

MGNREGS Promoting Employment and National Integration



Social Science

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ABSTRACT

Although the magnitude of poverty and unemployment even after 60 years of independence is substantial in India and launching of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is right step to mitigate the issue in this direction. In addition to create employment and assets under MGNREGS, it (MGNREGS) has been promoting national integration and providing work to aged persons also. Regarding unemployment, the statistics in Tables -1 speak the truth. If employment can be created for unemployed youths then poverty can be reduced to a great extent. Now the question is how to create employment for the youths – in urban areas scope of getting employment is better than rural areas as in urban areas due to modern technology, and other tertiary activities youths have greater access to employment than rural areas. Moreover majority of the rural youths hail from Below Poverty Line (BPL) families mainly they belong to marginal and small farmers, artisans, landless workers etc. Many of the rural youths have traditional skill. In this backdrop self-employment is an alternative to create sustainable employment for the rural youths. Although Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) which is in operation in the country by enacting an Act in the Parliament can provide hardly 100 days of employment but every adult require income throughout the year for his/her and family members' sustenance. In this context by quoting UNCRD, 1985, it may be stated that "Rural development no longer means agricultural development alone. It is also not a social welfare case of pumping money into rural areas to provide for basic human needs. It encompasses a spectrum of activities and human mobilisation to make people stand on their own feet and break away from all the structural disabilities which chain them to the condition in which they may live."

Table 1: Rural Unemployment rates according to Usual Status, Current Weekly Status (CWS) and Current Daily Status (CDS) – (July 2004 – June, 2005) (Per thousand)

Status	Unemployment Rate		
	Male	Female	Person
Usual status - PS	21 (12)	22 (5)	23 (9)
Usual status (adjusted)	16 (9)	13 (4)	16 (7)
Current Weekly Status	47 (25)	45 (12)	46 (18)
Current Daily Status	90 (47)	93 (19)	91 (33)

(Note: Figures within brackets indicate the proportion of unemployed per 1000 persons / person-weeks / person –days).

Source: NSSO, Employment & Unemployment Situation in India, 60th Round (January – June, 2004).

The census data of 2001 reveal that in rural areas major activity still today is agriculture i.e. cultivation and agricultural labourer against this backdrop in urban areas majority percentage of workers are eking out their livelihood through other works. As is known to all agriculture cannot provide employment to growing rural population as land is inelastic and same issue is with the agricultural labourers. In view of this, Mahatma Gandhi NREGS has great relevance in the country. Salient features of MGNREGS are indicated below.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS):

This is a wage employment programme implemented in the country under National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, notified on 7th September 2005. Before MGNREGS, time to time different wage employment programmes were introduced in the country. Some of these are Rural Manpower Programme (RMP), Crash Scheme for Rural Employment (CSRE), Pilot Intensive Rural Employment Programme (PIREP), and Food for Work Programme (FWP), National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP), Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY), Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY), Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) and Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana, (SGRY). During 2009-10, through an amendment the MGNREGS has been rechristened as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and as Scheme it is known as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. Some of the sa-

lient features of MGNREGS are presented below.

- Employment is to be provided to every rural household whose adult member volunteer to unskilled manual work. Such household is to be provided work for 100 days in a financial year.
- This is a demand based Programme and demand emanating from the Village through the village assembly (in India called Gram Sabha).
- Every person who has done the work to be provided minimum wages. Disbursement of wages to be done on weekly basis but not beyond a fortnight.
- Work should ordinarily be provided within 5 kilometers radius of the village or else extra wages of 10 per cent are payable.
- Each employment seeker to be registered by village level local self-government, called Gram Panchayat in India, after due verification and the household to be provided a Job Card.
- Village level local self-government (Gram Panchayat) is the authority for planning, registering, issuing job cards to the beneficiaries, allocating employment and monitoring of works.
- Wages have to be paid through bank/post office accounts.
- At-least one-third of the workers should be women.
- Contractors/machineries are not permitted.
- Mainly water conservation, droughts proofing including plantation and afforestation, flood protection, land development and minor irrigation works are permitted.
- Employment will have to be provided by the village panchayat (local self governing body) within 15 days of work application or else unemployment allowance has to be paid.

