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Socio-economic Impact of Implementation of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in India

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Introduction

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005 which is a rights-based flagship scheme of the Government of India with effect from 2 February, 2006, guarantees at least 100 days of wage employment in a given financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The MGNREGA is also intended to create durable community assets which would enhance productivity along with an increase in demand for labour. The Act mandates 33 per cent participation of women. It provides disincentive for underperforming states, as an unemployment allowance has to be paid by the state government if work is not provided within 15 days of demand. Also an accountability of the delivery system has been built in through social audit. However, the key question is whether various provisions of the Act are being implemented properly for the desired impact. The present study attempts to analyse the impact of the implementation of MGNREGA in the past four to five years and also to identify the critical gaps and challenges.

Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Examine the impact of MGNREGA on employment, wage rates of rural labourers, out-migration, community assets, overall processes of rural transformation, including empowerment of marginalised social groups such as scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, women, etc.

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2. Find out the nature and extent of positive and negative effects (if any) of MGNREGA on agriculture, especially crop productivity and costs of production due to rise in agricultural wages, if any.
3. Identify the key challenges in the implementation of MGNREGA and suggest appropriate measures for improvement.

Methodology

The study is based on collection and analysis of both secondary and primary data. While the analysis of secondary data covered the entire country, the primary data were collected from 23 selected districts in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal in the year 2010–11. The districts were chosen from among the 200 backward districts which were selected for implementation of MGNREGA in 2006–07 so that the impact of implementation could be observed over at least three to four years. The districts were selected purposively, keeping in view their representativeness mainly in terms of Naxalism, agricultural development and Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST) population. Most of the districts selected for this study were in the Maoist-affected areas. These include Adilabad, Khammam, Gaya, East Singhbhum, Bastar, Dhamtari, Malkangiri, Sonbhadra, Gondia and Balaghat. Of the remaining districts, Dang, Chitradurga, Kalahandi and Banskura were tribal-dominated and Cuddapah, Lalitpur and Bankura were SC-dominated. All these areas were poverty stricken, underdeveloped and prone to extremism.

In each of the selected areas, the following exercises were carried out:

1. A survey of minimum 60 households in each block, covering a village or cluster of villages. Only those villages were selected where a minimum of 20 beneficiaries were available and most of them had worked for at least three to four years. The overall sample household was 2200.
2. A survey of officials and Panchayat functionaries to find out the constraints faced by them in implementing the MGNREGA. These involved structured interviews with officials of the district administration, block administration as well as elected Panchayat-level administration. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed.

Access to Employment

According to official statistics, the number of rural households which were provided employment under MGNREGA progressively increased over time from 21.02 million in 2006–07 to 33.91 million in 2007–08, 45.12 million in 2008–09 and 52.59 million in 2009. In 2010–11 (up to 2 December), the number of

Social Change, 41, 3 (2011): 445–471

households covered by MGNREGA stood at 37.06 million. In 2009–10, when agricultural output and employment suffered heavily due to severe drought in various parts of the country, it was MGNREGA which provided relief to a vast number of rural labour households in the country. In terms of geographical distribution, the states of Rajasthan (6.52 million), Andhra Pradesh (6.16 million), Uttar Pradesh (5.48 million), Madhya Pradesh (4.71 million), Tamil Nadu (4.37 million), Bihar (4.13 million), Karnataka (3.53 million) and West Bengal (3.48 million) together shared nearly 73 per cent of the total number of beneficiary households (Table 1).

It may be seen from Table 1 that the percentage of rural households benefitting from MGNREGA was very low in the states of Haryana (6.4 per cent), Maharashtra (5.4 per cent), Punjab (9.8 per cent), Goa (4.7 per cent) and Dadra and Nagar Haveli (11.4 per cent). The states of Rajasthan (91.1 per cent), Chhattisgarh (60.3 per cent), Andhra Pradesh (48.6 per cent) and the north-eastern states of Tripura, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland (100 per cent) had relatively better coverage than all other regions. According to the official record, nearly 99 per cent of all rural households who demanded employment were provided employment during 2008–09 to 2010–11. It was only in a few states such as Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Karnataka, Manipur, Meghalaya, Orissa, Sikkim and Uttar Pradesh that there were gaps between demand for and supply of work. However, one does not know how accurate these estimates are, as the demand for work is likely to be underestimated for various reasons in most places. It was also observed in the field that the delivery system did not often give information to the workers, as it had the commitment to provide unemployment allowance in case it failed to provide work on demand. It would be further seen from Table 1 that the average person days of employment per household in a year ranged between 24.91 in Arunachal Pradesh to 94.57 in Mizoram in the year 2009–10. It was above 50 days in Mizoram (94.57), Nagaland (87.40), Sikkim (79.92), Tripura (79.83), Manipur (73.15), Rajasthan (68.97), Andhra Pradesh (65.67), Uttar Pradesh (64.91), Himachal Pradesh (57.29), Karnataka (56.67), Madhya Pradesh (55.66), Tamil Nadu (54.67) and Chhattisgarh (51.41).

Table 1 further shows that as many as 69 per cent districts in the country reported that less than 10 per cent households could avail 100 days of employment under MGNREGA. In several states, including West Bengal, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Orissa, Punjab and Uttarakhand, 70 to 100 per cent districts belonged to the category where less than 10 per cent households had availed 100 days of employment under MGNREGA. It was only in 6 per cent districts in the country where a little above 30 per cent households had availed of 100 days of employment under MGNREGA. It would not be out of place to mention here that many of the districts having a low proportion of households availing 100 days of employment were economically backward and had a high incidence of poverty.

