

# Implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in India: Problems and Prospects

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## ABSTRACT

*The people-centric government has focused on rural development under decentralised democratic system. Infact, rural development needs a holistic approach and the Government of India implements various programmes for the development of the people, especially in the rural areas which constitute 72.2% of the total population. The schemes/programmes of rural development include the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (infrastructure development), the Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (self-employment), the Provision of Urban Amenities in Rural Areas (basic facilities), the National Social Assistance Programmes (social security and welfare measures), the Watershed Development Programmes and Land Reforms (area development), the Rural Drinking Water and Rural Sanitation (health and hygiene protection), the Indira Awaas Yojana (housing for the rural poor) and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (wage employment). All these schemes promote livelihoods and improve the socio-economic conditions of the people living in rural areas.*

**Keywords:** People-centric, Rural development, Holistic approach, Schemes, Socio-economic

## INTRODUCTION

### National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), 2005, is a revolutionary step for ensuring the guarantee of unskilled employment to the rural people and develops the infrastructure at the grassroots level. In September 2005, the government enacted the NREGA, 2005, which provides a legal guarantee for 100 days of employment in every financial year to any rural household whose adult members are willing to do unskilled manual work at the statutory minimum wage. To translate this 'right to work' concept emanating from the NREGA

into a reality, the act was launched in the form of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) on 2 February 2006, initially, in 200 poorest and backward districts in the country. This was guided by the success of the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Act (MEGA). The MEGA has been functioning in the State of Maharashtra since 1976 (Durgaprasad, 2007).

### **OBJECTIVES**

Following are the main objectives of the scheme:

- To provide livelihood security to the households of rural area by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to the adult members who volunteer to do unskilled manual work.
- To create durable economic assets and strengthen the livelihood resource base of the rural poor.
- To reduce migration of the people from rural to urban areas.
- To remove poverty from the rural areas and improve the infrastructure.
- To rejuvenate natural resources for stimulating the local economy at the grassroots level.
- To bring social safety to the landless families.
- To move the local bodies towards good governance through transparency and accountability.

### **IMPLEMENTATION**

The NREGS has been implemented throughout the country, in areas classified as rural, in a phased manner. In the first phase, 200 of the most backward districts of the country were covered. In the second phase, 130 districts were covered, while in the third phase, the remaining 265 districts were covered. This scheme has been implemented in 595 districts out of 614 districts in the country.

The scheme was first launched at P. Bandlapalli (a tiny village of Narpala Mandal) in the Ananthapur district of Andhra Pradesh on 16 February 2006. Prior to this scheme, the Government of India had launched various wage employment schemes, such as the National Rural Employment Programme (1980); the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (1983); the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (1989); the Employment Assurance Scheme (1993); the Jawahar Gramin Samradh Yojana (1999); and the Sawarnajayanti Gramin Rozgar Yojana (2001). The NREGS (2006) was renamed as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) on 2 October 2009 (Gulati, 2001).

In Haryana, the NREGS was launched initially in the Sirsa and the Mahendargarh districts in the first phase on February 2006 and was extended to two more districts, *viz.*, Ambala and Mewat, on 1 April 2007 in the second phase. The scheme was implemented in all the remaining districts on 1 April, 2008 (Dhankhar, 2003).

## **IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES**

### **National Level**

The Ministry of Rural Development implements through the state governments a number of schemes and programmes. All these schemes and programmes are meant for the overall development and upliftment of the life standard of the rural people. The Ministry of Rural Development monitors fund utilisation and physical coverage of the benefits to the rural people under MGNREGS at the national level (Puri, 2006).

### **State Level**

At the state level, the Department of the Rural Development of the state government is the nodal agency for the implementation of the MGNREGS. The Secretary of the Department is the Commissioner of MGNREGS, who is expected to ensure that all the activities required to fulfil the objectives of the act are carried out in letter and in spirit. The Director, Rural Development Department assists the Secretary.

