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MGNREGA: A New Hope to Reduce Rural Poverty

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Abstract:

India is mainly an agricultural country in which the strength of rural unskilled labour is very high and majority of the rural poor depends mainly on the wages they earn through unskilled, casual, and manual labour. The main significance of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is to improve the livelihood conditions of the rural poor by providing 100 days of employment to any rural household whose adult members are willing to do unskilled manual work. The Act provides an opportunity to work in the lean season, which helps rural poor to maintain the consumption level and strengthen the livelihood resource base during this critical time period. Only the growth of economy cannot create social justice and balanced development unless, it is attached with poverty alleviation and employment generating opportunities for deprived and marginalised section of the society. Thus, a study on MGNREGA as a hope to reduce rural poverty has been taken in the village Shanoo of district kupwara of state Jammu and Kashmir.

Keywords: MGNREGA, Unskilled labour, Rural Livelihood, Poverty etc.

1. Introduction

In India majority of the poor in rural areas depends mainly on the wages they earn through unskilled, casual, manual labour. Inadequate labour demand or unpredictable crises that may be general in nature, like natural disaster or personal like ill-health all adversely impact their employment opportunities. For many years, both in developed as well as in developing countries in a context of poverty and unemployment, workfare programmes have been an important interventions. These programmes typically provide unskilled manual workers with short term employment on public works such as, irrigation infrastructure, reforestation, soil conservation and road construction, etc. The workfare programmes like National Food for Work Programme (NFFWP) etc. provide income transfers to poor households during critical times and also enable consumption smoothing, especially during Food for Work Programme (FWP), National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP), Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY), Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS), Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY) and slack agricultural seasons or years. In countries with high unemployment rates, transfer benefits from workfare programmes can prevent poverty from worsening, particularly during lean periods. Based on the experience of these workfare programmes the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) comes into existence to reinforce the commitment towards livelihood security in rural areas and was notified on 7th September, 2005. MGNREGA creates a right based framework for wage employment programmes and makes the Government legally accountable for providing employment to those who ask for it. The objective of the MGNREGA is to create durable assets, and strengthen the livelihood resource base of the rural poor. The choice of works suggested in the Act address causes of chronic poverty like drought, deforestation, soil erosion, etc. so that the process of employment generation is maintained on a sustainable basis.

MGNREGA is applicable to areas notified by the Central Government that guaranteed 100 days wage employment in a year to every rural household. Government of India has renamed the NREGA as MGNREGA on 2nd October 2009. On 2, Feb, 2006 it was launched in 200 select districts and was extended to 130 additional districts during 2007-2008. Poverty is one of the main and important issue that determine a condition in which a person feeling unsatisfied towards the fundamental needs of daily life as food, clothes, shelter etc. Only the growth of economy cannot create social justice and balanced development unless it is attached with poverty alleviation and employment generating opportunities for deprived and marginalised section of the society. The survey, conducted by the State during 2007-2008 places the BPL population at 21.63 percent. A large no. of poverty alleviation programmes are in operation in the State Jammu and Kashmir mostly with central assistance. Among which the MGNREGA is an important one

because of its imperative features, great consequences and covering magnitude. The Act extended to the state Jammu and Kashmir in 2007 and the implementation of MGNREGA has been done phase wise. In the first phase, three districts, viz. Poonch, Doda and Kupwara were brought within the ambit of this Scheme which has been extended to the districts of Anantnag and Jammu during phase II and later it was notified for the extension in the remaining Districts with effect from April 2008 under phase III. Through this research paper the researcher will attempt to highlight the role of MGNREGA to alleviate the rural poverty in the study area.

2. Review of Literature

MGNREGA being the largest public welfare program has drawn a lot of attention of the leading economists, sociologists and other Scholars. So it is necessary to look at some of the findings and recommendations of the leading experts in this field. Sarkar, Kumar (2011) examine the impact of MGNREGA on reducing rural poverty and improving socioeconomic status of rural poor and found that in the initial year of implementation (2007-08) of MGNREGA in the study area, 43.9 per cent beneficiary households were in poor socioeconomic conditions which have gradually improved in the succeeding years and decreased to 32.9 per cent in 2008-09 and further to 18.3 percent in 2009-10. Kareemulla, Ramasundaram (2013) studied the impact of National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in India on rural poverty and food security. The findings of the study indicated that the seasonal migration of rural labour has come down significantly due to the opportunities of employment provided under the scheme and the wage earnings have been used mainly for meeting the expenses like food, education, health care etc. which indicates that it has helped in bringing down poverty in rural areas.

