
Problems and Constraints in the Functioning of MGNREGA

*Renu Gupta**

*Professor & Head, School of Management Studies
Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah University, Jammu & Kashmir, India.*

*Safiya Bano***

Research Scholar, Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah University, Jammu & Kashmir, India.

Abstract

MGNREGA is the central Government programme to the constitutionally manifested right to work and means to promote livelihood security in the rural areas. The programme guarantees generation of employment opportunities for 100 days in a financial year. The latest literature has observed the low awareness of the beneficiaries as well as some institutional gaps in the implementation of the scheme. The study tries to review the various problems and issues which hinder the successful implementation of MGNREGA in sundarbani block in Rajouri district of J&K state. Besides identifying various problems and issues, efforts have also been made to put forward few recommendations to bring further improvements in the working of the programme.

Key Words: *MGNREGA, Implementation, Issues, Problems.*

Introduction

The World's large employment Guarantee Programme MGNREGA has been in operation in India since 2006. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was notified on 7th September, 2005 to create a right-based framework for wage employment. The aim of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was to enhance the livelihood security of people in rural areas by guaranteeing 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to a rural household whose member volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The act covered 200 districts in first phase, implemented on February, 2 2006 and was extended to 130 additional districts in 2007-08. All the remaining rural areas have been notified with effect from April, 1 2008. The Government of India (GoI) on 2nd October 2009 renamed this programme NREGA as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA SAMEEKSHA, MoRD, GOI publication).

The main objective of MGNREGA is to protect rural households from poverty and hunger. The other objectives are: generating productive assets, protecting the environment, empowering women, reducing rural-urban migration, and fostering social equity, among others. Thus, MGNREGA is not just an employment scheme: it is a tool of economic and social change in rural areas.

The act stipulates that labour cost and material cost should be in the ratio of 60: 40. The central Government provides the funds for the wages, and for 3/4th of the material costs.

Table 1: Financial Allocation for MGNREGA

Year	Budget Allocation (Rs. Crore)	MGNREGA Expenditure as % of Total expenditure	MGNREGA expenditure as % of Rural Development expenditure
2006-07	11,300	1.2	46.55
2007-08	12,000	1.5	41.71
2008-09	30,000	1.6	52.77
2009-10	39,000	2.7	69.08
2010-11	40,100	2.8	55.63
2011-12	40,000	3.1	53.98
2012-13	33,000	2.2	33.33

Source: Budgets & annual reports of Government of India

Above table shows the Budget allocation for MGNREGA from Year 2006-12. It is clear from the table that the allocations of funds are increasing from year to year as the participation in MGNREGA is also increasing from year to year except for 2012-13.

Objectives

The study has been conducted with the following objectives:-

1. To find out various problems and constraints which come in the way of proper functioning of the programme.
2. To suggest few recommendations and strategies to bring further improvements in the working of the programme.

Study Area

Rajouri district of Jammu and Kashmir state is located in the foothills of Peer-Panjal range of Himalyas. The district has an area of 2630 sq. Kms, which comprises of nine blocks and seven tehsils. The district has a population of 619,266 as per the census 2011, which comprises 345351 males and 297064 females. Out of the total area of the district only 56400 hect. is available for cultivation. The small size of holdings coupled with poor irrigational facilities, results in a low yield of productivity. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was launched in the year 2007 in the study area with the main objective of providing livelihood security by providing 100 days of employment

Methodology

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Personal interview method and group discussions were held to collect the primary information from the MGNREGA workers. A total sample of 50 respondents were interviewed from 4 villages namely Marchola, Hathal, Channi prat and Thanda pani of Sundarbani Block of Rajouri District in J&K state.

Results and Discussion

Keeping in view the objectives of the study, the researchers have made an insight into various socio-economic parameters by analyzing sex, age and educational status of the sample households in the study area to arrive at a concrete strategy for bringing improvements in the implementation part of the programme. The details are as under:-

Table 2: Distribution of Sample Households by Sex & Age.

S.No	Village	No. of Households	Population					
			Male			Female		
			Upto 30 Years	Above30 years	Total	Upto30 years	Above 30 years	Total
1	Marchola	15	12	2	14	1	-	1
2	Hathal	20	14	4	18	1	1	2
3	Channi Prat	10	8	2	10	-	-	-
4	Thanda pani	5	2	3	5	-	-	-
	Total	50	36(72%)	11 (22%)	47(94%)	2 (4%)	1 (2%)	3(6%)

Source: Field survey

A look at table 2 shows that out of the total sample households 94% are males and 6% are females. It is also clear from the table that upto age of 30 years and above 72% and 22% were males and 4% and 2% were females respectively. Which indicates that the participation of female respondents were far less as compared to male respondents

Table 3: Educational Status of the Sample Households

Village	No. of Households	Male				Female			
		Illiterate	Primary level	Middle/Secondary level	Total	Illiterate	Primary Level	Middle/Secondary level	Total
Marchola	15	10	2	1	13	2	-	-	2
Hathal	20	17	2	-	19	1	-	-	1
Channi prat	10	7	2	-	9	1	-	-	1
Thanda pani	5	3	1	1	5	-	-	-	-
Total	50	37(74%)	7(14%)	2(4%)	46(52%)	4(8%)	-	-	4(8%)

Source: Field Survey

Table 3 deals with the educational status of the sample households. The table reveals that 41 respondents out of 50 were illiterate which comprises of 74% males and 8% females. The table further shows that 7(14%) respondents were educated upto primary level and 2(4%) upto middle/secondary level. This highlights the level of literacy among the MGNREGA workers in the study area.

