



Sociological Appraisal of MGNREGA in Odisha

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Abstract: India is still a developing country and is considered as poor country having high unemployment rate and poverty. After new economic reforms in 1990, privatization has increased; there is decline in agricultural work force. Most of the population of Odisha lives in rural area and has high poverty and unemployment rate. Odisha is also known for its distress migration because of unavailability of jobs. In this context MGNREGA that provides guarantee wage employment has been studied based on secondary data in two selected panchayats of Balasore district to assess the employment opportunities and participation of vulnerable sections of the society. It was found that among the selected panchayats Anko has performed better.

Keywords: MGNREGA, Employment, Distress migration, Vulnerable sections

Introduction:

A.R Desai has rightly pointed out that real India lives in villages. This holds true even today's society. A large section of the population in India still resides in villages that are marked by extreme poverty, persistent unemployment, and underemployment. This has also engaged many scholars in long debates and to devise policies to reduce unemployment and poverty. However, in the post-independence period, this was taken by the planning commission and has launched various programs like FWP (food for work program (1977) followed by NREP (National Rural Employment Program), JRY (Jawahar Rozgar Yojana) (1993-94) etc, but unfortunately it failed in achieving its aims and objectives.

Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) which was began in 1970s as a drought relief program, in Maharashtra stood as a model for National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and subsequently introduced as an ambitious national anti-poverty program in August, 2005 and came in to force in Feb, 2006. Later it was renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on 2nd October 2009. The main objective of this scheme is to enhance the livelihood security of households in rural areas of the country by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to households whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. This scheme was expanded in phased manner in different States. Recently, the Ministry of State for Rural Development has taken initiative to give an additional 50 days of employment under this scheme for drought-affected areas. During 2016-2017, seven drought affected areas were allowed to work for 150 days.

India is still a developing country and is considered as poor country having high unemployment rate and poverty. After new economic reforms in 1990, privatization has increased; there is decline in agricultural work force. Most of the population of Odisha lives in rural area and has high poverty and unemployment rate. Odisha is also known for its distress migration because of unavailability of jobs. For state like Odisha NREGA plays a vital role in creating employment opportunities there are several studies have been carried out by scholars on the NREGA are confined to states like Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat but backward states like Odisha has not received due attention.

Public works programmes are not new. As early as 1870, public works emerged as a safety net against famines in India. With them arose the desire to distinguish between protective public works and productive public works, since only productive public works were considered appropriate for financing through borrowing. Since then, India has engaged in several public works programmes, particularly in times of famine. The largest such experiment, the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS), began as a drought relief programme in the 1970s but continued as an antipoverty programme. The EGS served as a model for the advocacy of a rural employment programme in the early 2000s. Following the 2000 drought in Rajasthan, a strong people's movement emerged with a demand for jobs to provide drought relief. In a separate but related development, the Supreme Court of India also expressed an opinion in response to public interest litigation linking the right to food to the right to work and asked for speedy implementation as well as expansion of Sampoorna Gramin Rozgar Yojana (Total Rural Employment Scheme), the precursor of MGNREGA. A growing economy combined with rising inequality to make it politically desirable to implement a programme with broad appeal, giving rise to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.

Besides the decades of poverty alleviation efforts, the absolute number of poor has doubled, since independence in 1947. Poverty is widespread in India. According to 2011 World Bank estimate, 29.8 per cent of the total population in India falls below the international poverty line and India ranks 72nd Position in poverty among all other countries in the world with respect to poverty. Poverty in India is closely associated with over population or an imbalance between population and land resources. In India, landless people live close to the margin of existence, experiencing seasonal unemployment and nutritional stress. The rural poor are generally socially disadvantaged and are more numerous, more dispersed and more unorganized. Poverty eradication is a prime issue in India.

