



Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MANREGA): Problems & Challenges

Dr.Pallavi Bhavsar

Mahila Kala Mahavidyalaya,
Aurangabad.

Introduction:

MANREGA is a social security scheme launched by the government of India that attempts to provide employment and livelihood to rural laborers in the country. MGNREGA is demand driven wage employment programme and resource transfer from Centre to States is based on the demand for employment in each State. MGNREGA is bottom-up, people-centred, demand-driven, self-selecting and rights-based programme. It provides a legal wage employment by providing allowances and compensation both in cases of failure to provide work on demand and delays in payment of wages for work undertaken. The work undertaken through MANREGA gives priority to activities related to water harvesting, groundwater recharge, drought-proofing, as also the problem of floods. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was implemented and came into force on February 2, 2006. It was the first act of its kind in the world where in an economic safety net is provided to around 2/3rd of the population through the right to work. The scale on which it has been provided is just mindboggling, engaging around 1/10th of the total world population. It was second in a series of right based policies Government of India has rolled out in the past decade. Thus MGNREGA also marks a break from the relief programmes of the past towards an integrated natural resource management and livelihoods generation perspective. This article discusses some problems that need to be addressed in order to meet the objectives of the Act.

Objective of MANREGA

Its objective is to provide a minimum of 100 days of guaranteed non-skilled manual employment to rural workers every year, so that rural households are able to sustain themselves. The MGNREGA act has laudable objectives of providing a work-guarantee to the poor rural households on one hand and creating quality asset, strengthening rural resource base, ensuring social inclusion, and strengthening Panchayati Raj institutions on the other

The core aim of the NREGA scheme is to ensure that there is a source of livelihood for the economically weaker section of the population. The NREGA also aims to proactively



include the weaker section of society. Strengthening the livelihood and provide resources to the poor. The scheme also aims at strengthening of Panchayati Raj establishments across India.

Goals of MANREGA

The goal of MGNREGA is to provide social protection for the most vulnerable people living in rural India by guaranteeing wage employment opportunities. It aims at strengthening democracy at the grassroots level by strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions MGNREGA aims at creating a durable and productive rural asset base. It aims at enhancing the livelihood security of the rural poor through the generation of wage employment opportunities in works leading to the creation of durable assets. The goal of MGNREGA is to rejuvenate the natural resource base of rural areas. To strengthen decentralised, participatory planning through convergence of various anti-poverty and livelihoods initiatives.

MANREGA –Identification Of Problems

Any evolution of NAREGA will seek to answer if it has fulfilled its roll as an employment generating program along with its impact on poverty reduction. Since conception, this has not been the primary objective of the Narega, at least among those who struggled for it. Nonetheless ,critics as well as proponents have tended to evaluate the impact of NAREGA in terms of its efficiency and efficacy in ensuring redistribution of income to the poor.This has not only been debated in terms of its efficacy vis-à-vis universal cash-transfer program but also in terms of its impact on other economic indicators such as wages.

This program is likely to have nontrivial consequences on local labor markets. By providing low - skill individuals with the possibility of working at a daily wage that is significantly higher than the informal market clearing one, the NREGA may affect adversely employment. The program may be difficult to put into place in practice, be it only because of the significant administrative cost of organizing the work to be done. However, the real question of whether NREGA is a palliative to keep rural distress under control in short terms or is it the long term solution for rural revitalization still remains.

Implementation - Tool For Monitoring:

The relatively better implementation of NREGA compared to previous rural wage employment programs also owes itself to certain institutional provisions within the NREGA which are crucial for effective implementation of the programme. While, greater involvement of PRIS is certainly a first step in this regard, its effective use is conditional on the functioning of PRIs in states which varies a great deal. An important tool in this regard is the inbuilt mechanism of social audit within the NREGA. Effective social audit of NREGA has been an important instrument of ensuring effective implementation of NREGA. However, this process



in itself has not been a self - starter in many other cases. This in itself raises the important issue of using social audit as a tool for monitoring government programs such as NREGA but also extending it to other programs. So far, the experience has been mixed in this regard. However, it is an important issue which needs to be explored in greater detail.

CHALLENGES

NAREGA is a relatively new legislation with only five years of implementation on the ground so far. However, given the wide reach and the stated objectives of the Act, its performance is of concern to everybody including academicians, planners, policy makers and grass - root level activists. It is also expected that the program will take time to mature and be of relevance in fulfilling its stated objectives. This is critical in designing not only appropriate policies for wage - employment programs but also for other rural development programs. Besides, it will also contribute to a better understanding of the issues involved in designing public welfare programs either for redistribution or for growth. The lack of manpower has adversely affected the preparation of plans, scrutiny, approval, monitoring and measurement of works, and maintenance of the stipulated records at the block and GP level. The CAG report points out that besides affecting the implementation of the scheme and the provision of employment, this also impacted adversely on transparency.

There are two types of governance challenges that make the large - scale implementation of social safety nets in rural areas, such as those implemented under NREGA, inherently difficult : 1. The challenge of avoiding elite capture and of actually reaching the poor and the disadvantaged, and 2. The challenge of managing the funds allocated to the program effectively and avoiding leakages and corruption. As a public works program, NREGA uses a self - targeting mechanism to meet the first challenge. In fact, the program has been remarkably successful in this regard. More than half of its beneficiaries belong to Scheduled Castes and Tribes, and more than half are women. The second challenge is more difficult to meet because NREGA involves two features that have been highlighted in the paper. First, the program is transaction - intensive in terms of time and space: It requires day - to - day action throughout a country that spans an entire subcontinent. Second, the program requires discretion, since decision making on issues such as the type of infrastructure to be created under the program cannot easily be standardized. There are no simple administration solution to the problem of managing programs that are at same transaction –intensive and discretionary.

Delays in wage payments have emerged as the most frequently heard complaint under MGNREGA. At times payments have not been made even after nine months and workers are



rarely being paid compensation for the delay. The major reason for the delay is that measurement of work is not being done on time. This is mainly due to lack of adequate technical staff at the block level. Besides, there are also bottlenecks in the flow of funds through the system, at times because data on the Management Information System is not being filled up in time. Some implementation challenges include widespread existence of ghost workers, discrimination in awarding work, delays in the preparations of muster delays in measurement resulting in delayed payments.

Conclusion:

MGNREGA has in recent years been most proactive in promoting ICT innovations including biometrics and low cost hand held devices. Successful implementation of MGNREGA critically depends on the establishment and operationalisation of a proper computer based Management Information System through an ICT network interconnecting all the gram panchayat, blocks, districts, states and the Union Ministry. It is the time to initiate the use of biometric device to check corruption and delays under MGNREGA which will bring in transparency in implementation. The objective of the system is to capture and use biometric information through appropriate ICT devices for identification of the workers at the work sites and to improve the overall delivery system in the implementation of the scheme by capturing all the processes right from registration, demand of work, issue of dated receipt, allocation of work, attendance at worksite, measurement of work and wage payments. In order to increase the transparency, accountability and monitoring of implementation of MGNREGA ; ICT based devices will be used.

References:

- Puran Singh (2008) -National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme - A look ahead - Edited by Sawalia Bihari Verma & Yogesh Upahyay - Sarup & Som Publishers ,New Delhi
- Sharma Jogender (2009) - Potential and Challenges - Kurukshetra- A journal on Rural Development, Vol. SK, No 2, December.
- WWW.infochangeindia.org
- <http://www.csh-delhi.com>
- <http://nrega.nic.in/MNREGA Dist.pdf>
- <http://muktsar.nic.in/drad/nres.htm>