

IMPLEMENTATION OF MAHATMA GANDHI NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE SCHEME IN CHURACHANDPUR DISTRICT, MANIPUR: A BENEFICIARY PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was enacted on 7th September 2005. The act is one of the largest right-based social protections that guarantees wage employment of 100 days in a year to the rural poor that they can expect to earn a living wage, without loss of dignity. The study was carried out in two blocks of Churachandpur District, Manipur. Random sampling technique was used for selection of district, blocks, villages and beneficiaries. Rural people of Manipur rely heavily on earnings from unskilled wage labour to other farm or non-farm enterprises. More than half of the population is unemployed as the State has no big industry. In addition, agriculture which is one of the main occupations in Manipur, is in a bad state as it is dependent on monsoon due to non-availability of irrigational facilities, lacks modern farm equipment and fertilizers and is therefore unable to absorb the large number of unemployed. Non availability of employment is one of the major causes of poverty in the State. Therefore, MGNREGS has a very significant role in a State like Manipur as it provides the rural people with the right to work, enhance livelihood security and bring about development of community assets to be able to generate work on a sustainable basis. Review of literature shows that there have been a number of studies that looked at implementation of the act in terms of employment generation, socio-economic, infrastructural development and works completed but very few studies have been done on beneficiary perspective. Thus, the present study has investigated the role of Gram Panchayat in functioning and implementation of the programme and satisfaction level of the beneficiaries with respect to provisions of the programme. As revealed by the study Gram Panchayat played and effective role in functioning and implementation of the programme by taking

initiatives in registering, issuing job cards and providing employment to all interested members in their villages. Besides, they also conducted planning and recommending of work, monitoring and executing work, disbursing equal wages to the beneficiaries, maintaining records and practiced social audit. They also provided feedback opportunity to beneficiaries for proper implementation of the programme. The study also found that in both the blocks MGNREGS not only provided daily wage jobs to beneficiaries but also addressed environmental issues by undertaking works like water conservation, drought proofing, flood protection, land development, minor irrigation, horticulture and rural connectivity. The study revealed that the beneficiaries were largely satisfied with the provisions and implementation of MGNREGS. There are some reasons for dissatisfaction like delayed payment of wages, unsatisfactory wages earned per day, less provisioning of worksite facilities and unsuitable duration of work for women. So, there exist a scope for improvement in the provision and implementation. Hence, MGNREGS can be more effective in future if the State and Gram Panchayat made a concerted effort.

Keywords: Beneficiaries, Gram Panchayat, Functioning and Implementation, MGNREGS, Satisfaction level.

INTRODUCTION

Unemployment in India is one of the major problems faced by rural people of the country mainly, due to lack of employment opportunities in the villages. In India, about 7 crore people are without employment as per National Sample Survey Report published in 2012. The Census 2011 estimates that 83 million people continue to live below the poverty line in rural India [1]. Unemployment which was 7.2 percent in the year

2000, increased to 8.1 percent in 2010 in comparison to urban unemployment rate which increased from 7.7 to 7.9 percent during the same period [2]. To achieve growth with equity and social justice, the Government of India (GOI) has been implementing specific poverty removal programmes since the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-79). This direct attack on poverty was spear-headed by a two-pronged strategy of wage and self-employment programmes. Poverty alleviation and employment generation programmes have been re-structured and re-designed from time to time to make them more effective [3]. GoI's most recent initiative under the wage employment programmes is the launch of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) which was enacted on 7th September 2005. The Act was notified in 200 districts in the first phase with effect from 2nd February 2006 and then extended to an additional 130 districts in the financial year 2007-2008 (which includes Churachandpur district, Manipur). The remaining districts were notified under MGNREGA from April 1, 2008. Thus, the MGNREGA covers the entire country with the exception of districts that have a hundred percent urban population [4]. MGNREGA is one of the largest right-based social protection and first ever law initiative in the world, that guarantees wage employment of 100 days in a year to the rural poor so that they can expect to earn a living wage without loss of dignity, and demand this as a right. The primary objective of the Act is augmenting wage employment. The choice of work suggested in the Act addresses causes of chronic poverty like drought, deforestation and soil erosion, so that the process of employment opportunities are maintained on a sustainable basis [5]. MGNREGA has a unique character to transform the development scenario in India. In a country where labor power is the only economic asset for millions of rural people, gainful employment becomes the only channel for the fulfilment of the other basic rights -- the right to life, the right to food, and the right to education. The Act also visualises and strengthens democratic decentralization processes by making it participatory and empowering people at the grassroots level. Though the constitution mandated Panchayati Raj system which was ushered in more than 15 years ago, most of the major scheme in functional domain of Panchayats, since then have largely ignored the Panchayats or given them only perfunctory role. However MGNREGA breaks new ground in this respect. Under the Act Panchayats have been conferred the powerful legal entitlement as the "principal authorities for planning and implementation" of the scheme [6]. Manipur is a land of Agriculture and is one of the eight northeast States of India. Agriculture being the main occupation of the people of Manipur, it has an important place in

