

SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IMPERATIVES OF MGNREGA IN INDIA - A CASE STUDY OF DISTRICT KUPWARA AND POONCH, J&K.

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ABSTRACT

Holding the philosophy of dominant paradigms of Rural Development, the MGNREGA has been able to move in a direction of Sustainable Development & Sustainable livelihood. Although, to meet the goals of these dominant paradigms ascertained targets have not been achieved but the impact analysis of MGNREGA shows that goals of the Social Protection, Sustainable Development & Sustainable Livelihood are met to a large extent. The creation of various assets and natural resource base under MGNREGA not only safeguards and meets present developmental requirements but also future one as well. The creation of natural base at village level not only reduces the migration of labour force but also has positive impact on the education of children as well. There is immense opportunity and availability of work at village level. The opportunity and availability of work has made social protection an achievable phenomenon to rural masses. Thus, present study aims to identify and assess the range of activities carried out under MGNREGA and its impact on labor force. The range of activities and frequency of work available are hence meeting the goals of Social Protection, Sustainable Development & Sustainable Livelihood.

Keywords: *MGNREGA, Sustainable Development, Sustainable Livelihood.*

Introduction

The major approaches and strategies of rural development in India during 1990 were Microcredit, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Actor-Oriented RD, Stakeholder Analysis, Gender & Development (GAD), Environment & Sustainability and Poverty Reduction. However, the dominant paradigms were participation and empowerment which can be reflected through the retrospect of various rural development programs initiated in the decade.

The decade 2000 had a total paradigm shift in approaches of rural development although, sustainable livelihoods, good governance, decentralization, critique of participation, sector-wide approaches social protection, poverty eradication were dominant paradigms but major emphasis was on sustainable livelihoods, good governance and social protection, these goals were realized to be met by various policies and program, one of the key program was launched in India as MGNREGA.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is a job guarantee scheme, enacted by legislature of India on August 25, 2005. The MGNREGS is not only a scheme but empowered by an Act of Parliament of India – the “National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) 2005”. The act provides a legal guarantee for one hundred days of employment in every financial year to adult members of any rural household willing to do public work, unskilled manual work. Such work will be provided at the minimum wage rate and, as far as possible, within a 5 km radius of the village where the applicant resides. Failure to provide such wage employment within 15 days of the receipt of the application will entitle the applicant to receive a daily unemployment allowance.¹ The Act moves towards ensuring the right to work and lays the basis for development interventions which do not depend on the willful benevolence of the state but legally bind the state to provide employment for any rural family that demands it. Since April 2008, the coverage of the Act was expanded to all districts of India, making it the largest employment programme in the world. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee act (MGNREGA) is created to bring change to the lives of millions of rural poor with the inclusion of new works under its ambit and the convergence with other flagship programmes will increase its efficiency².

¹ Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005.

² NREGA to change the face of rural India, *Kurushetra.*, 2009-Vol 57(12): 54.

In phase I MGNREGA was introduced in 200 of the most backward districts of the india, with effect from February 2nd 2006 and then extended to an additional 130 districts in the financial year 2007-2008 (113 districts were notified with effect from April 1st 2007, and 17 districts in UP were notified with effect from May 15th 2007. The Act was notified in the remaining rural districts of India from April 1, 2008 in phase III. Thus, the Mahatma Gandhi NREGA covers the entire country with the exception of districts that have a hundred percent urban population.

The scheme was introduced in district Kupwara and Poonch of Jammu & Kashmir during its first phase. Thus, the reference is drawn here to understand the goals of “Social Protection” and “Livelihood Security” are met by MGNREGA in these two districts.