Problems & Issues

During the field study, it was noticed that there are a number of problems which come in the way of smooth functioning of the programme. Mention may be made of delays in issue of job cards, non-payment and delayed payment of wages, abandoning work midway besides, the assets under the scheme had little relevance to livelihood of the poor. However, some of the main problems are as under:-

Inadequate awareness

Due to lack of awareness about the provisions of the Act, People (85% of the respondents) in the study area are unaware of their basic entitlements under MGNREGA such as Job Cards, Minimum Wage Amount, Unemployment Allowance etc. There is a widespread ignorance about how to avail the unemployment allowance; sometimes even the officials deliberately do not give out this information as they fear punishment for not providing jobs.

Delay in payments and issue of job cards

Delay in payment of wages is another problem which was noticed in the study area. Almost all the respondents(100%) were of the view that generally there is delay in the payment of wages. Whereas, MGNREG Act stipulates that wage payments be made within 15 days*. The same was the case with the issue of job cards.

Differential in wage rates

It was also noticed in the study area, that the wage rates given under MGNREGA (80% of the sample households) are far less than the prevailing market rate which results in non availability of labour to do the work under MGNREGA.

Employment problem

Majority of the respondents (91%) argued during the field study that 100 days of employment as per the scheme is not made available. They were of the view that by and large 30-40 days employment is being provided under the scheme on an average.

Lack of worksite facilities

It has also been found that required facilities as per the scheme are not available at the worksite. Secondly, it was also seen that first-aid box are not available to provide medical assistance to the workers at the work site.

Besides the above **problems**, the researchers observed that there are a number of other **problems** which are hindering its progress. Some of these **problems** are being given below:-

Lack of Focus on objectives

The basic objective of the MGNREGA Act referred to conservation of natural resources such as rainwater, land, forests, was not reflected in the works floated for the scheme. Also under this scheme, contractors and machineries should not be used, but in some work places, contractors were allowed and machineries were involved.

Implementation and Monitoring Problems

Implementation of the programme is not properly done according to the set schedule of the scheme and also there is not properly time to time review of implementation of the programme by the concerned quarters.

Lack of adequate man power

Another issue is the deficiency of adequate administrative and technical manpower at the Block and Gram Panchayat (GP) Levels, especially at the level of programme officer, technical assistants etc. The lack of manpower has adversely affected the preparation of plans, scrutiny, approval, monitoring and measurement of works, and maintenance of the stipulated records at the block and GP level.

Problem of maintaining Ratio of Labour and Material

The ratio set by the Government for the labour and material is not favourable somewhere as Government has set 60% for the labour cost and 40% for the material cost and also the scheduled rates of material(Like bajri, sand etc) set are far less than the prevailing market rates which in result creates some loopholes in the programme.

Recommendations & Suggestions

Keeping in view the above problems and issues, there is urgent need to have specific strategies so that the fruits of the scheme can go to the deserving sections of the society for a better tomorrow. Few of the recommendations are as follows:-

1. More awareness programmes should be organised for creation of awareness about the scheme in each and every village.
2. Effective efforts should be made to achieve present target of 100 days employment per house hold.
3. It is suggested that MGNREGA wage rate should have parity with outside rate and ongoing price hike which would reduce the migration of labour from village to nearby township or city.
4. As far as possible village administration should be strengthened so that all the development programmes under MGNREGA can reach to the villages situated at a distance from Development Block.
5. There should be proper planning of the various activities and programmes coming under the MGNREGA that is all the activities, works must be planned well ahead of time with a definite time frame for their completion.
6. Proper Auditing should be done through an extra government agency in addition to *Gram Panchayat* to check mishandling of funds and also for the proper functioning of the programme (NREGA draft Report, New Delhi).
7. There should be more transparency in the various activities of MGNREGA and the sanctioned work and financial involvement must be transparent.
8. Local government bodies like panchayats should be well empowered to create capacity and train the functionaries to implement the programme well.
9. Importantly, life saving medicines besides other facilities as per scheme must be kept at the work site because workers may get bitten by poisonous reptilians while clearing bushes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be summed up that if the above recommendations and suggestions are properly put in use, there is every likelihood that the set targets under the MGNREGA programme can be achieved. But nothing can be said at the moment, only time can stand as a witness.

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