



EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITY UNDER MGNREGA

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is considered as a "Silver Bullet" for eradicating rural poverty and unemployment, by way of generating demand for productive labour force in villages. It is a boon for Person with Disability (PWD) to Earn their livelihood. It aims at providing 150 Days work for each Family in a year. Persons with disability are Provided Suitable works to their abilities, and are given equal wages along with Non-disabled Candidates/Labours For which it has been considered as the largest anti-poverty programme in the world. But the success of this Act depends upon its proper implementation.

KEYWORDS : persons with disability, Employment, Equal wages, Non-Disabled.

Introduction

Implementation of MGNREGA has proved to be rewarding to the PWD as they enjoy the right to work for 100 days provided they are willing to take up unskilled wage labour. Many PWDs have been denied or kept away from wage labour due to the wrong notion that disabled could not work and even if they work, output would not be worth to the payment made. As a result of this, they were kept away from wage labour in the agriculture and construction sectors. Implementation of MGNREGA has provided opportunities for those disabled to work and earn decent income to support the family.

Like others, the PWDs were also keen and interested in undertaking employment suited to their physical and mental conditions. The current level of work participation of disabled population either in skilled or unskilled employment sector is very low despite the protective measure extended through the Disability Act (1995). One of the reasons for low participation is due to the social and environmental barrier erected around them. The study reveals that many of those disabled who were hitherto denied or deprived of employment in the unskilled sector got an opportunity to take up wage employment for the first time in their life and earn a modest income. However, the national level data, considering the total population of the disabled, showed that the number of them engaged in MGNREGA is too small.

Disability is related with human condition. Disabled people exist in every community of the world. Disability is a dynamic phenomenon-modified by changes in environment and academic understanding. Concepts and understanding of human disability are observed to be undergoing continuous modification and consequently administrative attention across the world. The central concern in modern debates appears to be 'how one should view the presence of a disability'.

Though convergence in conceptualization is desirable, universally accepted definition of disability is yet to emerge and according to some researchers probably impossible to achieve. Different international organizations discussed the concept of disability in diverse ways. World Health Organization has addressed the disability issue and provides a conceptual framework for disability with three significant aspects or issues; they are interrelated and overlapping in some sense: Impairment; Disability and Handicap.

One may observe some hierarchical order in conceptualization. Impairment is "any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological, or anatomical structure or function".

Disability is a "restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range

considered normal for a human being". And handicap is a "disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from an impairment or disability that limits or prevents the fulfillment of a role that is normal (depending on age, sex and social and cultural factors) for that individual".

In 2001, the "International Classification of Functioning and Disability" (ICF) explains the concept of "disability," or "functional" abilities or inabilities as an umbrella concept applicable both for the body perspective, and to the individual and society perspective.

In India, disability condition has been introduced essentially following the medical model and, as such, they have been based on various criteria of ascertaining abnormality or pathologic conditions of persons. In 1995, The Persons with Disabilities Act (PWD-Equal opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) has defined disability as a person suffering from not less than forty per cent of any disability as certified by a medical authority. The disabilities identified are; blindness, low vision, cerebral palsy, leprosy, leprosy cured, hearing impairment, locomotors disability, mental illness and mental retardation.

Census and NSSO are two important sources for quantitative information on disability. NSSO considered disability as "Any restriction or lack of abilities to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for human being". However, in India, disability issue is moving from medical to human rights issue. But, the society has created doubt about their rights.

N.R.E.G.A. - Work for all, but none for the disabled! The Government of India passed the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (N.R.E.G.A.), in September 2005. It provides legal guarantee of a hundred days of employment in a financial year to adult members of a rural household. In this undoubtedly most ambitious programme to address rural poverty and empower the rural poor, the Government has once again failed to consider the most vulnerable population of disabled people.

It is a well known fact that over 75 per cent of the Indian population is rural. Despite a growing economy, a majority of the people in rural areas live below the poverty line, as employment opportunities are hard to come by. Thus, N.R.E.G.A. aims to end food insecurity, empower village communities, and create useful assets in rural areas. The approach is rights based as the assumption here is that every adult has a right to basic employment opportunities at the statutory minimum wage. Under this scheme, one member of every rural household is guaranteed 100 days of work at the minimum wage of Rs. 60 a day. All rural poor, immaterial of whether they are below the poverty line or not, are eligible to apply, One-third of the

beneficiaries should be women. This scheme, if properly implemented, will go a long way in alleviating rural poverty.

While appreciating the genuine concerns and efforts of the Government to ensure employment, food and livelihood security for its rural citizens with the enactment of N.R.E.G.A., it is distressing to see that people with disabilities, who constitute the most vulnerable and poorest of the poor segment of society, have been completely left out of the scheme of things. It can be stated with conviction that all the good work will come to naught, as the goal of poverty eradication cannot be achieved if disabled people who constitute 5-6 per cent of the total population of India are ignored or left out. If figures are indicative of the status of any section of society, then disabled people constitute 20 per cent of the world's poorest of the poor, and over 80 per cent of the 70 million disabled people live in rural India - well below the poverty line. It is an accepted fact that there is a two-way relationship between disability and poverty. It's a vicious circle where poverty leads to disability because of the living conditions, and in turn disability leads to more poverty due to limited opportunities and discrimination at all levels.

