



Awareness About Job Provisions in MGNREGA A Preliminary Analysis

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ABSTRACT

MGNREGA is landmark legislation in the history of wage employment programs. The scheme has the potential not only to strengthen social security in rural India, but also to transform rural economy by building a strong base for agriculture production. The scheme encompasses many provisions for inclusive growth with initiatives to transform rural lives. The level of awareness about MGNREGA provisions will reveal the significance of program for its primary stakeholders and their likelihood to work for the program. On the basis of micro level field investigation present paper reveal, the level of awareness about unique provisions of job available in the scheme. The scheme is a great hope for poor people; this hope can be further strengthened if people understand the notion of 'right to employment' for them in the scheme.

KEYWORDS

households, beneficiary, unemployment allowance, social security.

MGNREGA is a wage employment program with a paradigm shift in rural development programs. A first ever law, that guarantee wage employment in an unprecedented scale. Unique features of the Act include, time bound guaranteed employment within 15 days in works related to creation of durable assets, failure of which leads to entitlement of unemployment allowances, prohibition of machinery and contractors at the worksite. The Act also mandates 33 percent participation for women in MGNREGA related works. Besides these main features, the scheme involves features of participatory planning through proactive role of Gram Sabha, rigorous and continuous monitoring by the way of social audit, childcare facility, health insurance through RSBY.

MGNREGA is significant for various reasons, besides provision for guaranteed wage employment, it aims at enhancing livelihood security of households in rural areas through creation of durable assets for sustainable development by enhancing agricultural production. Although Studies have pointed out many loopholes in the implementation of scheme. Decline in employment generation, irregularity in works completion, delay in administrative and technical sanction of works and poor utilization of funds (CAG 2013). The reasons cited for these include a low awareness of the scheme regarding the provisions under the Act (Bhatia and Dreze 2006); inefficiency and non-accountability of government officials (Ambastha, Shankar and Shah 2008); non participation of villagers in gram sabha meetings and inefficiency of gram panchayat to execute program (Rao 2007). MGNREGA being a right-based social protection policy emphasise the enhancement in awareness level about the rights and entitlements as a prerequisite in achieving its policy objective (Reddy et.al. 2010).

MGNREGA uniqueness of 'right based guaranteed employment' necessitate sufficient awareness amongst beneficiaries about various provisions of the Act, for its successful implementation and to meet its ultimate objective of sustainable rural development by inclination of more and more rural people towards this development program. Development woes become exacerbated until participation of ultimate stakeholder is not ensured in planning process. This study enquires in detail about the working of MGNREGA in terms of level of awareness about its unique provisions of employment. The study has been undertaken in district Mandi of Himachal Pradesh to assess the functioning of MGNREGA towards rural development. Proposed study is an attempt to gain an insight into the functioning of MGNREGA with respect to the interests of key stakeholders at panchayat level. The study may through some light into the challenges involved in effective implementation of the scheme

towards making it a result oriented rural development program.

Objectives

- To find out the level of awareness among MGNREGA beneficiaries about employment provisions of guaranteed wage employment scheme.
- To find out the reasons of beneficiaries' participation in employment program.

Methodology

The study is based on the analysis of field investigation conducted in district Mandi of Himachal Pradesh in year 2013-14. The district is having the achievement of providing employment to maximum number of households (every year) in the state since the inception of MGNREGA. The data for study was collected by using stratified random sampling. The level of awareness about provisions of MGNREGA was assessed by using structured schedule. All the ten blocks of district Mandi were taken for the study to represent its diverse population. Four best performing panchayats, in terms of employment provided to households (maximum average growth rate) were further selected from each block. A total of 400 randomly selected MGNREGA beneficiaries from each of these panchayats were interviewed. In addition, a few interviews were conducted with panchayats pradhans; ward members and panchayats secretaries to know about the challenges involved in effective implementation of the scheme in remote areas of Himachal Pradesh.

Awareness about Basic Privileges

The study attempted to assess the functioning of MGNREGA in terms of awareness level among beneficiaries about its unique development provisions, making it an unprecedented program in the history of employment programs. These provisions have been categorised as provisions for basic privileges, worksite facilities, social security and provisions for monitoring the performance of MGNREGA related works.

It can be concluded from the table I that most of the respondents working under MGNREGA are aware about 100 days of employment (98 percent) in a year. Although awareness about unemployment allowances is only 53.2 percent, it was further revealed that only 25.5 percent of respondent have ever obtained a dated receipt for their application and none of them have ever received unemployment allowance till date. In fact, work application process was not in place in most of the surveyed panchayats. Most of the respondents wait for the works to open, to be intimidated by the ward members to apply for work. Raising a concern on the whole process of demand driven employment program. Awareness about additional al-

lowances to work outside five kilometres is 80.2 percent, while awareness for provision of work within 15 days of application is 86.0 percent.