Achievement under MGNREGS:

During the first year of 2006-07 of implementation in 200 districts, 2.10 crore households were provided employment and 90.5 crore person-days were generated. Over the years employment opportunities under MGNREGS have increased and during 2010-11, 5.49 crore households were provided employment and 257.15 crore person-days were created. During 2011-12 (up to 16th December, 2011), 3.54 crore household were provided employment and 108.19 crore person-days have been generated across the country. At the national level, average wage paid under MGNREGS has increased from Rs. 65 (2006-07) to Rs.100 in 2010-11. During 2010-11, expenditure on wages was Rs. 25,686.53 crore (68 per cent of the total expenditure) and in the year 2011- 12 (up to 16th December, 2011), expenditure on wages was Rs.13012.82 crore (73 percent of the total expendi-

ture). The Scheme had a high workforce participation of marginalized groups like SC/ST (52percent) in 2010-11. Women workforce participation also surpassed the statutory minimum requirement of one third participation. In 2010-11, women participation was 48percent and same was 50percent in 2011-12 (up to 16th December, 2011). Financial inclusion of the poor and marginalized had also increased manifold as during 2010-11, 9.88 crore banks and post office accounts have been opened to disburse wages directly to the workers' accounts. In 2011-12 (up to December, 2011), 61.61 lakh works were taken up, of which 53percent constituted water conservation, 22percent rural connectivity, 9percent land development, 0.37percent Rajiv Gandhi Sewa Kendra. In addition, irrigation facility provided to individual beneficiaries constituted around 12percent of the total work. The remaining 4 percent works were other activities specific to the local needs of the respective rural areas (MoRD, 11-12).

MGNREGS case of National Integration:

In this section a case from Karnataka where national integration was observed is presented. Such unique case is rarely observed. Under MGNREGS in Bellakadi hamlet, Golthamajalu village Panchayat, Bantaval taluka in Dakshin Kannada district a case of national integration studied by the author (Chatterjee, published in Grameen Bharat, 2010), is presented here. In the hamlet 32 households belonging to Christian, Hindu and Muslim communities live. Although they each have a dwelling, the villagers do not own any agricultural land. They earn their livelihood through agricultural work and bidi making. There had long been a felt-need for an approach road as the hamlet is located in the upland and the villagers had difficulties in reaching the main road. Keeping in mind their concern, an amount of R. 1.34 lakh was sanctioned under MGNREGS for 800 metres approach road with provisions for sidewall as well as drainage. The villagers started the work and thus they got not only the long awaited approach road but also a source of income. When the width of the road was found to be problematic as it should have a minimum width of 10 feet for movement of small vehicles etc., six villagers belonging to both Hindu, Muslim and Christian communities voluntarily and happily agreed to shift their compound wall to provide the appropriate width. The author (Chatterjee) interacted with the villagers during his visit and found they were happy about their sacrifice as the road would benefit all. This case is a rare event because many people sacrifice their land for the development of the community.

Aged persons working in MGNREGS:

During March 2013, author (Chatterjee) visited at Sri Gangana- gar district of Rajasthan and in Sri Ganganagar block observed workers like Surjan Singh (above 80 years, male), Hari Singh (62 years, male), Kartar Kaur (60 years, female), Kamrai (65 years, female) were working under MGNREGS for their livelihood sup-

port. And also while in December 2010, at Boko block of Kam- rup district of Assam, observed Nabi Rabha a widow of 60 years aged woman was working in a road project being constricted under MGNREGS as her son was living separately and her one of the important sources of earning was MGNREGS. Thus it is evident that MGNREGS has been promoting national integration as well as employment for even elderly persons.

Other issues in MGNREGS: Although MGNREGS has been de- signed meticulously but corruption issues cannot be ignored. H.E. President of India during her address to Parliament on June 4, 2009 had emphasized on the need for consolidation of the exist- ing flagship programmes for employment, enlarge the scope of works, increasing transparency and public accountability of NRE- GA by enforcing social audit and ensuring redressing of grievance by setting up district level ombudsman. Commensurate initia- tives to achieve these have been taken (Annual Report, 09-10).

Jean Dreze and Reetika Khera in their article on "From Accounts to Accountability: Bank payments alone are not an adequate protection against corruption in NREGA", published in The Hin- du (6 December 2008) have mentioned cases of some problems linked with corruption. The authors have concluded that, "the Central Government seems to regard bank payments as a "magic bullet" against corruption, but the bullet is in danger of ending up in its own foot".

Conclusion:

Undoubtedly MGNREGS is the programme meticulously planned for the rural unemployed youths which has been gener- ating employment as well as creating assets also. Our personal opinion is that Government officials, NGO functionaries, PRI representatives, educated persons, students and others should always keep watch on MGNREGS. And any sort of problem should be settled out immediately. No compromise should be made with corruption. Policy should be 'nip in the bud'. In fact corruption is off-shoot of British policy which can be justified with the statement of Macaulay who in his address to the Brit- ish Parliament 2 February, 1835 told, I have travelled across the length and breadth of India and I have not seen one person who is a beggar, who is a thief such wealth I have seen in this coun- try, such high moral values, people of such calibre, that I do not think we would ever conquer this country, unless we break the very backbone of this nation which is her spiritual and cultural heritage, and, therefore, I propose that we replace her old and ancient education system, her culture, for if the Indians think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self-esteem, their native culture and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nation".

REFERENCE

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