Table 1. Number and per cent of rural households provided employment under MGNREGA

States	No. of Households provided employment (in millions)		Percentage of households provided employment		Average person days per house-hold		Less than 10 per cent households availed 100 days of employment		Above 30 per cent households availed 100 days of employment	
	2009-10		2009-10		2009-10		2009-10		2009-10	
Andhra Pradesh	6.16	48.58	65.67	13.64	22.73					
Arunachal Pradesh	0.07	41.43	24.91	93.75	6.25					
Assam	2.14	50.64	34.29	88.89	7.41					
Bihar	4.13	32.60	27.55	84.21	0.00					
Gujarat	1.60	27.12	36.65	76.92	0.00					
Haryana	0.16	6.37	37.74	90.48	0.00					
Himachal Pradesh	0.50	45.31	57.29	75.00	0.00					
Jammu and Kashmir	0.34	28.93	38.30	86.36	0.00					
Karnataka	3.54	52.96	56.67	73.33	0.00					
Kerala	0.96	19.34	35.54	85.71	3.33					
Madhya Pradesh	4.72	58.03	55.66	70.00	6.00					
Maharashtra	0.59	5.38	46.38	81.82	0.00					
Punjab	0.27	9.80	28.37	95.00	0.00					
Rajasthan	6.52	91.11	68.97	27.27	24.24					
Sikkim	0.05	59.04	79.92	0.00	25.00					
Tamil Nadu	4.37	52.85	54.67	16.13	6.45					
Tripura	0.58	106.82	79.83	0.00	50.00					

Uttar Pradesh	5.48	26.63	64.91	45.07	9.86
West Bengal	3.48	31.18	44.59	100.00	0.00
Chhattisgarh	2.03	60.31	51.41	83.33	0.00
Jharkhand	1.70	44.78	49.48	83.33	0.00
Uttarakhand	0.52	43.67	34.92	92.31	0.00
Manipur	0.42	141.24	73.15	100.00	0.00
Meghalaya	0.30	91.14	49.41	85.71	0.00
Mizoram	0.18	226.99	94.57	87.50	12.50
Nagaland	0.33	122.58	87.40	63.64	36.36
Orissa	1.40	20.62	39.63	93.33	0.00
Puducherry	0.04	55.92	-	-	0.00
Andaman and Nicobar Island	0.02	40.96	-	-	0.00
Lakshadweep	0.01	97.03	-	-	0.00
Chandigarh	NA	NA	-	-	0.00
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	0.00	11.41	-	-	0.00
Daman and Diu	NA	NA	-	-	0.00
Goa	0.00	4.69	-	-	0.00
All India	52.61	38.03	52.51	69.33	6.04

Source: Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of India (website).

Also, most of the districts which were selected for the purpose of this study showed a much more depressing picture. Table 2 shows that the average person days of employment per household as per official data was highest in Cuddapah (82.35), followed by Sonbhadra (79.55), Adilabad (78.12), Lalitpur (75.03), Khammam (65.24), Dindigul (61.16), Balaghat (59.41), Chitradurga (57.61), Dhamtari (53.21), Dhenkanal (50.62), Raigarh (45.74), Gumla (45.47), Dang (44.99), Bankura (44.02), East Singhbhum (43.26), West Medinipur (39.33), Gondia (39.11), Malkangiri (37.28), Kalahandi (27.95), Bastar (27.24), and Gaya (14.03). However, based on the data from the villages, it was observed that average person days employed per beneficiary household was higher in some cases and lower in some other cases. On the whole, even the village-level study shows that the access to employment was much lower than the guaranteed level of 100 days in a year. The percentage of rural households availing 100 days of employment in the selected districts in the year 2009–10 was highest in Cuddapah (31.43), followed by Lalitpur (30.36), Adilabad (28.68), Dindigul (28.17), Banswara (26.58), Balaghat (25.29) and Khammam (22.57). In all the remaining selected districts—such as Sonbhadra (15.39), Dang (12.77), Dhamtari (8.47), Gumla (3.95), East Singhbhum (3.82), Chitradurga (3.40), Raigarh (2.88), Khunti (2.69), Bastar (1.58), Gondia (0.91), Dhenkanal (5.68), Kalahandi (1.97), Malkangiri (3.26), Bankura (2.60), Gaya (0.58) and West Medinipur—this was very low. (Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, MGNREGA website). It would be seen from Table 2 that there is not much difference between what the official data and our survey data indicate about access to MGNREGA employment in most cases, although in several places the official figures were either overstated or marginally understated.

It may also be noted in this context that almost all these low-ranking districts are under the influence of Maoists/Extremists. What does it really indicate? Do Maoist activities constrain effective implementation of MGNREGA? Or does the ineffective implementation of MGNREGA and other development schemes in these places result in the growth of Maoism and other forms of extremism? Both could be true in some cases. In several of our study areas where Maoists were active, MGNREGA has proved to be a popular scheme if and when explained to the poor people properly. Unfortunately, there is a gap in communication between the officials and the people and consequently, the MGNREGA remains poorly canvassed and implemented in many such areas. At the same time, it needs to be stressed that lack of development itself promotes Maoism/Extremism in many places.

Table 2 further shows that about 82.5 to 99.2 per cent households in the selected districts had a job card, but no adequate employment. For example, in the Singhbhum district of Jharkhand, 99 per cent households had job cards, but only 3 to 4 per cent households had access to 100 days of MGNREGA employment. Also a significant proportion of the total households in Cuddapah, (55.8), East Singhbhum (98.3 per cent), Khunti (97 per cent), Gumla (96 per cent), Bankura (45 per cent) and West Medinipur (63.3 per cent), had reported that they did not

Table 2. Access to Job Card, Employment and Unemployment Allowance in the Selected Districts

District	% of households having job card	Average Person days of employment				% households receiving 100 days of employment		% households applied for unemployment allowance	% households received unemployment allowance
		Official data		Our survey data		Official data 2009-10	Our survey data 2010-11		
		2009-10	2010-11	2009-10	2010-11				
Cuddapah	92.50	82.3	100.0	31.43	30.58	0.00	0.00	0.00	
Khammam	84.17	65.2	100.0	22.57	20.30	1.67	0.00	0.00	
Adilabad	93.00	78.1	50.0	28.68	25.15	2.30	0.00	0.00	
Gaya	83.33	14.0	45.0	0.58	0.35	0.83	0.00	0.00	
Raigarh	86.67	45.7	51.5	2.88	2.00	0.83	0.00	0.00	
Dhamtari	88.50	53.2	41.7	8.47	6.25	0.83	0.00	0.00	
Bastar	87.00	27.2	43.0	1.58	0.90	1.00	0.00	0.00	
Dang	86.67	45.0	71.7	12.77	11.00	0.83	0.00	0.00	
East Singhbhum	99.17	43.3	41.7	3.82	2.85	0.00	0.00	0.00	
Khunti	85.00	22.4	33.0	2.69	2.00	0.83	2.25	2.25	
Gumla	85.00	45.5	42.3	3.95	2.10	0.83	3.00	3.00	
Chitradurga	83.33	57.6	85.5	3.40	2.65	0.83	5.83	5.83	
Balaghat	94.17	59.4	33.1	25.29	28.50	3.33	0.00	0.00	
Gondia	91.67	39.1	50.4	0.91	1.20	4.17	4.17	4.17	

