

Impact of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on the Livelihood Security among Rural People: A Study from Kalahandi District of Odisha

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ABSTRACT The aim of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is to enhance livelihood security of households in rural areas of the country by providing 100 days of manual wage employment annually to every household. The present study was designed to assess the impact of MGNREGA scheme on the livelihood of studied people. To get more insights of the research an empirical study was carried out among the selected sample in Kalahandi district of Odisha. First hand data was collected with the help of elaborate questionnaire schedules on socio-economic aspects through in-depth interviews. Outcome of the study reveals that the MGNREGA scheme had contributed significantly sustaining the lives of beneficiaries through enhancement of socio-economic status by creating valuable assets. The results of the study also found a significant impact of the MGNREGA scheme in terms of ensured food security and purchasing power.

INTRODUCTION

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is considered as one of the largest public employment programmes in the world (Sarkar and Islary 2017). The MGNREGA legally entitles all rural households of the country to a minimum of 100 days of manual labour every year at a notified wage rate. Workers are permitted to demand work as per their requirement. The administration is duty-bound to allot work within 15 days. If it fails to do so, it is required to pay an unemployment allowance (Shah M, Mann N and Pande V. 2012). Besides an in-built accountability framework, MGNREGA has a transaction based, real-time online system, and the first, for any public works programme in the country. The huge database of 2.5 lakh gram panchayats pertaining to workers was made available in MGNREGA (Narayanan et al. 2019). However, just the availability of the information in a public domain is of no big achievement as long as there is no transparency regarding wage payments. MGNREGA is marching ahead by inculcating inclusive reforms, and hence, it claims conditions for comprehensive development in terms of pay security and restoring provincial economy. The scheme improved the living standards of people

by its adaptive flexibility, which enabled to create productive assets, reduce the rate of migration, social inclusion of women, work opportunity to the needy and upgraded vocation security (Malangmeih et al. 2014). The studies from India and abroad indicated the rural transformation with more diversified income and employment options to rural population, but the actual process underlying these changes is not very well documented in India and elsewhere (Reddy et al. 2016). The accomplishment of MGNREGA relies on its legitimate execution. Consequently, there ought to be steady endeavours towards making acceptable apprehension on various arrangements of this Act by creating awareness among the locals (Ramya 2018).

Objectives

- The major objectives of the study are as follows:
- i. To assess the impact of the MGNREGA scheme on livelihoods in terms of changing pattern of income, expenditure, savings, migration and assets creation.
 - ii. To study the issues pertaining to perception and awareness about MGNREGA scheme.
 - iii. To analyse the problems faced by MGNREGA beneficiaries and make appropriate suggestions for its better implementation.

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METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional study was carried out and the sample of 140 individuals of Kalahandi district of both gender aged between 20 to 60 years were considered through multi-stage random sampling technique. Kalahandi district was selected purposively, as the district is inhabited by a large proportion of the Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe population, and majority of its area falls in the fifth schedule of the constitution. The two villages, namely Khaliabhata and Paikbahali, were selected on the basis of poverty in terms of livelihood and employment. Demographic data regarding household composition, economic status and educational status, cultural practice and tradition along with social norms were collected through household schedules. In-depth interviews and observation techniques were employed to collect data on the livelihood of villagers, changing pattern of income and expenditure, awareness about the scheme, people's perception on quality of work, creation of assets and impact on savings. Structured interviews were carried out with the wage seekers, elected panchayat raj representatives, government personnel, key informants and other local leaders of the community. The entire collected data was compiled and analysed to assess the impact of MGNREGA programme in the study area.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic Attributes of Respondents

It is evident from Table 1 that among respondents (n=140), 52.9 percent males participating in MGNREGA work, whereas female participation is 47.1 percent, which shows that some portion of females are reluctant to take part in MGNREGA activities.