Table I: Response Analysis of Awareness about Basic Privileges by Respondents

| Block | Guaranteed 100 days of employment | | Work in 15 days of application | | Unemployment Allowance | | Additional Allowances | | Dated Receipt | |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|----------|--------------------------------|---------|------------------------|---------|-----------------------|---------|---------------|---------|
| | | | | | | | | | | |
| Balh | 39 | (97.5%) | 36 | (90.0%) | 8 | (20.0%) | 30 | (75.0%) | 10 | (25.0%) |
| Chauotra | 40 | (100.0%) | 39 | (97.5%) | 21 | (52.5%) | 24 | (60.0%) | 4 | (10.0%) |
| Dharampur | 40 | (100.0%) | 36 | (90.0%) | 27 | (67.5%) | 33 | (82.5%) | 7 | (17.5%) |
| Drang | 39 | (97.5%) | 33 | (82.5%) | 28 | (70.0%) | 35 | (87.5%) | 17 | (42.5%) |
| Gohar | 40 | (100.0%) | 36 | (90.0%) | 27 | (67.5%) | 33 | (82.5%) | 7 | (17.5%) |
| Gopalpur | 40 | (100.0%) | 25 | (62.5%) | 27 | (67.5%) | 29 | (72.5%) | 10 | (25.0%) |
| Karsog | 39 | (97.5%) | 33 | (82.5%) | 21 | (52.5%) | 35 | (87.5%) | 15 | (37.5%) |
| Sadar | 40 | (100.0%) | 38 | (95.0%) | 18 | (45.0%) | 37 | (92.5%) | 4 | (10.0%) |
| Seraj | 39 | (97.5%) | 33 | (82.5%) | 28 | (70.0%) | 35 | (87.5%) | 17 | (42.5%) |
| S. Nagar | 39 | (97.5%) | 35 | (87.5%) | 8 | (20.0%) | 30 | (75.0%) | 10 | (25.0%) |
| Total | 395 | (98.8%) | 344 | (86.0%) | 213 | (53.2%) | 321 | (80.2%) | 101 | (25.2%) |

Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages to total sample respondents in the district

Awareness about Worksite Facilities and Works

It is also attempted to know about the awareness of provisions to be available at worksite among beneficiaries. As MGNREGA has intrinsic provisions for better worksite facilities by having first aid kit, drinking water, shade at work-site etc. in order to make it a better workplace. It is observed from table II that awareness about these basic facilities at worksite is highest (99 percent) among respondents. Further, 96.3 percent beneficiaries are aware about non usage of machinery, while only 88.2 percent of respondent acknowledge aware-

ness about day care facility for children. Although ladies with small babies are often discouraged to come for work as it impedes the average output hence wages of other workers. Further, a total of 93.5 percent of respondents admit that they should participate in gram sabha meeting to decide the shelves of works in their respective wards. Indicating an increasing inclination of villagers towards decision making process, towards the better implementation of scheme for development purposes.

Table II: Response Analysis of Awareness about Worksite Facilities by Respondents

| Block | Worksite facilities | | Day care facility for Children | | Usage of Machinery | | Participate in GS meeting for shelves | |
|-----------|---------------------|----------|--------------------------------|-----------|--------------------|---------|---------------------------------------|----------|
| | | | | | | | | |
| Balh | 40 | (100.0%) | 31 | (77.5%) | 40 | (100.0) | 40 | (100.0%) |
| Chauotra | 40 | (100.0%) | 35 | (87.5%) | 40 | (100.0) | 39 | (97.5%) |
| Dharampur | 40 | (100.0%) | 38 | (95.0%) | 40 | (100.0) | 39 | (97.5%) |
| Drang | 39 | (97.5%) | 37 | (92.5%) | 39 | (97.5) | 38 | (95.0%) |
| Gohar | 40 | (100.0%) | 38 | (95.0%) | 40 | (100.0) | 39 | (97.0%) |
| Gopalpur | 40 | (100.0%) | 40 | (1000.0%) | 40 | (100.0) | 40 | (100.0%) |
| Karsog | 39 | (97.5%) | 37 | (92.5%) | 27 | (67.5) | 23 | (57.5%) |
| Sadar | 39 | (97.5%) | 28 | (70.0%) | 40 | (100.0) | 39 | (97.5%) |
| Seraj | 39 | (97.5%) | 38 | (95.0%) | 39 | (97.5) | 38 | (95.0%) |
| S. Nagar | 40 | (100.0%) | 31 | (77.5%) | 40 | (100.0) | 39 | (97.5%) |
| Total | 396 | (99.0%) | 353 | (88.2%) | 385 | (96.3) | 374 | (93.5%) |

Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages to total sample respondents in the district

Awareness about Provisions for Social Security

The unprecedented scheme has the provision of social security as well for its beneficiaries. With a provision of ₹ 25,000 for accidental death or permanent disability at worksite and ₹ 30,000 for health insurance under Rashtriya Swasthaya Bima Yojana (RSBY) being started on April 1, 2008. With a nominal registration fee of ₹ 30 MGNREGA beneficiaries are entitled for medical insurance of ₹ 30,000 for most of the diseases that require hospitalization. A careful analysis of table III reveals that only 60.8 percent of respondents are aware of unique provision of hospitalization benefits under RSBY, a discrepancy was also observed in the issuance of RSBY cards to

beneficiaries since most of the cards were issued irrespective of seniority and work days by beneficiaries, only 44.2 percent of respondents are aware of the fact that if they are injured at worksite and are admitted in hospital, they are entitled for 50 percent of wages. Only 39.5 percent of respondents are aware of exgratia payment of ₹ 25,000 in case of death or permanent disability. It can be concluded that awareness level about social security provisions is fairly low among beneficiaries, which needs to be enhanced in order to enhance likeliness for the scheme.

Table III: Response Analysis of Awareness about Social Security Provisions

| Block | RSBY | | Hospitalisation | | Exgratia Payment | |
|-----------|------|---------|-----------------|---------|------------------|---------|
| | | | | | | |
| Balh | 24 | (60.0%) | 13 | (32.5%) | 15 | (37.5%) |
| Chauntra | 29 | (72.5%) | 20 | (50.0%) | 16 | (40.0%) |
| Dharampur | 32 | (80.0%) | 22 | (55.0%) | 16 | (40.0%) |
| Drang | 17 | (42.5%) | 18 | (45.0%) | 18 | (45.0%) |
| Gohar | 32 | (80.0%) | 22 | (55.0%) | 16 | (40.0%) |
| Gopalpur | 21 | (52.5%) | 19 | (47.5%) | 17 | (42.5%) |
| Karsog | 18 | (45.0%) | 17 | (42.5%) | 16 | (40.0%) |
| Sadar | 31 | (77.5%) | 16 | (40.0%) | 12 | (30.0%) |
| Seraj | 26 | (40.0%) | 17 | (42.5%) | 17 | (42.5%) |
| S. Nagar | 23 | (57.5%) | 13 | (32.5%) | 15 | (37.5%) |
| Total | 253 | (60.8%) | 177 | (44.2%) | 158 | (39.5%) |

Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages to total sample respondents in the district.

Awareness about Monitoring and Grievances Redressal Mechanism

The study also attempted to find out the awareness level of respondents about monitoring process and grievance redressal mechanism in the Act. As better monitoring of processes like social audit, attendance in muster rolls, usage of MGNREGA web site ensure better implementation of the scheme.

From table IV, it is evident that all the respondents are aware about marking their attendance in muster roll. While only 80.8 percent of respondents have heard the word social audit, although they are not aware of its process and relevance. As noted 97.5 percent of respondents admit that work should be provided continuously for 14 days at a regular stretch. Contrastingly only 1.8 percent of respondents have ever used the web site of MGNREGA to avail the information. Despite having every information available on the web site, most of the ward members don't know how to make use of web site to know the sanctioned amount for their wards, approved works and works in progress, MIS etc. Depicting a huge digital divide and necessitating the web site related training for ward members and panchayat pradhans for better dissemination of information. Although panchayat secretaries and gram rozgar sewaks are well aware of the usage of MGNREGA web site for information retrieval.

It is interesting to note that although most of the beneficiaries are aware of provisions of basic privileges that are available for them under the Act. But for most of them these facilities are just a paper formality. Since none of them knew what to do if RSBY card is not made, what can be done in case a fake attendance is marked in muster role, what to do if work is not provided for 14 continuous days, whom to contact to settle the issues of no payment or delayed payments for the works done etc. Hence, it can be concluded that awareness related programs are needed to be strongly implemented at the grass root level for the successful implementation of scheme. Better awareness of ward members and involvement of mahila mandals can play a significant role in this direction.