Table 2. (Continued)

Table 2. (Continued)

District	% of households having job card	Average Person days of employment		% households receiving 100 days of employment		% households applied for unemployment allowance	% households received unemployment allowance
		Official data 2009-10	Our survey data 2010-11	Official data 2009-10	Our survey data 2010-11		
Kalahandi	88.33	27.9	32.1	1.97	2.18	0.83	0.00
Dhenkanal	88.33	49.9	21.7	5.68	4.55	0.83	0.00
Malkangiri	86.67	37.3	7.0	3.26	4.00	0.00	0.00
Banswara	95.00	76.7	16.7	26.58	28.26	3.33	0.00
Dindigul	88.33	61.2	66.2	28.17	26.12	18.33	10.00
Lalitpur	85.00	75.0	58.6	29.97	12.00	3.33	0.83
Sonbhadra	82.50	79.6	62.3	15.39	10.50	0.00	0.00
Bankura	88.33	44.0	21.7	2.60	3.10	0.00	0.00
West Medinipur	86.67	52.0	53.1	1.08	1.50	0.83	0.00

Source: 1. Official data obtained from the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India (website).

2. CSD Survey data for the year 2010-11.

receive a job within 15 days of application. Besides, in most cases, they neither applied for legally entitled unemployment allowance nor did they receive it in case applied.

Contribution of Income under MGNREGA to Total Household Income

Figure 1 shows various sources of income of MGNREGA-beneficiary households. As can be seen from the figure, wage incomes through MGNREGA work constituted as much as 44.25 per cent of total household income in Adilabad (A.P.), 43.18 per cent in Khammam (A.P.), 36.52 per cent in Sonbhadra (U.P.), 28.28 per cent in Dang (Gujarat), 24.85 per cent in Cuddapah (A.P.), 23.7 per cent in Lalitpur (U.P.), 21.23 per cent in Gaya (Bihar), 18.5 per cent in East Singhbhum (Jharkhand), 15.13 per cent in Chitradurga (Karnataka), 14.61 per cent in West Medinipur (West Bengal) and 10.89 per cent in Banswara (Rajasthan). In the remaining districts, it was in the range of 1 to 7 per cent. In several places, the share of MGNREGA income was higher than that of traditional agricultural and non-agricultural wage incomes considered individually. These districts include Khammam (A.P.), Lalitpur (U.P.) and Sonbhadra (U.P.).

Investment Priorities and Asset Creation

According to the official guidelines, water conservation, water harvesting, drought proofing, irrigation, renovation of traditional water bodies, land development,

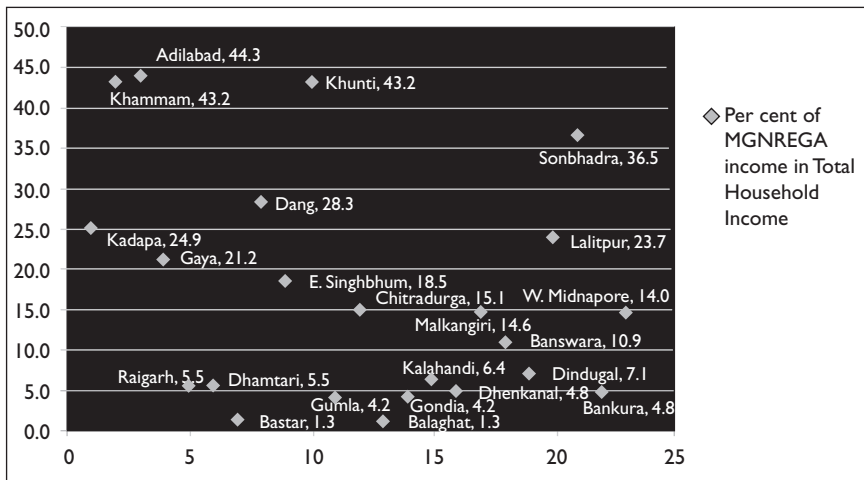


Figure 1. I-Per cent of MGNREGA income to Total

flood control and drainage improvement and rural connectivity would be the focus in order of priority. The data for the years from 2008–09 to 2010–11 reveal that about 35.8 per cent of the total MGNREGA expenditure was on rural connectivity, followed by water conservation and water harvesting (23.7 per cent), renovation of traditional water bodies (12.6 per cent) and land development (7.05 per cent), respectively (Table 3). Irrigation canals accounted for only about 5 per cent of the total expenditure. However, it varied from state to state. The states where water conservation and water harvesting had the highest share in total expenditure include Jharkhand (40.1 per cent), Madhya Pradesh (39.0 per cent), Maharashtra (37.9 per cent) and Gujarat (36.1 per cent). The states of Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Punjab and Puducherry rightly spent a sizable proportion of total expenditure on renovation of traditional water bodies as these states were once rich in water bodies which showed signs of decline over time. In fact, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Punjab put highest priority on renovation of traditional water bodies. The states of Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal which witness floods frequently hardly spent much on flood control and drainage improvement, while this was one of the priority areas for MGNREGA work in Kerala, Uttarakhand and Goa.

The states of Karnataka, Mizoram and Sikkim spent about 9 to 29 per cent of the total fund on drought proofing. Irrigation facilities to SC/ST/Indira Awas Yojana (IAY)/Land Reform (LR) beneficiaries accounted for a significant amount of total expenditure only in Madhya Pradesh (11.1 per cent), Gujarat (9.9 per cent) and Karnataka (5.6 per cent). In the remaining states, it was more or less negligible. The result of our field survey also indicated that renovation of tanks, irrigation and land development formed priorities in most places.

Impact on Agriculture

The activities being undertaken under MGNREGA such as (a) water conservation and water harvesting; (b) drought proofing (including afforestation and tree plantation); (c) irrigation; (d) provision of horticulture plantation and land development facilities on the land owned by households belonging to SC and ST or Below Poverty Line (BPL) families of beneficiaries of land reforms, Indira Awas Yojana or that of the small and marginal farmers, as defined in the Agriculture Debt Waiver and Debt Relief Scheme, 2008; (e) renovation of traditional water bodies, including desilting of tanks and ponds; (f) flood control and drainage improvement in water logged areas; and (g) rural connectivity, are aimed at improving the resource base of the rural poor for sustainable agriculture and food security. Also the recent expansion of the scope of MGNREGA to include works on the lands of small and marginal farmers is a strategic step towards increasing irrigation potential and drought proofing in rain-fed areas which will reduce soil erosion and loss of organic matter and improve crop yields (Sharma, 2010)¹.

