



THE MAHATMA GANDHI NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ACT (MGNREGA) IMPLEMENTATION: THE ISSUES AND CHALLENGES: A CASE STUDY FROM PURULIA, WEST BENGAL

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Abstract

Poverty is a major challenge in all developing countries and to counter it not only the concerned government but also the pundits are in a process to formulate different programs across the world which will ultimately lead to complete eradication of poverty. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is considered as a panacea for eradicating rural poverty and unemployment to the Government of India, by way of generating demand for productive labor force in villages. It provides an alternative source of livelihood which will have an impact on reducing migration, restricting child labor, alleviating poverty, and making villages self sustaining through productive assets creation. However, there are major issues when it comes to implementation of the program in the field. This paper attempts to identify and highlights the major issues related to implementation of MGNREGA using primary data from four blocks of Purulia district of West Bengal with secondary data.

Keywords: MGNREGA.

Introduction

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was introduced after a long movement of different political parties, civil society organizations, non government organizations on 5th September in the year of 2009. The act was renamed as MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment guarantee Act) on 2nd October in the year of 2009. The act offers different choice of livelihood by ensuring 100 days of unskilled, physical work to the interested rural people conceiving that it will have an impact on migration, child labor, poverty, and making villages self sustaining through productive assets creation such as road construction, cleaning up of water tanks, soil and water conservation work, etc, for which it has been considered as the largest anti-poverty program in the world. But the success of this Act depends upon its proper implementation. The program in many states faced serious allegations for violating the guidelines and West Bengal is also in that list.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study is to highlight the issues and challenges come for the implementation of MGNREGA for all the stake holders includes indirect beneficiary by analyzing both primary and secondary data. In a nutshell, the objectives can be described as follows

- To analyze the current prospects of MGNREGA in study region context and highlights the gaps which are involved in its implementation agencies.
- To suggest the ways and strategies for effective implementation of the act based on the analysis studies.

Methodology

The study is based on primary data based on survey done during 2013 in four blocks of Purulia namely Raghunathpur-I, Raghunathpur-II, Pancha, Hura. Apart from primary data different sources including books, websites are used as secondary data.

The Structure of Implementation of MGNREGA

The Ministry of Rural development (MoRD) has issued a common guidelines in a circular for MGNREGA implementation and most of the states follow the same to execute it but there is also flexibility to make it more relevant according to respective state's regional context. At village level Gramsabha is primary institution to take decision about planning of work and its execution in the villages as per the required demand. Grampanchayat and involved functionaries has responsibility to implement the work plan in successive mode. A Gram Rojgar Sevak(GRS) is the key person appointed at village level to help the MGNREGA worker and maintain the record of their work in consultation with other functionaries. The Gram Panchayat (GP) is the main institution and prime stakeholder to maintain all the records in consultation with the concerned Program Officer who is Block development Officer also at Panchayat Samity Level. The Program office or Block Development Officer bears the overall responsibility to look after the administration and monitor the implementation of work in entire block. The District Program Coordinator who is also District Magistrate has responsibility to take the periodic review of MGNREGA implementation from district place and he is the competent responsible authority to take decision and execute the program in successive mode. He is equally responsible to ensure the work demand has fulfilled within a time.

Important Steps Associated with MGNREGA Implementation

Preparation of Perspective Village Plan: The Panchayat functionaries will prepare a perspective plan in consultation with the experts and will place it at sansad level meetings. The sansad level meeting will validate the plans and will send it to



Gramsava meeting held at panchayat level. There further refinement is done with the plan came up from the sansad level meeting in presence of Block representative and other stake holders.

Planning of Schemes: The next step is planning of schemes . After the Gram Sava armored with the prepared perspective village plan the Planning of schemes is one of the important point in MGNREGA. MGNREGA is demand driven programs, it is likely that Gram panchyat have to identify their own requirements to create infrastructure or assets for their people and they should put their demand in black and white and get it sanctioned from the concerned block and district administration. In NREGA policy frame work bottom up approach has been adopted and decentralization of power is institutionalized.

Demand of Work: As mentioned earlier by the law the program is a demand oriented programs. The wage seekers should put their demand and it becomes the responsibility of Gram Panchyat and Gramsevak to forward it to block panchyat to get it approved. They have to ensure that the applicant beneficiary should get employment within 15 days. In this way the flow of work starts.

Findings Analysis

It was found that in the context of MGNREGA the issues and challenges related with the implementation are two folded. The first one is from the implementation agency's side while the other is from the public side.