Social protection for the most vulnerable people living in rural India: The MGNREGA was introduced with an aim of improving the purchasing power of the rural people, primarily semi or unskilled work to people living in rural India whether or not they are below the poverty line³. MGNREGA is significant for various reasons, it is one of the few experiments in the world to provide alternative source of livelihood which will have an impact on reducing migration, growth in education and healthcare spending⁴. In this study of two districts of Jammu and Kashmir, Poonch in Jammu division and Kupwara in Kashmir division. The social protection was assessed in terms of impact on migration and education of children. The people in villages use to find limited resources available, particularly the daily unskilled laborers. They often use to migrate temporary or permanently to urban settlements for work options. Since, the trend of migration still continues but, after the implementation of MGNREGA there has been huge impact on it. In the table 1.1, the 87 of the sample job card holders out of 100 used to migrate to different urban settlements for seeking daily wage. While as after implementation of MGNREGA only 16 % of job card holders are migrating that too on temporary basis. It reflects the availability of work within 5 KM radius has checked the migration of labour force.

The enrollment of the children has been taken from the schools (primary and middle) at village level. The enrollment of children at schools was taken with difference of 5 years. The 88% of children in the age group of 6-14 are at presently enrolled in the various schools in sample villages. The percentage of enrollment before 5 years was 69%. This reflects the increase in the growth of education. Besides, the no of schools have also increased which have the impact on this growth. However, the implementation of MGNREGA is not the only reason for this growth. There are various other factors responsible for this growth as well, like policies and programs in education sector.

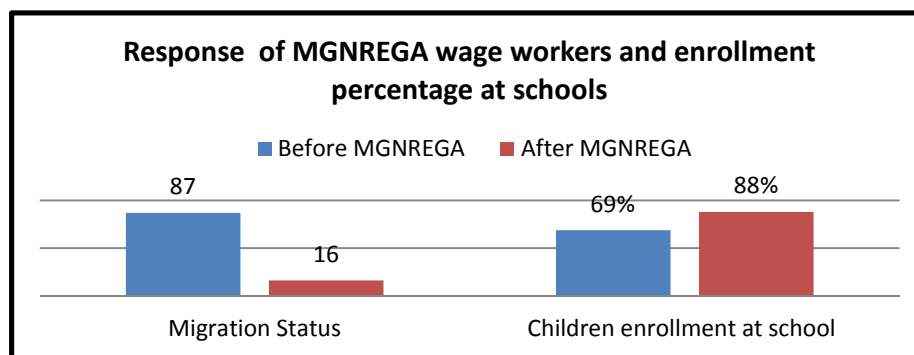


Table 1.1

³ A.P. Palanichamy, A study on Mahatma Gandhi national rural employment guarantee program (MGNREGP) in Thuinjapuram block Thiruvannamalai district in Tamilnadu international Multidisciplinary Research Journal 2011, 1(3):37-46

⁴ (MoRD)2008 A Study On Socio - Economic Empowerment of Women ,Under National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (Nrega) Supported By UNDP

Livelihood Security: The MGNREGA is designed to enhancing livelihood security by adopting to Sustainable Livelihood Approach. Livelihood security for the poor is carried through creation of durable assets, improved water security, soil conservation and higher land productivity which relates the issues of Sustainable development, rural poverty and environment. Thus MGNREGA has goal orientation to ensure Sustainable Livelihood. A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base⁵. Among five key elements in the Sustainable Livelihood Approach, three are focusing on livelihood and two focuses on sustainability.

The *creation of working days* is ability of particular combination of livelihood strategies to create gainful employment for certain portion of the year. Sen has noted three aspects of employment; income, production and recognition of employment⁶. MGNREGA has been able in creating livelihood approach by ensuring the income, production and recognition of employment by its gainful employment for 100 days.

The second being *poverty reduction* as criteria to assess the Sustainable Livelihood. Though there are range of factors identified for measuring “poverty line” with some major challenges⁷. However, the quantitative measures are emerging out from the implementation of MGNREGA and its impact on poverty line, but the level of impact has not been assessed in detail.

The *wellbeing and capabilities* is the third prerogative of Sustainable Livelihood. The capabilities as what people can do or be with their entitlements⁸. The wellbeing and capabilities are resulting from sustainable livelihood out come by diverse factors such as self-esteem, security, happiness, stress, vulnerability and power⁹ MGNREGA ensures entitlements among rural population and hence sharpens the wellbeing and capability.