Table 3. Pattern of MGNREGA expenditure (cumulative 2008–09 to 2010–11 up to December 2, 2010)

State	Flood control	Rural connectivity	Water conservation		Renovation of traditional water bodies		Drought proofing	Irrigation canals	Irrigation facilities		Land development	Other works	Rajiv Gandhi Seva Kendra
			and water harvesting	water bodies	(SC/ST/IAY/LR)	(SC/ST/IAY/LR)							
Orissa	0.60	52.22	10.75	19.11	2.36	1.95	3.42	1.03	2.60	5.97			
Rajasthan	1.63	42.17	23.62	12.01	3.54	4.32	4.42	4.77	2.98	0.54			
Chhattisgarh	2.99	40.19	19.01	16.37	4.51	7.26	4.65	4.57	0.46	0.00			
Jharkhand	0.79	39.27	40.14	5.92	2.59	1.05	2.03	4.14	3.50	0.58			
Madhya Pradesh	0.87	33.95	38.98	3.75	5.33	1.03	11.06	3.26	1.77	0.00			
Tripura	1.51	37.68	14.37	2.73	5.49	7.77	0.94	15.11	14.27	0.13			
Maharashtra	0.83	24.47	37.89	21.51	5.19	0.55	1.39	7.24	0.92	0.00			
Gujarat	10.91	25.42	36.14	6.06	5.09	0.92	9.92	2.92	2.52	0.10			
West Bengal	7.16	41.33	21.94	13.03	3.29	4.97	1.42	5.79	1.06	0.01			
Kerala	27.08	4.50	11.84	15.24	3.35	8.77	4.08	24.48	0.65	0.00			
Karnataka	13.62	15.65	19.33	7.70	8.99	11.21	5.59	12.45	5.40	0.05			
Bihar	4.35	52.69	10.26	6.82	9.37	10.18	0.29	4.37	1.66	0.00			
Mizoram	2.94	79.09	1.64	0.05	5.18	0.11	0.06	10.50	0.43	0.00			
Haryana	3.43	33.60	23.22	7.00	5.19	7.22	0.10	11.72	2.66	5.85			
Himachal Pradesh	15.29	44.26	13.18	3.09	0.73	11.26	1.16	8.37	2.64	0.00			
Uttar Pradesh	5.17	41.72	27.89	5.63	3.56	3.29	1.50	5.11	6.12	0.00			
Nagaland	1.48	74.40	5.15	0.18	2.90	6.45	0.15	4.54	4.75	0.00			
Assam	13.29	59.94	5.13	1.85	3.92	3.51	0.17	8.78	3.13	0.28			

Table 3. (Continued)

Table 3. (Continued)

State	Water con- servation and water harvesting			Renovation of traditional water bodies		Drought proofing	Irrigation canals	Irrigation facilities			Rajiv Gandhi Seva Kendra
	Flood control	Rural connec- tivity	Water con- servation and water harvesting	Renovation of traditional water bodies	Irrigation (SC/ST/ IAY/LR)			Land development	Other works		
Uttarakhand	32.34	2.70	28.58	5.07	8.95	13.48	0.49	7.45	0.93	0.00	
Meghalaya	5.74	61.12	17.29	1.48	6.21	2.56	0.03	4.55	0.90	0.12	
Punjab	3.45	33.32	2.11	40.61	3.65	3.54	0.02	9.03	3.23	1.03	
Tamil Nadu	0.67	18.91	20.52	47.48	0.02	12.20	0.11	0.08	0.00	0.00	
Sikkim	14.55	25.08	0.83	0.40	29.34	13.59	0.03	14.99	1.08	0.11	
Manipur	14.34	34.06	9.52	9.38	7.09	13.09	0.00	12.18	0.34	0.00	
Jammu and Kashmir	23.31	39.63	9.02	1.84	0.43	6.87	0.27	17.63	1.00	0.00	
Goa	32.27	32.08	2.26	7.34	0.00	0.39	0.32	25.35	0.00	0.00	
Arunachal Pradesh	23.52	44.24	1.48	0.00	0.27	14.43	0.37	13.84	1.86	0.00	
Lakshadweep	0.17	0.00	19.42	16.03	16.39	0.00	0.00	39.96	8.03	0.00	
Andaman and Nicobar	8.27	23.29	35.65	1.36	0.31	6.64	0.00	24.49	0.00	0.00	
Puducherry	0.00	0.00	0.00	99.04	0.46	0.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	
Daman and Diu	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	
Andhra Pradesh	3.64	20.81	13.24	24.91	3.28	4.97	4.47	24.39	0.28	0.00	
Chandigarh	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	
All India	4.57	35.82	23.70	12.56	4.03	5.00	3.87	7.05	2.97	0.43	

Source: Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India (website).

It was borne out from the discussion with Gram Panchayat Heads in most of the surveyed villages that renovation of ponds/canals using MGNREGA resources helped improve irrigated area which impacted crop yields and income positively. The districts where such an impact could be observed prominently include Cuddapah, Khammam, Raigarh, Dang, Chitradurga, Balaghat, Gondia, Banswara, Sonbhadra, West Medinipur and Bankura. Also implementation of MGNREGA helped improve forests and other natural resources which would indirectly improve environment and livelihood opportunities for the poor. An increase in the forest area was reported in Chitradurga, Kalahandi, Lalitpur, West Medinipur and Bankura, while an increase in common property resources accessible to all was reported in almost all the places, excepting East Singhbhum, Gondia, Kalahandi and Sonbhadra. Besides. In the districts of Khammam, Raigarh, Chitradurga, Balaghat, Kalahandi, Banswara, Dindigul, Lalitpur and Sonbhadra, Gram Panchayat functionaries reported that there was a change in the cropping pattern in favour of crops such as fruits and vegetables, cotton and paddy, which yielded more returns. Also with the implementation of MGNREGA, there has been a substantial increase in the market wage rates of agricultural and non-agricultural labourers. This has been true for both male and female labourers. The increase in the agricultural wage rates could be observed more prominently in Cuddapah, Khammam, Dindigul, Raigarh, Gaya, Chitradurga, Kalahandi, Lalitpur, Sonbhadra, West Medinipur and Bankura in both peak and lean seasons (Table 4).

In most southern districts, the non-agricultural wages of both male and female workers also increased substantially.

