to rectify them. Hence this research becomes important. This research also reflects the social status of the people, effects of the scheme on agriculture and the present situation of the rural people therefore it can be called as the mirror of the society.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

India is the largest democratic country with rich and varied culture and life styles. There are industrious cities and fertile villages. The villagers depend on agriculture for their living. More than 80% of the Indians live in villages. When agriculture fails them, they hurl in poverty. They central and state governments have implemented various schemes to eradicate the poverty of the rural people. National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) is one such a scheme which has gained popularity in recent times. It is one of the schemes that has reached the people directly and is popularly known as 100 days employment scheme.

The scheme has gained popularity among the poor and has many salient features. Has this scheme reached the people? This is a key point to be researched upon. More over the study on this scheme becomes essential as it has affected the rural people and agricultural works both directly and indirectly and in a positive and negative way. These should be studied closely to identify the negative aspects and the central reason behind them. So that they can be rectified in order to make the scheme more successful.

The implementation of the scheme nation-wide has many practical difficulties. Only a direct research with those who help in implementing the scheme and the beneficiaries will help to remove these difficulties.

OBJECTIVES

1. To study the socio-economic background of the beneficiaries under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) in Ariyalur District.
2. To study the awareness regarding the NREGS among the respondents.
3. To evaluate the usefulness of NREGS in study area.
4. To find out the difference in the standard of living of the village people before and after implementation of NREGS.

HYPOTHESIS

1. People under the NREGS scheme have higher wages than the people involved in the agricultural work.
2. The Agricultural works had more labourers before the implementation of NREGS than after the implementation of the scheme.
3. People with higher level of education are likely to have a higher level of awareness on the scheme when compared to people with lower level of education.
4. People of the rural area get higher employment opportunity through NREGS than before its implementation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Descriptive Research Design has been used for the present study. An attempt has been made, initially, to describe the background socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, and then the key variables namely awareness of the people on the scheme, employment opportunity. The universe of the present study includes all the people living within 6 unions that falls under Ariyalur district. From the total number of 6 unions, one union was selected by lottery method. Thirumanur union, which was selected, has 36 panchayats. Among them only those panchayats with families that completed the full 100 days under the NREGS were selected by the researcher for the study. There were 20 such panchayats that came under the study. This had 107 families that completed 100 days of employment. Census method was used to select the panchayat presidents and beneficiaries (107 families) as respondents. The researcher used a self – prepared structured Interview-Schedule which included the respondent's personal details such as age, gender, education, occupation, income etc., and awareness of the people on regarding NREGS the scheme, registering for the scheme, getting employment and wage and socio-economic conditions of the respondents were included in the schedule. The structured interview schedule was prepared in Tamil so that it could be understood by the respondents. The collection of data was done from 19th June to 31st August, 2009.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**TABLE – 01: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY AGE VS GENDER**

S. No.	Age	Male	Female	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	20 – 30 years	3	9	12	11.2
2.	31 – 40 years	8	17	25	23.4
3.	41 – 50 years	19	17	36	33.6
4.	51 – 60 years	15	11	26	24.3
5.	61 – 70 years	6	1	7	6.5
6.	Above 70 years	1	-	1	1.0
	Total	52	55	107	100.0

Source: Field Survey

The tables above show the age and gender of the respondents. It is clear from the table that the maximum number of respondents i.e. 33.6 per cent of them belongs to the age group of 41-50 years and the male and female beneficiaries in the age group are comparatively equal. About 92.5 per cent of the respondents belong to the working age group between 20-60 years. It shows that NREGS has been successful in employing the right age group for the works and Table No.2 shows that it is equally beneficial to the male as well as the female.

TABLE – 02: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY THEIR RELIGION

S. No.	Religion	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Hindu	97	90.6
2.	Christian	10	9.4
	Total	107	100.0

Source: Field Survey

The above table shows that the majority of the beneficiaries 90.6 per cent belong to the Hindu religion. It also shows that even the people from the minority community benefit from the scheme.