3. Methodology

The present study is descriptive in nature and is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data is collected from the Shanoo village of Kupwara district of state Jammu and Kashmir with the following objectives. (i) To analyze the socioeconomic conditions of the respondents. (ii) To examine the impact of MGNREGA on the upliftment of the respondents. (iii) To evaluate the role of MGNREGA in reducing the rural poverty and to increase their standard of living.

The village consists of 190 registered families and 223 registered registrants under MGNREGA. Among these 223 registered registrants 217 are males and 6 females. However 11 registrants were deleted, amongst which 3 registrants were expired, 1 nonexistent in panchayat, 4 incorrect jobcards and 3 have some other reasons. Thus the total numbers of registered registrants in the village Shanoo are 212. Out of these 212 registered registrants the researcher selected with the help of Purposive non random Sampling method 50 respondents i.e., (23.5 percent) of the total registered registrants. The responses were elicited with the help of structured interview schedule and observation techniques. A scaling technique has been used in an interview schedule in order to measure the opinion of the respondents regarding the functions, benefits and development of MGNREGA.

4. Results and Discussion

After the end of data collection, the data has been classified, tabulated, and interpreted in simple percentages in a manner to know the initiatives taken by the MGNREGA to reduce the rural poverty in the study area. The detailed analysis, discussion and findings are given below.

4.1. Socio – Economic Conditions of the Respondents

S.No.	Varia	ble	No. of the Respondents	Percentage
1	Educational Status Illiterate		6	12%
		Primary	14	28%
		Secondary	22	44%
		Higher Secondary	8	16%
	Total		50	100

Table 1

From the investigation it is clear that the majority (84%) of the respondents are males, (55%) of the respondents belong to the age group of 30-40 years and agricultural work is their main occupation. Most of the respondents (62%) are having joint family system. Regarding the educational qualification of the respondents the above table shows that the majority (44%) of them are educated up to the eight standard level and (6%) of the respondents are illiterate and rest of them are educated up to primary and higher secondary level

S.No.	Variable		No. of the Respondents	Percentage
1	Monthly Income	2000 - 3000	6	12%
		3000 - 4000	12	24%
		4000 - 5000	21	42%
		5000 - 6000	11	22%
	Total		50	100

Table 2

In the study area, it has been found that most of the respondents (62%) working under MGNREGA are married and belongs to the forward cast. The above table provides the distribution of the respondents based on their monthly income. The table infers that the majority (42%) of the respondents have the monthly income of Rs 4000-5000 and the minority (12%) of the respondents earn income only between Rs 2000-3000 and rest of them earn monthly income of Rs 3000-4000 and 5000-6000 per month. This variation in the monthly income of the respondents depends upon their possession of agricultural land and the availability of work provided by MGNREGA.

S.No.	Variable		No. of the Respondents	Percentage
1	Type of House	Concrete	13	26%
		Kachha	37	74%
	Total		50	100

Table 3

Table 3 clearly states the infrastructure facilities, majority (74%) of the respondents live in the kachha houses which are constructed by mud and soft bricks and rest of them are living in the concrete houses which are constructed by cement and solid bricks. However during the investigation no family were found in thatched houses.

S.No.	Facilities				Facilities	
	Drinking W	ater	Percentage	Toilet		Percentage
1	Available	24	48%	Available	13	26%
2	Not Available	26	52%	Not Available	37	74%
	Total	50	100		50	100

Table 4

The above Table 4 shows the facilities available at home. It has been found that the electricity is available at the respondent's home. However there is lack of drainage system in the village. The table reveals that the majority (52%) of the respondents have not drinking water facility inside their home and the rest are using the common tape for the purpose of drinking water. The table also states that the majority (74%) of the respondents are lacking the toilet facility and the rest are using the traditional latrine for the purpose of excretion.