In this context, it should be noted that farmers organisations in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu had made a representation to the Union Government saying that implementation of MGNREGA had affected the agricultural sector adversely for two reasons. First, it increased the market wage rates of agricultural labourers which resulted in an increase in the cost of production of various crops; and second, labour availability in the peak agricultural season became scarce, affecting agricultural operations adversely. While this may be true, it should be noted in this regard that in the rain-fed areas, improvement and water availability through MGNREGA work by way of renovation of ponds/canals and watershed development, land development, etc., has also helped improve agricultural productivity in some places. Also the landless and semi-landless poor who benefitted from employment under MGNREGA would create additional demand for various agricultural products, resulting in rise in the farm prices of agricultural commodities. On balance, therefore, in the medium- to long-run, the agricultural sector would immensely benefit from MGNREGA. The additional cost of production due to rise in agricultural wage rates should get compensated for the farmers by way of a proportionate increase in the minimum support prices which would also impact the market prices of commodities, thereby benefitting the farming community in general. Regarding scarcity of agricultural labour during the peak agricultural seasons in some places—particularly Punjab, Haryana, coastal Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu—due to competition from MGNREGA work, there would be a

Table 4. Per cent change in wage rates due to MGNREGA

State	District	Increments in agricultural wage rate due to MGNREGA (% change during 2006–10)				Increments in non-agricultural wage rate due to MGNREGA (% change during 2006–10)	
		Peak season (Male)	Peak season (Female)	Lean season (Male)	Lean season (Female)	Male	Female
Andhra Pradesh	Cuddapah	100	75	85	62.5	135	52.5
	Khammam	80	42.5	80	65	55	70
	Adilabad	88	45	82	70	72	80
Bihar	Gaya	46	46	46	46	50	50
Chhattisgarh	Raigarh	55	55	50	50	55	40
	Damtari	60	58	45	52	50	48
	Bastar	65	60	42	55	48	45
Gujarat	Dang	40	40	30	30	22.5	10
Jharkhand	Purvi Shinghbhum	9.5	9.5	9.5	9.5	9.5	9.5
	Khunti	10	16	7	19	9	15
Karnataka	Gumla	7	15	7	18	10	5
	Chitradurga	50	30	40	20	65	55

Madhya Pradesh	Balaghat	27.5	20	25	25	55	55
Maharashtra	Gondia	35	20	20	15	40	15
Orissa	Kalahandi	80	80	60	60	40	40
	Dhenkanal	80	83	57	49	57	35
Rajasthan	Malkangiri	80	85	50	43	57	29.5
	Banswar	26	26	12.5	12.5	26	26
Tamil Nadu	Dindigul	97.5	62.5	192.5	207.5	125	75
Uttar Pradesh	Lalitpur	41	41	41	41	41	41
	Sonbhadra	31.5	31.5	31.5	31.5	31.5	31.5
West Bengal	Paschim Medinipur	36	36	36	36	55	40
	Bankura	40	40	40	40	35	40

Source: Based on Field Survey in 2010-II.

readjustment process in which farmers would now either do the farm work themselves or adopt more mechanisation.

Impact on Social Inclusion

It may be seen from Table 5 that the shares of SCs and STs in total employment created under MGNREGA were disproportionately higher than their share in the total population in the country. The share of SC beneficiaries in MGNREGA employment in 2009–10 was about 22.9 per cent as against their share of 16.2 per cent in the total population. Similarly, the share of ST beneficiaries in total MGNREGA employment was nearly 33.2 per cent against their share of 8.1 per cent in the total population. However, this kind of relationship should be read with a word of caution. In fact, the incidence of poverty among SCs and STs was much higher than others in almost all the states and therefore, they needed greater employment opportunities than others from the point of view of equity and social inclusion. Considering the country as a whole, the poverty ratio among SCs and STs were 53.8 per cent and 61.3 per cent, respectively against 41.8 per cent of average poverty ratio. In several states, it was higher in the range of 60 to 84 per cent for STs and 57 to 78 per cent in the case of SCs.

Participation of Women

According to the provisions of MGNREGA priority must be given to women in such a way that at least one-third of the beneficiaries shall be women who have registered and requested for work under this Act. The official data (Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India website) suggest that the share of women in the total MGNREGA employment in the country progressively increased from 40.65 per cent in 2006–07 to 42.52 per cent in 2007–08 and 47.87 per cent in 2008–09 and 48.80 per cent in 2009–10. In the current year, up to 2 December, 2010, the share of women workers stood at 51.75 per cent.

It would be seen from Figure 2 that the states where the share of women in total employment was disproportionately higher in recent years include Kerala (90.1 per cent), Tamil Nadu (76.7 per cent), Rajasthan (68.5 per cent), Andhra Pradesh (57 per cent) and Himachal Pradesh (55.2 per cent). It was very low in Jammu and Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh and low in all other states. The states which failed to provide one-third share of employment to women (as mandated by the Act) were Jharkhand (32.4 per cent), West Bengal (31.2 per cent), Bihar (29.8 per cent), Lakshadweep (27.6 per cent), Assam (23.2 per cent), Mizoram (23.2 per cent), Uttar Pradesh (15.6 per cent), and Jammu and Kashmir (10.8 per cent). In fact nearly 42 per cent districts in the country failed to provide above one-third employment to women workers as mandated by law. Several of the districts

Table 5. State-wise participation of SCs and STs in MGNREGA

States	Percentage share in total population		Percentage share in person days generated under MGNREGA		Poverty ratio	
	SCs	STs	SCs	STs	SCs	STs
Andhra Pradesh	16.2	6.6	25.0	14.4	41.8	60.3
Arunachal Pradesh	NA	NA	1.1	86.5	NA	NA
Assam	6.9	12.4	10.8	31.7	45.3	28.8
Bihar	15.7	0.1	45.6	2.3	77.6	59.3
Chhattisgarh	11.6	31.8	14.7	37.9	48.6	65.5
Gujarat	7.1	14.8	13.1	39.1	49.3	57.1
Haryana	19.3	0.0	52.9	0.0	47.5	0.0
Himachal Pradesh	24.7	4.0	32.9	8.2	39.5	35.4
Jammu and Kashmir	7.6	10.9	8.5	26.3	14.7	26.5
Jharkhand	11.8	26.3	16.1	42.0	61.0	60.6
Karnataka	16.2	6.6	18.0	9.3	57.4	50.5
Kerala	9.8	1.1	17.5	5.7	30.8	56.9
Madhya Pradesh	15.2	20.3	18.5	43.9	62.6	80.0
Maharashtra	10.2	34.4	18.3	35.9	66.1	73.2
Manipur	NA	NA	15.0	57.1	NA	NA
Meghalaya	NA	NA	0.5	94.3	NA	NA

