Abstract

National Rural Employment Grantee Act (NREGA) is one of the progressive and transformative legislation passed by Indian Parliament in the year of 2005 by UPA government for ensuring employment guarantee and livelihood security to each rural household. In year 2007 it is renamed as Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). The MGNREGA guarantees annual employment for 100 days to all rural households whose adult members are willing to do unskilled manual work at a statutory minimum wage. The fundamental goal of this right based policy initiative is to provide employment guarantee and promote infrastructural development in the villages for the well-being rural household, it has also been considered as an integrated approach for rural poverty eradication and sustainable development. The objective is to ensure livelihood and food security by providing unskilled work to people through creation of sustainable assets. Rural women are traditionally homebound; the employment guarantee act played a significant role for curbing gender discrimination and empowering rural women. The national rural employment guarantee act 2005 or NREGA was brought into force by the union government in February 2006 a different scheme for the betterment of women empowerment and development of rural population. The scheme is attractive especially for women because it stipulates that one third of the total workers should be women. In this paper, based on the secondary data, an attempt has been made to comprehensively understand the development effort to rebuild the rural life and livelihood on the basis of various secondary data.
I. INTRODUCTION

India has been listed as one among 88 countries where people live with hunger. In the Global Hunger Index 2008, India occupied 66th position out of 88 countries listed by International Food Policy Research Institute, Washington, USA. India is a democratic country where 80 percent people reside in rural areas. Socio-Economic status of any country depends on its economy. Rural economy depends on agriculture. In India rural development enhances Indian economy which ultimately reduces to the poverty. So economy, rural development and poverty are interrelated and interdependent to each other. In India the contribution of agriculture in GDP is about 1/5th. In developing nations rural development is supposed a global attention.

In India present strategy of rural development is to provide basic amenities infrastructure, better livelihood opportunity and to terminate poverty through various wage and self-employment innovative programmes. The government of India has taken various steps to reduce rural poverty in India such as Small Farmer Development Programmes, Drought Area Development Programmes and Food for Work Programme, Minimum Needs Programme, Integrated Rural Development Programme, National Rural Employment Programme, Rural Labour Employment Guarantee Programme and Assurance on Employment etc. Undoubtedly, government of India has been implemented many government planning to eradicate poverty such as Swaran Jayanti Swarojagar Yojana (SGSY), Drought Prove Area Programme (DPAP), Tribal Area Development Programme (TADP), High Yield Variety Programme (HYVP), Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM), Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEG).

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MGNREGA is one of the government’s flagship programmes within the overarching national development strategy, the 11th Five-Year Plan (2007-2012). This plan focuses on measures of “inclusive growth” through a three-pronged strategy: economic growth, income poverty reduction through targeted programmes and human capital formation. There are three overarching goals in MGNREGA: i) employment creation; ii) regeneration of the natural resource base and creation of productive assets in rural areas; and iii) strengthened grassroots processes of democracy through transparent and accountable governance. In this
paper, based on the secondary data, an attempt has been made to comprehensively understand the development effort to rebuild the rural life and livelihood on the basis of various secondary data.

II. MGNREGA - TAMIL NADU

MGNREGA in Tamil Nadu, the scheme was launched on 02-02-2006 and was initially implemented in six districts. From 01-04-2007, four more districts were covered by the scheme. From 01-04-2008, the scheme was extended to twenty more districts. The works taken up in the programme included

- Formation of new ponds
- Renovation of existing ponds, kuttais, kulam, oranies and temple tanks etc.
- Desilting of channels
- Desilting and strengthening of bonds of irrigation tanks,
- Formation of new roads and
- Other water conservation/soil conservation measures/ flood protection measures.

Following steps were initiated to streamline and expedite the implementation of the scheme.

