



A STUDY ON THE PERFORMANCE OF MAHATMA GANDHI NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ACT IN VIDHARBHA REGION

DR. SHAIKH AFTAB ANWAR

Vice Principal and HOD Commerce

Poona College of Arts, Science and Commerce,
Camp, Pune-411001 (MS) INDIA

ABSTRACT

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (NREGA) renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is the most realistic approach to the problems of poverty and unemployment in rural India. In fact, the Scheme ensures the employment security of the rural poor by providing guaranteed wage employment for minimum one hundred days. The study examines India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) according to criteria viz. average number of days of employment per household; percentage of households completing 100 days of employment under NREGS; percentage of expenditure against total available funds etc. Performance of the first two criteria has been disappointing and has deteriorated over a period of time. However the percentage of expenditure against total available funds has risen sharply.

Keywords: Rural Employment, Mahatma Gandhi, Vidarbha Region, National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS)

Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is a revolutionary Act of the Government of India with tremendous potentiality of eradicating unemployment situation. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme implemented by the Ministry of Rural Development is the flagship programme of the Central Government that directly touches the lives of the poor and promotes inclusive growth in the country. The NREGA was notified on September 7, 2005 and was the first of its kind in the world. It was brought under umbrella legislation for rural employment at an unprecedented scale in order to provide employment when other employment alternatives are scarce or inadequate. The Act is considered as a significant instrument for strengthening decentralised and deepening process of democracy by giving a pivotal role to the Panchayati Raj Institution concerning planning, monitoring and implementation. Unique features of the Act includes, time bound employment guarantee

DR. SHAIKH AFTAB ANWAR

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within 15 days of registration, and incentive-disincentive structure to the State Government for providing employment as 90% of the cost for employment is borne by the Centre or payment of unemployment allowance at their own cost and emphasis on labour intensive works prohibiting the use of contractors and machinery. An emphasis has been given in the Act on empowerment of women by mandating 33% participation for women. The principal objective of launching of programme is to uplift the backward socio-economic conditions of rural people of India. It indicates that the socio-economic backwardness of rural India has profound impact in launching of NREGS and therefore, the Central Government has implemented the Scheme called Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act with a lot of enthusiasm in the year 2005.

Statement of the problem:

The main objective of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is to ensure livelihood security of the rural people by providing at least 100 days guaranteed wage employment to every rural household in a financial year whose adult member volunteers to do unskilled manual labour at a statutory minimum wage. Apart from, this employment guarantee can also serve other objectives such as generating productive assets, protecting the environment, empowerment of rural women, reducing rural-urban migration and fostering social equality among others (NREGA, 2005). The promise of providing at least 100 days guaranteed wage employment to every rural household in a financial year and implementation of other pertinent feature of the Act in each and every state is a need of the study.

The significance of NREGA lies in the fact that it creates a right based framework for wage employment programme and makes the Government legally bound to provide employment to poor unskilled labours. While the Act provides a legal framework, the State Governments have the legal liability and the Central Government provides the fiscal guarantee for it. In this way the legislation goes beyond providing a social safety net, and towards guaranteeing the right to employment. A lot of research has been done to assess the performance of NREGS ever since the Act relating to it came into being. While some studies have drawn attention to huge leakage and fudging of muster rolls, others are not that critical and have been ecstatic over the number of jobs created, and number of beneficiaries from disadvantaged groups such as the Scheduled Tribes (ST), Scheduled Castes (SC) and women. This is symptomatic of the fact that while some studies have debunked this nation-wide programme. The Act will transform the lives of poor and make them aware of their entitlement. In the light of this situation the study examines the implementation of National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in the Vidharbha region with emphasis on coverage of households, employment guaranteed, strengths, bottlenecks and strategies for further strengthening the programme.

Objectives of the study:



The main focus of the present study is to examine the performance of NREGS in Vidharbha region. Therefore, the study is based on the following objectives:

1. To assess the performance of MGNAREGA in few districts of Vidharbha region.
2. To suggest suitable measures for the effective implementation of the scheme.

Methodology:

This study uses mainly secondary data. The sources of the data are published and unpublished sources like books, journals, reports of the Government, , unpublished doctoral dissertation and concerned web sites etc. For assessing the performance of National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in Vidharbha region particularly Chandrapur, Wardha, Gadchiroli,,Buldhana and Bhandara. The data related to NREGS are compiled from the secondary sources and the study covers three consecutive years from 2012-13, 2013-14 and 2014 to 2015. Using official data this paper evaluates India's NREGS according to criteria: a) average number of days of employment per household; b) percentage of households completing 100 days of employment under NREGS; c) percentage of expenditure against total available funds etc.