TABLE – 03: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY THEIR COMMUNITY

S. No.	Community	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	SC	27	25.2
2.	BC	72	67.3
3.	MBC	8	7.5
	Total	107	100.0

Source: Field Survey

Distribution table above shows the community wise difference among the respondents. Among the respondents 67.3 per cent of them belong to the Backward Community. The Scheduled Community 25.2 per cent and the Most Backward Community 7.5 per cent have also benefited from the scheme. Though there is a vast difference between each community, still when compared with the population in the target area, the scheme has provided equal opportunity to every community.

TABLE – 04 DISTRIBUTIONS OF RESPONDENTS BY THEIR EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION

S. No.	Educational Qualification	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Primary	30	28.0
2.	Secondary	38	35.5
3.	Higher Secondary	2	2.0
4.	Technical	1	1.0
5.	Illiterate	36	33.5
	Total	107	100.0

Source: Field Survey

The table above states that 28 per cent of the beneficiaries have only completed primary education and 35.5 per cent have done secondary education while 33.5 per cent of them are illiterate.

TABLE – 05: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY THEIR OCCUPATION

S. No.	Type of Occupation	Before NREGS	Percentage	After NREGS	Percentage
1.	Agricultural Labourers	70	65.4	25	23.4
2.	Own agricultural	20	18.7	8	7.5
3.	Others works	17	15.9	-	-
4.	NREGS works	-	-	74	69.1
	Total	107	100.0	107	100.0

Source: Field Survey

Occupation wise distribution table shows a very salient point about the scheme. The table clearly shows that people who were agricultural labourers (70) and even those who had their own agricultural land (20) have opted to work under the scheme. About (74) of the respondents have left agricultural work and have joined the NREGS scheme. This study shows that agricultural labour has been affected by the scheme. Even the (17) who have done others works before the scheme have left them and joined the scheme after its implementation.

TABLE – 06: EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY OF THE RESPONDENTS

S. No.	Employment Opportunity per month (In Days)	Before NREGS	Percentage	After NREGS	Percentage
1.	5 – 10	5	4.7	-	-
2.	10 – 15	89	83.2	10	9.3
3.	15 – 20	13	12.1	80	74.8
4.	20 – 25	-	-	17	15.9
	Total	107	100.0	107	100.0

Source: Field Survey

The above table studies the employment opportunity of the respondents before and after the implementation of the scheme. Maximum number of respondents have expressed that NREGS has given them more number of days of employment per month. (89) of them have said that they had 10-15 days of employment per month before the scheme and (80) of them have agreed that the days of employment has increased to 15-20 days per month after the implementation of the scheme.

TABLE – 07: INCOME VARIATION BEFORE AND AFTER NREGS

S. No.	Annual Income of the Individual	Before NREGS	Percentage	After NREGS	Percentage
1.	10,000 – 12,000	7	6.6	-	-
2.	12,000 – 14,000	78	72.9	13	12.2
3.	14,000 – 16,000	18	16.8	71	66.4
4.	16,000 – 18,000	4	3.7	14	13.0
5.	Above – 18,000	-	-	9	8.4
	Total	107	100.0	107	100.0

Source: Field Survey

The above table shows clearly that the annual income of the beneficiaries has increased after the implementation of the scheme. The maximum number of respondents (78) have stated that their annual income was 12,000 – 14,000 before the scheme and (71) among (107) accepted that their annual income has increased to 14,000-16,000 after the implementation of the scheme.

TABLE – 08: WAGE AND WORKING HOURS

S. No.	Type of Work	Working Hours		Wage	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
1.	Agricultural Works	5 Hours	5 Hours	100	50
2.	NREGS works	7 Hours	7 Hours	80	80

Source: Field Survey

The above table explains the working hours and wage of the respondents in agricultural works and in NREGS works. The working hours have increased from 5 to 7 hours in the NREGS works. The wages for the men have reduced by 20 rupees whereas for the women it has increased by 30 rupees. There is equal wage for men and women in the NREGS works. The differences in the wages and working hours have not affected the involvement of people in NREGS works as they have regular work. From the above table we also come to the conclusion that the male workers get fewer wage in the NREGS works comparing to agricultural works. Whereas the female workers get more wages through NREGS comparing to agricultural works. The female workers benefit more from this scheme.

