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Role of MGNREGA in Rural Employment: A Study of Barpeta District of Assam, India

Mrs. Darshana Das

Research Scholar, Political Science Department, Gauhati University, Assam, India

Abstract

India virtually lives in its villages. Being a pre dominant agrarian economy, in India agriculture continues to be the only avenue of employment available with a major chunk of the rural populace. Thus seasonality of agriculture and its low productivity combined with absence of alternative opportunities are responsible for higher incidence of poverty in the rural sector. In order to tackle the problems of poverty and unemployment, the planners and policy makers have launched several employment generation programmes like IRDP, NREP, RLEGP, JRY, SGSY etc. Despite these well meaning programmes and massive investments, rural areas continued to suffer from acute poverty and unemployment problems at a alarming rate. Considering this, National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was launched on 2nd February, 2006 to enhance livelihood security in rural areas of the country. MGNREGA is the most pragmatic approach to the problems of rural poverty and unemployment. In fact, the Scheme ensures the economic security of the rural poor by providing guaranteed 100 day of wage employment. This Act has marked a paradigm shift from the other employment programmes with its right based approach. Govt. is legally accountable for providing employment of hundred days to those who demand it. Moreover, MGNREGA has positive impact on employment pattern of women. A key goal MGNREGA is to protect natural resources like land, water, soil etc. The study is an attempt to assess the impact and effectiveness of the Act in the district of Barpeta, Assam during the financial year 2013-14.

Key Words: Poverty, Employment, MGNREGA.

India virtually lives in its villages. Being a pre dominant agrarian economy, in India agriculture continues to be the only avenue of employment available with a major chunk of the rural populace. In rural areas, Agriculture is not only seasonal; the existing farming is also primitive which is responsible for low labour and land productivity. The farmers, therefore, have to remain idle during the lean agricultural season. Not all farmers have access to land; some workers engage in farming have to work as an agricultural labour. There is near an absence of organised industries in the rural sector. Thus seasonality of agriculture and its low productivity combined with absence of alternative opportunities are responsible for higher incidence of poverty in the rural sector. As a result, in rural India, poverty and unemployment are twin long pending problems. Though India has completed more than 60 years of independence poverty in rural India continues to increase day by day. . The nations cannot achieve its goal of reaching the higher stage of economic development unless and until these two problems are completely eradicated. Therefore government has accorded top priority

to rural development in the country's planning process. The thrust of rural development programs has been to make a frontal attack on poverty through special employment generation programs.

Therefore, since independence, employment generation programmes in India have been repeatedly redesigned to generate productive employment and additional income. In the seventies, for the first time, the policy makers of India used the approach of rural development and rural employment programme for the eradication of rural poverty. In the later phase of nineteen seventies, Government had implemented three major anti-poverty programmes namely Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) and Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP). Moreover, the Government of India had launched different types of schemes under different headings and purposes to give partial employment to the rural poor to support their family economy like Food For Work, Jawahar Rojgar Yojana, Ensured Employment Scheme, Sampoorna Gramin Rojgar Yojana, Rashtriya Sram Vikash Yojana etc. However, these programmes have not proved highly successful. This is largely due to their inability to provide sufficient employment as per the demand, at the minimum wages. The limitations of these wage employment programmes paved the way for creating some other sort of employment model with the potential to provide employment and to reduce household poverty. With such objective the government of India introduced The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in 2006 that guaranteed 100 days wage of employment in a year to every rural house. National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) 2005 seems to be a more advanced and radical scheme which directly gives a right to employment.

Objective of the study:

1. To know the object and implications of MGNREGA Act in rural areas.
2. To know the impact of MGNREGA on natural resources such as land, water etc.
3. To know how MGNREGA helps to attain sustainable rural development in the economy
4. To know the extent of women participation.

Methodology: The data for this study is based on secondary sources collected from MIS report on MGNREGA and other sources like different reports of government, books, journals, periodicals, publications, unpublished doctoral dissertation. The study covers during the year 2014-15.

Study Area: MGNREGA was introduced to the district of Barpeta in the second phase in the year 2007-2008 and the implementation of MGNREGA scheme in the district commenced on April 1, 2007. Before analysing the fact, a brief description of the district is given below.

Barpeta district which is consisting of two civil sub-divisions, Barpeta and Bajali covers an area of 3245 Square Kms. It has 11 Development Blocks, 150 Gram Panchayats and 1077 Villages. The district shares its border with Bhutan in north, Nalbari district in east, Kamrup and Goalpara districts in the south and Bongaigaon district in the west. The district lies between 90°-45' and 91°-15' longitude and 60°-5' to 26°-49' north and 30°-39' to 91°-71' east latitude.

According to the census report of 2011, the total population of this district was 1,693,622 of which 867,004 were males and 826,618 were females.

