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Performance of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in Jammu and Kashmir

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Abstract:

One of the most important initiatives by the UPA coalition government is the enactment of legal and right based programme called Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. The MGNREGA provides a legal guarantee for one hundred days of employment in every financial year for every rural household who are willing to do unskilled manual work. The programme was launched with an aim of increasing purchasing power capacity of the poor people living in rural India. The State of Jammu and Kashmir is predominately an agrarian state with nearly 75% of the population resides in the rural areas. Out of which 26.14% is living below the poverty line (BPL), which in average terms means that out of every four persons, one belongs to the BPL category. NREGA was extended to three backward districts in Jammu & Kashmir (Doda, Kupwara and Poonch) during the first phase in 2006, and was later extended to two more districts (Anantnag and Jammu) during the second phase and finally to the entire State during the third phase in 2008-09. From the year 2008-09 up to 2013-14, under this scheme, the state has been allotted 3090.47 crore rupees out of which it utilized 2680.49 crore. Besides, the State provided employment to 2744879 households, generated 1349.246 lakh man-days and issued job cards to 5169902 households. In the light of official data collected from the Rural Development Department this paper examines both financial and physical performance of MGNREGA in the State by focussing on the issues like, job cards issued, man-days generated, employment provided to households, works taken up and completed and also the supportive staff engaged. After the proper analysis of the data it was found that performance of the scheme in the State is far from satisfactory and state has to work hard to make the scheme purposeful and goal oriented.

Keywords: MGNREGA, BPL, job cards, MGNREGS households, gram panchayat, man-days, gram rozgar sahayaks, programme officer, information technology

1. Introduction

Since economic liberalisation in 1991, the Government of India (GoI) has introduced a number of social protection programmes at the central level, apart from the already existing federal state initiatives. One of these important initiatives was the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005, which aimed to provide enhanced livelihood security, giving at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year to every household whose adult members seek unskilled manual work. MGNREGA, which has now been much studied, is a public works programme, involving poor women and men in the construction of water conservation and harvesting structures, roads, and irrigation facilities. It also focuses on improving existing assetsⁱ. This Act was introduced with an aim of improving the purchasing power of the rural people, primarily by providing semi or unskilled work to people living below poverty line in rural India. It attempts to bridge the gap between the rich and poor in the countryⁱⁱ. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is one of the largest promotional social protection programmes in the Indian polity. Its public work-based social assistance nature basically indicates that it is an offshoot of the “need-based and rights based school of social protection” with its primary objective being to maintain the subsistence level, bring people out of poverty and protect those who are at risk of falling into it. It also encompasses a secondary, promotional and transformative vision of strengthening future livelihood opportunities and fostering women’s empowerment in rural areasⁱⁱⁱ.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), a self-targeting labour intensive public works programme, in the first phase was implemented in most backward 200 districts of the country from February 2006. In April 2007,

additional 130 districts were included under phase II, bringing the total districts under the scheme to 330 districts. From April 2008, under phase III, MGNREGA has been extended to all 644 rural districts in the country^{iv}.

The State of Jammu and Kashmir is one of the largest States of India. Jammu and Kashmir presently comprises of three divisions namely, Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, and has 22 districts. According to 2011 census the State has a population of 125 lakhs. Out of the total population of 125 lakh, 91.35 lakh (72.79 percent) live in rural areas and 34.14 lakh (27.21 percent) live in urban areas as compared to all India level which is 833.1 (68.8 percent) in rural areas and 377.1 (31.2 percent) in urban areas^v. Jammu and Kashmir like other States of the country is predominantly an agrarian State with nearly 75 percent of the population residing in the rural areas and is directly or indirectly linked with this sector for the livelihood^{vi}. Rural J&K hosts more than 70 percent of the total population, out of which 26.14 percent is below the poverty line (BPL), which in average terms means that out of every four persons, one belongs to the BPL category^{vii}. Thus, there was obvious need of the programme like NREGA in Jammu and Kashmir in order to reduce the poverty level and increase the purchasing power of the rural poor.