Table 5. (Continued)

Table 5. (Continued)

States	Percentage share in total population		Percentage share in person days generated under MGNREGA		Poverty ratio	
	SCs	STs	SCs	STs	SCs	STs
Mizoram	NA	NA	NA	99.6	NA	NA
Nagaland	NA	NA	0.0	98.3	NA	NA
Orissa	16.5	22.1	19.4	34.8	67.9	84.4
Punjab	28.9	0.0	77.4	NA	38.4	30.7
Rajasthan	17.2	12.6	26.1	22.7	48.5	59.3
Sikkim	NA	NA	7.7	42.0	NA	NA
Tamil Nadu	19.0	1.0	49.0	1.9	51.2	47.3
Tripura	NA	NA	19.8	43.1	NA	NA
Uttar Pradesh	21.1	0.1	50.6	1.6	56.6	42.0
Uttarakhand	17.9	3.0	23.6	3.9	46.2	32.4
West Bengal	23.0	5.5	36.9	13.6	37.1	54.3
All India	16.2	8.1	22.9	33.2	53.8	61.3

Source: Census of India, Ministry of Rural Development website and Tendulkar Committee Report.

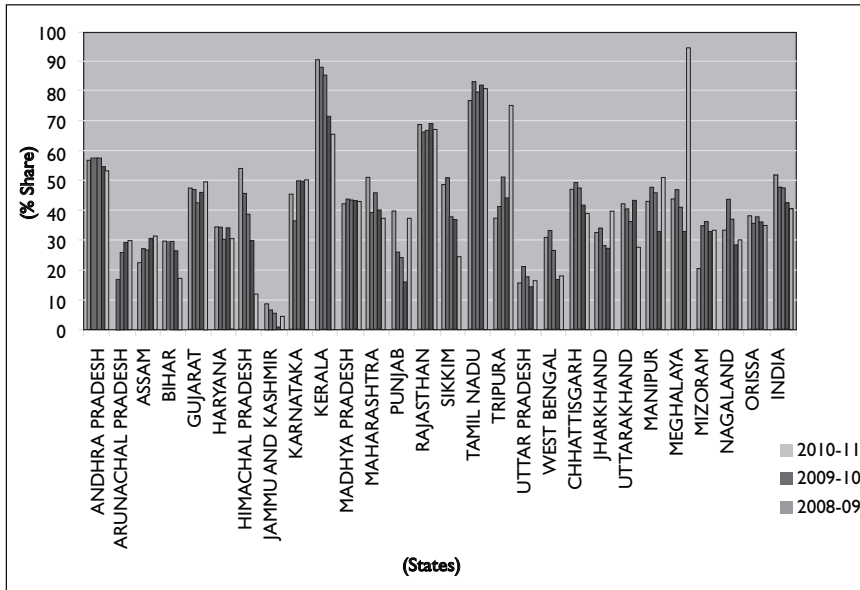


Figure 2. Per cent Share of Women in MGNREGA

selected for this study, namely Gumla (25.7 per cent) and Khunti (30.8 per cent) had less than 33 per cent share of women in MGNREGA employment while in Dang (48.7 per cent), Chitradurga (45.4 per cent), Bastar (42.7 per cent), Malkangiri (42.6 per cent), West Medinipur (41.9 per cent), East Singhbhum (41 per cent), Kalahandi (39.2 per cent), Sonbhadra (38.6 per cent) and Gaya (35 per cent), it was in the range of 33 to 49 per cent. In other selected districts, the share of women was above 50 per cent (Ministry of Rural Development, website).

Impact on Out-migration

While migration of skilled workers from rural to urban areas or from underdeveloped to developed regions, for upward mobility is generally considered to be a sign of progressive economic development, any distress migration of unskilled workers from rural to urban areas is a sign of underdevelopment. Hence, MGNREGA was intended to create adequate employment opportunities in the rural areas so that distress migration of rural workers could be either prevented or reduced. The results of our field study also reveal—through analysis of both household and Gram Panchayat level-data—that there has been a decline in the incidence of migration of workers in several places in the post-MGNREGA scenario. Based on the interview of Gram Panchayat heads, a maximum decline in the incidence of migration was observed in Lalitpur (150 per cent), followed by Banswara (88.4 per cent), Chitradurga (86.5 per cent), Dang (78.2 per cent),

West Medinipur (59.5 per cent), Gaya (50.4 per cent), Raigarh (50 per cent), Dindigul (33.3 per cent), Balaghat (30 per cent), Bankura (29.5 per cent), Cuddapah (25 per cent) and Kalahandi (18.2 per cent). In other cases, there was either no change or a marginal increase in migration as in Sonbhadra (Table 6).

Still the incidence of migration in search of jobs remained quite high in many places. In Dindigul, nearly 36 per cent of the sample households reported that they migrated in search of wage employment. In several other districts including Khammam, Gaya, Chitradurga, Gondia, Sonbhadra, West Medinipur and Bankura, nearly 10 to 27 per cent sample households reported that their adult members migrated for employment. This was mainly because the employment opportunities—including both MGNREGA and non-MGNREGA—were not adequate and also the local wage rates were lower.

Table 6. Impact of MGNREGA on Out-migration in Selected Survey Districts

State	District	% decline in out-migration rate from 2006–2010	% of respondents still migrating in search of seasonal wage employment	The main reasons for out-migration
A.P.	Cuddapah	25.0	4.2	Inadequate employment
	Khammam	0.0	15.0	
	Adilabad	0.0	15.0	
Bihar	Gaya	50.4	18.3	
Chattisgarh	Raigarh	50.0	1.7	
	Dhamtari	54.6	2.0	
	Bastar	22.2	2.0	Low Wage rate
Gujarat	Dang	78.2	1.7	NR
Jharkhand	East	0.0	0.8	Low Wage rate
	Shinghbhum			
	Khunti	33.3	4.0	Low Wage rate
	Gumla	20.0	5.0	Low Wage rate and inadequate employment
Karnataka	Chitradurga	86.5	10.8	Low Wage rate and inadequate employment
Madhya Pradesh	Balaghat	30.0	6.7	Inadequate employment and Low Wage rate
Maharashtra	Gondia	0.0	26.7	Low Wage rate and inadequate employment