Mgnrega: At A Glance

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is a historic legislation passed by the Government of India in September 2005 and was implemented in a phased manner. In Phase I it was introduced in 200 of the most backward districts of the country and was extended to additional 130 districts in Phase II in 2007-2008. The Act was notified in the remaining 285 rural districts of India

from April 1, 2008 in Phase III. It is now implemented in 645 districts of the country. The Scheme offers a statutory minimum wage of Rs. 142 for each job holder per day in 2014 prices. Later on 2nd October, 2009 it was renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. The Act was initiated with the objective of enhancing livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. Another aim of MGNREGA is to create durable assets such as roads, canals, ponds, wells. . It also aims at serving other objectives like creation of useful assets in rural areas, empowering women, reducing rural- urban migration and changing the power equations to bring in a more equitable social order. . The scheme strives to improve the economic and social condition of the poor people residing in the rural areas. MGNREGA marked a paradigm shift from the earlier employment programmes with its right based approach. Govt. is legally accountable for providing employment of hundred days to those who demand it.

Salient features of the MGNREG Act:

The important features of the MGNREG Act are as under:

1. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (NREGP) is right based programme, gives guaranteed employment opportunity up to 100 days for each rural household willing to do unskilled manual work every year.
2. Employment will be provided by the GP within 15 days of work application, else unemployment allowance will be paid up-to 100 days in a financial year per household depending on the actual demand.
3. A 60:40 wage and material ratio has to be maintained. No contractors and machinery is allowed.
4. The Act provides an opportunity to build rural infrastructure through watershed development, restoration of water bodies such as tanks and canals, activities aimed at forestry, land development, soil erosion and flood control, construction of roads and institutional facilities.
5. The programme is framed on the lines of democratic decentralization and participation of the rural poor is encouraged. „This is perhaps the first time that the Panchayats have been provided with the freedom to plan and execute works and is backed by substantial resources, which are at their own disposal.
6. The state is obliged to ensure worksite facilities to enhance women workers' participation crèche, drinking water, first aid and shade provided at worksites.
7. The Act stipulates that a minimum of one-third of the beneficiaries are to be women who have registered and have requested for work.
8. It aims at alleviating the problem of chronic unemployment and poverty. Creation of durable assets and strengthening the livelihood resource base of the rural poor.
9. Wages are to be paid according to the Minimum Wages Act 1948 for agricultural labourers in the State, unless the Centre notifies a wage rate which will not be less than Rs. 60/ per day. Equal wages will be provided to both men and women. It will be either paid in cash, or in kind, or both, provided that at least one-fourth of the wages shall be paid in cash.
10. Work should ordinarily be provided within 5 km radius of the village. In case work is provided beyond 5 km, extra wages of 10% are payable to meet additional transportation and living expenses.

11. In case the number of children below the age of six years accompanying the women working at any site is five or more, provisions shall be made to depute one women worker to look after such children and she shall be paid the statutory minimum wage.
12. Social Audit has to be done by the Gram Sabah. All accounts and records relating to the Scheme should be available for public scrutiny.
13. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (NREGP) is mainly, funded by the Central Government contributing 90% of the expenses, while, the State government has to contribute only 10%. While unemployment allowance is borne by State Govt.

Findings of the Study:

Table -1: MGNREGA statistics of Barpeta District in nutshell

Employment provided to households	26063
Total person days	788000
SCs	21922
STs	10920
Other	755158
Women	280078
Total work taken up	2307
Works completed	511
Works in progress/pending	1698
Works yet to approved	98

Table- 2: Works under MGNREGA during 2014-15

Category of works	Works taken up	Works completed	Ongoing/ pending progress	Works yet to be approved
Anganwadi	0	0	0	0
Bharat Nirman Rajeev Gandhi Sewa Kendra	11	0	11	0
Coastal areas	0	0	0	0
Drought proofing	221	64	152	5
Fisheries	25	0	23	2
Flood control & protection	145	41	96	8
Food grains	0	0	0	0
Land development	690	153	508	29
Micro irrigation work	15	2	7	6
Other works	91	0	91	0
Play ground	0	0	0	0
Renovation of traditional water bodies	10	1	6	3
Rural connectivity	1076	243	789	44
Rural drinking water	0	0	0	0
Rural sanitation	5	0	4	1

Water conservation & water Harvesting	14	6	8	0
Works on individual lands	4	1	3	0

Table- 3: Caste wise registration under MGNREGA at different blocks of Barpeta District during 2014-15

1	2	3				4					
		a	b	c	d	a	b	c	d	e	f
Sl. No	Block	Cumulative No. of HH issued job cards (Till the reporting month)				Cumulative Person days generate (Till the reporting month)					
		SCs	STs	Others	Total	SCs	STs	Others	Total	Men	Women
1	Bajali	551	861	13933	15345	1595	2985	33481	38061	29341	8720
2	Barpeta	620	914	18511	20045	1179	5652	71428	78259	47141	31118
3	Bhawani pur	1134	500	28121	29755	3121	899	58119	62139	38638	23501
4	Chakchaka	183	146	14106	14435	92	6	20136	20234	13225	7009
5	Chenga	597	31	16536	17164	3075	106	135230	138411	101789	36622
6	Gobardhana	506	92	9858	10456	1287	37	32203	33527	21725	11802
7	Gomaphulbari	130	2	17622	17754	1928	12	75078	77018	46472	30546
8	Mandia	1340	42	58309	59691	2407	98	150648	153153	87929	65224
9	Pakabetbari	2621	581	18481	21683	6472	784	63854	71110	42962	28148
10	Rupshi	104	0	30459	30563	83	0	74119	74202	45657	28545
11	Sarukhetri	730	421	13810	14961	683	341	40862	41886	33043	8843
	Total	8516	3590	239746	251852	21922	10920	755158	788000	507922	280078