Ten years after the Disability Act, implementation in critical areas such as education, employment and barrier-free access remains at zero level. The economic empowerment of disabled people is key to independent living and sustainable livelihoods. Therefore, mainstreaming of disability into development projects is crucial. It is now an accepted position that disability has to be a component of all development programmes. In line with this thinking, the Tenth Plan also advocated the introduction of a Component Plan for the Disabled in the budget of all concerned Ministries/Departments in order to ensure a regular flow of funds for Schemes/Programmes for the empowerment of disabled people.

About 10 percent of the world's population suffers from some kind of disability and they are classified as Persons with Disability (PWDs). PWDs are the most vulnerable and marginalized section of the society, are suffering from social stigma and isolation and discrimination in job market. However, MGNREGA has opened up new avenues of employment opportunities for PWDs. The paper insists of adequate measures for the inclusion of PWD in MGNREGA.

According to available estimates, approximately 10 percent of the world's population suffer from some kind of disability and are Classified as Persons with Disability (PWDs). PWD is now recognized as differently-abled persons and a sizeable proportion of this group may be involved in various social activities. However, Physically Challenged Persons (PWDs) are the most vulnerable and marginalized section of the society all over the world. They are suffering from social stigma and isolation. In general PWDs have been facing several barriers that limit their participation in mainstream societal activities.

In India, PWDs have poor health outcomes, lower education achievements, less economic participation and higher rates of poverty than people without disabilities. They also have experience of exclusion from everyday life activities. PWDs do not receive the disability-related services that they require.

In India, PWDs suffer from discrimination in job market despite some kind of reservation. According to 2011 census, about 2.21 per cent of total populations suffer from various types of disability in India. More than 75 percent PWDs lives in rural India. Available estimate suggests that the work participation rate among PWDs is 35 per cent. Experience suggests that employment problem of unskilled section of the PWDs is acute while the skilled and educated section are trying to cope with the adverse environment. They face a wide range of employment disadvantages, especially in rural areas. The major barrier to employment by PWDs continues to be attitudinal barriers. Explanations also lie with stereotypical thinking and the postulation that they are always incapable to do the work done by the normal people. However, situation has been changing slowly.

Government of India has different programmes to promote employment among PWDs. On 2 February 2006, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) came into force. The main objective of the act is to enhance livelihood security in rural areas 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. In this sense, it seems to be a boon for the disabled who have been hitherto excluded from different employment programme due to their differently abled nature coupled with the negative attitude prevailing in the society about their ability to undertake manual labour. Adequate measures are required for the inclusion of PWD in MGNREGA.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF PWD IN MGNREGA – INTERSTATE VARIATIONS

Globally, PWDs face a wide range of complexity in employment opportunity. It is found that in high income countries, PWDs are more likely to have access to the services to decent employment. But in some developing countries, the available data indicate that the unemployment rate is estimated to be 80 per cent and above. However, the majority of studies find that persons with disability have lower employment rates than persons without disability irrespective of countries (Table-1).

Table – 1 Employment Rate of Disabled People Across Countries

Employment Range (percentage)	Countries
10 – 20	Serbia, South Africa
20 – 30	Mexico, Japan
30 – 40	UK, India, Netherland
40 – 50	Australia, USA, Germany
50 – 60	Sweden
60 – 70	Norway

Data relates to 2000; Source: OECD (2003)

It can be seen that maximum countries fall within the groups 30 to 50 percentage. Thus it can be predicted that global average of employability of PWDs stands roughly in the group 30 to 50 percentages.

The employment of PWDs is cause for serious concern. However, in India, the employment opportunity for PWDs is insignificant. In a rural Indian agrarian context, rather than disability per se, the ability of a person to be engaged in gainful employment determines whether an individual is considered to be disabled; among persons with disabilities (PWDs), acceptance within their local communities was contingent upon whether they were employed through waged labour or domestic work. India, unlike most developing countries, has a disability policy and a variety of programs to promote employment among PWDs. There are various laws and programs that are designed, at least in part, to promote the employment of PWDs.

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is a flagship programme of wage employment programme in rural India. The main distinguishing feature of this scheme is that it is demand based, rights based and inclusive in nature. It is a unique poverty alleviation programme implemented in the country. The Act came into force on February 2, 2006 and was implemented in a phased manner.

MGNREGA is the first ever law that guarantees wage employment at an unprecedented scale. The primary objective of the Act is augmenting wage employment. Its auxiliary objective is strengthening natural resource management through works that address causes of chronic poverty like drought, deforestation and soil erosion and so encourage sustainable development. The process outcomes include strengthening grass root processes of

democracy and infusing transparency and accountability in governance.

In India, PWDs have been excluded from unskilled wage employment programme due to their handicap or differently abled nature coupled with the negative attitude prevailing in the society about their ability to undertake unskilled manual labour. However, the introduction of NREGS heralds a new chapter in the history of wage employment for the PWDs.

