

MGNREGA: The Tangible Option for Rural Prosperity

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Abstract: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is the largest social security scheme in the world that provide assurances of hundred days of unskilled manual work to all rural households in the country. It gives rural communities the right to work under Article 41 of the Constitution of India. Though the MGNREGA has proved a boon to millions, there are still certain policy and operational challenges which need to be addressed to make MGNREGA more pragmatic.

Keywords: Audit, Individual Beneficiary Scheme (IBS), Job card, MGNREGA, Monitoring, Natural Resource Management (NRM), Rural infrastructure, UNNATI.

1. Introduction about MGNREGA

In order to provide direct supplementary wage employment to the rural population through public works, many programs were initiated by the Government of India, namely the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP), Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) and Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY). However, these programs were found to be barely adequate enough to provide a sufficient number of days of employment to each 'Below Poverty Line (BPL)' household in rural areas.

Subsequently, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 was notified on 7th September, 2005. Under this act, the eligible person has the right to 100 days of employment in a year, for each family within 5 km of his/her residence with 15 days from application for a local development project.

The physical progress of Mahatma Gandhi NREGA in terms of person-days generation, average person-days per household and participation of women and SC/ST is indicated in table 1.

2. Challenges of MGNREGA

Though the MGNREGA has proved a boon to millions, there

are still certain policy and operational challenges which need to be addressed to make MGNREGA more pragmatic. Since nine years MGNREGA is being implemented in all 623 districts of the country, but it is reported by researchers that it has not shown the result which had been expected and even put forward in MGNREGA objectives. Most of the evaluation studies have shown that the Scheme is not working properly at ground level because of its poor implementation [1].

Some of the salient issues which have emerged from the ground and need appropriate addressal by the policymakers are listed below. It is for consideration to find out that whether the satisfactory compliance to the stipulated norms is occurring or not. For the sake of easy comprehension, the issues have been segregated into four themes.

A. Theme 1: Monitoring, Audit & Grievance addressal

1. It is reported that the MIS data presently is not a true measure of performance in MGNREGA as an MIS-based implementation, without a robust leakage control mechanism, can only give out faulty data and misleading impressions.
2. The Gram Sabha needs to conduct regular social audits of all the projects under the Scheme.
3. Auditing Standards for Social Audit have been issued by GoI. States/UTs have been advised to establish independent Social Audit Units, conduct Social audits, and also train village resource persons for conducting audits. This needs to be earnestly taken up by all the states. For the purpose of monitoring assets, the GoI has started the implementation of GeoMGNREGA for geotagging of assets in partnership with the National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC) of the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO). This needs to be meticulously ensured.
4. National Mobile Monitoring Software (NMMS) App permits taking real-time attendance of workers at

Table 1
Physical progress of MGNREGA

S.No.	Indicator	2021-22*	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16
1	Person-days generated (in crore)	173	389.19	265.35	267.96	233.74	235.65	235.15
2	Average person-days per household	31.94	51.52	48.40	50.88	45.69	46.00	48.85
3	Women participation rate (%age)	53.62	53.18	54.78	54.59	53.53	56.16	55.26
4	SC/ST participation (%age)	36.53	37.33	38.89	38.19	39.05	38.94	40.09

*As per MIS (as on 02.09.2021)

Mahatma Gandhi NREGA worksites along with a geo-tagged photograph. The use of the same should be made mandatory.

5. GIS-based planning through the online portal Yuktdhara as Developed by the National Remote Sensing Center, ISRO, Department of Space needs to be ensured.
6. Climate Resilience Information System and Planning (CRISP-M) tool to help embed climate information in GIS-based planning and implementation has been developed. The use of the same has yet to be pragmatically initiated.

B. Theme 2: Wage payment

1. Currently, MGNREGA wage rates of some states are less than the corresponding state minimum wages. The low wage rates have resulted in a lack of interest among workers in working for MGNREGA schemes, making way for contractors and middlemen to take control locally [2].
2. There are provisions for in case the payment of wages is not made within fifteen days from the date of closure of the muster roll, the wage seekers shall be entitled to receive payment of compensation for the delay, at the rate of 0.05 percent of the unpaid wages per day of delay beyond the sixteenth day of closure of muster roll. This needs to be ensured.
3. A Standard operating Procedure (SoP) on the timely payment process for direct payment into the account of beneficiaries has been instructed to states by GoI. The use of platforms such as PFMS/NeFMS to enable real-time monitoring of the payments should be effectively putting place.
4. There is need to ensure increase in wages through linkage with commensurate inflationary index.
5. There is need to explore the option of expanding the ambit of permissible works under MGNREGA.
6. Fake Job Cards - Genuine job cards are being deleted to meet 100 percent DBT targets. Genuine job cards are being randomly deleted as there is a huge administrative pressure to meet 100 percent Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) implementation targets in MGNREGA [2].
7. Adherence to the guidelines provided that for the areas which have been affected by natural calamities, 50 days of additional work should be ensured.

C. Theme 3: Operational issues

1. There is a need to give equal emphasis on 'Common rural infrastructure' and 'Individual beneficiary schemes (IBS)'.
2. Individual beneficiary schemes (IBS) should be allotted as per the family's needs, resources, and primary livelihood options. Water based infrastructure should be the first priority in IBS.
3. Community welfare schemes are utilized mostly by privileged persons and also not utilized to the full

scale. Whereas IBS will be fully utilized because of direct access to the poorest.

4. A Priority list is prepared once a plan is sanctioned. Priority is not maintained during practical implementation due to political or contractor influence. During sanction and implementation, priority should be strictly followed as per community and submission during Gram Sabha.
5. There is a need to revise the guidelines ensuring 50 percent IBS should run consecutively with 50 percent common infrastructure schemes.
6. Labour groups of the same cluster must work during the implementation of IBS. Quality of material-level work can be maintained by engaging local SHG or VO members only if small-level IBS schemes are implemented on a large scale.
7. A real-time MIS-based implementation and a centralized payment system have further left the representatives of the Panchayati Raj Institutions with literally no role in the implementation, monitoring, and grievance redress of MGNREGA schemes. It has become a burden as they hardly have any power to resolve issues or make payments. The over-centralization of the Scheme has completely depoliticized the implementation of MGNREGA, and local accountabilities have been completely diminished.

D. Theme 4: Gender & Skill

1. While providing in employment lieu of demand, priority is to 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.
2. At the worksites, women may be accompanied by their children. In case the number of children below the age of five years accompanying the women working at any site is five or more, and provisions will have to be made to depute one of such women workers to look after such children. Provision of safe drinking water, shade for children, and periods of rest, a first-aid box with adequate material for emergency treatment for minor injuries and other health hazards connected with the work being performed need be provided at the work site.
3. The project "UNNATI" intends to upgrade the skill base of the Mahatma Gandhi NREGS workers, and thereby improve their livelihoods so that they can move from the current partial employment to full employment.

References

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