Unemployment and under-employment are chronic problems in the rural areas and they remain untackled inspite of series of schemes in this direction. The cumulative effect of this situation over several years is large scale poverty in rural India in the midst of plenty of manpower and other resources Still many rural poor suffer even for want of basic amenities such as safe drinking water, reasonable food and housing, primary education and medical facilities. These facilities of basic requirements of life and creation of infrastructural facilities needed for rural development, can easily be provided, if gainful employment with a living wage is provided to all unemployed and under-employed people in rural areas. In India, this poverty is treated as an absolute phenomenon where significant section of the society is deprived of minimum

requirements of cereals, pulses, milk, vegetables, clothing, calorie intake and continues a bare subsistence level. (Coombs, Philip H., and Manzoor Ahmed. "Attacking Rural Poverty: How Nonformal Education Can Help, A Research Report for the World Bank Prepared by the International Council for Educational Development.", 1974, p 170).

Migration is a complex phenomenon. It can benefit migrants and their families, but there are also major challenges. Migration is a key component of rural livelihoods, by which households aim to diversify their income sources, and thus escape poverty and food insecurity. In many developing countries, remittances are an important share of national income and can be larger than the size of official development assistance, while an estimated 40% goes to rural areas. Migration can also bring social change, especially by changing gender roles. Many rural youths choose to migrate in search of a better life. About a third of all international migrants are young, aged between 15 and 34. Many move away because of the lack of decent jobs in rural areas and the unattractiveness of low productivity agriculture. As a result, rural areas lose a vital and potentially dynamic share of their workforce. This raises questions regarding the future of agriculture given that, worldwide, farmers are ageing while deep-seated changes in agricultural practices are needed to step up food productivity and make agricultural production sustainable.

Beginning of NREGA

In a report released by the Planning Commission of India, 22.7 per cent of Indians live below the poverty line, out of which 75 per cent of the population lives in rural areas. There is a growing incidence of illiteracy, blind faith, hungry people, mal-nourished children, anaemic pregnant women, farmer suicides, starvation deaths, migration resulting from inadequate employment, poverty, and the failure of subsistence production during droughts. In order to make solution to these problems and to provide livelihood security to rural unemployed, Government of India enacted the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA).

NREGA covered 200 districts in its first phase, implemented on February 2, 2006 and was extended to 130 additional districts in 2007-2008. All the remaining rural areas have been notified with effect from April 1, 2008 and within a year the NREGA got universalized by bringing the entire country under its horizon with the exception of districts that have a hundred per cent urban population & got soon named after Mahatma Gandhi (in October 2', 2009) to make the Act more reachable to the masses and thus it became Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). (www.mgnrega.nic.in)

MGNREGA is the first ever law internationally, that guarantees wage employment at an unprecedented scale. The potential of act spans a range of possibilities. The primary objective of the Act is augmenting wage employment. The choice of works suggested in the act addresses chronic poverty through measures like drought proofing, regeneration of vegetative cover and soil and water conservation, and other works of villages to improve the rural assets carried by gram panchayat. So, the process of employment generation is maintained on a sustainable basis. The Act is also a significant vehicle for strengthening decentralization and deepening processes of democracy by giving a prime role to local governance bodies, i.e., the panchayat raj institutions.

Hence, MGNREGA is the most significant act in the history of Indian polity in many ways like grass-root level participation of every citizen and beneficiary through democratic process, multi-layered social audit and transparency mechanism by involvement of civil society organizations, comprehensive planning at village level towards sustainable and equitable development, is getting monitored at various levels. Gram Sabha monitors the work at the village level, while gram panchayat monitors works executed by other implementing agencies. Intermediate panchayat and programme officer check the registration of households, employment provided, unemployment allowance paid, social audit, flow of funds, payment of wages, progress and quality of work. District panchayat and district programme coordinator keep monitoring all aspects of implementation. State government keeps watch on performance of all districts. State level and district level vigilance and monitoring committees constituted by ministry of rural development supervise MGNREGA (Anonymous, 2010).

