

MGNREGA IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES AND PROBLEMS FACED BY BENEFICIARIES OF DOABA REGION OF PUNJAB

BALWINDER KAUR¹ & VARINDERRANDHAWA²

¹Assistant Professor (Home Science), KVK Booh, GADVASU, Ludhiana, India

²Professor, Department of Home Science Extension & Communication Management,
College of Home Science, PAU, Ludhiana, India

ABSTRACT

The study aimed at assessing implementation of *MGNREGA* in *Doaba* region of Punjab state. Two districts from this region were selected for the study i.e. Hoshiarpur and Nwanshaheer. Further, two blocks per district, two villages per block and nine beneficiaries per village were selected to complete a sample of 72 beneficiaries. Interview schedule in five parts was prepared to elicit information regarding implementation procedure i.e. issuance of job cards, employment record, wage records, social audit and complaint redressed system. The major findings revealed some irregularity in implementation of *MGNREGA* such as documents verification never done before issuance of job cards, late payments to workers, lack of worksite facilities, non-maintenance of work and complaint registers and non-conductance of social audit. Workers got maximum 40-45 days of work which was much below the prescribed 150 days of employment. To make the scheme successful in improving quality of life of rural poor, it is very necessary that they should regularly participate in programme and share their difficulties and complaints regarding implementation of scheme. So, it can therefore be concluded that awareness needs to be generated amongst the beneficiaries through mass media and other campaigns for effective implementation and success of the scheme.

KEYWORDS: MGNREGA Implementation, Beneficiaries, *Doaba* Region

INTRODUCTION

Rural development programmes have been implemented by the government to create employment opportunities, alleviate poverty and improve quality of life of these rural poor. Since India's independence, a number of policies and programmes have been designed with the aim to alleviate rural poverty as an approach towards planned development of the country. The employment oriented programmes as effective instruments of poverty alleviation started receiving attention around 1980's. Consequently, the sixth plan included National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) and the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP). Some other employment generation programmes launched by central government included JawaharRozgar Yojana (JRY), Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS), Sampoorna Grameen Yojana (SGRY) and National Food for Work Programme (NFFWP) etc. However, all these programmes were treated as schemes which did not involve any legal entitlements. They were aimed to reduce the gap between rural and urban people which would help reduce imbalances and speed up the development process. So, huge investment has been made by the Government of India for up-liftment of rural areas.

Nevertheless, rural development is an interminable, unending and on-going process. Even the partial success of a set of programmes takes rural society forward, changing it in the process and thereby needing new measures to be put into

operation. So, rural development is thus continuous in its conception, with only a change in content or a shift in period of time. The term "rural development" connotes the overall development of rural areas to improve the quality of life of rural people. And it is a process leading to sustainable improvement in the quality of life of rural poor (Ramesh 2012). It basically aims at improving rural people's livelihoods in an equitable and sustainable manner, both socially and environmentally, through better access to assets (natural, physical, human, technological and social capital), and services, and control over productive capital (in its financial or economic and political forms). The development of the rural sector thus necessarily has very high priority, more so in a democracy like India whose very survival depends upon the consensus of these people.

The focus of national rural development programmes is therefore on raising the economic level of the people, reduce poverty and unemployment, improve health and educational status and fulfill the basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing of the rural masses. The poverty alleviation programmes focus on generating employment through creation of basic social and economic infrastructure, provision of training to rural unemployed youth and providing employment to marginal farmers/labourers to discourage their seasonal and permanent migration to urban areas. The rural development programmes also focus on improving the quality of life of the rural people through the instrument of self-employment and wage employment programmes and by providing community infrastructure facilities such as drinking water, electricity, road connectivity, health facilities, rural housing and education and promoting decentralization of powers to strengthen the Panchayati raj institutions etc.