- Increase in minimum wage under MGNREGA from Rs.80 to Rs.100.
- Revision in the formats of job cards and nominal muster rolls.
- Provision of additional fuel of 50 liters per month for each of the vehicles of Assistant Executive Engineers.
- Sanctioning of additional ministerial, technical and computer staff at district, division and village level.
- Talking up only 100 per cent labour intensive works to present the entry of contractors.
- Talking up only bigger works not less than Rs.3 lakhs in value have been taken up in order to ensure sustained employment at least for 30 days and do create visible and durable and benefit assets to the community.
- Conducting social audit by members of various section of the society including six MGNREGA workers.

III. THE PRESENT STUDY

In the present study, the investigator investigated the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in detail with the help of secondary data. The data was collected between May 2015 to May 2017 from university library, daily newspapers, magazines and internet. Two case studies are also cited based on first-hand field work. The present study intends to assess the overall scenario i.e., the pros and cons associated with the scheme with the following objectives

- To assess and acquire new insights on development of MGNREGA as well as overall socio-economic impact of different rural development programmes on the lives of the rural people.
- To document the improvement or changes brought by MGNREGA in the lives of the rural poor at the household level and village level.
IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of authors have attempted to study the MGNREGA in detail and its related problems. Dreze (2007) looks at the corruption in rural employment programmes in Orissa (India) and how this has continued in a NREGA as well.

According to Mathur (2007), a system of regular and continuous flow of authoritative information is essential, as opposed to the random reports and studies dependent on the initiative of individuals and groups. To improve implementation, the government needs to solve problems, modify policy directives, and issue operational guidelines for the district, block and village levels. The government must take the lead, be proactive, mobilise institutions and groups, and use the media effectively. NREGS involves several lakhs of government officials, panchayat functionaries, elected representatives, NGOs and community groups. They play a critical role, but had little preparation for the challenge. NREGS in fact is a program of national importance which has been marginalised. While the Ministry of Rural Development is the nodal ministry at the centre, every relevant department and agency requires being involved.

Ambasta et al. (2008) gave a number of important recommendations. These included deployment of full-time professionals dedicated to MGNREGA at all levels, especially at the block level. Intensive efforts at building up a massive cadre of fully trained grass-root workers are required at the Gram Panchayat level through a nationwide movement for capacity building, engaging government and non-government training institutions.

Mehrotra (2008), a civil servant who has worked in implementation of the scheme, believes that 4 per cent of programme costs allocated as administrative costs and professional support is still quite low and does not recognise the fact that a programme at the scale of MGNREGA requires serious professional support.

Khera (2008) thinks that the successful implementation of the MGNREGA in the Pati block in Orissa (India) state goes beyond the ability of its residents to claim their rights. This is brought out by the high levels of engagement with the programme in terms of planning, implementation and monitoring.

Mathur (2009) states that in social audit undertaken in Andhra Pradesh (India), it was found that in certain villages, some people stated that they had not been paid for the work done. When comparisons were made of the payments as per the pass-book with the payment as per the job card, it was discovered that the job card did not contain the inner pages that record the work done by each person; the job card itself was incomplete.

The MGNREGA needs to be a support system for the desperately poor and should enable, encourage and empower them to stand on their own feet. In its present format, the MGNREGA could become yet another subsidy programme that runs the risk of becoming a burden on the nation (The Economic Times, 2009).

Rural development is the need of the hour. It not only constitutes the development of rural regions but also aims at improving the well-being and quality of life to the rural poor through collective process. It is clear from the review that though this programme is meant for improving the life conditions of the people in the rural settings but this programme
suffers from a number of shortcomings. Thus, the detailed review of literature clearly indicates that there is a need for extensive anthropological research work for understanding the socio-economic impact of MGNREGA programme on rural Indian.

V. MGNREGA AND WOMEN

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) provides a legal Guarantee of 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to every rural household. The participation of women in the workforce has surpassed the statutory minimum requirement of 33 percent and through this it has protected the women justice and rights. The Act provides some explicit entitlements for women to facilitate their full participation. These include

- **Equal wages for men and women** ‘Equal wages shall be paid to both men and women workers and the provisions of Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 shall be complied with’.

- **Participation in Management and monitoring of the programme** ‘The gram sabha will elect the members of the committee and ensure that SC/STs and women are represented on it’.