Recognising this need the MGNREGA was extended to three backward districts (Doda, Kupwara and Poonch) during the first phase in 2006, and was later extended to two more districts (Anantnag and Jammu) during the second phase, and finally to the entire State during the third phase in 2008-09^{viii}. Initially the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was not fully applicable in the State until 2007^{ix}. This was because of the State's special constitutional status, which does not allow the direct extension of any central Act, unless asked for and approved by the state government. Until April 2007, when the Act was formally extended to the State, the implementation was carried out under the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme^x.

2. Review of Literature

After the scheme was launched by GoI in 2005 and subsequently implemented by the department of rural development, different scholars, writers have extensively written on the different aspects of the programme. Some studies have focussed on the employment guarantee and crisis response and have argued that NREGA can be used as a crisis response like economic crisis and sudden natural and man-made disaster^{xi}. Some scholars have focussed on the implementation of the Act and have highlighted the gap between fund utilization and fund allocation, and argued that NREGA scheme has not been able to provide the employment that one would have expected in poor states^{xii}. Studies done have also focussed on the progress of the scheme after it has been launched and have come up with the reports that some backward states have done better than several of the progressive ones. They further wrote that NREGA has impacted the poor. A large number of unlettered households have made the effort to come forward to register themselves under the scheme. The scheme has somehow reduced the problem of migration in villages^{xiii}.

Although, a lot of literature has been published on MGNREGA in the form of books, Journals, articles and working papers by different non-governmental organisations, research institutes, government agencies and by individual efforts at National and International level, there is dearth of material related to the progress and performance of the scheme as far as Jammu and Kashmir is concerned. At the national level different books and other published material can be seen but they only provide the passing reference as far as the State is concerned. Some individual researchers and few government institutions have worked on the scheme in the State. One of the research argue that research on the implementation of the scheme across India has bypassed Kashmir and what little analysis there is, is limited to official statistics. It further explains that a comprehensive understanding of the outcomes of such schemes depends on the analysis of ground level data rather than official figures alone^{xiv}. Another study done by the National Institute of Rural development Hyderabad on the scheme in 2010 examined the direction and effectiveness of the process of planning and implementation of NREGS, and argued that NREGS is highly relevant for the State because of the rising soil degradation and low level of water conservation. The study highlighted the main issue that high market wages and preference for less arduous work by the local workers will reduce the demand of employment in the future in Jammu and Kashmir^{xv}.

3. Objectives of the Study

The study will focus on the following issues:

1. Highlight the essential features of the scheme.
2. Analyse the physical and financial performance of MGNREGA in Jammu and Kashmir.
3. Analyse the performance of MGNREGA in generation of rural employment in Jammu & Kashmir.
4. Analyse the problems in implementation of the scheme at the grass root level.
5. Provide suggestions for the effective implementation of the scheme in the State.

4. Methodology

The methodology applied in the study is historic-analytical. The historical method is used to trace the historical records and information related to the study while, analytical method is applied to analyse the facts pertaining to the study. The data has been collected through secondary sources like journals, books, articles written on the subject. The official website of the J&K Rural Development Department and also the website of the Union ministry of rural development and official website of MGNREGA has been used to get the information related the scheme.

4.1. Hypothesis

1. MGNREGA has not proved beneficial in providing rural employment in Jammu and Kashmir.
2. Performance of MGNREGA is far from satisfactory in the State of Jammu and Kashmir

4.2. Important Features of the Scheme

- MGNREGA is open to all rural households who are in need of wage employment and desire to do unskilled manual work in and around their village.
- A job card is necessary for demanding employment under the scheme.
- The scheme is demand driven, addresses the needs and concerns of those areas where public volunteers do unskilled work after obtaining job card in 100 days.
- Work site facilities including safe drinking water, shade for children, first aid box is provided to the labourers. Further, if more than five children below six years are present a person should be engaged to look after them.
- The scheme envisages entitlement of 100 days guaranteed employment in a financial year to a household registered under the scheme
- The programme is being implemented as a centrally sponsored scheme on cost sharing basis between centre and states on the basis of 90:10 respectively
- The scheme has the provision of the unemployment allowance if the employment seekers are not provided employment within 15 days of the receipt of their application seeking employment.
- Work is provided within 5 Km of applicant’s residence. If employment is provided beyond 5 Km radius of the applicant’s residence then he/she is entitled to 10% additional wages towards transport and living expenses.
- Labourers are entitled to the statutory minimum wages for agriculture labourers in the state until the central government notifies a minimum wage rate, in any case wages shall not be less than Rs.60 per day.
- Wages of the labourers is to be paid every week or in any case, not later than a fortnight after the date on which such work was done.