the economy of the state. Agriculture sector contributes a major share to the total State domestic product and provides employment to about 52.19 percent of the total workers in Manipur [7]. Out of 21.7 lakh population, about 8 lakh educated youth are unemployed. On the whole more than half of the population is unemployed. This pyramid of unemployment is the origin of all problems. Population below poverty line is 28.54% in Manipur against the officially recorded all India average of 26.10% [8]. MGNREGS implementation in the State played a very crucial role by providing employment to 2.30276 lakhs households [9]. Therefore, MGNREGS has the potential to transform the rural life of Manipur through wage employment and creation of durable assets, so that employment opportunities are maintained on a sustainable basis.

Reflection from Literature Review

The programme itself is a beneficial programme as it provides earning during the lean agriculture period by guaranteed 100 days of employment to rural people who are willing to do unskilled manual work. However, success of this programme greatly depends on effective implementation at grass root level, notwithstanding all stake holders. The existing literature indicates a mixture of success and failure of the programme in some States and its implications in its design. According to Reetika Khera (2009), the experience of the Jagrut Adivasi Dalit Sangathan in Madhya Pradesh shows the power of grassroots organisational work in activating the NREGA. Levels of MGNREGS employment in the Sangathan areas are as high as 85 days per household per year, and nearly half of all working households have got 100 days of work. They also earn the minimum wage. The Act can also be an opportunity to promote overall rural development and alter the balance of power in village society [10]. Pinaki Chakraborty (2007) argues that the existing institutional arrangement in poorer states is not good enough to implement the MGNREGS in an effective manner. The study suggests that there is an urgent need for both vertical and horizontal co-ordination across levels of governments within the states. In many places panchayats do not have the necessary capacity to manage the schemes and capacity building ought to take place at the panchayat level. Devolution of responsibilities and strict accountability norms would accelerate capacity building at the level of the panchayat and the scheme can effectively function as a demand-driven one. In assessing the demand for labour, panchayat level preparation of labour budgets would go a long way for effective implementation [11]. Anand (2010), revealed that although labourers are getting economic benefits from MGNREGA, they are unhappy regarding two issues such as not getting sufficient number of days to work and delay in

