



MGNREGA: A STEP TOWARDS LIVELIHOOD SECURITY OF RURAL POOR

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ABSTRACT

Progressive reduction of unemployment has been one of the principal objectives of economic planning in India. The expansion of employment that ensures adequate livelihood security and decent conditions of work ought to be the bottom line in the pursuit of economic development in a country like India. To deal with unemployment problem, Government of India has launched various employment schemes from time to time. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is one of them. Enactment of MGNREGA was a historic step in Indian context. It is visualized as a first step towards the realization of the economic right to work as envisioned in the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution of India. It recognizes Article, 39 of the Constitution, according to which the state must ensure that "citizens men and women equally have the right to adequate means of livelihood" and Article, 41 whereby "the State shall within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing right to work in cases of unemployment. The principal objective of the Scheme is to enhance livelihood security in rural areas and also create opportunity to live in dignity 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 strengthening the livelihood resource base of the rural poor. Against this backdrop, this paper makes a humble attempt to evaluate the impact of MGNREGA in livelihood security of rural poor in Kankadahad Block of Dhenkanal District in Odisha.

KEYWORDS : Livelihood Security, Rural Poor, Unemployment, Economic Development

INTRODUCTION

MGNREGS came into force all over India on 02.02.2006. It has become a powerful instrument for inclusive growth in rural India through its impact on social protection, livelihood security and democratic governance. MGNREGA is the first ever internationally that guarantees wage employment at an unprecedented scale. Livelihood is one of the most important goals of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. This is working as an influential instrument for ensuring inclusive growth in rural India through livelihood security. All rural districts are covered under this Scheme with several permissible works like: Water Conservation, Drought Proofing (including plantation and afforestation), Irrigation Canals, Minor Irrigation, Horticulture and land development on the land of SC/ST/BPL/IAY and land reform beneficiaries, Renovation of traditional water bodies, Flood Protection, Land Development, Rural Connectivity and any other work that may be notified by the Central Government in consultation with the State Government.

The significance of MGNREGA lies in the fact that it creates a right-based framework for wage employment programmes and makes the Government Legally bound to provide employment to those who seek it. 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 an agricultural based economy.

The MGNREGA scheme was launched in 19 districts of Odisha, in 2006 on same date and extended to other Districts in phased manner and presently covers all 30 districts. Dhenkanal District has been covered in the Scheme in the first phase since 2006, since has a great impact on the social transformation as well as on the livelihoods of poor and marginalized.

OBJECTIVES

- To identify the socio- economic status of MGNREGS beneficiaries in selected villages.
- To Study the satisfaction of the rural poor for work in MGNREGS.
- To know the impact of MGNREGS on the livelihood conditions of beneficiaries.

Review of Literature

Few selected research reports, articles and books were evaluated as part of the literature review exercise for laying the foundation for the present study all of which either related to the central theme of MGNREGS or affiliated aspects of the subject matter under consideration.

K D Adhikari (2000) in his book "*Co-operation on Eastern Himalayan Rivers – Opportunities and Challenges*" observed that MGNREGS expects fixing priorities of activities while providing a basic employment guarantee in rural belt. He recommended, it is mandatory under MGNREGS to formulate action plans and perspective plans prior to implementation, the focus of the act should be on activities related to water conservation, water harvesting, flood and drought proofing, irrigation, land development and rural road connectivity.

Das Vidhya (2010) his book chapter, The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act: The Vision and Reality Published in his book "*Human Rights Inhuman Wrongs- State of Governance in Tribal Regions*" pointed that, MGNREGS has immense potential to stop migration, it can help to build assets in the villages and country side and gradually change the face of the rural areas. In the next part of his chapter he describes how NAREGA suffers from major flaws. And in the concluding part he wrote, a proactive and responsive government is required for all this, not one looks at voluntary organizations as trouble makers, and is wary of sharing any information or resources with them or with people in any transparent manner,

Ashek Purohit (2012) in his book "*MGNREGA and Rural Development*" has focused on different aspects of the Act including Planning, Execution, Labour Budget, Monitoring & Evaluation, Social Audit, Payment of Wages & UA, Transparency & accountability. So also, he explained on rural urban migration, empowerment of women and socially disadvantaged, challenges and opportunities of MGNREGA.

