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Role of MGNREGA in Mewat district of Haryana state

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Abstract

The development impact of the MGNREGA will not be significant till the villagers are involved in planning according to the needs of the village. Common people should be involved in preparing the annual plan to address the real needs of the people. The number of works should be more than the estimated demand. To avoid delay, the administrative and technical sanctions should be taken for all works well in advance.

It was also seen that productive assets are turning useless due to poor maintenance and weak institutions. Strong institutional mechanisms need to be put to manage and distribute the resources after the creation of assets. Plan should include not only the completion of each asset, but also the provision of its maintenance.

The most distressing was the absence of crèche or child care facility. As a result of this older female children could not attend school since they had to take care of their younger siblings when their mothers were away at work.

Wage payments were often delayed due to delayed measurement and irregular availability of funds. As a result the extremely poor people who support their families with daily earnings lose interest in the programme and try to seek some other job or migrate to other places for their livelihood. According to section 17 of the MGNREGA, it is mandatory that regular social audits be conducted in the Gram Sabha at least once in every six months. But no such Social Audit committee was found anywhere and it needs to be ensured that such Social Audit committees are constituted in all the villages at the earliest.

Keywords: Development, impact, significant, Planning, productive, work

Introduction

India has emerged among the fastest growing economies of the world after many decades of planning, investment and effort. But growth can be sustainable only if it generates adequate employment opportunities for everyone. It is incumbent upon the State according to Article 39A of the Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution, to ensure that every citizen has adequate means of livelihood. UNDP (2000) in its Millennium Development Goals also treats livelihood as an important factor to combat, poverty and hunger to attain a better human development index. By being a signatory to the Millennium Declaration in 2000, India decided to generate employment opportunities as a legitimate policy commitment. Under the development programme, an attempt is being made to reach out to poor households to provide them livelihood opportunities and to sustain their sources of income.

A livelihood includes the capabilities, assets and activities necessary for a means of living. Unfair access to livelihood opportunities widens income inequality, expands poverty causes environmental degradation, paving way for social unrest and political turmoil. Appropriate policies can be formulated, on the basis of perspective, taking into account the various risks and opportunities faced by communities and individuals. Such policies will help to create conducive environment for equitable and sustainable livelihood patterns.

The sources of livelihoods of households and communities are highly varied. In developing countries where labour force is growing rapidly, people are engaged in a number of activities to earn their livelihoods. Amidst high levels of uncertainty and risk, people pursue various

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occupations and income generating activities to sustain themselves. The diversification of livelihood strategies is an ongoing and ever increasing process.

Rural Livelihoods comprise the economic, social and cultural milieu in which rural families make their living. According to the official estimates of Government of India 70% of the poor in India live in rural areas. A huge majority of them work as agricultural wage labourers or as marginal farmers. Agriculture in India is plagued by slowdown. Bhalla (2003) points out that agricultural employment growth rate has turned negative in numerous states. Despite agriculture being an important activity in rural areas, it fails to provide sufficient means of survival. With the declining scope of employment in agriculture, the number of casual workers is escalating. Wage employment both as agricultural labour and labour in allied activities is a main source of livelihood in rural India.

Rural labour, which is mainly unorganized, is in a miserable and pathetic condition. These include landless and poor households, depending upon wages earned through farm and non-farm activities. The rural work-force suffers from lack of employment opportunities, low wage rates and they have only seasonal employment. These poor rural households do various activities for livelihoods and even have to migrate to other places temporarily to increase their employment days. Since independence, the govt. has started a number of public works programmes and social security measures to improve the miserable living conditions of rural workforce. Wage employment programs in Independent India was introduced in selected districts in the country under the name of Rural Works Program. The aim of this programme was to general employment for the rural poor. A number of wage employment programs in modified and better forms have followed this programme.

Haryana ranks among the progressive states of India which is spread over 44,212sq.km. It consists of 21 districts, 119 blocks and 6955 villages. According to Census 2011, the total population of Haryana is around 25 million. 65.21% of them live in rural Haryana. The literacy rates of 76.64% has improved considerably in the last ten years. The sex ratio in the state is highly skewed- 877 females per 1000 males. This is less than the national average by 70 points (Census 2011). This sex-ratio is a big negative point in the overall picture of the state. Rural poverty has declined from 28.0% in 1993-94 to 13.6% in 2004-05. People from rural Haryana to urban areas are migrating at the rate of 29.3%.

Mewat is a very backward region since it is far behind the rest of India *viz-a-viz* all the parameters of the measurement of development as is clearly brought out in the Census Data. This district is spread over an area of 1860sq.km. Consisting of 491 villages and six small towns, suggesting that it has predominantly rural population. The MEO Muslims represent 70.9% of the total population and they belong to the OBC category. The literacy rate in the district is 44.07%, 24% less than the national average. The sex ratio in the district is 894 as opposed to the national average of 927. The district also lags behind in terms of educational infrastructure and health facilities, only 10% of the population have the facility of the Primary Health Centres (Census 2011). According to Agriculture Census (2001) only 40% people are involved in economic activities and 20% of the workforce acts as agricultural labourers. Only 53% of the total cultivated area is irrigated and 37% thereof is the sown more than once. There are a number of reasons

for the success of MGNREGA in Mewat. One, the district is very backward and predominantly rural. Two, the district is very vulnerable in terms of physical and social infrastructure. A number of factors such as abject poverty, low participation in economic activities, lower agricultural productivity and scarcity of non-farm employment opportunities make this district most deserving for the implementation of MGNREGA.