5. Results and Discussion

MGNREGA provides for the enhancement of livelihood security and generate employment opportunities of the households in the rural areas of the country by providing at least one hundred days of employment to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. Table 1 below depicts that there is large variation between the households issued job cards and the households who actually were provided employment in the state during the time period. Since 2008 up to the year 2013-14, the scheme could provide employment to 2744879 households as against 5169902 job cards. Thus, 53.09 percent of the total job card holders in the State were provided employment. The table clearly depicts that the employment generation increased from 40.04 percent from the year 2008-09 to 66.80 percent up to the year 2012-13 but showed drastic decrease of 30.15 percent during the year 2013-14. On the other hand job cards issued to households increased from 498022 lakh to 1082897 lakh from the year 2008-09 up to 2013-14. The study reveals that there is almost 50 percent gap between the job cards issued and employment provided to households.

Year	Households provide Employment	Households issued Job cards
2008-09	199445	498022
2009-10	357598	670841
2010-11	469735	832553
2011-12	671764	1008034
2012-13	719817	1077555
2013-14	326520	1082897
Total	2744879	5169902

Table 1: Employment provided and job cards issued to the households
Source: Rural Development Department Jammu & Kashmir

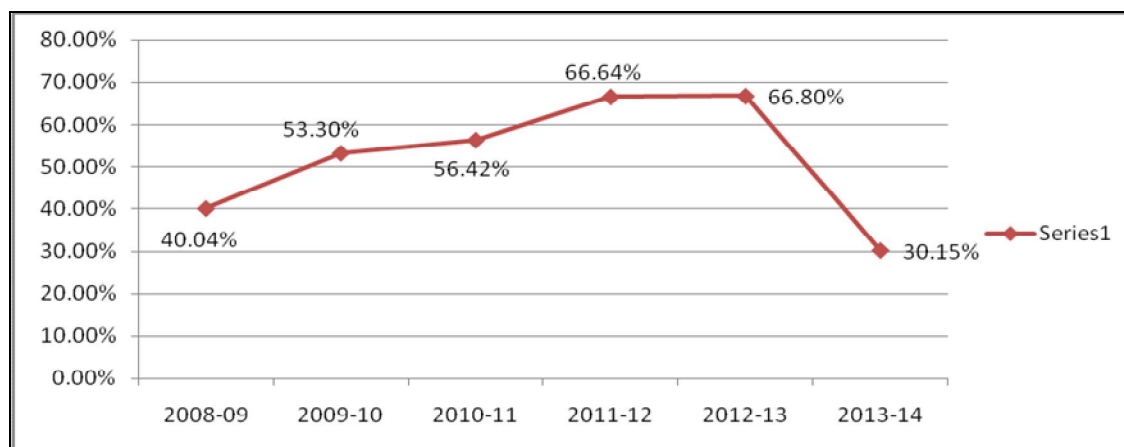


Figure 1: Percentage of Households Provided employment from the year 2008-09 up to 2013-14