Bhat and P Narayan (2016) in their paper "Role of MGNREGA in Transforming Rural life" published in "*Asia Pacific Journal of Research (APJR)*" focused about the impact of MGNREGA on rural lives in village panchayat Hangah, Kupwara district, State Jammu and Kashmir. They pointed several changes in the lives of the rural poor people in general and vulnerable

sections of the rural population in particular by securing their livelihood by the impact of MGNREGA. Further they wrote MGNREGA not only provide wage employment as an alternative source of livelihood but also create durable assets.

Research Gap

The present study seeks to fulfill the research gap to make an in-depth assessment on the impact of this Act and to give independent assessment, how MGNREGA provide livelihood security to rural poor in Kankadahad Block.

Study Area

Kankadahad Block Located in rural region of Dhenkanal district in Odisha. It is one among the 8 blocks of Dhenkanal district. According to Census 2011 there were total 13,114 families residing in the Block, the total population of Kankadahad Block is 61,222. Out of which 30,917 are males while 30,305 are females (Census 2011). Table-1 represented, 45,696 are engaged in work activities whereas 29,529 are non-working. 33.64 % of workers describe their work as Main Work (Employment or Earning more than 6 Months) while 38.71% are involved in Marginal activity providing livelihood for less than 6 months and 4,145 are Agricultural labourers. However, over the last few years Kankadahad Block topped MGNREGS implementation among the 8 blocks in terms of generating man-days (DRDA Office, Dhenkanal).

Table-1 Working Population of Kankadahad Block

Sl no	Categories of Work	Male	Female	Total	%
1	Main Workers	10,985	3,018	14,003	33.64
2	Cultivators	4,869	346	5,215	11.41
3	Agriculture Labourer	2,475	1,670	4,145	9.07
4	Household Industries	216	92	308	0.67
5	Other Workers	3,425	910	4,335	9.48
6	Marginal Workers	7,163	10,527	17,690	38.71
7	Non Working	12,769	16,760	29,529	-

Sources: DRDA Office, Dhenkanal

Methods of Study

The methodology based on a collection of primary data. Fieldwork for this study carried out in selected villages of Kankadahad Block. Direct interview with the beneficiaries conducted who are engaged in MGNREGS at least three years or more. So the sample size is to be 200. A simple statistical tool used to analyze the data through descriptive calculation of percentage. Apart from this secondary data like books, different officials and internet Websites, various research papers, government reports, news papers and journals were followed.

Data Analysis

The central focus of this part is to highlight the impact of MGNREGA on Livelihood security of rural poor. This part will help us to know better how the rural poor people sustain themselves and to manage their life in-road of MGNREGS work. We have tried to present here an overall picture of what rural poor typically earn in MGNREGA period. During our visit to DRDA Office Dhenkanal, we got the information that, the Kankadahad Block has given more importance under MGNREGA to Development works like, Construction of Earthen Canal, Const. of Farm Pond, Renovation of Marakhani Tank, Construction of Jatiamata Canal at Kandhara, Rain water Management, Construction of PMAY-G House for Individuals, Construction of Play Ground, Construction of FRA (Forest Right Act) Land Development, Construction of Dug Well, Cashew nut Plantation, Construction of Drain, Road Construction in Rural Area etc.

This part concentrates majorly on the research strategy used in collecting the relevant data to study the impact of MGNREGS on livelihood security of rural poor, to know the

socio-economic condition of the rural poor people after implementation of MGNREGA' which is our major objective. This part based on a household survey, and analyzes the reaction of local MGNREGS beneficiaries with the social, economic and environmental impact of the Scheme. In a nutshell, this is the part that gives a comprehensive and analytical overview of the collected data from the questionnaires administered by the researcher, which is expected to form the basis for the conclusion and opinion inferred from this study. For the purpose of analysis, tables are used to give clearer understanding of the data from the questionnaires.

Under MGNREGS period the unemployed reduced to 7% (Table-2). The rural poor getting wages working under different development projects under MGNREGS. They admitted MGNREGA wages are not higher than the wages but it is locally available. The man and woman both are getting equal wages. However, 42.5% respondents said that they were getting less than 30 days work in pre- MGNREGS period and 35.0% said they were getting 31-50 days work and no people get more than 100 days work. but, during the MGNREGS period represents a different scenario, 43.0% are getting work 71-90 days in a year, whereas 6.0% getting more than 100 days (Table-3).

