

A CASE STUDY :

A comparative study on the performance of MGNREGA

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SUMMARY : The MGNREGA, a self targeting programme, is intended in increasing outreach to poor and marginalized section of the society such as women and helping them towards the cause of financial and economic inclusion in the society. In this comparative study, an attempt has been made to analyze the performance of the MGNREGA in term of awareness of women beneficiaries about various provisions in MGNREGA and constraints faced by them while working under it. The study was conducted in Bikaner and Ludhiana districts of Rajasthan and Punjab, respectively. The sample consisted of 120 randomly selected respondents comprised of 60 women beneficiaries from each districts. Personal interview technique was used for collecting data. Findings of study show that respondents in both the districts are not much aware about the provisions under MGNREGA. Similarly, the respondents faced many problems while working under this Act regarding delay in issuing of job card, delay in payment, lack of crèche facility, harassment at work site etc. The study has made some suggestions also for incorporating improvement in the present MGNREGA scheme based on the constraints reported by the women beneficiaries associated with this act.

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BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) (initially named as National Rural Employment Guarantee Act or NREGA) enacted by Government of India, is the largest employment programme ever started in a country with a huge public investment. The prime focus of the scheme is to provide 100 days of wage employment to every rural household who wishes to work and asks for unskilled manual work. It aims at creating sustainable rural livelihood through regeneration of the natural resource-base, *i.e.* augmenting productivity and supporting creation of durable assets and strengthening rural governance through decentralization and processes of transparency and accountability. Gram Panchayats are involved in the planning and implementation of the scheme and creation

of durable assets for sustainable development of the rural area. The low rate of growth of agriculture sector also affected the rate of creation of employment opportunities in rural areas. It is observed that majority of the poor in rural areas of the country largely depend on the wages earned through unskilled casual manual labour.

In a context of rural poverty and unemployment, workfare programmes are considered as most important interventions. These programmes typically provide unskilled manual workers with short term employment on public works such as irrigation, soil and water conservation, rural connectivity, reforestation etc. Poverty alleviation programmes comprising of wage employment programmes, rural housing schemes and a public distribution system have been initiated from time to time. Some were partially successful in addressing the issue of poverty whereas others suffered from major flaws

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in their implementation. The MGNREGA is completely different in concept from the earlier government employment schemes since it treats employment as a right and the programme is initiated to be demand-driven. The right-based framework of the programme makes the government legally bound to extend employment to those who demand it. Since the launching of MGNREGA, there have been several studies looking into its implementation aspects, such as wage formation processes in the rural labour markets, its finances, its democratic administration and implementation (Ambasta *et al.*, 2008; Bardhan, 2011; Harrison, 2011; Khera and Nayak, 2009; Shah, 2007). Some studies have focussed on its socio-economic impact such as rural poverty alleviation, gender issues, self-esteem, livelihood and food security and migration (Haberfeld *et al.*, 2011; Sankaran, 2011; Tiwari *et al.*, 2011; Zorlu *et al.*, 2003; Raju, 2011; Rogaly, 2011).

In every society women play a very crucial role. Where women have been given chance, they have not only excelled in all areas, but also have played an important role in the development of country as a whole. They make a significant contribution to economic and social development, as citizen's worker and mothers. Rural women in India are too much preoccupied with domestic chores that they are starkly ignorant about the outside world. They are not aware about income generating programmes which could help better in their socio-economic lot. Similarly, in path of gaining benefits of any programme, constraints are the speed breakers which slow down the accessibility of individual towards achieving them. Thus, to strengthen the effectiveness of any programme, constraints in its success needs to be identified. An attempt has, therefore, been made to study the performance of MGNREGA in term of awareness of women beneficiaries regarding different provisions in this Act and constraints being faced by the beneficiaries of MGNREGA.

