

MAHATMA GANDHI NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ACT (MGNREGA) – GOVERNMENT POLICY FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract : Since independence rural employment has been prime agenda of debate as 74% of the unemployed population hails from rural India. For the past 3 decades India has been implementing rural employment generation programme. Different innovative scheme and programme have been initiated time again in different 5 year plans. In the past, number of scheme have been provided temporary employment on public works programmes at the government's discretion, but the present scenario brings with it legislation and right-based approach for implementing pro-people development policies in the country. The biggest example of this is the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

The act provides a legal guarantee of 100 days of work a year at a minimum wage to all households in India willing to perform unskilled manual labour. According to the act, any household seeking work must be provided with employment within 15 days or else be paid a daily unemployment allowance until work is found. NREGA has been selectively rolled out in three phases, starting with the 200 most backward districts in India, over the past two and a half years and now is being implemented in all districts nationwide. Responsibility for the immense task of generating sufficient work for all who demand it and for supervising worksites is delegated to the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) in the act. Gram Panchayats are tasked with estimating local demand for work, suggesting suitable projects, issuing job cards for new job seekers, monitoring worksites, and implementing at least 50% of worksites. Intermediate (Block / Mandal) Panchayats are responsible for ensuring that job seekers are provided with work within 15 days and identifying appropriate works if the GP fails to do so. (In some states, these responsibilities have been legally devolved to the GPs.) District (Zilla) Panchayats are required to devolve year plans based on overall district needs and to coordinate NREGA activities at the district level. (Right to Food, 2005)

Keywords: Employment, Unskilled Labour, GP,PRI

INTRODUCTION

The prime objective of this scheme is to bring the stability among rural population through available resources and by providing employment to unskilled labors for proper development of the rural villages. Keeping in view the same objective, Central government has started National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) -2005 for giving 100 days employment to each family of the rural villages. For implementing NREGA scheme, Maharashtra State Government decided to merge earlier Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (REGS) and NREGA scheme and freshly implemented as MREGS. For giving better livelihood benefits to the rural workers, this broad and extensive scheme has been implemented by the Central and State Government.

- Taking into consideration the limitation of earlier rural employment programs, in recent years the government has taken a historic move by enacting the MGNREGA, which is perhaps the largest employment generating program in the world ensuring a one-step-ahead move towards guaranteeing the right to work in a country with a population over a billion - created in old spirits but new letters with an

ambition to build durable assets and basic rural infrastructure in the country. After the independence to till date the government provide following rural employment schemes:-

- 1980- National Rural employment Programmes (NREP)
- 1983- Rural Landless Employment Guarantee (RLEG)
- 1989- Jawahar Rojgar Yojna(JRY)
- 1993-Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS)
- 1999- Jawahar Gram Samrudhi Yojna (JGSY)
- 2001- Sampoorna Gramini Rojgar Yojna(SGRY)
- 2004-Food For Work Programme (FFWP)
- 2006 National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS)

Lack of planning has been the main problem of programmes such as JRY, EAS, SGRY and the MEGA, both in the short term and long term. Although the main goal of these programmes has been to reduce rural poverty, the demand for public wage employment has rather increased. Other evident problems have been corruption, too small programmes, low wages, low participation rate and limited creation of quality assets (Hirway, 2005:703).

Objective:-

1. To study the socio economic profile of the beneficiaries before and after MGNREGA.
2. To study the impact of MGNREGA on day to day living of the rural people.
3. To measure the economic empowerment of rural people through MGNREGA.
4. To examine the implementation process of MGNREGS as an impact on life of rural people.

