RESEARCH ARTICLE :

MGNREGA – Impact and constraints in Mon district, Nagaland

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SUMMARY : The present study was conducted in Mon district of Nagaland with the objectives to assess the impact of MGNREGA programme and analyze the constraints faced by its beneficiaries. Ex –post facto research design was undertaken for the present study. Mon rural development (RD) block was selected purposively out of total six RD blocks under the present district. Six villages were purposively selected from Mon RD block. A sample size of 120 respondents was selected from the six selected villages by following random sampling procedure. Findings revealed that majority (67.5 %) of the respondents belonged to the age group of 33-57 years; male population formed a larger part of the beneficiaries (66.7 %); majority (29.2%) of the respondents were middle school educated; 45 per cent of them had medium land holding size, 50 per cent of the respondents had kutccha houses, 90.8 per cent of them had medium level of annual income (Rs. 30,958.3) and majority (95 %) of the respondents had annual savings less than Rs. 10,000. Impact of the programme resulted in creating physical assets in the form of village approach roads, village circular roads, agri-link roads, concrete footsteps, community wells, culvert and irrigation channels. An average of 65 mandays of employment was generated under this programme. Major problems perceived by the beneficiaries included less avenues to get adequate mandays of employment against the targeted 100 mandays and low wage rate in comparison to other similar jobs in the selected area.

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BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is the largest employment providing scheme in the world. It is described as a rights-based, demand-driven, self-selecting, bottom-up scheme (Mukundan, 2009). It was introduced in 2005 as NREGA, and was renamed MGNREGA in 2009, after the scheme had been rolled out across all Indian states. It is one of the most ambitious anti-poverty scheme launched anywhere in the world. It is also one of most important rural development projects to transform the lives of rural poor in India. It has generated considerable interest largely because of the scale and enormity of the programme. This programme is often perceived as an income generating scheme through wage employment due to which, the aspect of asset creation is overlooked. Despite

its large scale implementation, the scheme has shown several anomalies when it comes to implementation in the right manner. It may be understood that the problems and challenges are from both, Government and public (Chaarlas and Velmurugan, 2012). One shared and often voiced concern pertains to the quality of MGNREG assets and their maintenance, which derives from a perception that the assets are of very poor quality and that they are not durable (Narayanan *et al.*, 2014). The mechanism to ensure durability and sustainability of the assets created under this programme is absent.

As such, this study focused on the success rate of the scheme in terms of socio-economic benefits as well as physical assets created, the lacunae and drawbacks and mechanism by which they may be redressed.

The present study was undertaken with the objectives to analyze the selected socio-economic profile of beneficiaries, to examine the level of their annual income, savings and creation of physical assets, to know the problems perceived by the beneficiaries and suggest strategies for effective implementation of MGNERGA.

RESOURCES AND METHODS

Mon district in Nagaland covers an area 1,786 sq. km. The district is bordered with Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in the North, Tuensang and Longleng districts of Nagaland in the South-West and Myanmar in the East. Mon Town is the district headquarter which is 354 km away from state capital, Kohima. Mon rural development (RD) block was selected purposively out of total six RD blocks under this district. Six villages were also purposively selected from this block which included Chi, Goching, Pongkong, Longkei, Shangnyu and Lampong/ Sheanghah. Twenty beneficiaries were selected from each of these six selected villages by following random sampling procedure so as to make a sample size of 120 respondents.

Primary data were collected through a pre - tested interview schedule while secondary data were collected from various publications, magazines, journals, annual administrative reports, concerned departments and other sources.

Data were classified into different categories and analysed with statistical tools such as mean, frequency and percentage, standard deviation and correlation analysis to obtain valid inferences.

OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

The results obtained from the present study as well as discussions have been summarized under following heads:

Socio-economic profile of beneficiaries :

Table 1 revealed that majority (67.5 %) of the respondents were in the age group of 33-57 years. Guha and Mazumder (2017) also found in their study that majority (58%) of the beneficiaries were under the age of 50 years. Further the male population formed the major part of the beneficiaries (66.66%); majority (29.16%) of the respondents were middle school educated; majority (97.5 %) of them were married; majority (45 %) had medium land holding size; majority (50 %) of the respondents had Kutccha (earthen) type of houses. It was observed from the above findings that male beneficiaries were dominant in the study area. This result depicts the existence of 'patriarchy' in the villages, which is not unusual, as it is a distinctive feature of Konyak tribal culture. It also indicated a lower participation of women in the programme. Nair *et al.* (2009) observed that even though many new workers are coming into the rural labour market as a result of the NREGA, many of them were young workers, who were not willing to work in the agricultural sector.