During the time period 2008-09 to 2013-14, the scheme could generate 1349.246 lakh man-days in the State by spending 2680.49 crore as against availability of Rs 3090.47 crore. The total expenditure during the time period in the State was 86.73 percent. Table 2 clearly shows that the expenditure of the funds has increased from 59.30 percent to 94.32 percent from the year 2008-09 up to 2012-13, and has decreased up to 77.49 percent during the year 2103-14. The highest expenditure, 94.47 percent, took place in the year 2009-10, and lowest, 59.30 percent, during the year 2008-09. The availability of the funds in the state also shows increase from the year 2008-09 to the year 2012-13 and the allocation has shown downward trend during the year 2013-14. The availability of funds has been almost doubled in 2011-12 (904.38 crore) as compared to the year 2010-11 (424.84 crore). As per the expenditure the State has shown satisfactory results except for the year 2008-09 when the scheme in the State was in initial stage and the awareness among the people regarding the features of the scheme was not good. The table further reveals that man-days generated in the state has also increased from 79.25 lakh (5.87 percent) to 415.91 lakh (30.82 percent) during the year 2008-09 to 2012-13, and has decreased back to 134.79 lakh (9.99 percent) which is about the same number of man days generated during the year 2009-10. The highest number of man-days generated 415.91 lakh (30.82 percent) was during the year 2012-13 and lowest 79.25 lakh (5.87 percent) during the year 2008-09. The table reveals that the employment generation in the State has not shown positive results so far, and state needs lot of affords to increase the employment generation.

Year	Funds Available (in crore)	Expenditure (in crore)	Man-days of employment generated (in lakhs)
2008-09	146.52	86.89	79.25
2009-10	208.97	197.42	131.81
2010-11	424.84	378.29	203.00
2011-12	904.38	776.71	384.48
2012-13	901.81	850.64	415.91
2013-14	503.95	390.54	134.796
Total	3,090.47	2,680.49	1,349.246

Table 2: Financial performance and man days generated in the state from year 2008-09 up to year 2013-14

Source: Rural Development Department J&

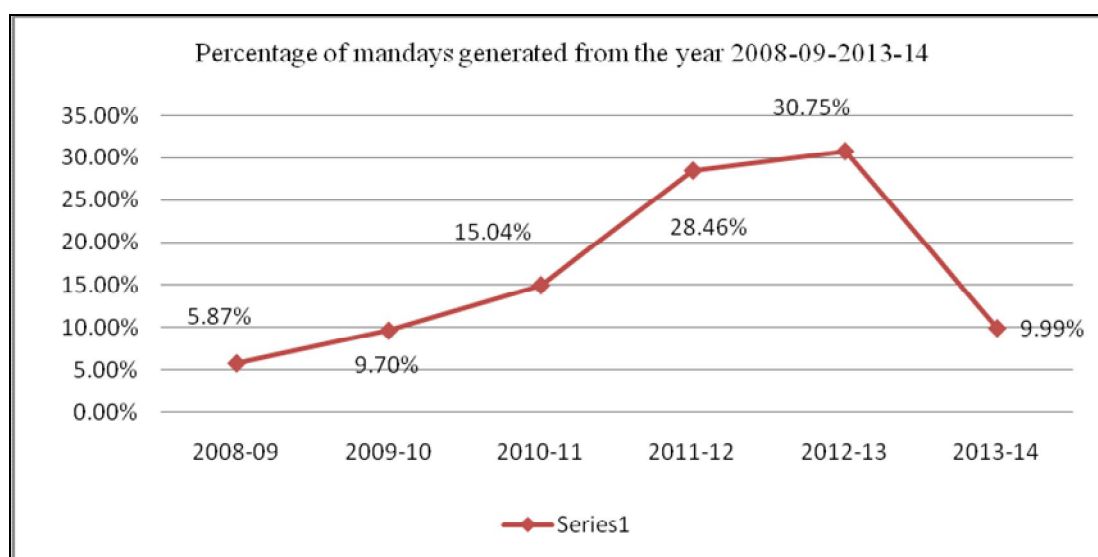


Figure 2: Percentage of man days out of total man-days generated from the year 2008-09 up to year 2013-14.

MGNREGA envisages fixing priorities of activities while providing a basic employment guarantee in rural areas. MGNREGA, besides providing employment to the poor unskilled manual labourers of the society, was launched to improve the rural infrastructure like roads, bridges canals etc. It mainly focuses on improving the availability of resources and conserving them. As far as the State of Jammu and Kashmir is concerned, the Department of Rural Development has taken up 4,03,192 works during the time period out of which 2,62,324 (65.06 percent) works related to development of roads, bridges, canals and preservation of water bodies and levelling of agricultural fields were completed (table 3). Highest number of works i.e. 1,31,198 (76.57 percent) were taken up during the year 2012-13 whereas, lowest number of works i.e.13,045 (50.66) were taken during the year 2008-09. Highest numbers of works 76.57 percent were completed during the year 2012-13 and lowest 50.66 percent in the year 2013-14. The table depicts that during the year 2008-09 to 2011-12 the target of completed works has never crossed 65 percent mark and only during the year 2012-13 75 percent works were completed which again went down to 50.6 percent during the year 2013-14. This table below reveals that except the year 2012-13 there is wide gap between the works taken and works completed in the State.