Table 6. (Continued)

Social Change, 41, 3 (2011): 445–471

Table 6. (Continued)

Orissa	Kalahandi	18.2	4.2	Inadequate employment and Low Wage rate
	Dhenkanal	40.0	14.2	Inadequate employment and Low Wage rate
	Malkangiri	66.7	26.7	Inadequate employment and delay in payment
Rajasthan	Banswara	88.4	6.7	Inadequate employment
Tamil Nadu	Dindigul	33.3	35.8	Inadequate employment and Low Wage rate
Uttar Pradesh	Lalitpur	0.0	0.0	–
	Sonbhadra	–9.6	12.5	Interior nature of EGS work, inadequate employment and Low Wages
West Bengal	Bankura	29.5	14.2	Inadequate employment Low Wage rate and job insecurity
	West Medinipur	59.5	26.7	Inadequate employment, delay in payment, job in security and Low Wage rate

Source: Our Field Survey in 2010–11.

It was borne out from discussion with Gram Panchayat heads as well as village-level focused group discussions that a system of social audit of MGNREGA was in place in almost all the selected study areas, except Gaya. In most places, women were active members of social audit teams. Although the process of social audit was smooth in most places, resistance to social audit was reported in Dang, Raigarh, Banswara, west Medinipur and Bankura. While Gram Panchayat heads themselves offered resistance to social audit in West Medinipur and Bankura, in most cases it was both Gram Panchayat head and the material suppliers who put up resistance to social audit. Besides, the process of social audit did not seem to be truly participatory, as gram Panchayat heads and official agencies dominated.

Social Change, 41, 3 (2011): 445–471

Key Challenges and Suggestions

A critical analysis of the processes and impact of implementation of the MGNREGA in various parts of the country shows that it has performed quite well in several places in providing a safety net to the rural poor, although the average person days of employment provided per beneficiary household was much lower than the entitled 100 days in most cases. The very fact that nearly 5.26 million rural households (38 per cent) availed of MGNREGA employment earning an additional income of ₹4883 per household per year in 2009–10 is, in itself, no small achievement. The overwhelming participation of socially disadvantaged groups such as SCs, STs and women in the MGNREGA activities further indicates that it has a tremendous potential to transform social and economic relations in rural India which, if properly utilised, may result in a much-desired social transformation. However, currently there are several gaps and challenges to the effective implementation of MGNREGA in most places, which could be briefly discussed as follows:

Bridging the Entitlement Gaps

The main objective of MGNREGA is to provide a right-based 100 days of unskilled employment for enhancing the rural poor's purchasing power and capacity to overcome hunger and poverty. However, this objective has not been achieved in any state so far at the aggregate level.

Most of the districts selected for this study exhibited a depressing picture. The average person days of employment provided per beneficiary household was as low as 14.03 in Gaya, 27.2 in Bastar, 22.4 in Khunti, 27.9 in Kalahandi, 45.0 in Dang, 45.7 in Raigarh, 43.3 in East Singhbhum, 45.5 in Gumla, 39.1 in Gondia, 37.3 in Malkangiri and 44.0 in Bankura. Also, several of these districts including Dang and Sonbhadra had only 13 to 15 per cent households that had accessed 100 days of employment, while in Gaya (0.58 per cent), Bastar (1.58 per cent), Raigarh (2.88 per cent), Gumla (3.95 per cent), East Singhbhum (3.82 per cent), Khunti (2.69 per cent), Chitradurga (3.40 per cent), Gondia (0.91 per cent), Dhenkanal (5.68 per cent), Kalahandi (1.97 per cent), Malkangiri (3.26 per cent), Bankura (2.60 per cent) and West Medinipur (1.08 per cent), less than 9 per cent households had accessed MGNREGA employment. All these low-ranking districts are also reported to be under the influence of Maoists/Extremists mainly due to inadequate employment and scarce livelihood opportunities. Therefore, bridging the entitlement gaps in all such areas should be accorded priority by the Government, as effective implementation of MGNREGA and other development schemes would help reduce the incidence of extremism. It is also not true that Maoists always interfere with the implementation of MGNREGA as is generally believed in official circles. Hence, the communication gap that currently exists between government officials, PR institutions and local people needs to be bridged, so that

the extremists-affected backward regions of the country can be brought within the loop of development.

Another related issue is of correct and timely payment of wages to MGNREGA workers. It was observed that a significant proportion of MGNREGA beneficiaries in East Singhbhum (19.2 per cent), Sonbhadra (17.5 per cent), Banswara (8.3 per cent), Gaya (5 per cent) and Dindigul (5.0 per cent) did not have an account with either a bank or a post office and therefore, received cash payment, leaving scope for corruption. Also, as many as 61.7 per cent beneficiaries in Gaya and 43.3 per cent in Kalahandi reported that they had bank accounts at a distance of 10 to 15 km where the road connectivity also was not very good. In all such cases, the cost of travel, loss of working hours and non-cooperation of the bank officials discouraged them to opt for MGNREGA employment. Besides, there were reports of under-payments and fake payments.

The key requirement in this regard would be to create awareness among people about various entitlements of MGNREGA and mobilise support from all sources for their effective delivery. The result of our field survey (which could not be presented in detail here due to lack of space) reveals that the level of awareness about various entitlements of MGNREGA was very low in several places. Regarding the minimum 100 days of employment guarantee, about 42 per cent families in Kalahandi, 35 per cent in Dhenkanal, 40 per cent in Malkangiri, 28 per cent in Raigarh, Dhamtari and Dang, 22 per cent in Bastar and Khunti, 30 per cent in Chitradurga and Gondia and 24 per cent in East Singhbhum reported that they were not aware of this provision. Regarding other entitlements of MGNREGA—such as minimum wages, work to be given within 15 days of application, unemployment allowance, one-third workers to be women, work to be provided within 5 km, if not additional payment, work site facilities, etc.—the level of awareness was extremely low. As a result, there are huge gaps between various entitlements and their actual realisations by the rural workers. It is therefore, recommended that the Panchayati Raj institutions, civil societies and the concerned Government departments should work hand in hand to create the necessary awareness among rural people about various entitlements of MGNREGA and mobilise support for their effective implementation.