payment of wages [12]. Therefore, proper role and responsibility at all levels is the only way to success of the programme and to meet the set-objective of the Act.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study was carried out in Manipur, Churachandpur district, which is one of the largest districts of the State and occupies the south-western part of the State. Churachandpur district has the highest literacy rate among the hill districts of State, but has high level of unemployment rate. The District has 5 sub-divisions namely Tipaimukh, Thanlon, Henglep, Churachandpur and Singhat. Out of the five sub-divisions two sub-divisions namely Churachandpur and Henglep were selected for the study. The study was conducted in 2 blocks namely Tuibuong block from Churachandpur sub-division and Henglep block from Henglep sub-division. Random sampling technique was used to draw district, blocks, villages and beneficiaries. Within these 2 blocks, 4 villages from each block were selected and 10 households were studied from each of the selected villages, thus making a sample size of 80 households in both the blocks. From Tuibuong block the selected villages were Molnom, M. Songgel, L. Simol, and D. M Veng and from Henglep block the selected villages were S. Nabil, Molpheitampak, Leinom and Bunglon. In addition one member of GP from selected villages was included in the study making a total sample size of GP to 8. A semi-structure interview schedule was used for the beneficiaries and Gram Panchayat comprising of close-ended and open-ended questions to gather information. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected to study the Beneficiaries and Gram Panchayat with respect to provisions and its implementation of the programme. The objectives of the study include satisfaction level of beneficiaries and role of GP in functioning and implementation of MGNREGS. Satisfaction level of beneficiaries were studied with respect to registration, getting job card and employment, getting employment within 15 days of application, work within 5 km, wages earned per day, equal wages, duration of work, work allotment, worksite facilities and disbursement of wages. Transparency on accounts and records and monitoring and supervising of work were also studied. On the other hand Gram Panchayat role on implementation of the programme were studied on the aspects of registering, issuing job cards and providing employment. Planning and recommending of work, monitoring and executing work, maintaining records and payment of wages were also studied. Besides, the researcher also attempts to study the type of works taken up in all the selected villages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Beneficiaries

The study revealed that all the selected beneficiaries were able to get their households registered under MGNREGS. For them MGNREGS provided a guaranteed source of income and work without loss of dignity. As, a result, 55% of the respondents in the sample said that they were satisfied and 45% of them reported high level of satisfaction in receiving household registration for employment. Beneficiaries from both the blocks obtained job card free of cost, however they paid for photograph. Though people did not write application for getting employment, the village panchayat provided employment to all the job card holders within 15 days as and when notified by the Programme Officers. The study revealed that works were provided within 5 km and so the case for payment of extra wages did not arise. Around 63% of the respondents were satisfied with the wage rate (Rs 80.40 as existing at the time of the study) as the rate exceeded open labor market wage rate of Rs 60. However 36% of the respondents in the sample were not satisfied with the wage rate as the price of essential commodities has been constantly increasing. Both men and women were provided equal wages and beneficiaries of both the blocks expressed their satisfaction about equality of wages. With regard to work duration and work allotment, 10% of the beneficiaries were not happy with duration of work and 11% expressed their dissatisfaction about the nature of work allotment. The unsatisfied beneficiaries were mainly women who have to look after their family and children and also the elderly workers who found it difficult to do hard labour like land levelling. In addition, 81% of the respondents were satisfied with provision of facilities at worksite however, while 19% of the respondents were not satisfied with the same. These comprised particularly women as crèche provisioning was not practiced in most part of the villages. Though some relaxation was given to those women working with their children they still wanted crèches to be provided at the worksite. According to the Act, wages have to be provided within 15 days of work done but this practice was not followed. Beneficiaries of both the blocks faced delay in payment of wages which caused dissatisfaction as they were mostly daily wage earners. The studies found that in both the blocks beneficiaries were satisfied with regards to accounts and records available to them and about 90% of the beneficiaries were satisfied with the way the scheme was being monitored by concerned authorities. However 10% of the respondents (mainly from Henglep block) expressed dissatisfaction regarding lack in monitoring of work by concerned authorities.

Table 1: Satisfaction Level of Beneficiaries Regarding Provision and Implementation

Satisfaction level	Block				Total	
	Tuibuong block		Henglep block		No. of respondents (n=80)	%
	No. of respondents (n=40)	%	No. of respondents (n=40)	%		
Low satisfaction						
17-33	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Medium level of satisfaction						
34-51	14	35.0	27	67.5	41	51.3
High level of satisfaction						
52-68	26	65.0	13	32.5	39	48.7

All the responses were comprehensively analysed using rating scale and classified into three levels-low, medium and high satisfaction. The level of satisfaction of the beneficiaries in the selected blocks is shown in Table 1.

All the beneficiaries were satisfied with the initiatives taken by the Gram Panchayat at village level. Highly satisfied category was lesser in Henglep block because most of the beneficiaries relied on MGNREGS as a source of income to meet their day to day expenses. Delay in payment of wages, lesser wages, less worksite facilities, unsuitable duration of work for women and low level of monitoring and supervision of work at village level were the reasons for dissatisfaction in both the blocks.