Though no special provision has been made to the disabled in respect of allotment of works, the Act clearly states that the disabled should be given suitable work that suits to his/her ability and qualifications. Similarly, the provision of 3 per cent reservation in

MGNREGA as specified in the Disability Act (1995) mainly depends on the implementing agency. Due to insensitivity to the problems of the disabled and negative attitude of the implementation officials, the disabled person may not get any preference while allotting the work.

Though PWDs have not received any special attention in MGNREGA, the measure is helpful; many PWDs have been benefited from MGNREGA in India. But, considering the total population of disabled in the country their coverage under the scheme is very poor. The number of disabled beneficiaries covered under this scheme during the years of 2009-10 and 2010-11 in different states in India can be seen from Table-2.

Table – 2 Disabled MGNREGA Beneficiary: Interstate Variations

States/Union territories	Disabled Persons (0.00)	Disabled Beneficiaries			
		(2009-2010)		(2010-2011)	
		Total (0.00)	Percent of state total	Total(0.00)	Percent of state total
Andaman & Nicobar	7057	85	1	1	0
Andhra Pradesh	1364981	68256	5	61978	4
Arunachal Pradesh	33315	18	0	1	0
Assam	530300	1989	0	1792	0
Bihar	1887611	34161	2	3533	0
Chandigarh	15538	0	0	-	-
Chhattisgarh	419887	11221	3	22906	6
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	4048	0	0	0	0
Daman and Diu	3171	0	0	25	1
Goa	15749	3	0	-	-
Gujarat	1045465	10926	1	28059	3
Himachal Pradesh	155950	1791	1	2112	1
Haryana	455040	74	0	234	0
Jammu and Kashmir	302670	1037	0	332	0
Jharkhand	448377	5515	1	8682	2
Karnataka	940643	8522	1	5977	1
Kerala	860794	2661	0	2583	0
Lakshadweep	1678	0	0	0	0
Madhya Pradesh	1408528	8665	1	22232	2
Maharashtra	1569582	2186	0	10994	1
Manipur	28376	513	2	133	1
Meghalaya	28803	518	2	93	0
Mizoram	16011	236	2	57	0
Nagaland	26499	271	1	41	0
Orissa	1021335	4017	0	4639	0
Pondicherry	25857	8	0	4	0
Punjab	424523	114	0	183	0
Rajasthan	1411979	11586	1	3110	0
Sikkim	20367	164	1	53	0
Tamil Nadu	1642497	9381	1	37862	2
Tripura	58940	13678	23	10018	17
Uttar Pradesh	3453369	47523	1	13279	0
Uttarakhand	194769	505	0	280	0
West Bengal	1847174	51591	3	72535	4
Total	21637969	297215	1.37	313728	1.5

Sources: 1) NREGA, Ministry of Rural Development, Department of Rural Development;
2) Census of India, 2001, GOI

As per the 2001 census, the proportion of disabled in the selected States is given in the Table-2, which accounts for 2.16 crores. From the Table it may be seen that the maximum number of disabled (23 per cent) benefited from MGNREGA in the year 2009-10 was reported in the State of Tripura followed by Andhra Pradesh which stood at 5 per cent. In the States of Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, 3 per cent each of the disabled benefited from the scheme in the year 2009-10. In Bihar the benefited disabled accounted for 2 per cent of the disabled. North-eastern states like Meghalaya, Manipur and Mizoram engaged 2 per cent of the disabled in MGNREGA work, while Sikkim provided employment to 1 per cent of the disabled. The number of disabled engaged in NREGA in the rest of the states and union territories was very marginal.

From the Table-2, it may further be noted that in terms of number of disabled engaged in employment for the year 2010– 11, Tripura topped the list with 17 per cent and Chhattisgarh stood second with 7 per cent. West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh had the same distribution of 4 per cent each. The next highest was reported in Gujarat (3 per cent) followed by Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Jharkhand accounting for 2 per cent each of the disabled. Distribution in the order of 1 per cent was reported in Karnataka, Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur and union territory of Daman and Diu. The distribution in the rest of the states and union territories was very marginal.

We have seen that the total population of disabled in the selected states stood at 2.16 crores. In the year 2009-10 the total number of

disabled individual beneficiaries benefited in MGNREGA was 297215 indicating that number of disabled benefited from employment was only 1.37 per cent. While in the following year of 2010-11, the number of disabled engaged in employment was 1.5 per cent indicating marginal increase. The macro level national level data showed that even after implementation of MGNREGA work nearly for the last 5 years only 1.5 per cent of disabled could benefit from the scheme. This figure is only half of the figure of the mandated 3 per cent reservation made available to them. The reasons for this low level of participation may be due to lack of awareness about the scheme, discrimination in the community and work place, environmental barriers among other factors associated with disability.

CONCLUSION

This, MGNREGA plays an important Role in Providing Suitable employment to the PWDs. Many PWDs in every village utilize this opportunities and stand independent Economically

It considers the disableds vulnerability, physical and mental condition, and provides suitable Working Environment by discounting of work Norms to Attract them in to it. It helps the PWDs to realize their Abilities and contribute their share to the Nation-Building

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