Table -4: Other statistics of Barpeta District during 2014-15

Sl. No.	Block	Cumulative No. of HH completed 100 days (Till the reporting month)	No. of HH which are beneficiary of land reform/IAY	No. of Disabled beneficiary individuals
1	Bajali	29	84	1
2	Barpeta	191	23	12
3	Bhawani pur	27	9	0
4	Chakchaka	0	13	3
5	Chenga	199	195	1
6	Gobardhana	10	141	13
7	Gomaphulbari	15	129	235
8	Mandia	189	384	0
9	Pakabetbari	116	2	11

10	Rupshi	138	22	9
11	Sarukhetri	11	50	0
	Total	925	1052	285

The Table-1; shows that in the district the year 2014-15 the total employment provided to households 0.261 lakhs and person's man day was 7.88 lakhs. Among which SCs were 2.78 %, STs were 1.39%, other was 95.83% and women were 35.54 %. This also indicates that participation of women under this scheme has increased than the previous year. STs and SCs are significantly low participation in the district. The number of total works taken up was 2307 among which works completed were 511 and works in progress were 1698. The number of family completed 100 days works is 925.

Water is a basic need for survival of life. Resources of water are limited and thus by digging ponds, conserving water bodies etc under MGNREGA can solve the problem of water scarcity. These pond water can be used multipurpose fully like in agriculture, some domestic propose etc. Besides being a flood prone district, recurring of floods every year causes extensive damage to the people. Therefore, construction of embankment under MGNREGA can minimise the damage cause by flood. Hence through the operation of this scheme a multiplier employment generation may be solved in the long-run. From the above analysis it is also clear that women participation has remarkably increased through NREGA scheme. The extensive participation of women in MGNREGA has meant that women are coming out of their homes, not only to work but also to visit banks and Panchayat offices, which they may not have done previously. This enhanced mobility comes with the higher status of being income-earning workers. Although this study did not find any evidence of changing gender roles within the household as a result of women working on MGNREGA sites, it find evidence of increased confidence and decision making skill among women. Besides MGNREGA has reduced the traditional gender wage discrimination particularly in the public works sector and as a positive impact on the socio economic status of the women. It also helps in providing employment across all the castes which results in reducing gap among the owner and labouring class. Thus this programme not only provides employment but also focuses on inclusive growth. It conserves natural resources and creates productive assets. By protecting the environment and reducing rural-urban migration this programme has transformed the face of the rural India.

Major Loopholes of MGNREGA Scheme: Though MGNREGA has provided a fair opportunity to people from rural India to earn their own income without any discrimination of caste or gender, the scheme is marked by some limitations. These are as follows:

- One of the major shortcomings of the Act is non-availability of child care and raring facilities at the work site even though the Act includes this provision. Different studies show that women remained worried about their children while they are working at MGNREGA worksite Even some women do not accept the job facilities of MGNREGA because of non-availability of proper child care facilities.
- MGNREGA funds have been allocated for the provision of safe drinking water, resting place, changing room, first aid and recreational facility for children etc. But different studies revealed that except drinking water facility all other facilities were generally absent. The working women are not satisfied and they said that they had not got any other facility provided by MGNREGA.

- Most of the studies show that there is delay in payment of MGNREGA which is also responsible for poor participation of people.
- Low level of awareness of the people about the process and entitlements of the programme is another drawback of the scheme.
- Another loophole of the scheme is the involvement of the contractors which directly affect the beneficiary.

Conclusion: MGNREGA is one of the largest rural development programme implemented in India. Rural areas were most affected with the problem of poverty and non-availability of opportunities to work in hometowns. The rural people were always in hardship and were forced to migrate. In this backdrop, the MGNREGA proved to be a miracle for the poor in the rural areas. The MGNREGA provides at least 100 days guaranteed wage employment for all who demands for work. Women are given guaranteed one-third share in the total employment. Marginalized groups, for example SCs, STs & others, are allowed to get developed own private lands. All these provisions in the act make MGNREGA more inclusive. In the villages, the infrastructure is created which is of prime importance for the development of the rural as well as the urban areas. However, the government needs to amend the MGNREGA to provide more employment for unskilled manual work regularly. So it is recommended that the present programme should be further spread in the rural areas by means of proper planning, adequate supervision and effective implementation and better monitoring so that the country will get fruitful benefit and helps to overcome from unemployment, reduced migration, reduces poverty etc.

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