TABLE – 09: AWARENESS ON SALIENT FEATURES OF THE SCHEME

S. No.	Salient Features of the Scheme	No. of Respondents (107)	Percentage
		Know	
1.	Free medical Treatment for those injured during the work	105	98.1
2.	50 per cent of the wage will to be given during the period of treatment	105	98.1
3.	There should be an open administration	100	93.4
4.	In case of any accident or death during work 25,000/- to be given as compensation	104	97.1
5.	The work should be in accordance with Right Information Act.	75	70.0
6.	Aged people and Physically Challenged to be allotted suitable work.	100	93.4
7.	Social audit reports to be displayed for the public to see	60	56.0

Source: Field Survey

The salient features table shows that the people are aware of the benefits of the scheme. We can come to the conclusion that most of the beneficiaries are aware about the salient features of the programme. Their awareness about openness of administration right to information act, work to be allotted for physically challenged and aged people and audit reports are very little since it does not personally concern them.

TABLE – 10: FULFILLMENT OF 100 DAYS OF EMPLOYMENT

S. No.	No of Person in a Family Jointly Fulfilled the 100 Days	No. of the Family	Percentage
1.	Single person	20	18.7
2.	Two person	61	57.0
3.	Three person	21	19.6
4.	Four person	5	4.7
	Total	107	100.0

Source: Field Survey

The table above shows that the scheme provides an opportunity for the beneficiaries to arrange a substitute from their family when they are unable to attend the work. The family members can compensate and complete the 100 days' work. The real beneficiary in the scheme is the family. From the table we come to know that (61) respondents have expressed that two persons of the same family completed the 100 days. This provides opportunity for substituting during times of sickness and other personal reasons so that the family gets 100 full days of work and wages to manage the family expenses.

FINDINGS

I. SOCIO – DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Majority of the respondents 33.6 per cent were in the age group between 41 and 50 years. A little more than half of the respondents 51.5 per cent are females. A vast majority of the beneficiaries 90.6 per cent were Hindu. More than half of the respondents 67.3 per cent belong to the Backward Community. Majority of the respondents 35.5 per cent had completed secondary education.

II) ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

Majority of the beneficiaries 70 were involved in agricultural work before the implementation of NREGS while 74 of them joined NREGS after the implementation. A vast majority of 89 among 107 respondents had employment opportunities for 10-15 days per month before the implementation and a majority of 80 among 107 respondents had employment opportunities for 15 – 20 days per month after the implementation. Majority of 78 respondents had 12,000-14,000 per year as their annual income before NREGS and majority of 71 respondents had 14,000 – 16,000 per year as their income after the implementation of the scheme.

III) AWARENESS OF NREGS

All the respondents 100 per cent were aware of the NREGS and its implementation in their villages. Majority of the respondents 45 per cent had stated that announcements and bit notices were the methods used to create awareness among the public. Other methods used by and large were advertisement board, newspapers, Radio, and Gram Sabha Meetings. A vast majority of 86.5 per cent at average respondents were aware of the salient features of the scheme relating to free medical treatment, open administration, compensation, Right to Information Act and Social Audits.

IV) EMPLOYMENT AND WAGES

All the respondents 100 per cent agreed that wages were given in cash once in a week. 100 per cent of the respondents stated that men and women get equal wage under the scheme. All the respondents 107 agree that the wage particulars were announced in public and wages were given in a stipulated place.

V) FINDINGS RELATED TO ASSUMPTIONS

The findings of the survey shown that women in the NREGS have higher wages than in the agricultural work whereas men, who were getting Rs.100 in agricultural work, are only getting Rs.80 in NREGS. The findings shows that 70 among 107 respondents were involved in agricultural work before the NREGS while only 25 among 107 were involved in agricultural work after the implementation of the scheme. The findings show that the annual income of the people has increased from 12,000 – 14,000 per month to 14,000 – 16,000 per month which indicates that the Assumptions is true.