Gram Panchayats (GP)

On the selected parameters responses were also taken from GP members to gather their perception about MGNREGS and its implementation in their village. The study found that in both the blocks the GPs registered, issued Job card and provides employment to all the interested households in their villages though, writing application was not practiced. However, Leinom village GP reported that as the number of houses in their village kept increasing every year, around 30 households from his villages did not get Job card and to this effect a memorandum was submitted to Department of Rural Development of the district but there was no positive result given to the GP. This inaction by the higher level officer has lead to misunderstanding between the GP and the villagers. In terms of planning and recommending work the GP carried out planning and recommending work in both the blocks in the initial year of MGNREGS implementation (during 2008-2009). However in the later year (2009-2010), it was reported that planning of work in two villages of Henglep block namely S. Nabil and Bunglon, was conducted by Block development officer/Programme officer as the two villages did not meet the prioritization criteria of work set by the State. GP

also carried out monitoring and executing of work at village level. However, it was found that inspection of worksite by district and block level officers were more in Tuibuong block than Henglep block. With regards to maintaining records the GP in all the selected villages maintained records of their respective villages. Besides, they also maintained transparency in accounts and allowed interested villagers to access the records. They also provided feedback opportunity to the beneficiaries for effective implementation of the programme. It was found that in both the blocks there was delay in disbursement of money from the State government. This leads to delay in payment of wages to the beneficiaries. The Act mandates that wages should be paid within a week, or fifteen days at most. However in reality this was not happening. There is no discrimination on women participation at worksite as per GP members and payment of wages for men and women was equal. The scheme not only provided wage employment to the selected villagers but also ensured sustainable development by undertaking works like water conservation, drought proofing, flood protection, land development, horticulture and rural connectivity. Rural connectivity was the biggest work taken up during the last three years of MGNREGS as per GP members as it is the pre-requisite of any developmental strategy of the district.

CONCLUSION

The study indicates that Gram Panchayats played an effective role in implementation of the programme in both the blocks. Beneficiaries faced no difficulties in registration, issue of job card, and getting employment under MGNREGS. They experienced medium to high level of satisfaction regarding the provision and implementation of the scheme. Rural poor work under MGNREGS mainly to earn their daily living however, delay in payment of wages adversely affected their lives as most of them depend on daily earning for their livelihood. The State government must therefore ensure timely payment of wages and ensure 100 days of guaranteed wage

employment to the rural poor. Direct benefit transfer should be incorporated for the beneficiaries to ensure timely payment of wages. In regards to crèche provisioning it should be made mandatory so that women with children are able to participate without any hindrances. This will also ensure them from safety related work issues. Rotation among women can be developed in this regard. For work duration and nature of work women should be given relax rule than men as women have more responsible role in looking after their family and moreover women are by nature physically weak than men. Therefore, work allotment should be such that women should be engaged in lighter work than men. e.g., like land levelling requires much muscular effort this can be easily carried out by men than women. Regarding accountability and transparency in the implementation of the scheme Gram Panchayat also ensured the beneficiaries to share their views and allow them to access accounts and muster rolls. For effective implementation of the scheme monitoring and inspection of work should be frequently conducted by State, district and block level officers. This will also leads to quality of work and timely acknowledgement of difficulties or problems faced at each level. During the last three years, inter-village road construction was the major work executed, as rural connectivity is the main pre-requisite of any development strategy in this district. It is also suggested that capacity building of the GP is essential for better planning of work for future. Future work plan should emphasize more on sustainable development work like water conservation, plantation, minor irrigation facilities though it has been in practiced. As this district experienced potable water scarcity, temperature rise and drought for the past years. Therefore more focus should be given on work relating to these aspects, which can also be sustained for a longer period of time. Thus, concerted efforts by State, district, block level officers and Gram Panchayat towards improving the provisioning and implementation of MGNREGS can go a long way to achieving sustained social, environment and economic development of the district.

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