Problem related with the implementing agency:

The problems which lie with the implementing agencies can be further classified in to following categories

- a) Poor planning and administrative skills.
Though the panchayats play a very big role in development, but still these institutions are struggling with adequate skilled, trained personnel to cope up the situation. There is no permanent dedicated staff for implementing MGNREGA at panchayat level. All the staffs who are associated with MGNREGA are contractual and it is found that their salary is less comparing to their work volume. Not only that, most of them do not have proper administrative training to facilitate MGNREGA as per guidelines.
- b) Lack of objectives
As the staffs associated with the MGNREGA are not trained or they have the administrative skills, so they are unable to maintain the main objectives of the program.
- c) Lack of infrastructure
To implement a program with such huge magnitude, a proper ambience is necessary. To work one need proper office, office infrastructure, proper coordination. It was found that the Panchayat office places are not even enough to keep the records. There resources are very limited. Not only the Panchayat offices, but also there are no sufficient banks to ensure wages to be paid to the laborer within the stipulated time. Not only the gramian banks but also the nationalized banks are unable to deliver the required service with their limited resources.
- d) Lack of adequate staff strength.
The machinery for implementing MGNREGA at grass root level is also struggling with inadequate man power. Either there are no staff recruitments for the long time or the nature of job does not attract skilled personnel to join the service. Most of the system is suffering dearth of trained, skilled personnel which ultimately hampering the implementation of MGNREGA.
- e) Severe corruption and irregularities
Social programs in India are beset with corruption. Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi once suggested that only 15% of spending on such programs actually reached the intended beneficiaries. The Planning Commission of India in 2005 estimated that a similarly low proportion, 27%, of government transfers actually reach the poor. Such embezzlement adds to the strain on state finances, and may make these programs more regressive than progressive (Olken and Pande 2012, Niehaus and Sukhtankar 2012). Theft from the materials budget has not been carefully studied but during survey it was noticed that the panchayat official sand, soil contractors, leaders have made an unscrupulous nexus where the contractors supplies below quality or less materials , so by law materials costs can constitute at most 40% of the total and in practice they are even lower. Theft from the labor budget has been found a common practice. To understand how it works, let us consider the following hypothetical situation. Suppose the wage set by the government is Rs.100 a day. The laborer works for 5 days, but instead of paying him Rs.100 daily, the official pays him only Rs.90, keeping the remaining Rs.50 $((100 - 90) \times 5)$ for himself. Let us call this form of corruption 'underpayment'. In addition to underpayment, the official also reports to the government that the laborer worked for 10 days rather than 5, and pockets the additional Rs.500 (100×5) . We'll call this 'over reporting'. Under this breakdown, work done by 'ghost' workers (people who don't exist) is also considered over reporting, as would any collusion by workers and officials to extract payments from the government for work that is never done. Unfortunately, however, the responses to community monitoring across India provide a cautionary tale. For starters, it seems as though the punishment for exposing corruption is worse than the punishment for being found to be corrupt (Vanaik 2008).
- f) Unnecessary political interference.



The unnecessary political interference hampers MGNREGA implementation at field level. The norms says all the list of schemes must be presented in the general gram sava and it must be validated. But in practice, it is found that the political parties make the scheme list and general people are unaware about such list. While distributing works the local leader decides actually where the work would be done and who will get the job.

Now the issues are not only with the implementing agencies only. The problem lies with the people also. The problems associated with the people can be classified further into the following categories.

A. Insufficient awareness about the program

MGNREGA provides the rural poor a right to demand for work for 100 days in a financial year. But people's efforts to get jobs under this scheme have been obstructed by the fact that Governments have done nothing to encourage people to register demands. Due to lack of awareness about the provisions of the Act, People are unaware of their basic entitlements under MGNREGA such as Job Cards, Minimum Wage Amount, and Unemployment Allowance etc. If someone applies for job to the government, the official who is receiving the application must give them in return a receipt of the received copy. This given receipt is actually a basic record for claiming the unemployment allowance. There is a widespread ignorance about how to avail the unemployment allowance; sometimes even the officials deliberately do not give out this information as they fear punishment for not providing jobs and poor awareness not only leads to corruption but also to poor management of the scheme and thus true potential of the MGNREGA is not being realized.

B. General apathy towards administration.

During survey, it was noticed that due to different social and political reason, the people have grown apathy towards the administrative system and political system. Unless they require any documents or something like that, people generally avoid going to block or panchayat office. The administrative process to them remains shrouded in mystery to them.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The political and bureaucracy will and commitment seen as theoretical in execution of scheme. The poor had become weary of the scheme because of lack of regularity and assurance of wages and where erring officials were not punished and nor was unemployment allowance granted to any labourer who was not provided with work. Seasonal migration has been on the rise as a result of this situation. (C.Datar 2007). There is need to create mass level awareness about the program, recruitment of competent and sensitive human resources should be the part of implementation process to ensure the realization of desired goals of MGNREGA policy. There is need to create proper monitoring and co-ordination system with less paper work to ensure the quality in work within stipulated time. Inter departmental co-ordination and conversion of schemes from forest agriculture or irrigation department did not lead to holistic planning at the village level. (Sunita, 2008) There is a success story of Andhra Pardesh government that they have set up Society for Audit Accountability and Transparency (SAAT) as an autonomous body to ensure effective implementation of MGNREGA program and even. This is first state in country who have institutionalized social audit within pubic governance to ensure accountability transparency which finally resulted in effective implementation. Though after a very long hue and cry, the West Bengal government has set up an independent Social audit unit but it works under the Panchayat department. So the independency is in big question mark.

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