MGNREGA's aim is to create durable assets and strengthening the livelihood resource base of the rural poor. These include water conservation, water harvesting structure, drought proofing including afforestation and tree plantation, horticulture plantation, provision of irrigation facilities and land development. MGNREGA arrived as an unprecedented opportunity for rural India as it guarantees one of the crucial rights- right to work, envisaged in the article 41 of the Indian constitution. The MGNREGA has the potential to provide "big push" in India's regions of distress. The scheme also provides protection to all those involved in social auditing. State governments on their part should ensure that the scheme runs properly and transparently so that it fully benefits the rural poor. This has reduced rural-urban migration, improved food security, generated employment with dignity, brought about the economic empowerment of women, created sustainable community assets and raised the standard of living of beneficiaries. MGNREGA workers represent the most economically and socially under privileged sections of society. Mostly, these workers are under nourished, with poor opportunity for health care. Therefore, there is need to bring about a convergence of child care, nutrition, health and education programmes at MGNREGA sites. The government is fully aware that there is scope to expand activities under NREGA. The programme can become an instrument to make individuals to become self-sufficient and to give them an opportunity for development in their panchayats. It also helps to improve both food security and human development index.

Theoretical debate:

Several studies have been conducted to assess the performance of MGNREGA. While in the one hand some studies have attracted the attention to huge leakage and loopholes whereas on the other hand some studies have been ecstatic over the number of jobs created and number of beneficiaries from disadvantaged groups such as SC, ST and Women.

Some scholars who are in favour of MGNREGA in their work and have pessimistically supported starting from Derek and Khera, they argued MGNREGA reached the poorest citizens, 73% of workers in SC and ST categories. Liu and Barrett (2012) found that MGNREGA reduced the migration in certain states. Meanwhile Ghosh (1993) argue that MGNREGA contributes to the feminization of poverty. Novonty also argues MGNREGA had minimal impact on migration. A review of past research studies helps in

understanding the theoretical and conceptual framework relevant to the study. In addition, the review of studies provides insights about missing research gaps and up to date status of the research in the field of study. This will enable the researcher to collect relevant data, analyse and interpret the same so as to draw meaningful interpretations. Several studies have been conducted on rural/agriculture development programme apart from MGNREGA.

Research Questions:

However, based on review of literature few questions can be sited which are not taken up by the scholars.

1. To what extent MGNREGA meets the employment requirement of unemployed rural mass?
2. Is MGNREGA preventing the distress migration which is common among weaker sections?
3. Are socially weaker sections such as SC, ST and women are really benefiting from this program more than the general sections of population?

Objectives:

The present study has the scope of evaluating the impact of MGNREGA on generation of employment opportunities and participation of the different marginalised sections of both the Panchayats. This study is based on the following objectives —

1. To assess the impact of MGNREGA in the generation of employment opportunities.
2. To assess the participation of SCs, STs, and women in MGNREGA Scheme.

Methodology:

For this present study Balasore district has been selected from Odisha. In Balasore there are 12 blocks and 360 Gram panchayats. From Balasore district the researcher have selected Balasore block. Again from the selected Block two Panchayats has been selected. From Balasore Block Chandipur and Anko panchayat has been selected. The type of research method that seems more suitable is qualitative one. This study is primarily based on the secondary sources and data have been collected from NREGA public data Portal (Ministry of Rural Development), National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), Central Statistics Office (CSO), and Census 2011. Secondary data would be incorporated to make the research lucid and to develop a deep insight into it would be the main focus. The research design that is being used here is Exploratory research deign. For this research the researcher has adopted Multi-stage sampling method. Multistage sampling is the taking of samples in stages using smaller and smaller sampling units at each stage.

Findings of the study:

Balasore district is one of the Coastal districts of Odisha. It is bounded by the Mayurbhanj district in north, Bhadrak district in south, Bay of Bengal in the east and Keonjhar district in the west. The district has an area of 3806 sq.kms and 23, 20,529 of population as per 2011 census. Out of which 11, 85,787 are male and 11, 34,742 are female. The district accounts for 2.44 percent of the state's territory and shares 5.53 percent of the state's population. The density of population of the district is 610 per sq. kms. As against 270 person per sq.km of the State. It has 2952 villages (including 365 un-inhabited villages) covering 12 blocks, 12 Tehsils and 2 Subdivisions. As per 2011 census the schedule caste population is 478586 (20.60 %) and schedule tribe

population 275678 (11.90%). The literacy percentage of the district covers 79.80 against 72.90 of the state. In Balasore rural population is 20, 67,236 and it constitutes 89.1% of the whole district population and urban population accounts 2, 52,293 which constitutes only 10.9% of the whole district population.

