



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor: 5.2
IJAR 2016; 2(1): 583-585
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 19-11-2015
Accepted: 20-12-2015

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Mahatma Gandhi national rural employment guarantee Act, 2005 (MNREGA) success and failure: A comparative study of Bangarmau block, Unnao district of Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract

India lives in villages. In rural areas, a majority of people are poor and vulnerable. They depend mainly on the daily wages earned through unskilled, casual, manual labour. They are living often on threshold levels of subsistence to transmigrate to chronic poverty and destitute. Inadequate labour demand and unpredictable situation like natural disaster, illness, all unfavorably impact their employment opportunities. India's development planning has been sensitively focused on the needs of the poor and trying to reduce poverty and unemployment from the very beginning of the planning era in 1951-52. For the very purpose Government of India has been introducing and implementing various employment programmes throughout the country but no programme gives the guarantee of employment to the poor and the destitute. In 2005, Government of India introduced Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act with the mandate to provide guaranteed 100 days employment to every rural household.

This research paper compares some basic objective of MNREGA to the actual performance in the Bangarmau block Unnao district of Uttar Pradesh and find a big gap between the objectives and the actual achievements and poor performance. It also notices the malpractice of proxy employment in the villages.

Keywords: Mahatma Gandhi national Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MNREGA), Rural Employment, Success and Failure.

1. Introduction

In the history of rural development emergence of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has an important occurrence for the India. MNREGA is unique among all the wage employment programmes planned and implemented so far ensuring the livelihood security for most vulnerable section of the society of rural India during post-independence as it has a legal provision and right to provide at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment to every household in a financial year. Just after the independence the vulnerable and the destitute were the major concern for the Government of India. To eradicate poverty and provide employment opportunities to the rural poor Government has been introducing and implementing various wage programmes like Rural Works Program (RWP) in 1961, Cash Scheme for Rural Employment (CSRE) and Food For Work Program (FFWP) in the 1970s, National Rural Employment Program (NREP) and the Rural Labour Employment Guarantee Program (RLEGP) in the 1980s, and the Jawahar Rojgar Yojna (JRY), the Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS), and the Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY) in the 1990s but these scheme proved to be ineffective to serve the purpose and had many shortcomings.

During the period of post liberalisation (after 1991) the economy of country was growing at a high rate (at an annual average of 7 to 9 percentage) while the annual employment growth rate recorded decline from 2.01% over 1983-1993/94 to 1.84% (1.45% in rural areas and 3.14% in urban areas) in 2004-05 much below the rate of growth of the labour force and population (Pranati, 2009) [4].

Thus, with a view to redress the demand of unemployment in rural area, eradicate the weaknesses and shortcomings of the previous wage employment creating programmes, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Program (NREGP) launched by the Government of

India followed by enactment of a Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) by Indian Parliament in 2005.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005, was introduced on 7 September 2005. On 02 February, 2006, MNREGA was launched in 200 selected districts and during 2007-08 it was extended to 130 additional districts. All the outstanding rural areas throughout the country have been covered latter under the Act w.e.f. 1 April 2008. Currently, implemented of MNREGA is being taking place in each and every notified rural area across the country with the mission to enhance wage employment opportunities through providing on demand employment and thus create a security net to the people and concurrently generate durable assets to assuage some aspects of poverty as well as address the problem of rural development. MNREGA was implemented in Bangarmau block of Unnao district in the first phase i.e. on 02 February, 2006

Objective of the MNREGA

The mandate rest with the Act is to provide 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year to every rural household¹ whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

The objectives of the MNREG A comprise

- Ensuring social protection and minimizing migration to various cities for the most vulnerable people by providing employment opportunities in rural area across the India
- Securing livelihood for the poor by creation of durable assets, better water security, soil preservation and higher land productivity,
- Drought-proofing and flood management in rural area of the Nation,
- Empowering the marginalized section of society with especial focus on women, Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs),
- Consolidating decentralised, participatory planning by union of various anti-poverty and livelihoods initiatives,
- Enhancing democracy at the grass-roots level by consolidating the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)²,
- Ensuring more transparency and accountability in governance.

MGNREGA assume to be a powerful instrument for inclusive growth in rural India through its impact on social protection, livelihood security and democratic governance.

Salient Features of the Act

Registration: All adults member of rural households residing permanently in a hamlet/village are entitled to register for job cards and may apply for registration either in writing, or orally to the local Gram Panchayat.³ Each rural household is entitled to a 100 days of employment every year under the Act.

¹A household is defined as members of a family related to each other by blood, marriage or adoption, and normally residing together and sharing meals.

²Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are systems of local governance in rural India at three levels of administration: village, block and district.

³Gram Panchayat is the primary unit of the three-tier structure of local self-governance in rural India, the Panchayati Raj System. Each Gram Panchayat consists of one or more villages.

Job Card: After registration scrutiny is done regarding family, place of residence, age, sex and photographs, etc. job cards should be issued to the eligible families within 15 days of application. Each job card has a unique identification number and forms the basis of identification for the demand of employment. The demand for job has to be made against the Job Card number at the Gram Panchayat or at block level. As and when the work is undertaken Job cards must be updated with days of work and payment made to the beneficiary.

Application for Work: Adult Members of the rural household having job card, either individually or in group, either verbally or in writing, are entitled to apply for wage employment either in Gram Panchayat or Block Office. Within 15 days they should be allotted jobs within the radius of five kms.

Unemployment allowance: Unemployment allowance will be paid by state (as per the Act) to the beneficiary in case of failure to provide employment within 15 days.