RESOURCES AND METHODS

The present study was conducted in Bikaner district of Rajasthan state and Ludhiana district of Punjab state in 2013 to know the spatial variance of programme with different socio-economic characteristics. At the same time MNREGA programme implemented in third phase in 2008 in both the districts of Rajasthan and Punjab states. It has also completed five years (from 2008 to 2013) successfully in these two districts *i.e.* sufficient time to evaluate any development programme. One block with maximum number of women participation was purposely selected from each district. The selected blocks were Nokha from Bikaner and Raikot blocks from Ludhiana. A list of different villages under these two blocks with higher number of women participants was prepared and then two villages from each block were randomly selected. Thus, a total of four villages were selected. The Khara and Ghattu villages were selected from Nokha

block of the Bikaner district and Talwandi and Nurpur villages were selected from Raikot block of the Ludhiana district.

For selection of respondents, 30 women who were benefited under MNREGA from each village were randomly selected. A total of 120 rural women respondents were selected randomly from the total number of beneficiary women from the selected village and were called as beneficiary respondent. An interview schedule was prepared for collection of data from the respondents.

OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

The results obtained from the present investigation as well as relevant discussion have been summarized under following heads :

Awareness of beneficiaries about MGNREGA :

MGNREGA is distinctive for its vision to redefine avenue of proving employment opportunities to the poorer in rural area. But the possibility of employment largely comes with better level of awareness as it marks the level of accessibility. Women beneficiaries' awareness about the key provision can be treated as one of the performance factors of the scheme. If the beneficiaries have knowledge on the scheme they can benefit more and it lead to improve their life style. The figure in the Table 1 shows that the situation in this front was not very encouraging in the study area. As most of the women beneficiaries were illiterate and belonged to economically poor class, the extent of awareness about MGNREGA has emerged out to be major concern in all the study area. It is fund that the highest level of awareness among the beneficiaries was on the guarantee of 100 days of employment to each house hold. This was followed by the awareness of the minimum wage rate and availability of drinking water at work site. It is interesting to note that despite a basic knowledge among respondents about their entitlement for 100 days of work, a very little information was found in relation to their awareness on the right to demand the work and un-employment allowance. For remaining provisions of MGNREGA, the level of awareness is found very poor. The awareness level on different work site facilities including crèche, shelter at work place for rest was also poor. It is also seen that the beneficiaries were not well aware on the accountability and transparency issues like social audit and facility for filing complaints. Similar findings were reported by Bebart (2013) and Kumar (2013).

Constraints being faced by beneficiaries :

Constraints faced by the beneficiaries were another key performance factor of the scheme. Constraints are the speed breakers which slow down the accessibility of individual towards achieving them. Thus, to strengthen the effectiveness

of any programme, constraints in its success needs to be identified. That data in Table 2 reveal that all the beneficiaries reported unemployment allowance was not provided in case of delay in job. Most of the beneficiaries in both the districts reported the delay in issuing a job card, disparity in job card distribution and complex procedure of registration as prime constraints, followed by unable to availed 100 days of employment according to act, huge delay in wage payment and harassment during work. Delay in payments was also responsible for poor participation of women particularly in case of single women if they are the main earners in the family. Because the banks are far from the village, it becomes difficult for the women to open bank account and draw cash which was again a major constraint for women.

Some beneficiaries complained that work is more laborious and hard for women, lack of crèche and no shade during rest period. In most of the projects selected being related to rural connectivity and renovation of local water

bodies involving earth work requiring application of physical force, male workers were preferred to women workers. In most cases mother had to keep young infant in the blistering heat or leave them at home often in the care of older children or other family members. If the child is sick, the women may not even come for work. Some children were sent to Anganwari centre where the timing was different from the work schedule. No provision for skilled or semi-skilled works was pointed out by some of the beneficiaries. Similar findings were reported by Sobha (2000) and Tiwari and Upadhyay (2012).