Mewat is not only backward in terms of human development it is a drought prone area also. It is ignored by policy makers and major development agencies due to its remote location and the implementation of poverty implementation programmes is also a challenging task in this district.

MGNREGA was introduced in Mewat in its IInd phase in 2007-08. But different villages were covered at different times, depending upon administrative planning and people's participation.

At the first stage five villages were selected from Mewat district. In the second stage 100 households were selected. All selected households were divided into two categories- beneficiaries of MGNREGA and non-beneficiaries in each the selected villages. The former were MGNREGA job Card Holders and latter were without such cards. From each category a simple random sample was drawn. A total of 20 households, 10 from each category were selected from each village. Thus, 100 households were selected in all. A probe was conducted as to how the MGNREGA has impacted the livelihood strategies of the beneficiary households.

This part of paper discusses some specific issues pertaining to the implementation of MGNREGA. All the issues related to implementation have been discussed from two different perspectives. The household surveys of both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries were carried out in selected villages to understand the necessity of such an important Act in context.

Carney (1998) recognizes the importance of transforming processes, policies and structures in determining the access to assets to achieve available and sustainable livelihood. Efficiently formulated and executed policies and programmes enable the people to switch their resources into productive uses, providing them a stable livelihoods platform. In backward areas where unemployment rates are very high, if benefits under workforce programmes are transferred, this can help reduce poverty. These programmes help develop requisite infrastructure through the creation of durable assets, which also paves the way for second-round employment benefits. Mewat district in Haryana was covered under MGNREGA in its second phase in 2007-08. The previous section deals with the detailed examining of the livelihoods context of Mewat revealing that there is tremendous scope for the implementation of MGNREGA. This section seeks to analyse the issues pertaining to the implementation of this programme in Mewat.

People need to be acquainted with their rights under the Act through the effective communication of information about the essential provisions of the scheme by respective state governments. Many of the beneficiaries were ignorant about most of the provisions of MGNREGA, especially concerning the provisions of unemployment allowance, social audit and importance of gram Sabha. They received information of the scheme from neighbours and fellow villagers (75%) and Sarpanch (100%). Social networks, informal discussions and word of mouth also played an

important role in communicating information. Respondents did not rely upon mass media to gather information regarding this programme. It could be that people did not have much access to mass media in these selected areas. Lack of information could be attributed to Weak Information Education and Communication (IEC) effort and the poor role of Gram Sabha in generating awareness.

Beneficiaries have no knowledge about the processes, modalities and procedures in the scheme. Awareness about the Act must be generated through effective communication plans. Literacy level being very low and mass media reach being limited in Mewat, the State Government should use other channels of communication such as other forms of local networks, community-media, people's organizations, radio advertisements, cultural forums etc. to promote awareness. The awareness campaign should also involve the Gram pradhan, educated persons and opinion leaders to disseminate necessary information. NGO groups and federations can be very helpful in informing the people about their legal entitlements and processes of MGNREGA along with initiatives and strategies. The Policy, Governance and Advocacy Centre of IRRAD is doing a good job in spreading awareness across several villages in Mewat. The local meetings and camps are organized by IRRAD to discuss the Policy and address its significant issues in detail in a very amicable and conducive manner.

The success of any programme depends upon the availability of human resources and improving their skills and capacities. The transfer of funds, functions and functionaries to Panchayat be made, but it must be ensured that the scheme is executed properly. The elected Panchayat members should be imparted necessary training and their capacity should be enhanced through necessary measures on priority basis. The Panchayat members should be well acquainted with the scheme to use their rights effectively.

Steps are required to be taken to ensure that no caste/community group members are denied registration and there should be no misuse of the job cards. The District Administration should keep a regular watch on the distribution of job cards to prevent any malpractice.

All the workers need to be informed emphatically that mere obtaining of the job card is not enough. They have also to apply for work. There should be no problem in getting application forms. Dated and signed receipts should be given to all the applicants. These receipts would entitle them for unemployment allowance if the work demanded is not given within 15 days.

No person was ever given unemployment allowance in any of the five selected villages, giving the impression that all the households were given jobs within 15 days of demanding. However, this was not true. The people being illiterate and ignorant sought work not by giving applications but by speaking orally to the Sarpanch. Thus, they had no receipt on the basis of which unemployment allowance could be claimed. There was a general reluctance among the panchayats to give unemployment allowance as it has to be borne by the state govt. and its payment reflects the inefficiency and administrative failure of the officials concerned.

Conclusion and policy implications

Even after the passing of the Act, a large number of villages and gram Sabha are not still covered under this scheme. The development impact of the MGNREGA will not be

significant till the villagers are involved in planning according to the needs of the village. Common people should be involved in preparing the annual plan to address the real needs of the people. The number of works should be more than the estimated demand. To avoid delay, the administrative and technical sanctions should be taken for all works well in advance.

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According to section 17 of the MGNREGA, it is mandatory that regular social audits be conducted in the Gram Sabha at least once in every six months.

But no such Social Audit committee was found anywhere and it needs to be ensured that such Social Audit committees are constituted in all the villages at the earliest.

People seek the redressal of their grievances by contacting Sarpanches and Secretaries. But they don't make written complaints, nor do they get any satisfactory response to their complaints. The grievance and the problems of the workers remain unresolved due to lack of information and awareness on the part of the Gram Panchayat. The grievances of the workers must be addressed properly.

However, this programme has tremendous potential in enhancing the rural household incomes and in developing infrastructure.

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