Table IV: Response Analysis of Awareness about Monitoring Process by Respondents

| Block | Social Audits | | Attendance in Muster roll | | Work for 14 continuous days | | Usage of web site | | Total | |
|-----------|---------------|---------|---------------------------|---------|-----------------------------|--------|-------------------|-------|-------|---------|
| | | | | | | | | | | |
| Balh | 32 | (80.0%) | 40 | (100.0) | 29 | (72.5) | 2 | (5.0) | 40 | (100.0) |
| Chauntra | 34 | (85.0%) | 40 | (100.0) | 32 | (80.0) | 0 | (.0) | 40 | (100.0) |
| Dharampur | 34 | (85.0%) | 40 | (100.0) | 30 | (75.0) | 0 | (.0) | 40 | (100.0) |
| Drang | 32 | (80.0%) | 40 | (100.0) | 39 | (97.5) | 1 | (2.5) | 40 | (100.0) |
| Gohar | 34 | (85.0%) | 40 | (100.0) | 30 | (75.0) | 0 | (.0) | 40 | (100.0) |
| Gopalpur | 38 | (95.0%) | 40 | (100.0) | 37 | (92.5) | 0 | (.0) | 40 | (100.0) |
| Karsog | 30 | (75.0%) | 40 | (100.0) | 39 | (97.5) | 1 | (2.5) | 40 | (100.0) |
| Sadar | 28 | (70.0%) | 40 | (100.0) | 14 | (35.0) | 0 | (.0) | 40 | (100.0) |
| Seraj | 30 | (75.0%) | 40 | (100.0) | 39 | (97.5) | 1 | (2.5) | 40 | (100.0) |
| S. Nagar | 31 | (77.5%) | 40 | (100.0) | 29 | (72.5) | 2 | (5.0) | 40 | (100.0) |
| Total | 323 | (80.8%) | 400 | (100.0) | 318 | (79.5) | 7 | (1.8) | 400 | (100.0) |

Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages to total sample respondents in the district

REASONS TO WORK UNDER MGNREGA: RESPONSE ANALYSIS

The study also attempted to know the reasons motivating villagers to work under the scheme. It is observed from table V, that majority of beneficiaries (34.5 percent) are working under the scheme for having supplementary income, since landholding status of these respondents was good enough. Family members were also generating income from

other sources like casual employment, milch animals and from agricultural based activities. Significantly, MGNREGA is acting as only source of livelihood for 29.8 percent of respondents, majority of them are widows, villagers in old age group and beneficiaries belonging to BPL/IRDP families. One third of respondents are working under the scheme to have an opportunity to earn independently and become self-dependent.

Table V: Reason wise Analysis of Respondents to Work under the Scheme

| Block | Earn livelihood | Have Supplementary Income | Opportunity to earn independently | Any Other | Total |
|--------------|-----------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Balh | 15 (37.5) | 11 (27.5) | 10 (25.0) | 4 (10.0) | 40 (100.0) |
| Chauntra | 3 (7.5) | 14 (35.0) | 18 (45.0) | 5 (12.5) | 40 (100.0) |
| Dharampur | 7 (17.5) | 14 (35.0) | 15 (37.5) | 4 (10.0) | 40 (100.0) |
| Drang | 16 (40.0) | 16 (40.0) | 8 (20.0) | 0 (.0) | 40 (100.0) |
| Gohar | 7 (17.5) | 14 (35.0) | 15 (37.5) | 4 (10.0) | 40 (100.0) |
| Gopalpur | 16 (40.0) | 14 (35.0) | 9 (22.5) | 1 (2.5) | 40 (100.0) |
| Karsog | 16 (40.0) | 16 (40.0) | 8 (20.0) | 0 (.0) | 40 (100.0) |
| Sadar | 8 (20.0) | 12 (30.0) | 19 (47.5) | 1 (2.5) | 40 (100.0) |
| Seraj | 16 (40.0) | 16 (40.0) | 8 (20.0) | 0 (.0) | 40 (100.0) |
| Sunder Nagar | 15 (37.5) | 11 (27.5) | 10 (25.0) | 4 (10.0) | 40 (100.0) |
| Total | 119 (29.8) | 138 (34.5) | 120 (30.0) | 23 (5.8) | 400 (100.0) |

Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages to row total

Concluding Remarks

MGNREGA in the existing framework has a great potential to transform rural India, if it is implemented significantly and efficiently. The launching of program has generated abundant hope in enhancing rural life on strong foundations of employment generation, women empowerment and in creation of much needed infrastructure. By introducing MGNREGA India has acquired the distinction of having world's largest employment guarantee scheme and public works at place. The Act has immense benefits for rural population in a country where people are facing the challenge of environmental degradation, unpredictable weather predictions, lesser agriculture productivity, mono crop cultivation, high seasonal unemployment etc., which drive them into arms of money lenders and ultimately into the sludge of debt trap.

The aim of MGNREGA should be to provide gainful employment with focus on sustainable development through generation of assets in rural areas. The scheme can be better implemented with more involvement of NGOs and self help groups for spreading awareness and by providing right based employment. The concern for generation of productive assets with employment is must among villagers. The program should be perceived as an avenue for development through strengthening of rural infrastructure rather than an employment generating program. The real potential of MGNREGA will be harnessed when rural people will come back to agriculture.

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