Impact of MGNREGA :
Level of income and savings of the beneficiaries :

From Tables 2 and 3, it can be inferred that majority (95 %) of the respondents had savings below Rs.10,000 from their annual income, while majority (94.17%) had savings below Rs. 500 from wages obtained from MGNREGA. The annual income had been drawn from sources such as agriculture, livestock, business, and other sources. Agricultural products such as rice, yam, mustard, pumpkin and chilli were the major crops cultivated in all the villages. The income from MGNREGA was used to pay off land taxes and also for advancing the money on interest to fellow beneficiaries. Thus, the money received through MGNREGA was spent almost immediately after wage payment. The respondents were also able to spend some amount of MGNREGA income on education and health needs of their children. The wages earned from MGNREGA were exhausted almost immediately. Some of the respondents were able to multiply the MGNREGA earnings by lending the money on interest to fellow

workers. This group comprised of those beneficiaries who were better off than the others; in other words, those engaged in some additional forms of occupation such as family business. Talwar and Singh (2015) found that the persons who were not able to increase the living standard were having a large family size due to which they were mainly engaged in fulfilling their requirements of the family and had not got the chance to increase the standard

Table 1: Socio-economic profile of MGNREGA beneficiaries (n= 120)

Sr. No.	Socio economic variables		Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Age (in Yrs)		<33 years	18	15.00
	Mean	= 45.908	33-57 year	81	67.50
	Sd	= 12.009	>57 years	21	17.50
2.	Sex				
			Male	80	66.66
			Female	40	33.33
3.	Education		Illiterate	23	19.16
	Mean	= 2.667	Primary school	28	23.33
	Sd	= 1.087	Middle school	35	29.16
			High school	34	28.33
			Pre-university/ Diploma	0	0.00
			Graduate	0	0.00
4.	Marital Status				
			Married	117	97.50
			Unmarried	3	2.50
5.	Land Holding Size		Landless	10	8.33
	Mean	= 3.700	Marginal	2	1.66
	Sd	= 1.089	Small	28	23.33
			Medium	54	45.00
			Large	26	21.66
6.	Type of House		Thatched	30	25.00
			Kutcha	60	50.00
			Pucca	25	20.83
			RCC Building	5	4.16

Table 2: Level of annual income of beneficiaries based on the impact of MGNREGA (n=120)

Sr. No.	Annual income (Rs.)		Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Mean	=Rs. 30,958.33	Low	0	0.00
	Sd	=Rs. 20,398.30	(<Rs. 10,560.032)		
			Medium	109	90.83
			(Rs. 10,560.032–51,356.634)		
			High	11	9.16
			(>Rs. 51, 356.634)		

Table 3 : Respondents savings after implementation of MGNREGA (n= 120)

Sr. No.	Sources of annual savings		Range of Annual savings	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	From annual income		<Rs. 10,000	114	95.00
	Mean	= 13.50	Rs. 10,000–20,000	4	3.33
	Sd	= 4637.53	>Rs. 30,000	2	1.67
2.	From MGNREGA wages		< Rs. 500	113	94.17
	Mean	= 58.333	Rs. 500–1000	6	5.00
	Sd	= 260.763	> Rs. 1000	1	0.83

of living.

Creation of physical assets :

From Table 4 it is evident that the assets created under MGNREGA were in the form of agri-link roads (30 %), village roads (20 %), community wells (17 %), irrigation channels (13 %), culvert (10 %), water tank (7 %) and village footstep (3 %). Majority of works were focused on rural connectivity in the form of constructing village approach roads, village circular roads, agri-link roads and footsteps for easier accessibility to farms and other destinations within and outside the villages. The findings showed that maximum numbers of assets were created in the form of rural connectivity (agri-link road and village circular road) in Shangnyu village. This

particular village is located on a very hilly terrain; hence, such type of work was taken upto develop transportation channels. Generally, the condition of roads in Mon district is very poor. Thus, in the rest of the villages also, majority of the works taken up were under rural connectivity. The construction of roads has made it easier for the people to travel in and out of the villages. This result is in line with the findings of Nair *et al.* (2009) who found that in Kerala, rural connectivity was given more importance than other types of work.

Community empowerment :

MGNREGA was originally devised as an employment generation programme but it has played an important role in community empowerment through the

Table 4 : Physical assets created under MGNREGA

Sr. No.	Activities	Total number	Percentage
1.	Village road	6	20.00
2.	Agri-link road	9	30.00
3.	Irrigation channels	4	13.00
4.	Culvert	3	10.00
5.	Water tank	2	7.00
6.	Community well	5	17.00
7.	Village footstep	1	3.00
	Total	30	100.00

Table 5 : Distribution of beneficiaries based on community empowerment (n=120)

Sr. No.	Variable	Degree of empowerment	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	S.D.
1.	Community empowerment	Less (<8.277)	5	4.167%	9.342	1.065
		Moderate (8.277 -10.407)	97	80.834%		
		High (>10.407)	18	15%		
		Total	120	100		

Table 6: Association of socio-economic variables with community empowerment (n=120)