- **Participation in social audit** ‘The timing of the forum must be such that it is convenient for people to attend that it is convenient for REGS workers, women and marginalized communities’.

- **Providing support for child care, and convenience to households** The guidelines mention the need for a crèche at the worksite, and for the works to be convenient for families.

- **Ensuring that single women are eligible** By recognizing a single person as a ‘household’, the Act makes it possible for widows and other single women to access work for widows and other single women to access work.

VI. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

MGNREGA has been able to make most of the women independent and empower them. It gives opportunity to women for governmental work, which is to provide higher wage than market. Although, work opportunities outside home reduce the economic dependence of women on men and also increase her economic command within the family. However, 20 per cent of the total respondent agreed that MGNREGA has given greater economic independence to women and also generated purchasing power at local economy. Through this scheme, women have started to assert themselves by seeking their voice.

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE FIELD

The following case studies are cited based on first-hand field work conducted at Nochimedu village of Thiruvallur district in Tamil Nadu, India and Nazarethpettai village of Thiruvallur district in Tamil Nadu, India.
Case 1:

Pattammal w/o Late. Chokkalingam aged 38 lives in Nochimedu Village of Nemam Panchayat of Poonamallee Block in Tiruvallur District in Tamil Nadu. She is a widow and has two sons and one daughter. She came to know about the MGNREGA works in her village through a public announcement. She decided to work under MGNREGA. She has used the money she earned for her regular household expenses. She has a BPL card and her household owns a little land. She says that agriculture work is available only for about 6 months in a year and that too not continuously. Their small land holding fulfils their basic food necessities. “Earlier my family used to go to neighboring villages and towns for works. Life has become relatively stable with the coming of MGNREGA as our family can stay in the village and do some work under EGA. I have so far worked for 50 days under EGA and have earned total amount of work done Rs. 8525/- and amount received Rs. 7301/- as wage. She is also an earning member of the family. She is happy that NREGA wages are paid every week.

Case 2:

P. Kalaiselvi w/o J. Panneer selvam aged 33 lives in Nasarathpettai Panchayat of Poonamallee Block in Tiruvallur District in Tamil Nadu. She is a Member of SHGs and has one son and one daughter. She came to know about the MGNREGA works in her village through a panchayat President. She decided to work under MGNREGA. She says that she used to be dependent on her husband for any expense but now she feels empowered and independent, as she is also an earning member of the family. She has works 50 days under MGNREGA so far and expressed great happiness on getting the opportunity to work and has earned Rs. 9150/- as wage. She has used the money she earned for her regular household expenses. She is happy that NREGA wages are paid every week.

VII. CONCLUSION

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is considered as a “Silver Bullet” for eradicating rural poverty and unemployment, by way of generating demand for productive labour force in Indian villages. It provides an alternative source of livelihood which will have an impact on reducing migration, restricting child labour, alleviating poverty, and making villages self-sustaining through productive assets creation such as road construction, cleaning up of water tanks, soil and water conservation work, etc. For which it has been considered as the largest anti-poverty programme in the world. Since the scheme is going to be in place for an undefined period of time, and is being enlarged in terms of scope and geographical coverage, there are many challenges like non-homogeneity in its effectiveness, region specific disparities and outcomes etc. It is exactly due to this reason; few NGOs have already done some surveys. However, they are very much confined to one or two districts, and more importantly cantered on systemic defects, rather than probing the impact of their programmes on beneficiaries. There is a necessity to carry out an in-depth review of these rural development programmes with two different strategies i.e., (i) All India studies by capturing signals from all corners of the country,
taking into account all the regions, and (ii) comprehensive coverage of all the objectives and clauses preserved in the MGNREGA in a broad manner. Thus, there is also a need to critically examine the implementation process of this programme and its impact on livelihood of the rural people. It can be concluded that the success of this Act depends upon its proper implementation and in this scenario, the community participation is very important to make this programme more effective.

VIII. REFERENCES


[7] http://nrega.nic.in


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