Suggestions for improvement :

Empowering workers – MGNREGA is a right – based statute and its effectiveness lies eventually in the extent to which wage seekers can exercise their choice and assert their rights to claim entitlements under the Act. The issues involved in empowering workers are in the range of enhancement of

Table 1 : Awareness of the women beneficiaries on various MGNREGA provision

Sr. No.	Provision of MGNREGA	Beneficiaries			
		Ludhiana		Bikaner	
		f	%	f	%
1.	Guarantee of 100 days of employment to each house hold	50	83.33	44	73.33
2.	Minimum wage rate	43	71.67	33	55.00
3.	Availability of drinking water at work site	40	66.67	42	70.00
4.	33% work should be given to women	30	50.00	40	66.67
5.	Availability of shelter at work site for rest	28	46.67	25	41.66
6.	Availability of crèche at work place	26	43.33	20	33.33
7.	Written application for work demand	15	25.00	12	20.00
8.	Provision of un-employment allowance	12	20.00	10	16.67
9.	Provision of filing complaints	10	16.67	10	16.67
10.	Provision of social audit at frequency of 6 month	9	15.00	9	15.00

Table 2 : Constraints faced by the women beneficiaries

Sr. No.	Constraints	Beneficiaries			
		Ludhiana		Bikaner	
		f	%	f	%
1.	Delay in issuing a job card	44	73.33	54	90.00
2.	Disparity in job card distribution	51	85.00	55	91.67
3.	Complex procedure of registration	40	66.67	51	85.00
4.	Unemployment allowance not provided in case of delay in job	60	100	60	100
5.	Unable to availed 100 days of employment according to act	20	33.33	45	75.00
6.	Huge delay in wage payment	25	41.67	44	73.33
7.	Harassment during work	18	30.00	20	33.33
8.	Work is more laborious and hard for women	15	25.00	16	26.67
9.	Lack of crèche	15	25.00	14	23.33
10.	Non- availability of drinking water	13	21.67	12	20.00
11.	No shade during rest period	10	16.67	10	16.67
12.	Non- availability of medical aid	9	15.00	8	13.33
13.	No provision for skilled or semi-skilled workers	8	13.33	6	10.00
14.	No special provision for elderly persons	7	11.67	8	13.33

knowledge levels, development of literacy skills, organizing workers, and enhancing social security levels of workers. Opening savings accounts of workers' in banks and post offices that has been initiated needs to be supported on a larger scale so that thrift and small savings can be encouraged among workers. The inclusion of MGNREGA workers under the cover of various life and health insurance schemes will also raise their security thresholds. Linkages with other development programmes – empowerment of workers and creation of durable assets depend to a great extent on the linkages between MGNREGA and other development programmes. Exploring the possibility of other works – the allocation for the eleventh plan (at current price) is tentatively provided at Rs.1,00,000 crore. However, since MGNREGA is a demand driven programme and the government is legally bound to provide employment mandated under the act, this figure is only indicate.

A multiple scheme and multiagency approach could also be a fruitful idea for the same purpose. Convergence of MGNREGS with other scheme of public works will certainly improve the skill levels among the workers. Incorporation of some special provisions for the elderly persons within the scheme is the immediate need to mitigate the problems being faced by the old persons. To make payments smooth, a specialized section in banks and post offices to deal with MGNREGA works should be developed. Some training sessions may be organized to train the workers, to generate awareness about the MGNREGS. They may also be trained on payment procedure of bank or post office to make the process less hectic. Providing only unskilled manual labour work through the scheme does not seem to be a healthy idea in the long-run. Provision for the semi-skilled and skilled workers should be incorporated into the scheme. Some mechanism should be evolved to restrict political interference in the programme and the 100 days ceiling limit may be re-considered for the benefit of workers regularly engaged with MGNREGS.

Conclusion :

It can be concluded that the issue of awareness emerges one of the hindrances to the local beneficiaries. It is thus, necessitates sufficient awareness amongst the intended beneficiaries regarding provisions of MGNREGA. Similarly, the constraints limited the rural women accessibility towards achieving the benefits optimally. To minimize the worksite constraints, adequate facilities must be provided to every beneficiary. Thus, to achieve the goal of programme, government must plan some policy which will be helpful for proper implementation of programme and it will be also helpful for reducing constraints faced by the beneficiaries of the programme

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