Sr. No.	Variables	Correlation co-efficient 'r'
1.	Age	-0.258**
2.	Sex	-0.028 [NS]
3.	Education	-0.046 [NS]
4.	Marital status	-0.099 [NS]
5.	Land holding size	-0.070 [NS]
6.	Type of house	-0.126 [NS]
7.	Annual income	-0.067 [NS]
8.	Annual savings	-0.129 [NS]
9.	Awareness about NREGA	0.079 [NS]

** indicates significance of value at P=0.01 , NS=Non-significant

decision making mechanism for creation of community assets and active participation of women. Factors that have encouraged women workers' participation include the nature of the job not requiring special knowledge and skill (Mathreyi *et al.*, 2004). Women's participation in the programme has ensured that women in the study area were able to find paid work outside of their homes which provided them with a sense of authority in the household spending decisions. One of the latent objectives of the MGNREGA is to strengthen community development processes through grass-roots institutions and to make decision-making at that level more inclusive and participatory. The community's participation in procedural aspects under MGNREGA, like selection and implementation of works, social audit, asset management, etc., indicates that the beneficiaries achieved moderate level of empowerment (80.83 %) as indicated in Table 5. Also, women beneficiaries were able to contribute towards the family income and hence reduced dependency on men for their personal needs. A similar finding was obtained in the study by Pankaj and Tankha (2010) where women used the MGNREGA wages for all kinds of purposes – on daily consumption items, household durables, health and education of children, visiting relatives, on social ceremonies and to meet their personal needs.

Correlation of socio-economic variables with community empowerment :

As evident from Table 6, the variable age was found to have negative and significant relationship with community empowerment. As the age of respondents increase, the community empowerment decreases. The younger beneficiaries were more inclined towards earning additional income. Findings also revealed that with the advancement in age, the MGNREGA works which are basically manual were difficult to carry out. This decreased the chances of receiving MGNREGA income and thus, becoming less economically empowered. Likewise, there were some other disadvantages attached to older age such as lower level of social participation resulting in decreased political empowerment. Supporting the above findings, it was found that most of the participants were middle aged. Thus, it can be inferred that the younger individuals contributed more towards community empowerment.

Table 6 also revealed that the variables *viz.*, sex, education, marital status, land holding size, type of house, annual income, annual savings and awareness about MG NREGA had non-significant relationship with community empowerment.

Constraints perceived by the beneficiaries :

Table 7 revealed that the major constraint perceived by the respondents was regarding attainment of 100 per cent of man days during the programme. On an average only sixty five mandays of employment were generated under this programme. Similar findings were reported by Shenbagaraj and Arockiasamy (2013) based on their study in Tamil Nadu, where the average number of mandays of employment generated was very low and it varied from 18-35. Only in blocks like Thoothukudi and Karunkulam, it provided employment for more than 30 days. The proportion of families who completed 100 days of employment was negligible. Next constraint was low wage payment (94.17 %), lack of adequate knowledge (24.20 %) and misuse of funds (19.20 %). The beneficiaries expressed discontent over the fact that 100 days of employment was not provided in any of the villages, as per the provisions laid in the MGNREGA guidelines. The beneficiaries also expressed that the SOR (Schedule of Rate) for MGNREGA *i.e.,* Rs. 100 was low as the wages received from hired labour ranged from Rs. 250-350 which is higher than that of MGNREGA wages.

Conclusion :

The study revealed that even though there were some distinct areas of concern, the performance of MGNREGA in the study area was highly encouraging. MGNREGA is not about charity; it has given the people their due *i.e.*, respect and dignified livelihood. It helped,

Table 7 : Constraints perceived by beneficiaries under MNREGA			(n= 120)
Sr. No.	Nature of problems	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Less Mandays of employment	120	100.00
2.	Low wage payment	113	94.17
3.	Lack of adequate knowledge	29	24.20
4.	Misuse of funds	23	19.20

not only in giving immediate relief to the poor by assuring them to earn a dignified livelihood (even if it was under 100 days) but has also produced tangible results in the form of rural infrastructure, within the vicinity of these rural households. Other programmes like IAY (Indira Awaas Yojana) and BRGF (Backward Region Grant Fund) have helped in improving the housing conditions of the villages, but the study revealed that the people were more satisfied with MGNREGA as this programme was a source of individual income, in addition to creating community assets. Hence, in terms of impact, the programme benefitted the community as a whole.

Recommendations :

– Awareness programme regarding all the guidelines and rights under MGNREGA should be conducted as most of the beneficiaries are still unaware about certain issues. It can begin by educating the local leaders, at village level about NREGA in all its dimensions, who in turn can conduct village meetings to disseminate this knowledge to the fellow beneficiaries.

– Implementation of 100 mandays should be the priority of the implementing bodies as this would ensure some tangible benefits in the income of beneficiaries and also ensure better creation of community assets.

– Assets created under the MGNREGA should be maintained by the community. The Village Council and the Village Development Board should be encouraged to work out the modalities to maintain the assets.

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