SUGGESTIONS

SUGGESTIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT

Men are paid less (Rs. 80/day) in NREGS when compared to other works where they get more (Rs.100 / day) this could be taken into consideration. The scheme has been designed to give equal salary to men and women. The minimum limit can be raised to Rs.100 / day for both men and women however providing more wages for men would result in better quantity of work. The survey points out that there are people in the group of workers (20 people) who do not involve whole heartedly in the work but get equal wages as those who do majority of the work. In order that every individual gives equal share of work monitoring based on norms could be strengthened which also leads to completion of work and better quality of work. Self Help Groups could also be used to better monitoring. NREGS provides work for aged people and physically challenged people which is very much welcomed by the public.

SUGGESTIONS TO FUTURE RESEARCHERS

The future researchers could make a study on the feasibility of bring out standardized norms for the NREGS works on topics related to monitoring, work allotment, registering people and age limit. The salient features of the scheme have not fully reached the beneficiaries which could separately be taken for study by the future researchers. The study has excluded those beneficiaries who did not complete 100 days. The future researchers can take up for their study those people so that their problems could be analysed and reasons for non-completion could be evaluated.

SUGGESTION TO SOCIAL WORKERS

The social workers who play a vital role in strengthening the government schemes on various levels could help in monitoring and implementation of the scheme so that the aims and objectives of the government are achieved. The social workers could also take up volunteering work of educating the beneficiaries, implementers and farmers on health and hygiene, saving habits and so on. This could further add value to the scheme.

CONCLUSION

The present study is a humble attempt to describe the important variables such as implementation of NREGS, Awareness on the scheme, salient features of the programme and employment opportunities created by the scheme while considering their socio-demographic characteristics and analysing the associations among the different key variables. The study has brought out important findings which indicate significant differences between the NREGS works and its relation to the agricultural works, the benefits as against the drawbacks and some valuable suggestions. This study will form a basis for more methodologically sound and rigorous research studies in the broad area of norms related to NREGS works and awareness and reach of the salient features of the scheme.

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TABLES**TABLE – 01: FUNDS RELEASED & EXPENDITURE UNDER NREGS (RS. IN CRORES)**

S. No	Year	Central Government	State Government	Total	Expenditure
1	2005-06	65.72	7.31	73.03	3.00
2	2006-07	170.89	18.08	188.97	151.65
3	2006-07	516.29	57.29	573.58	477.36
4	2008-09	969.34	103.12	1,072.46	779.99
	Total	1,722.24	185.80	1,908.04	1,412.00

Source: Rural Development & Panchayat Raj Department Tamil Nadu

TABLE: 02 - FOLLOWING TABLE THROWS LIGHT ON STATE-WISE PERFORMANCE OF NREGS

S. No.	Name of the State	No. of persons provided Employment	Daily Wages (In R s.)
1	Andhra Pradesh	705,822	80
2	Arunachal Pradesh	N.A.	57
3	Assam	6,990	62
4	Bihar	505,281	68
5	Chhattisgarh	162,480	58.83
6	Gujarat	73,791	50
7	Haryana	15,573	95.13
8	Himachal Pradesh	24,848	70
9	Jammu & Kashmir	20,261	70
10	Jharkhand	501,388	50.06
11	Karnataka	66,530	62.5
12	Kerala	N.A.	125
13	Madhya Pradesh	1,804,953	61.37
14	Maharashtra	183,075	@ 47
15	Manipur	45,172	72.4
16	Meghalaya	N.A.	70
17	Mizoram	N.A.	91
18	Nagaland	N.A.	66
19	Orissa	563,681	55
20	Punjab	21,284	89
21	Rajasthan	846,263	73
22	Sikkim	N.A.	85
23	Tamil Nadu	82,009	80
24	Tripura	16,218	60
25	Uttar Pradesh	779,611	58
26	Uttaranchal	11,178	73
27	West Bengal	495,493	67.42

Source: Data presented in Rajya Sabha on Aug.2, 2006

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