Provision of Work: Extra 10% wages will be paid to the beneficiaries to meet additional transportation and living expenses in case work is provided beyond 5 kms. Radius of his/her village. To ensure the one-third beneficiary are women under the MNREGA priority is given to the women and in terms of cost, at least 50% of work executed by Gram Panchayats.

Wages: Under the MNREG Awage rate should be at par with the minimum wage notified by the concerned State Governments for agricultural labourers. There is a Schedule of Rates (SoRs)⁴ as per which wages are to be paid accordingly. Weekly payment of wages has to be done and it should not be exceeded 15 days in any circumstance. It is mandate that the payment of wages occur through the nationalized bank individual/joint or post office beneficiary accounts.⁵

Planning: It is the open assemblies of the Gram Sabha (GS)⁶ who is responsible for the plans and decisions regarding the nature, choice of works, order of work and site selection, etc. to be undertaken in a financial year and ratified by the Gram Panchayat. Block and District levels works, before administrative approval can be given, have to be approved and prioritized by the Gram Sabha. The Gram Sabha is entitled to either accept or amend or totally reject them.

Cost Sharing: Entire wage cost of unskilled manual labour and 75% material costs are incurred by Government of India.

⁴The details of the productivity norms are listed in the Schedule of Rates (SoRs). The SoRs are calculated through Work Time and Motion Studies. The SoRs, under the Act, have to be such that an average person working for nine hours, with one hour of rest, is able to earn the notified MGNREGA minimum wage.

⁵Exceptions are made if the State Government has an exemption from the Government of India (GoI), specifying a plausible reason.

⁶A Gram Sabha is a body of all persons entered as electors in the electoral roll for a Gram Panchayat. All the meetings of the Gram Sabha are convened by the Gram Panchayat to disseminate information to the people as well as to ensure that development of the village is done through participation or consent of all households.

Worksite Management: The Act prohibits the use of contractors or machinery in execution of the works to ensure the wellbeing of the workers. To ensure the concentration of the spirit of the Act, MGNREGA mandates that the wage expenditure to material cost ratio should be 60:40 of the total cost of works undertaken in a Gram Panchayat. It also ensures the worksite facilities like crèche, drinking water and shade at every worksite.

Transparency and Accountability: Transparency and accountability in the programme is ensured by Social audit,⁷ grievance redressal and public scrutiny, all the records and works under the Scheme are to be scrutinised by the GS and public.

Objectives

This research study aims at achieving following objectives:

1. To assess how far the implementation of MNREGA has been successful to provide improved employment opportunities to marginalize section (particularly women, SCs, and STs) of Bangarmau Block of Unnao district Uttar Pradesh and stopping their distress migration to different cities.
2. To assess how far the MGNREGA, has been able to empower the marginalize section specially women, SCs and STs.

Research Methodology

This research paper is mixed of descriptive and exploratory based on primary and secondary data. Primary data have been collected by interview of Gram Pradhan and head of vulnerable household of five villages in Bangarmau Block of Unnao district of Uttar Pradesh. Convenient sampling has been used in this study. Questions asked in the interview were structured multiple choice using Likert's 5 point scale. This study is based on qualitative analysis.

Findings

Analysis of the data collected with the help of interviews comes up with following results:

Bangarmau Block is one of the under developed block of Unnao district of Uttar Pradesh. MNREGA was implemented in the Block on 02 February, 2006. Most of the SCs, OBCs and minorities households are in vulnerable condition dependent on agriculture and allied employment or daily wage employment. Performance of agriculture i.e. productivity is continue to decline due to bad weather and minimal rain fall. Labour force and demand for employment is increasing at higher rate as compare to the available employment opportunities in the Bangarmau. 100 days employment provided by MNERGA is prove to be ineffective and insufficient for most of the rural households due to uneven employment, large number of members, inflation of money, illness and meeting social obligation, etc.. Sensing the ineffectiveness and insufficiency of employment opportunities in the Bangarmau block most of the adult members of rural households (particularly adult members of SC, OBC and minority households) are helpless to distress migration to different cities in the quest of better employment. Most of the heads of rural households state that with the help of conspiracy of Gram Pradhan and block

officer the followers of Gram Pradhan are provided proxy employment. All the Gram Pradhan and head of the rural households interviewed observe that implementation of MNREGA is providing some financial relief to the targeted sections of rural India but objective of their empowerment is still to be achieved. Most of the interviewee suggested that for better implementation and achievement of the basic objectives of MNREGA, the number of days of employment and wage rate should increase to 250 days and Rs. 350 respectively.

Conclusion

Implementation of MNREGA in Unnao district occurred in the first phase i.e. on 02 February, 2006 with the mandate to provide 100 days employment to every rural household. But the employment opportunities provided through the scheme is ineffective and insufficient to check the distress migration of adult members of the most vulnerable households. Most of the poor (male as well as female) belonging to SCs, STs are migrating to various cities in the quest of improved employment opportunities.

As for as the empowerment of marginalise and vulnerable particularly women, SCs and STs is concerned the implementation of MNREGA has provided some financial relief to them but the actual empowerment, as described in the Act, is yet to be achieved.

As long as the question of success and failure of MNREGA is concern, the Act successfully provide the some financial relief and temporary employment at some point of time to the rural household but at the same time fails to check the distress migration of rural poor to cities, unable to empower the women, SCs and STs and helpless to stop the malpractice of proxy employment, etc.

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⁷Social audit refers to an audit of all processes and procedures under the Scheme, including wage payments, Muster Rolls etc. It normally involves a scrutiny of all documents and records of work done.