Performance of MGNAREGA in Vidharbha Region:

Vidarbha is the eastern region of the Indian state of Maharashtra, The region receives low rainfall during monsoon. While the farmers of Vidharbha region are completely based on monsoon and sources of employment are very few. It has been frequently observed that in this region maximum numbers of farmers have committed suicides due to failure of crops. In this scenario MGNAREGA, this could have gone some way in mitigating the current crisis. And significantly, its potential has been leveraged in Vidarbha, the region most prone to drought and home to 12,480 recorded farmer suicides from 2001 to 2014.

In 2014-15, the average number of workdays provided per household under MGNAREGA — the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act — was only 52.94 days, as against the guaranteed 100 days. Worse, in five districts of Vidarbha — Chandrapur (41.34), Wardha (45.52), Gadchiroli (47.63), Buldhana (49.71) and Bhandara (50.39) — the number of workdays is below even the state average, while only being marginally above in the remaining six districts of Akola (55.92), Gondia (56.42), Yavatmal (57.78), Washim (59.94), Nagpur (71.74) and Amravati (75.78).

Given that 75 per cent of Maharashtra's below-poverty-line population comprises not agricultural labourers but small and marginal farmers tethered to their land, public policy experts are now asking why 100 days of guaranteed livelihood is not part of a focused



strategy to counter crop loss, especially in the most vulnerable Vidarbha and Marathwada belt.

The Government should give special focus of MGNREGA's implementation in areas where monsoon failure or crash in crop prices lead to farmers committing suicide. "Public works programmes can help reduce uncertainties over future household incomes. They also encourage farmers to make investments on the farm, knowing they have access to a safety net during bad economic times,". The proportion of households with MGNREGA job cards that were provided 100 days of employment in Maharashtra has grown only marginally in the last three financial years: 14 per cent in 2012-13, 11 per cent in 2013-14 and 15 per cent in 2014-15. This should have been much higher in a year of crop failures such as the last one, but was hardly so. "The Government seems clueless about using MGNREGA in a targeted way, to extend it to even 150 days of employment in drought prone regions. In fact, the Act allows for more than 100 days employment to such labours.

That, in turn, is also courtesy low awareness among farmers that the list of permissible works under MGNREGA now include agriculture and livestock-related activities such as composting, vermi-composting, liquid bio-manures, poultry and goat shelters and azola as cattle feed supplement. "The current regime in Maharashtra has labeled MGNREGA a black spot and has instead given a big thrust to its new Jalyukta Shivar Yojana as a drought-proofing policy. It's a pity it does not understand that the state's original Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS), on which MGNREGA is based, was a successful anti-drought programme in the 1970s," says Kishore Tiwari of the Vidarbha Jan Andolan Samiti. Also, he claims that the deepening of nullahs under the Jalyukta Shivar Yojana tries to replicate the "Shirpur model" of recharge using canal waters in ecologically different Vidarbha, which will not succeed. Kumar, who is a former member of the Central Employment Guarantee Council, says Vidarbha has suffered historically even when it came to implementation of EGS. The political clout of farmers and leaders in western Maharashtra resulted in sugarcane, fruits and vegetable-growing districts such as Ahmednagar, Nashik and Solapur benefitting immensely from the EGS. The regional skew in implementing MGNREGA is a legacy of sorts; not a single district from Vidarbha figured in the top ten of EGS performers between 1977 and 1997. This was turned around partially in 2013-14, when Amravati managed to secure a NREGA district excellence award from the Ministry of Rural Development. Despite MGNREGA's rich possibilities, Kumar notes that the Maharashtra government has slashed allocations under it to Rs 800 crore in 2014-15.

Conclusion:

It is evident from the fact that in the year 2014-15, the average number of workdays provided per household under MGNREGA — the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act — was only 52.94 days, as against the guaranteed 100 days. The condition is



still worse in five districts of Vidharbha namely Chandrapur (41.34), Wardha (45.52), Gadchiroli (47.63), Buldhana (49.71) and Bhandara (50.39) — the number of workdays is below even the state average, while only being marginally above in the remaining six districts of Akola (55.92), Gondia (56.42), Yavatmal (57.78), Washim (59.94), Nagpur (71.74) and Amravati (75.78). The paper makes a number of policy suggestions to improve the performance of the NREGS.

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