The state government also constitutes MGNREGS council for the purpose of advising it on all matters relating to the scheme, like determining the preferred works, reviewing the implementation, monitoring, promoting widest possible dissemination of information and for preparing annual reports to be placed before the state legislature (Rajakutty, 2000).

### **District Level**

At the district level, the Deputy Commissioner (DC) is the district programme coordinator (DPC), and the Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC)-cum-Chief Executive Officer of the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) is the additional district programme coordinator under the scheme. The DC is responsible for the overall coordination and successful implementation of the scheme in the district and the ADC assists the DC in carrying out the objectives of the scheme.

At the district level, the Zila Parishad is responsible for finalising the MGNREGS district plan. The DPC monitors all the aspects of implementation, including registration, employment, unemployment allowance, social audit, funds flow, progress, quality of works, qualitative aspects of implementation, timely and correct payment of wages.

### **Block Level**

The Panchayat Samiti (PS) is responsible for planning of the MGNREGS at the block level and for its monitoring. The Block Development and Panchayat Officer (BDPO) is the programme officer at the block level, with necessary support of the staff for facilitating the implementation of the scheme. The PS and the BDPO monitor registration, employment provided to each household, payment of unemployment allowance, social audit, flow of funds, timely and correct payment of wages, progress and quality of works, etc. The BDPO is also responsible for sending the progress reports and returns to the DPC, who sends these reports to the state and the central governments (Sharma, 2000).

### **Village Level**

The Gram Sabha (GS) is responsible for a number of functions relating to the planning and monitoring of MGNREGS at the village level. The Gram Panchayat (GP) is the implementing agency and is responsible for the identification of works in the GP areas, as per the recommendations of the GS, and for executing the works. The Gram Sachiv helps the GP in discharging its duties and also receives applications, issues job cards, maintains records, etc. The GP can also engage services of a local graduate as Rojgar Sahayak on contractual basis to assist in maintaining the records and other related works of the schemes (Ramanjam, 2000).

### **PROBLEMS**

The present study focused on the various problems on the basis of face-to-face interviews with the villagers and the officials of the Rajound Block of District Kaithal (Haryana). The following hurdles or problems have been observed.

#### **Delay in Resolution**

It has been observed that there is delay on the part of the GP in preparing resolution, which consequently affects the wage payment to the workers. Hence, the morale of the workers is influenced due to the delay in resolution made by the panchayat.

#### **Bounded Scheme**

It is another big hurdle in the proper implementation of MGNREGS as the scheme is bounded for only 100 days. On the other hand, the government has taken initiatives to start a prospective plan under the scheme for accomplishing sustainable socio-economic development of the people at the grassroots level.

### **Lack of Technical Support**

The MGNREGS is also criticised on the grounds that it focuses on the manual unskilled wage employment rather than skill or technical wage employment. Moreover, utilisation of the machinery is purely prohibited under the scheme. Consequently, a major problem is created due to the lack of technical support.

### **Delay in Payments to the Workers**

Delay in payments to the workers is also a big problem in the scheme. Enormous delay is found in the payments to the workers. According to reliable sources, over-burdened junior engineers (JEs) of the panchayat department are not in a position to prepare the measure book (MB) and maintain it in time.

### **Lack of Terms and Conditions of Job Card**

Another practical problem in the scheme is: how can a family decide who should get the job under the scheme? This may disintegrate the families. It is feared that, under the scheme, physically handicapped are left out from claiming the benefits of the scheme. There is no terms and conditions of job card, as to who is eligible or who is not.

### **Lack of Basic Facilities at Workplace**

Under the MGNREGS, it has been also observed that workers suffer due to lack of basic facilities, like first aid box, safe drinking water, shed, crèche, etc. The Mate does not make the satisfactory arrangements.

### **Low Rate of Wage**

At present, according to the scheme, Rs. 236 is paid to the workers for manual unskilled wage per day, which is not enough to meet the requirements in the daily routine life.