Rural Development in Context of MGNREGA

A new rural development initiative of central government (passed by the parliament) came into existence in the form of an Act, on 25th August 2005 called the 'National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (*NREGA*)'. This is considered the most accessible approach to rural India for poverty alleviation through employment generation so far. This act, now called Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (*MGNREGA*) aims at enhancing livelihood security in rural areas which came into force on February 2, 2006 and planned to be implemented in phased manner. In the first phase, it was introduced in 200 most backward districts of the country and was then extended to additional 130 districts in the financial year 2007-2008. Subsequently, the Act was extended to cover all the districts, with the exception of districts that have a hundred percent urban population. This act is an Indian Labour law and social security measure that aims to guarantee the 'right to work' and enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

Starting from 200 districts on 2 February 2006, the *MGNREGA* brought all the districts of India under its ambit since April, 2008. The statute is hailed by the government as "the largest and most ambitious social security and public works programme in the world". In its World Development Report (2014) the World Bank termed it a "stellar example of rural development". The act envisages creating durable assets (such as roads, canals, ponds, wells), providing employment within 5 km of an applicant's residence, and paying them the minimum wages. If work is not provided within 15 days of applying, the applicants become entitled to an unemployment allowance. Thus, employment under *MGNREGA* is a legal entitlement.

MGNREGA is to be implemented mainly by gram panchayats (GPs). The involvement of contractors is banned. The law provides many safeguards to promote its effective management and implementation. The act explicitly mentions the principles and agencies for implementation, list of allowed works, financing pattern, monitoring and evaluation and

most importantly the detailed measures to ensure transparency and accountability. It is the first ever law internationally, that guarantees wage employment at an unprecedented scale. The works are mostly taken up under this act to rejuvenate the natural resource base and address the causes of chronic poverty such as drought, deforestation, soil erosion, floods, poor rural connectivity etc. In the year 2012-13 the scheme generated over 4.48 crore person days. Women constituted the major work force followed by those from scheduled tribes and scheduled castes. Over 23.28 crore worth works were under taken in the year 2008-09 of which 45% were water conservation, 20% were micro irrigation and 15 % were land development and 18% rural roads based projects as reported by Ministry of Rural Development (Anonymous 2016:b). In order to increase transparency in the programme and bring the rural poor under the organized banking sector and credit system, agencies for wage payment are being separated from implementing agencies through accounts-based wage payment.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was conducted to assess implementation of *MGNREGA* in *Doaba* region of Punjab state. A total of 2 districts were selected for the study through probability proportionate to size sampling procedure. Two blocks per district, two villages per block and nine beneficiaries per village were further selected to complete a sample for the study. Interview schedule in five parts was prepared to elicit information regarding implementation procedure i.e. issuance of job cards, employment record, wage records, social audit and complaint redressed system. The information was first collected from the Block Development officer about the villages where *MGNREGA* was operational since last 5 years. Next, the Gram Panchayat of selected villages were approached for obtaining list of job card holders along with information regarding their gender and number of years the workers have been working under *MGNREGA*. From this list only those who had been working under *MGNREGA* for the last at least five years were considered for the study. A total of nine beneficiaries (males and females) per village were then selected through purposive sampling procedure. An interview schedule consists of core question about implementation in yes and no response. Score was assigned to 'yes' and 'no' '1' and '0' respectively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 depicted that sixty one per cent of the beneficiaries registered through oral request followed by written application (38.89%). In Hoshiarpur, 77.18% registered through written application. Majority of the respondents submitted their request on or before the registration date. Only one per cent of the respondents were submitted their request at random. Particulars of the applicants were reported that verification was never done (59.72%). But in the hoshiarpur district seventy seven per cent of the respondents reported that the verification was done by additional project officer. Overall seventy five per cent of the respondents of *Doaba* region reported that all eligible members were included in job cards but in the Hoshiarpur district all the respondents reported all eligible family members were included in job cards. Job cards were issued within 15 days in Hoshiarpur district but in Nwanshaher district ninety seven per cent of respondents reported that job card was issued after one month. In the *Doaba* region all the job cards carried photograph of all the beneficiaries. It may be due that the scheme was first implemented in Hoshiarpur district and the beneficiaries were more aware about the implementation and provision of the act.

Table 1: Information Regarding Issuance of Job Cards in Doaba Region under MGNREGA Act n=36, N=72