Year	Works taken up	Works completed
2008-09	13,045	7,168
2009-10	30,239	18,892
2010-11	55,918	35,102
2011-12	97,452	62,546
2012-13	1,31,198	1,00,470
2013-14	75,286	38,146
Total	4,03,192	2,62,324

Table 3: Works taken up and completed during the time period
Source: Rural Development Department J&K

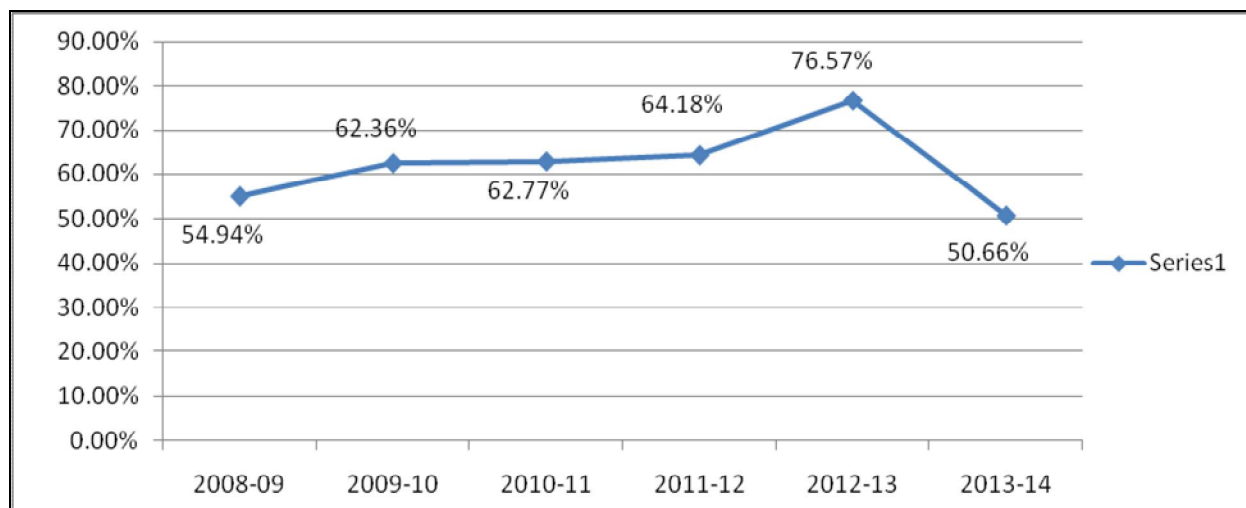


Figure 3: Percentage of works completed from the year 2008-09 to 2013-14

The implementation of NREGS involves considerable organizational responsibilities at District, Block and Gram Panchayat level. The Act makes it mandatory for the State governments to make available to the District Programme Coordinator and the programme officer staff and technical support as may be necessary for the effective implementation of the scheme. There must also be a supportive staff in the key functional areas like Works, Information Technology (IT) and Accounts^{xvi}. In Jammu and Kashmir the total posts to be created for the effective implementation of the scheme was 5,472 out of which 3,208 (58 percent) posts were fulfilled so far (Table 4). The table reveals that department has not appointed the supportive staff especially programme Officers and Gram Rozgar Sahayaks for the implementation of the scheme. Out of 143 posts of Programme Officers only 77 posts have been filled so far. Similarly, out of 4,128 Gram Rozgar Sahayaks only 2,044 posts were filled. Both of these posts are seen important at the Block and Gram Panchayat level for the effective implementation of the scheme. From the Statistics below it can be clearly seen that there is lack of supporting staff for the implementation of the scheme which could be the reason for the slow progress of the scheme in the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