Ensuring Productive Utilisation of the Assets Created

The second most important objective of MGNREGA is to create productive and durable assets of irrigation, drought proofing, water conservation and water harvesting, increasing horticulture plantations and connectivity for generating a sustainable livelihood system. In practice, this objective has been pursued in most places as revealed from the priorities of MGNREGA expenditure (Table 4). But there has been hardly any planned effort to ensure productive utilisation of whatever assets have been created. This is mainly because of lack of coordination and

convergence, between various departments and programmes at different levels. Even though the Ministry of Rural Development has designed guidelines for convergence between MGNREGA and other departmental development programmes to facilitate better planning and investments in rural areas, there is a lack of seriousness about it in most places. Moreover, due to the absence of adequate socio-economic infrastructure such as roads, electricity, education, training, etc., the potentials of assets created under MGNREGA remains either unused or underutilised. Therefore, there should be greater efforts to ensure not only increased convergence between MGNREGA on the one hand and agriculture, water conservation, irrigation and horticulture plantations on the other, but also to promote education, training and skills of the rural people along with development of all-weather roads, markets, power connectivity etc. so that the assets created under MGNREGA could be more productively utilised for sustainable rural development.

No doubt, the present investment priorities of MGNREGA is in the right direction, given its emphasis on water conservation, renovation of traditional water bodies, land development and irrigation facilities in the lands of SCs/STs, Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) and Land Reform beneficiaries and other small and marginal farmers and rural connectivity. All these have tremendous potential of raising farm productivity and incomes, apart from generating employment related incomes. In several places covered by our field study, it was observed that farmers have improved their irrigated area and changed the cropping patterns for realising higher productivity and incomes in areas treated through MGNREGA works. But in most cases, productivity-enhancing efforts are missing. Therefore, proper utilisation of assets created under MGNREGA should receive urgent attention by all those concerned at the state and local levels, through proper inter-departmental coordination and inter-programme/inter-activity convergence.

Addressing the Issue of Rising Wages and Cost of Agricultural Production

This study clearly reveals that the wage rates of agricultural labourers have substantially increased in recent years, under the impact of MGNREGA. At the same time, it has led to scarcity of labour in the peak seasons. These two factors are reportedly affecting agricultural productivity adversely in some developed pockets of the country. While the additional cost of production due to a MGNREGA-led rise in agricultural wage rates should be compensated by way of a proportionate increase in the minimum support prices which also impact the market prices of agricultural commodities positively—thereby benefiting the farmers in general—the issue of seasonal labour shortage in agriculturally-developed pockets would be taken care of through a process of readjustment in which farmers would now either do the farm work themselves or adopt more mechanisation.

Social Change, 41, 3 (2011): 445–471

Addressing the Issue of Social Inclusion

Although the shares of SCs, STs and women in the total employment generated under MGNREGA so far (as per official records) was found to be disproportionately higher than their share in the total population in most places, it should be noted that the proportion of households below the poverty line was much higher in the case of both SCs and STs. Considering the country as a whole, 53.8 per cent SC households and 61.3 per cent ST households were below the poverty line (based on the report of the Tendulkar Committee), as against 42 per cent in general. The incidence of poverty among ST households was invariably higher than the average poverty ratio in most states among it was as high as 80 per cent in Orissa, 73 per cent in Maharashtra, 66 per cent in Chhattisgarh, 61 per cent in Jharkhand, 60 per cent in Andhra Pradesh, 59 per cent in Bihar and Rajasthan and 57 per cent in Gujarat. All these states also had a high incidence of Naxalism/extremism. Therefore, there is no reason why there should be any comfort saying that the shares of SCs and STs in total employment generated under MGNREGA is higher. In fact, there is a greater need for social mobilisation, awareness-building campaign and effective implementation of MGNREGA in all the extremist-affected regions. Similarly, in the case of women, their relative share in total employment is comparatively higher than their share in the total work force in most places. But here again women, especially among SCs and STs, are more vulnerable than others and therefore, need a better deal. Moreover, the inadequate facilities of drinking water, crèches, toilets, etc., at the worksite affect women workers most. Hence, providing decent conditions of work for women workers, even within the SC/ST working members, should be a priority.

Ensuring Good Governance

The MGNREGA guidelines provide for social audit and vigilance and monitoring mechanism for its effective, transparent and corruption-free implementation. However, the present system suffers from various inadequacies and weaknesses. In several villages where the field level survey was conducted, the Vigilance and Monitoring Committees were dominated by the supporters of Sarpanch/*Pradhan* and ward members. This affected the proper functioning of vigilance committees. Similarly, in the case of social audit, the process of audit did not seem to be truly participatory, as Gram Panchayat heads and official agencies dominated and people's voices were often suppressed. Also, the reported social audits did not result in any mid-course correction. Besides, there were no technically-educated persons in the teams of social audit who could understand the technicalities of works and as a result physical inspection of works and assets was generally conducted in a very non-professional manner. Moreover, at the public hearings held at the *mandal* or block level, not only the poor peoples' participation remained

low, but also the uneducated people who still suffer from dependency syndrome in the villages did not open their mouth. Consequently, the entire show remained top-down and officially managed. It is therefore, suggested that the process of social audit should be people-centric and not Sarpanch-/Pradhan-centric and the civil society organisations should be actively involved to train the workers in articulating their grievances.

Building Capacities of Panchayat Functionaries and Officials

Appropriate training of Panchayat functionaries and government officials is the key to participatory and effective implementation of MGNREGA. There are several well established civil society organisations/NGOs as well as academic institutions in various parts of the country which can help build capacities of Panchayats and officials and support them in planning, implementation and evaluation of MGNREGA works. Also, such training will help the Panchayats and officials to formulate appropriate strategies to achieve sustainable rural livelihoods through convergence of MGNREGA with other schemes.

Conclusion

The MGNREGA has provided a unique legal space for the rural poor, especially the landless labourers, SC, ST and small and marginal farmers, with a consequent legal obligation on the part of the government at various levels to deliver and improve the socio-economic condition of the rural people. However, there are several gaps and weak links in the implementation of MGNREGA in most places, which need to be bridged through sustained awareness-building campaigns about various entitlements, social mobilisation, planning and convergence for proper utilisation of the assets created for productivity enhancement, social inclusion and good governance through effective, albeit truly participatory social audit, vigilance and monitoring and capacity building of Panchayati Raj functionaries and government officials.

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Social Change, 41, 3 (2011): 445–471

Note

1. Sharma, Rita (2010). Echoing the Green Revolution, *The Indian Express*, New Delhi, 9 January, 2010.