Dasgupta S and Sudarshan Ratna M. (2011) present evidence from the NSSO survey and MGNREGA, which suggests that in states where the gender wage gap is wider, women's participation in MGNREGA is higher, but these findings of the research are in contradiction to the present study's findings, which indicates that less participation of women (47.1%) has been found in the study area, due to involvement of

more than half of the women in SHGs. It is clear that the age group in which most of the workers are present comprises 37.9 percent, which is between 41-50 years. Respondents in age group 51-60 also contributed to 27.1 percent, which shows that they also work hard for a livelihood. From the analysis it has been known that most of the respondents' social group varied across sampled villages. Among them 45 percent and 32.1 percent are from disadvantaged groups, which are STs and SCs, whereas only 22.9 percent belong to other social classes. Education plays an important role in developing the society for different purposes. In total, 36.4 percent workers are illiterate in this area, which shows discouragement and unawareness of the benefit that education plays in an individual's life. About 29.3 percent indicate that primary and upper primary education was provided to children, while 13.5 percent conclude that very few could complete their higher education such as a diploma, 9th or 10th grade, B-tech and so on.

Pertaining to past work tenure of MGNREGA workers it was found that majority of respondents at 48.6 percent have worked for over three years. The workers association with the scheme between one to two years account for 10.7 percent. The employees who indulgence in MGNREGA activities of around 2-3 years corresponds to 32.9 percent and only 7.9 percent respondents worked for less than 75 days in 2013-2014 financial year. Past work encounter and occasions assume a huge job in the work related achievements of the respondents, as it incredibly impacts the new beginning of work. Before MGNREGA, more number of respondents worked as wage labourers (37.9%) and marginal farmers (62.1%). From this data it is clear that 59.3 percent of participated respondents are landless (55% in Khaliabhata and 65% in Paikbahali) while 36.4 percent (41.3% from Khaliabhata and 30% from Paikbahali) are marginal farmers. It is evident from the study that most of the workers fall under the lower income group and their average household income accounts to INR 82,000.

Majority of respondents from the study area revealed that the work given under MGNREGA opened many new avenues for them. The same kind of reflections was found in the study done by Pandi (2016). The factors responsible for wide acceptance to undertake work under this scheme

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

Characteristics	Total (n=140)		Male (n=74)		Female (n=66)	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
<i>Job Card Holders</i>	140	100	74	52.9	66	47.1
<i>Age (Over all: 43.89±8.46; Male: 43.69±9.34; Female: 44.11±7.43)*</i>						
20-30	19	13.6	13	17.6	6	9.1
31-40	30	21.4	13	17.6	17	25.8
41-50	53	37.9	26	35.1	27	40.9
51-60	38	27.1	22	29.7	16	24.2
<i>Community</i>						
SC	45	32.1	27	36.5	18	27.3
ST	63	45	27	36.5	36	54.5
OBC	32	22.9	20	27.0	12	18.2
<i>Educational Qualification</i>						
Primary (1-4)	29	20.7	16	21.6	13	19.7
Middle school (5-8)	41	29.3	18	24.3	23	34.8
High school (9-10)	17	12.1	8	10.8	9	13.6
Others	2	1.4	1	1.4	1	1.5
Illiterate	51	36.4	31	41.9	20	30.3
<i>Work Experience in MGNREGA</i>						
Up to 1 year	11	7.9	3	4.1	8	12.1
1-2 year	15	10.7	6	8.1	9	13.6
2-3 year	46	32.9	26	35.1	20	30.3
Above 3 year	68	48.6	39	52.7	29	43.9
<i>No. of Employment Days</i>						
50-60	14	10.0	3	4.1	11	16.7
61-70	18	12.9	10	13.5	8	12.1
71-80	10	7.1	5	6.8	5	7.6
81-90	17	12.1	10	13.5	7	10.6
91-100	81	57.9	46	62.2	35	53.0
<i>Occupational Activity Before Joining MGNREGA</i>						
Labour	53	37.9	30	40.5	23	34.8
Farmer	87	62.1	44	59.5	43	65.2
<i>Land-holding</i>						
Landless	83	59.3	43	58.1	40	60.6
Less than 1 acre	44	31.4	24	32.4	20	30.3
1-2 acre	12	8.6	7	9.5	5	7.6
2-3 acre	1	0.7	-	-	1	1.5