Sl. No	Name of Post	Total Posts	Posts filled
1	Programme officer	143	77
2	Technical Assistant	827	727
3	Social Audit Coordinators	22	18
4	Gram Rozgar Sahayaks	4,128	2,044
5	Computer/MIS Operator	330	330
6	Data Entry Operator for Social Audit	22	12
7	Total	5,472	3,208

Table 4: Supporting Staff engaged under MGNREGA

5.1. Major Findings of the Study

- The study highlights that from the year 2008-09 the scheme provided employment to 27,44,879 households and has issued 51,69,902 job cards to the households. Thus, the scheme could provide employment to 53.09 percent job card holders. This shows the vast gap between the job cards issued and employment provided to households during the time period. The employment generation increased from 40.04 percent to 66.80 percent from the year 2008-09 to 2012-13, but decreased to 30.15 percent during the year 2013-14.

- During the time period, the scheme could generate 1,349.246 lakh man-days in the State by spending 2,680.49 crore as against Rs 3,090.47 crore funds available. The total expenditure during the period was 86.73 percent. The man-days generated in the State has also increased from 79.25 lakh (5.87 percent) to 415.91 lakh (30.82 percent) during the year 2008-09 to the year 2012-13, and has decreased to 134.79 lakh (9.99 percent) in the year 2013-14. The table reveals the employment generation in the state has not shown positive results so far and state needs lot of efforts to increase the employment generation
- The State of Jammu and Kashmir has taken up 4, 03,192 works during the time period out of which 2,62,324 (65.06 percent) works were completed. Further the target of completed works has never crossed 65 percent mark and only during the year 2012-13 the 75 percent works were completed. Study reveals that there is wide gap between the works taken and works completed in the State.
- The State has created 5,472 posts of supportive staff for the effective implementation of the scheme out of which 3,208 (58 percent) posts were fulfilled so far. Out of 143 posts of Programme Officers only 77 posts has been filled. Similarly, out of 4,128 Gram Rozgar Sahayaks only 2,044 posts were filled. The study reveals that department has not appointed the supportive staff especially Programme Officers and Gram Rozgar Sahayaks. The above made analysis of the scheme hence reveals that the scheme has shown slow progress so far in Jammu and Kashmir.

5.2. Suggestions

- Awareness camps should be held in the villages in relation to different provisions of the MGNREGA scheme so that participation of the unskilled manual labourers can be enhanced. The help of print and electronic media can be sought to spread awareness
- The department should conduct social audits regularly in order to bring transparency and accountability in the scheme.
- A timeframe should be maintained in order to make sure that works taken up must be completed on stipulated time period without delay
- Department must recruit the supportive staff without further delay so that proper implementation of the scheme can take place at the different levels.
- Local Self Government institutions should be made powerful and effective powers must be devolved to them so that scheme can be implemented properly at the grass root level.
- A separate training programme must be organised for Sarpanchs and Panches in order to make them aware about the scheme.
- Government must fill the supportive staff like Programme Officers, Gram Rozgar Sahayaks, Technical Assistants and Social Audit Coordinators for the effective implementation of the Scheme in the State.

6. Conclusion

MGNREGS is a rights-based social protection programme of the Government of India. In the past, employment programmes in India targeted at the poor were generally identified with poverty alleviation. MGNREGA goes beyond poverty alleviation and recognizes employment as a legal right. With its legal framework and rights-based approach, MGNREGA provides employment to those who demand it and is a paradigm shift from earlier programmes. MGNREGA aims at enhancing livelihood security by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. However, the performance of the Scheme in Jammu and Kashmir is not good. The scheme is not able to generate employment the way it was ought to generate. There is a huge gap between the job cards and the actual number of days of employment provided to households. There exists a big gap between the works taken up and the works completed during the time period. Maximum number of works taken up has not been completed in the State. The State lacks effective supportive staff for the proper implementation of the scheme. Therefore, need of the hour is to remove the loopholes especially in the implementation of the scheme and also accountability and transparency must be taken care of so that scheme can achieve the goals for which it has been launched.

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