Panchayat: Chandipur (As on 28-04-2019)		
Job Card		
Total No. of Job Cards issued	417	
Total No. of Workers	0	
Total No. of Active Job Cards	111	
Total No. of Active Workers	0	
(i)SC worker against active workers[%]	0	
(ii)ST worker against active workers[%]	0	
Progress	2018-2019	2017-2018
Approved Labour Budget	0	0
Person days Generated so far	1,955	3,126
% of Total LB	0	0
% as per Proportionate LB		
SC person days % as of total person days	8.7	6.53
ST person days % as of total person days	0	2.69
Women Person days out of Total (%)	50.38	49.62
Average days of employment provided per Household	26.42	43.42
Average Wage rate per day per person (Rs.)	182	176
Total No of HHs completed 100 Days of Wage Employment	0	0
Total Households Worked	74	72
Total Individuals Worked	161	195
Differently abled persons worked	4	5
Works		
Number of GPs with NIL exp	0	0
Total No. of Works Taken up (New+Spill Over)	72	63
Number of Ongoing Works	61	53
Number of Completed Works	11	10
% of NRM Expenditure (Public + Individual)	0	0
% of Category B Works	97.22	96.83
Financial Progress		
Total Exp (Rs. in Lakhs.)	3.51	3.41
Wages (Rs. In Lakhs)	3.51	3.41
Material and skilled Wages (Rs. In Lakhs)	0	0
Material (%)	0	0
Total Adm Expenditure (Rs. in Lakhs.)	0	0
Admin Exp (%)	0	0
Average Cost Per Day Per Person (In Rs.)	182	176
% of Total Expenditure through EFMS	100	100
% payments generated within 15 days	100	100

Table1.1(Performance of MGNREGA during 2017-18 and 2018-19 in Chandipur Panchayat)

In Balasore district two panchayats namely, Chandipur and Anko have been selected from Balasore block for the present study. From Table 1.2 and 1.3 it can be seen that in Chandipur Panchayat only 417 job cards has been issued till 1 April,2019 and out of that 111 job cards are active whereas 535 people of Anko panchayat has issued job cards out of that only 101 job cards are active. As per the MGNREGA report Chandipur has no workers and so no active workers too. Even the same case is with Anko Panchayat also. In the financial

year 2017-2018 it was observed that Chandipur has generated more person days' work than that of Anko where only 950 person days had been generated. However, in the next financial year 2018-2019 it was seen that there was a sharp decline in the generation of person days in Chandipur from 3126 in 2017-18 to 1955 in 2018-2019. Whereas in Anko it was quite different. Huge progress was seen in there, person days generated increased to 3,452 in financial year 2018-2019. In Chandipur out of the person days generated in 2017-18, 6.53 % of that was generated for the Scheduled Castes and 2.69% for Scheduled Tribes. In the financial year 2018-19, person days generated for the Scheduled Castes increased to 8.7% but in case of Scheduled Tribes it reduced to zero person day's generation. In case of Anko, person days generated for SCs and STs in the financial year 2017-2018 was too low and accounts 0.63% and 0% respectively. It shows an increase in the next financial year 2018-2019 to 6.69% for SCs and 0.35% for STs. Women proportion to the person days were almost half in both the districts. For both the Panchayats there the average wage rate per day per person is same. It has increased from Rs.176 in 2017-2018 to Rs.182 in 2018-2019. Neither in Chandipur nor in Anko, any single household who completes 100 days of wage employment. In both the Panchayats some works have been completed and some new works has been started in the process of continuation.