The fourth prerogative is the *ability of a livelihood to recover and able to come out from shocks and stresses*. The developmental initiatives under MGNREGA have ensured recovering ability of livelihood round the year and thus facilitating in sustainability of livelihood. This in turn is helping people to gain work even in shocks and stresses. At last the *sustainability in natural resource base* is the major imperative of this approach. The imperative falls within the sustainable development paradigm by holding the philosophy of development and maintenance of natural resource base at local level. MGNREGA at village level has aimed under its developmental activities to promote a good sustainable natural base and the usage of natural resources in more productive ways.

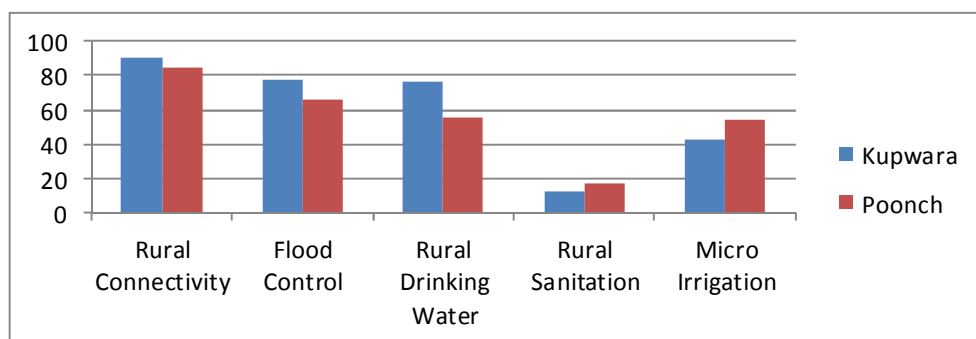


Table 1.2

⁵ Chambers and Conway among others 1992 team definition of Sustainable Livelihood, in Brundtland report WCED.

⁶ Sen, A, 1975, *Employment, Technology and Development*: Oxford Clarendon Press. pp-5

⁷ Greely, M. 1994, *Measurement of poverty or the poverty of measurement?*, IDS Bulletin 25(2): 50-57

⁸ Sen, A, 1984, *Rights and Capabilities In Resources, Values and Development*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell: 307-324.

The sustenance of natural resource base at village level has been focus of MGNREGA. The twin approaches of sustainability i.e livelihood and development goes in hand to hand. The participation and work done by the Job card holders was enumerated for five major categories of works. These five categories of works are *Rural Connectivity, Flood Control, Drinking Water Facility, Rural Sanitation and Micro Irrigation*. Firstly, rural connectivity includes the works like maintenance of link roads, developing new link roads and village pathways. Secondly, flood control includes works like bunds (protection walls) and drains, which not only secure the water bodies but also reduces incidence of landslide and soil erosion in villages. Thirdly, the rural drinking water includes construction of new wells to create drinking water facility. Fourthly, the rural sanitation is done under the convergence, in which the NBA is linked. Finally the micro irrigation is done through the irrigation wells. The range of activities has been done by the job card holders with varied range. However, the activities done shows how much work in these five areas has been done in promoting the development and sustenance of natural resource base at village level.

The types of work that has been done by Job card holders from last five years is enumerated as following; In total out of 100 job card holders of district Kupwara, 91 have worked in rural sanitation works, 78 have worked in flood control works, 77 in rural drinking water, 12 have worked in rural sanitation and 43 have worked in micro irrigation activities (Table 1.2).

In total out of 100 job card holders of district Poonch, 85 have worked in rural sanitation works, 66 have worked in flood control works, 56 in rural drinking water, 17 have worked in rural sanitation and 54 have worked in micro irrigation activities (Table 1.2).The empirical evidence is directly reflecting the achievement of The participation in these different kinds of works by Job Card holders is directly reflecting that there is sustainable development imperative in MGNREGA. It shows that all activities are carried with the aim of sustainability by preserving most precious natural resources. The activities have direct impact on reducing risks to natural resource base.It creates the opportunity for more production in terms of material output and encourages the more productive engagement of human resource at local level. The continuous engagement of labour also marks the positive impact on their social status goals. The evidence of sheer participation of labour force in activities reflects that the goal of sustainable livelihood and sustainable development are prerogative to MGNREGA.

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