4.2. MGNREGA Improved the Life Standard of the Rural Poor

S.No.	Life Standard	No. of the Respondents	Percentage
1	Improved	32	64%
2	Not Improved	18	36%
	Total	50	100

Table 5

Table 5 indicates the perception of the respondents regarding their life standard while working under MGNREGA. The table clearly depicts that the majority (64%) of the respondents are of the opinion that their standard of life improved by working under MGNREGA as they are enjoying the respect among the family members and in the community as well, because of their work. The rest percentage of the respondents are of opposite opinion, they think that MGNREGA failed to improve their life standard as the Act is providing low wages which are not sufficient to live a life in comfort.

4.3. Perception Regarding the Benefits of MGNREGA

S.No.	Benefits				Benefits	
	Socially		Percentage	Economically		Percentage
1	Benefited	28	56%	Benefited	33	66%
2	Not Benefited	22	44%	Not Benefited	17	34%
	Total	50	100		50	100

Table 6

Table 6 illustrates the opinion of the respondents concerning with the social and economic benefits of MGNREGA. As per the social benefits majority (56%) of the respondents are of the opinion that MGNREGA benefits them socially as they are enjoying the social respect because of their work and the rest number of the respondents are of different opinion. On the other hand most of the respondents (66%) believed that MGNREGA benefits them economically, they thought that the act is providing them assurance of

work while other work facilities are unavailable. There is availability of work in lean season also in which the labourers, mostly unskilled labourers suffer a lot and the rest percentages of the respondents are of opposite opinion.

4.4. MGNREGA Functioning to Eradicate Rural Poverty

S.No.	Rural Poverty	No. of the Respondents	Percentage
1	Helped to eradicate Rural Poverty	29	58%
2	Not helped to eradicate Rural Poverty	21	42%
	Total	50	100

Table 7

From the above table it could be seen that a good number of the respondents (58%) accept that the MGNREGA is functioning for the eradication of rural poverty and it curbs the poverty to some extent as per the past worrying life are concerned. While the rest percentage of the respondents is of the opinion that MGNREGA provides only 100 days of work in a year which are not sufficient for a rural poor to come out from the curse of poverty.

4.5. Developmental Activities Done by MGNREGA

S.No.	Development	No. of the Respondents	Percentage
1	Asset Creation	16	32%
2	Employment Generation	34	68%
	Total	50	100

Table 8

Table 8 reveals the developmental activities done by MGNREGA. The table describes that the majority (68%) of the respondents believe that MGNREGA remain successful in employment generation activity in the area and the less percentage of the respondents are of the view that MGNREGA works for the development of assets.

5. Findings

From the investigation it is clearly evident that the majority (84%) are male respondents and (44%) are educated up to secondary level. Most (74%) of the respondents live in the kachha houses constructed in mud and soft bricks, (62%) belongs to the joint family system. All the respondents are having electricity facility but lacking the drainage system. Majority (74%) are not having toilet facility and (52%) do not have drinking water facility inside their houses for which they are using traditional latrine and common tape in the village which results in the unhygienic health conditions.

The great part (76%) believe that their economic conditions remain good to some extent after working under MGNREGA and the majority (72%) have the perception that MGNREGA works for the betterment of the rural people as there is equality in the availability of work and wages and they are also satisfied by the facilities provided by MGNREGA for their safety. Further (64%) believed that MGNREGA helps to improve their life standard and (56%) believe that MGNREGA benefits them socially as they are enjoying good respect in family as well as in community. Majority (66%) are of the opinion that the Act benefits economically. In terms of functioning of MGNREGA mainly (58%) believes that the Act is working for the eradication of rural poverty and generally (68%) are of the opinion that the Act is functioning to create employment among the rural poor people.

6. Conclusion

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is an innovative welfare programme in order to enhance the rural livelihood. MGNREGA plays a key role in order to reduce the poverty of rural poor people as it increases the social respect, purchasing power, and decreases the bargaining of moneylenders and landlords. On the other hand it develops the social and economic infrastructure by providing the employment opportunity and development of Asset creation. The work opportunity provided by MGNREGA in a lean season without any discrimination helps to reduce the migration which ultimately declines the level of rural poverty. In this way MGNREGA has gradually raised the standard of rural livelihood as it provides the proper wage disbursement and genuine wok facilities.

In addition the Act is working for the betterment of rural poor and there is a good perception among the people regarding the performance of MGNREGA. But the function and success of MGNREGA mainly depends upon the people who are engaged with it therefore, the influence of government officials at block level must be controlled and the implementation process should be processed as per the objectives of MGNREGA.

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