Table-2 Income sources Inroad-of- MGNREGS

Sl no.	Sources of Income under MGNREGS	No of People Engaged	Percentage
1	Unemployed	14	7
3	Plantation	14	7
4	Water conservation	30	15
5	Renovation of water bodies	34	17
6	Land development	28	14
7	Rural connectivity	30	15
8	Construction labourers	30	15
9	Livestock rearing	20	10

Sources: Field Survey

Table-3 No. of working days in a year

Sl. no	Working Days	Pre-MGNREGS Period	%	During MGNREGS Period	%
1	Less than 30 days	85	42.5	5	2.5
2	31-50 days	70	35.0	12	6.0
3	51-70 days	32	16.0	15	7.5
4	71- 90 days	10	5.0	86	43.0
5	91- 100 days	3	1.5	70	35.0
6	More than 100 days	0	0	12	6.0

Sources: Field Survey

Major Findings

During our interaction with Beneficiaries, everybody admitted that, the livelihood condition of rural poor has improved to some extent. Consumption, clothing, health, education and economic condition have been impacted by the earnings. Local infrastructures have improved a lot. Individuals' beneficiary schemes have raised hopes on livelihood options and earnings.

Since its inception the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act ensured social protection or the most vulnerable and marginalized communities in rural areas of Kankadahad Block through providing employment opportunities on an average every year. It has provided basic income security to a large number of beneficiaries. Access to economic resources has also had a favourable impact on social status of rural poor. A large percentage of these rural beneficiaries spend their money to avoid hunger, repay small debts, paying their children's schooling etc.

MGNREGA works focus on regenerating the rural ecosystem and creating rural infrastructure that supports sustainable livelihoods. The works undertaken through this Act give priority to activities related to irrigation, land development, animal husbandry, individual benefit scheme for livelihood options like fishery, ponds, and horticulture. Its focus on eco-restoration and sustainable livelihoods has led over time, to an increase in land productivity and aided the workers in moving from wage employment to sustainable employment.

During our field visit we find, water related assets created under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act have increased the number of days in a year water is available and also the quantity of water available for irrigation. The increased availability of water has also led to change in crop patterns and increased area under cultivation. To further strengthen the Scheme's synergy with agriculture and sustainable livelihoods, the list of permissible works under MGNREGS has been expanded. The expansion of works is likely to improve the socio-economic conditions of marginalized sections of the society i.e., SC/ST/Small and Marginal farmers/Beneficiaries of Indira Awas Yojana/ Forest Rights Act beneficiaries etc.

After interaction with MGNREGA beneficiaries we felt, really this Act is a powerful tool for the economic, food and social security of the rural poor. 100 days family earnings have improved their livelihood status, poverty and migration checked marginally, health, education, economic condition have shown improvement. It has assured poverty reduction and social protection for the most vulnerable and marginalized communities in rural areas through providing employment opportunities.

Conclusive Remark

The largest public work programme like MGNREGS is undoubtedly a great opportunity for the poor to meet their livelihood and other needs with dignity. On the whole, the scheme has been able to provide livelihood security, arrest distress migration, create durable community assets, prevent the expansion of left-wing extremism, protect natural environment, empower women, strengthened village panchayats, and accelerated the process of inclusive growth. But the impressive performance of the scheme in the Block is not without constraints. Lack of awareness on some core aspects of the scheme was proved to a major impediment. Besides, creation of fragile assets, inadequate wages, delayed payment of wages and bureaucratic hurdles pose major constraints to the working of the scheme. Strengthening the Panchayati Raj system, fixing responsibility, transparency, and a robust civil society is the need of the hour to make the best out of the scheme.

In conclusive remark we can say, to deal with the unemployment problem and to provide the livelihood security of rural poor, government of India has launched the MGNREGS. Huge amounts of public money are being spent on recurring annual basis to support wage employment in this programme. The scheme has significantly transformed the life of the rural poor and it was a paradigm shift in any respects that provide the rural poor a ray of hope to overcome poverty. MGNREGA is a brilliant step in right direction as it requires concerted state action to enhance the capability of the poor. Above all the poor never need charity instead, they need opportunity. MGNREGA is an Opportunity, a step towards the livelihood security of rural poor.

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