Research methodology:

The research approach for this study was a mixed methods research. A mixed methods research means: “research that integrates quantitative and qualitative research within a single project” (Bryman, 2008:603). The research strategy used was a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods with the use of structured, semi- structured and unstructured interviews. The former research technique belongs to the quantitative method and the next two belongs to the qualitative method. The rationale for using a mixed methods approach was to get hold of as much information as possible to Research obtain the best understanding of the effectiveness of the MGNREGA on poverty reduction in the study area. The study mainly focuses on impact of MGNREGS on livelihood of rural households, rural development migration and agriculture and access to the credit and other services by the sample households, institutional capacities for implementation and monitoring of the programme. The study made use of secondary as well as primary data. A detailed study is done with stratified sample method and statically tool is used to measure the effectiveness of MGNREGA for rural development.

Review of Literature:-

The aim of the MGNREGA is to: “foster conditions for inclusive growth ranging from basic wage security and recharging rural economy to a transformative empowerment process of democracy” (GOI-MORD, 2008:2). With this, the MGNREGA has four main goals:

- (1) To reduce poverty,
- (2) To encourage sustainable development in the agricultural economy,
- (3) To promote empowerment and
- (4) To promote grassroots democracy.

Firstly, the heart of the Act is to eradicate rural poverty by providing a minimum income through employment for the poor. The purpose of the Act is to function as a social safety net during the agricultural lean season when other sources of employment are limited¹⁰. Secondly, the Act seeks to improve rural livelihoods by reinforcing durable assets through the initiation of preventive works that addresses the causes of chronic poverty, i.e. soil erosion, deforestation and drought (GOI-MORD, 2008:2). With this, the MGNREGA is regarded by the Government of India as having the potential of transforming the geography of poverty. Thirdly, the Act is meant to empower the people by being safeguarded as a legal „right? in the Constitution. Fourthly, by promoting transparency and local participation, the Act aims at promoting

democratic values (ibid.).

The MGNREGA represents an innovative commitment by the Indian government, and it introduces a new dimension to rural development in India by not only being a development program, but also „a regime of rights? (CSE, 2008:9). The scheme is demand-driven, which makes the government legally bound to provide employment for all the people demanding it. If employment is not provided, the government is entitled to offer the workers unemployment allowances (ibid.).

According to the NREGA implementation status report for the current financial year, 2013-14, (upto December, 2013) 3.8 crore households were provided employment and 135 crore person days of employment were generated through the MGNREGA. About 2.6 million works had been completed 29 The unemployment allowances constitute $\frac{1}{4}$ of the minimum wage for the first thirty days, and $\frac{1}{2}$ for the remaining days (GOI-MORD, 2008:111). It says under section 7(3)(d), in the Act that the unemployment allowances will be distributed until the applicant(s) has earned the amount equal to 100 days of work in the MGNREGS (GOI-Legislative Dept., 2005a:7). However, to be allotted the unemployment allowances, the applicant(s) must apply at the Gram Panchayat secretary office or at the Block Panchayat (GOI-MORD, 2008:111). The funding of the unemployment allowances is by the state government. If the payment unemployment allowances are delayed, compensation will be made by the central government (GOI-MORD, 2008:37).

Conclusion:-

One challenge faced by the respondents in the implementation of the MGNREGA, was a general lack of awareness about the Act. Being unaware of their rights in the MGNREGA, people are, at the same, time denied their possibility of being included in and taking advantage of the rights that are beneficial to them. The first step when incepting a law of rights, such as the MGNREGA, is to ensure that the beneficiaries become aware of its existence. If not, the intention behind the Act may not be realized. Needless to say, people cannot make use of a right they are unfamiliar with. This finding indicates that the responsibility of the implementing agencies to provide information about the MGNREGA in the study area has been insufficient. Hence, one might suggest that a challenge for the implementing agencies is to put more emphasis on raising the awareness levels about the MGNREGA of the villagers.

The findings also indicate that the practical implementation of the MGNREGA suffered from improper maintenance of Job Cards. As none of the Job Cards observed contained the required employment details, the participants under the Act can be subject to exploitation. Similarly, the goal of the MGNREGA to enhance transparency and accountability throughout the implementation process.

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