Household income (Mean±SD) 82047.39±31668.13 86657.47±42044.8176878.52±10389.33

include lack of alternative employment (57.9%), which was referred as the primary motivation to take part in MGNREGA as is obvious in Table 2, and concerns and obligations to family duties, particularly in case of women respondents, they do not prefer to travel to faraway places for work. In this context the MGNREGA work distance is confined within the radius of 5 kilometres, which is the major factor for large number of women's participation in the scheme. In the research investigation it was found that 28.6 percent of the labourers participate in MGNREGA activities

because the work place is easy to access and located within their geographical territory.

Through conversations with the workers it was known that 5.7 percent labourers reveal that the compensation rate offered by MGNREGA is pretty much equivalent to other horticultural works in the investigation territory, and hence it did not hold much appeal to them. The other issues stated by respondents are late payment of wages due to implementation technicalities in the states including inadequate staffing, untimely recording and reporting of attendance, data entry, generation of wage list, Fund Transfer

Table 2: Distribution of respondents based on their experience

Profile details	Total		Male		Female	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
<i>Reason for Taking up MGNREGA Work</i>						
Well paid-up	8	5.7	3	4.1	5	7.6
Non-availability of other work	81	57.9	51	68.9	30	45.5
Got opportunity to work within their locality	40	28.6	15	20.3	25	37.9
Additional benefit of unemployment allowance	11	7.9	5	6.8	6	9.1
<i>Reason for Low Employment Attendance in MGNREGA(Below 75 Days Only, n=47)</i>						
Involving in other work	29	61.7	15	51.7	14	48.3
Bound with family and social responsibilities	18	38.3	7	38.9	11	61.1

Order (FTO), weak banking infrastructure and lack of transparency. The findings of the research studies led by Sarkar and Islary (2017) and Narayanan et al. (2019) also have a similar tone with respect to technical issues of implementation of MGNREGA.

Proper physical working conditions are a prerequisite at the worksite for ensuring safety of workers, particularly for women. As per the MGNREGA guidelines, it is necessary to have essential provisions like safe drinking water, medical aid units, shelters, a time for rest, and childcare (crèche) for working mothers who have babies below five years of age at the worksite. It was noticed from the study that although few essential provisions mentioned in the guidelines were implemented, the most crucial facilities like safe drinking water, shelter to relax, first-aid kits and childcare (crèche) were not found at worksites. These findings of the study coincide with the results of studies done by Ramya (2018), and Holmes et al. (2010, 2011).

Impact on Expenditure Pattern

The majority of the respondents communicated that the MGNREGA program has acquired a noteworthy change among them and improved purchasing power. They could now deal with nourishment, medicinal services and different outlays. This finding is similar to the study done by Pandi (2016).

It is evident that they incur more money on food, and secondly they spend a portion of wages on priority basis on primary consumable articles, ceremonies, entertainment and so on. Spending on purchasing agricultural implements

is also one of their priorities for a good harvest but they spend moderate income for healthcare. Their least investment goes to education, as half of it is taken care of by the government. The implementation of MGNREGA ensured nourishment security to workers in the study region but did not make them monetarily solid, as they could not save from their low income. A similar kind of impact of the scheme pertaining to income, expenditure food security, health care and purchasing power was found in the study carried out by Ghosh (2011), Bordoloi (2011), Kajale and Shroff (2011), Kumar and Maruthi (2011), Vatta et al. (2011) and Vaidya and Singh (2011). Through informal discussion with the female workers it was learnt that, having some savings in the bank was a matter giving them great confidence, which enhanced their dignity in the family, which is similar to the study done by Parida (2016).