### **Unemployment Allowance**

If the applicant is not provided employment under the scheme within 15 days of receipt of his application or form, then he or she has the right to get one-fourth of the wage rate of Rs. 236 for the first 30 days during the financial year and one-half of the wage rate for the remaining period of the financial year, subject to a maximum of 100 days. However, in reality, unemployment allowance is not provided to the workers.

### **Lack of Citizen Charter**

Another major deficiency of the MGNREGS is that the work is started without any citizen charter. The date of starting of the work and the finishing date, as well as how much cost

expenditure is expected in the project, are not clear to the beneficiaries. There are no data displayed on the board. It creates malpractices in the scheme.

### **Discrimination in Salaries**

Under this scheme, the Gram Rozgar Sahayak and Mate are appointed at the village level and the Assistant Block Programme Officer (ABPO) at the block level. The ABPO gets a salary of Rs. 15,000 per month, while the Rozgar Sahayak gets a salary of only Rs. 2,000 when the work is done and only Rs. 1,000 when the work is not done. It is noticed that the Rozgar Sahayaks are suffering due to heavy workload and maintenance of the records.

### **Lack of Regular Social Audit**

To ensure transparency and enhance accountability for the effective implementation of the scheme, social audit process is adopted in the meeting of the GS at the village level to find out irregularities in the scheme. However, the social audit is merely a formality.

### **Corruption**

Due to lack of strong mechanism, the MGNREGS has been affected by malpractices. Recently, in the district Ambala of Haryana, a scandal of Rs. 44 crore was reported in the MGNREGS through issue of duplicate job cards. While on 9 December 2010, eight officials were arrested under the MGNREGS scam in the Amreli and Porbandar districts of Gujarat. Several malpractices, like forged job cards, fake muster rolls and fake names of the workers, have come to light. The existing mechanism has not been able to rectify these challenges. Thus, corruption is prevalent in the scheme at all levels (The Indian Express, 21 February, 2011).

### **SUGGESTIONS**

For rectifying the above-mentioned hurdles or problems of the MGNREGS, following suggestions are made:

- The government should appoint separate JEs to work only for MGNREGS at the grassroots level to avoid delay in preparation of the MB.
- Basic facilities, like safe drinking water, first aid box, shed and crèche, should be provided for the benefits of the workers.
- The mate should take videos and photos at the time of working.
- The government should appoint special auditors for the close examination of the account records of the GPs, the BDPOs as well as the DRDA regarding the MGNREGS.

- The reservation policy should be implemented for the under-privileged sections and other categories, more specifically the below poverty line (BPL) families.
- Strong mechanism should be provided at all levels for reviewing the performance of the implementing agencies.
- Under MGNREGS, it should also be ensured that the unemployment allowance is given to the workers if the applicant is not provided employment within 15 days of receipt of his application.
- Job cards should be modernised by sophisticated technology for avoiding malpractices or scams in the scheme.
- Rate of daily wage, i.e. Rs. 236, should be increased in the view of rising prices.
- Salary discrimination should be abolished and the services of the Rozgar Sahayak, the Mate and the ABPO should be regularised.
- The annual action plan and the prospective plan should be prepared and implemented effectively for accomplishing the goals and objectives of the scheme.
- Payments to the workers should be made in time, for which the bank or the post office delivery mechanism needs to be improved.
- The social audit should be a regular feature of the scheme to strengthen vigilance, transparency and accountability. The erring persons should be brought to book.
- The employment should be generated during the lean season such that it does not affect the other modes of the beneficiaries livelihoods, such as agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, fishing, bee keeping, etc.
- Public awareness regarding the MGNREGS should be generated with the help of NGOs, civil society, SHGs, media and active participation of the local bodies.

If the above suggestions are put into practice, then implementation of the act can provide real benefits and the objectives of the act can be achieved effectively.

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