Items	Hoshiarpur	Nwanshahar	Total
	F(%)	F(%)	F (%)
Membership Request			
Oral request	8(22.22)	36 (100)	44 (61.11)
Written application	28 (77.78)	0(0)	28 (38.89)
Nominated by gram sabha/APO	0(0)	0(0)	0 (0)
Submission of Request			
On registration day	8(22.22)	35 (97.22)	43 (59.72)
After registration day	28 (77.78)	0(0)	28 (38.89)
At Random	0(0)	1(2.88)	1 (1.38)
Verification of Applicants Particulars			
By Gram Sabha	0(0)	1(2.88)	1 (1.38)
By Additional project officer	28 (77.78)	0(0)	28 (38.89)
Never Done	8(22.22)	35 (97.22)	43 (59.72)
All Eligible Family Members Included in Job Card	36 (100)	18 (50.00)	54 (75.00)
Custody of the Job Cards			
Household members	36 (100)	36 (100)	72 (100.00)
Gram Panchayat	0(0)	0(0)	0 (0)
Any other	0(0)	0(0)	0 (0)
Issuance of Job Card After Registration			
Within 15 days	36 (100)	0(0)	36 (50.00)
15-30 days	0(0)	1(2.88)	1 (1.38)
More than 30 days	0(0)	35 (97.22)	35 (48.61)
Job Card Carries Photograph of all Beneficiaries	36 (100)	36 (100)	72 (100.00)

Table 2 illustrates that ninety-nine per cent of the respondents got less than 100 days of employment. Only one respondent from the Nwanshaher district got employment for 100 days. Gram Panchayat has to submit their annual schedule of work in advance but they were not interested in preparing the same and give annual schedule for 30-40 days of employment so the beneficiaries were not able to get employment. The study's findings were in line with Deepak Shah. Deepak, Shah (2012) reported that employment generation as the man-days generated and the number households provided 100 days of employment are quite low in almost all the districts of Maharashtra. None of the beneficiary got employment beyond 5 km. about the verification of records by Gram Panchayat, 38.89% of the beneficiaries reported that they verify employment record followed by wage payment and daily activity records. Majority of the respondents (59.72%) that notice board was used for communication of work allocation. In Hoshiarpur oral communication was major method of communication. About sixty four per cent of the respondents reported that women share was more than thirty three percent. In the Hoshiarpur district seventy eight percent reported they experienced the same. The study findings were in line with the Bebart (2013) who found that all the respondents (100%) keep their job cards with them.

Table 2: Maintenance of Employment Record in Doaba Region under MGNREGA act n=72

Employment Record Items	Hoshiarpur	Nwanshaher	Total
	F(%)	F(%)	F(%)
No. of Days Employment Offered			
100 days	0(0)	1(2.88)	1 (1.39)
> 100 days	0(0)	0(0)	0 (0)
<100 days	36 (100)	35 (97.22)	71 (98.61)
Off-site Employment Offered	0(0)	0(0)	0 (0)

off-Site Allowance			
Transport allowance	0(0)	0(0)	0 (0)
Living allowance	0(0)	0(0)	0 (0)
Verification of Records			
Daily activity record	0(0)	18 (50.00)	18 (25.00)
Wage payment	8 (22.22)	18 (50.00)	26 (36.11)
Employment record (number of days employed)	28 (77.78)	0(0)	28 (38.89)
Communication about Work Allocation			
Information on notice board	8(22.22)	35 (97.22)	43 (59.72)
Drum beating	0(0)	18 (50.00)	18 (25.00)
Public announcement	0(0)	1(2.88)	1 (1.39)
Oral communication (person to person)	28 (77.78)	0(0)	28 (38.89)
Women's Share in Work Allocation			
>33%	28 (77.78)	18 (50.00)	46 (63.89)
<33%	8(22.22)	18 (50.00)	26 (36.11)
Facilities Available at Work Place			
Crèche	0(0)	1(2.88)	1 (1.39)
First aid	0(0)	1(2.88)	1 (1.39)
Drinking water	8(22.22)	36 (100)	44 (61.11)
Shade for workers	8(22.22)	36 (100)	44 (61.11)
Maintenance of Attendance Record			
Muster roll	0(0)	1(2.88)	1 (1.39)
Register	36 (100)	35 (97.22)	71 (89.61)
Maintenance of Muster Roll			
Work allotted	0(0)	0(0)	0 (0)
Work actually performed	8(22.22)	18 (50.00)	26 (36.11)
Work measurement	36 (100)	17 (47.22)	53 (73.61)
Method of calculation of wages	8(22.22)	35 (97.22)	43 (59.72)