Panchayat: Anko		(As on 28-04-2019)	
Job Card			
Total No. of JobCards issued			535
Total No. of Workers			0
Total No. of Active Job Cards			101
Total No. of Active Workers			0
(i)SC worker against active workers[%]			0
(ii)ST worker against active workers[%]			0
Progress	2018-2019	2017-2018	
Approved Labour Budget	0	0	
Person days Generated so far	3,452	950	
% of Total LB	0	0	
% as per Proportionate LB			
SC person days % as of total person days	6.69	0.63	
ST person days % as of total person days	0.35	0	
Women Person days out of Total (%)	54.9	57.26	
Average days of employment provided per Household	37.12	23.75	
Average Wage rate per day per person(Rs.)	181.95	176	
Total No of HHs completed 100 Days of Wage Employment	0	0	
Total Households Worked	93	40	
Total Individuals Worked	176	62	
Differently abled people worked	3	0	
Works			
Number of GPs with NIL exp	0	0	
Total No. of Works Takenup (New+Spill Over)	71	46	
Number of Ongoing Works	48	45	
Number of Completed Works	23	1	
% of NRM Expenditure (Public + Individual)	0	0	
% of Category B Works	98.59	97.83	
Financial Progress			
Total Exp (Rs. in Lakhs.)	13.7	1.31	
Wages (Rs. In Lakhs)	6.15	1.31	
Material and skilled Wages (Rs. In Lakhs)	7.56	0	

Material (%)	55.14	0
Total Adm Expenditure (Rs. in Lakhs.)	0	0
Admin Exp (%)	0	0
Average Cost Per Day Per Person (In Rs.)	400.81	176
% of Total Expenditure through EFMS	100	100
% payments generated within 15 days	100	100

Table1.2 (Performance of MGNREGA during 2017-18 and 2018-19 in Anko Panchayat)

From the data available it can be summarized that from the two selected panchayats, in Anko MGNREGA has been comparatively better than Chandipur and has improved from the last financial year in terms of Participation of households and individuals. Even we can also evaluate them on the basis of the no. of works completed. It is 23 for Anko and 11 for Chandipur.

Conclusion:

From Anko and Chandpur Panchayat of Balasore block more number of job cards issued in Anko i.e. 535 against 417 job cards issued from Chandipur. Even though this much of job cards were issued but only 101 in Anko and 111 in case of Chandipur were only active. Person days generated so far is more in Anko Panchayat with 3,452 person days than in Chandipur Panchayat with 1,955 for financial Year 2018-2019 but it was not the same in last financial year. It was more in Chandipur Panchayat than in Anko Panchayat. So from the above mentioned data it can be said that more employment has been generated in case of Anko panchayat as compared to Chandipur Panchayat since the number of person days generated have been increased in Anko and decreased in Chandipur. Even the Total expenditure suggests that more work has been done in Anko than in Chandipur.

In order to assess the participation of SCs, STs and Women in this scheme data from MGNREGA official website has been taken. Data shows that out of the total person days generated among SCs of Anko Panchayat constitute 6.69% in 2018-2019 whereas as it was only 0.63% in 2017-2018. SCs of Chandipur Panchayat has constituted 8.7% to the total person days generated in 2018-2019 and it was 6.53% in 2017-2018. So it can be said that participation of SCs were more in Chandipur panchayat. When it comes to STs Participation in both the Panchayat they have too less participation compared to SCs. Their participation strength is negligible. But it is women who alone constitute the half of the person days generated in both the Panchayats.

Suggestion for Future Research Study

Necessary steps have to be taken to study and analyse the impact of MGNREGA programme in all the panchayats, blocks & districts of the country and among all categories to know its effectiveness in providing adequate employment opportunities for the needy local people. Therefore, it is suggested to investigate and collect feedback from all categories of MGNREGA beneficiaries who will help the policy makers to implement the programme effectively towards the welfare of the local people and the society. Further, it may be noted that panchayat members/local village leaders should be trained before initiation of MGNREGA programme for its effective implementation to ensure sustainability.

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