Impact on Village Asset Creation

In the research sites, the most common types of works carried out through MGNREGA were road construction and digging of ponds. Conservation of water through various water management works were taken up, which comprises drought proofing, exploring irrigation sources, which enables the small land holders more stable by creating productive assets such as land, livestock and irrigation works related to agriculture. Access to basic services such as health, education and communication in rural areas are possible through rural connectivity. In the study it was also found that the MGNREGA scheme focused more on rural road connectivity and carry out allied activities, which improved the economic wellbeing of native people.

Table 3: Perspective of respondents regarding effect of MGNREGA on village assets creation

<i>Specifics of asset creation</i>	<i>Total</i>		<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>	
	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Advantage from Communication and Transportation</i>						
Yes	109	77.9	57	77.0	52	78.8
No	8	5.7	5	6.8	3	4.5
To some extent	23	16.4	12	16.2	11	16.7
<i>Better Irrigation and Water Management</i>						
Yes	116	82.9	60	81.1	56	84.8
No	2	1.4	2	2.7	-	-
To some extent	20	14.3	10	13.5	10	15.2
<i>Creating Infrastructure for Cattle Shelters</i>						
Yes	121	86.4	62	83.8	59	89.4
No	6	4.3	4	5.4	2	3.0
To some extent	13	9.3	8	10.8	5	7.6
<i>Benefit from Afforestation Activities</i>						
Yes	127	90.7	69	93.2	58	87.9
No	3	2.1	-	-	3	4.5
To some extent	10	7.1	5	6.8	5	7.6

Pertaining to the impact of MGNREGA in enhancing town resources and infrastructure creation, it was found from the field data that respondents revealed that communication improved (77.9%), expressed improvement in safe protected drinking water supply (82.9%), informed conditions are favoured for domestication of cattle (86.4%) and people are happy with the measures taken for afforestation to increase the forest cover (90.7%), as mentioned in table 3. About one fourth of the respondents expressed that the advancement of works was delayed in some areas where the investigation was initiated, due to poor planning and lack of organisation among villagers and officials, which are relevant to the findings of Ramya (2018).

The study found mixed response from the selected respondents with regard to creation of resources. Major chunk of respondents expressed that the MGNREGA has acquired outstanding positive changes in towns as well as their lives by ensuring food security and enhancing purchasing power. Some workers stated that assets creation did not profit them and could not provide provincial improvement as visualised by MGNREGA. In spite of many odds and limitations of the scheme, it was inferred from the study that MGNREGA works are producing various ecological and financial advantages to the workers. These advantages will en-

able them to upkeep and improve the groundwater, recharge the ground water levels, increase the capacity of water bodies, which ultimately led to better irrigation system. The measures taken in MGNREGA also helped in checking soil erosion and disintegration. The workers were anticipating reaping more benefits of MGNREGA in the ensuing years.

CONCLUSION

The significant effect of the MGNREGA scheme was seen in the elevation of food security as well as improved purchasing power. The scheme ensured equal wages for both genders without any disparity and it also improved the living standards of people by providing hiked wages. The various impacts of this scheme added to improved financial status of the provincial family units and lessened destitution to some extent. As there are generous measures of landless poor in the examination zone, they rely upon ranch works and other occasional physical work before the implementation of scheme. But after the execution of the MGNREGA scheme in the region, it has dramatically ensured better livelihood of natives. The desired goals of the scheme to provide employment guarantee is gradually penetrating into the lives of people for overall welfare, but it will take quite a while before any noteworthy effect is noticeable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has identified the following key and critical issues of MGNREGA, which are important to be addressed by the government and all concerned for its better implementation.

1. Emphasis should be given to creation of awareness and motivation of the rural households towards the efforts made by the government for the scheme.
2. Regular monitoring and evaluation, and institutional support for development of skills consistent to the aim of the programme need to be fortified.
3. Guaranteeing the more prominent interest of women at all levels, for instance work-site administration, staff arrangements and social audits.
4. From grass root level, the GRS (*Gram Rojgar Sevak*) and *Sarpanch* should take interest in interacting with beneficiaries and make them aware of their rights for the better implementation of the programme.

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