In Hoshiarpur district only twenty two percent of the respondents got drinking water facility and shade for workers and Nwanshaheer district all the respondents got drinking water facility and shade for workers. When asked why they don't got these facilities the beneficiaries and gram panchayat answer that all the beneficiaries brought their drinking water with them and shades were already their where they work. However, our study provides strong evidence to suggest that there is no provision of childcare or proper shade for children near the worksites. It is mandatory to maintained attendance on muster roll. But about ninety percent of the respondents don't experience the same due the reason that *Gram RojgarSewak* was not able to distribute muster roll on daily basis. They work for 30-40 villages and it was not possible for them to visit all the villages in one day. Maintenance of 1/3rd of women at work place, it was found that 63.89 % of the respondents reported that women percentage was higher than 33%. Sixty-nine per cent women in Meghalaya and 72 per cent in Sikkim work in *MNGERA*. The findings were in line with Bhowmik, 2013.He reported that in terms of Women person-days, it is seen that though Tripura maintained the one-third stipulation.

Table 3: Maintenance of Wage Record under MGNREGA act in Doaba Region of Punjab n=72

Wage Record	Hoshiarpur	Nwanshaheer	Total
	F(%)	F(%)	F (%)
Wage Payment			
Weekly	0(0)	0(0)	0 (0)
Fortnightly	0(0)	1(2.88)	1 (1.38)

Monthly	0(0)	0(0)	0 (0)
Any others	36 (100)	35 (97.22)	71 (98.60)
Wage/day	186	184	185
Place of Payment			
G.P. office	0(0)	0(0)	0 (0)
Through banks / PO	36 (100)	36 (100)	72 (100.0)
Frequency of Meetings for Late/ non Payment	28 (77.78)	0(0)	28 (38.89)
Monthly	0(0)	0(0)	0 (0)
Bimonthly	0(0)	0(0)	0 (0)
Quarterly	28 (77.78)	0(0)	28 (38.89)
Any other	0(0)	0(0)	0 (0)

Table 3, illustrate that majority (98.60%) of the respondents reported that wage were not paid according to the guidelines. They have to wait for six to seven month for wages. All the respondents got wages at the rate of 185 rs/day which was minimum prescribed rate for the year 2014-15 in Punjab state. All the payments were made through the banks or post office. Only in Hoshiarpur the meeting were conducted for delay in payments and it was reported by majority (77.78%) of the respondents but in Nwanshaheer none of the respondent experiences the same.

Table 4: Maintenance of Records of Social audit and Complaints Redressal System for Public Scrutiny under MGNREGA act in Doaba Region of Punjab n=72

Social Audit Records	Hoshiarpur	Nwanshaheer	Total
	F(%)	F(%)	F (%)
Frequency of Social Audit			
Never done	36 (100)	36(100)	72 (100.00)
Once in 6 months	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Once in a year	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Composition of Social Audit Committee			
Job card holders	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Gram Panchayat members	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Any other	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Presentation of Social Audit Report			
Before Gram Panchayat	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Before job card holders	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Both of the above	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Complaints Redressal System			
Maintenance of complaints register	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Complaints lodging (written)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Complaints redressal record (written)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)

All the respondents reported that the social audit was never done (Table 4) but it is mandatory once in six months. Due to the above reason beneficiaries were not able to give their response for other things related to social audit e.g. committee of social audit, its presentation and purpose etc. about complaints redressed system, due to shortage of funds under MGMNGERA GRS were not able to provide complaints registers and beneficiaries were not able to get benefits. Although in these district social audit was conducted but the guidelines were not followed as such i.e. given for social audit. In these district only the general information about the scheme and the problems of the beneficiaries were considered

during social audit. But in the guidelines no such procedure is there to conduct social audit. Similar findings were reported by Mathur. Mathur (2009) states that in social audit undertaken in Andhra Pradesh it was found that in certain villages, some people stated that they had not been paid for the work done. When comparisons were made of the payments as per the pass-book with the payment as per the job card, it was discovered that the job card did not contain the inner pages that record the work done by each person; the job card itself was incomplete. This came as a surprise as it had not happened in any region so far as per guidelines.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on findings, it is concluded that some irregularities were observed in implementation such as late payments to workers, lack of worksite facilities, non-maintenance of work register and complaints register and non-conductance of social audit. Workers got maximum 40-45 days of work which was much below the prescribed 100 days of employment. *MGNREGA* remains a good legislation in theory but it is not so in practice. There is an urgent need to address/ rectify implementation flaws as observed during the survey to make *MGNREGA* more effective and responsive to the needs of the underprivileged people.

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