



Research Paper

MGNREGA in Arunachal Pradesh: Issues and Challenges

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ABSTRACT: Since the independence of the country, India has been struggling with the issues of unemployment problems, particularly in rural areas. The government of India has been putting their best efforts to address these problems, it is evident from the launching of a series of rural employment programmes. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (2005) is one such initiative of the government of India. It guarantees at least 100 days of manual unskilled wage employment to rural household. However, like every social security programmes, MGNREGA is not free from error. The present article highlights the issues and challenges of the implementation of MGNREGA in Arunachal Pradesh.

KEYWORDS: MGNREGA, Arunachal Pradesh, CD-block, Social Audit, Social Security.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The problems of unemployment have always been major obstacles to the economic development of India. It has crippled the country's economy from time to time. Ever since the independence of the country, India has been striving to cope up with the challenges of unemployment. It is evident from the launching of a series of rural employment programmes like Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP), Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY), Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS), Jawahar Gram Samridhhi Yojana (JGSY), Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), etc. Most of these programmes though were somehow successful in uplifting people from the scourge of poverty but had limited impact and suffered from various problems while they were implemented. Under such situations, and as an attempt to bridge the gap of earlier schemes, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (NREGA) emerged as a flagship programme of the government of India.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme was notified on 7th September 2005 as a subsumed scheme of the erstwhile Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana, National Food for Work Programme, Employment Assurance Scheme and Jawahar Gram Samridhhi Yojana (Ashok Kumar Giri, 2017). The MGNREGA aims at enhancing the livelihood security of rural households of the country by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

Initially, it covers 200 districts in its first phase during 2006 and it was extended to 130 additional districts in 2007-08 and subsequently, it was notified in all the remaining areas from 1st April 2008, (Mehrag, Nazia and Imran Ahmad, 2015). On 2nd October 2009 National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), (MoRD, GoI, 2006-12).

Arunachal Pradesh has formulated the Arunachal Pradesh Rural Employment Schemes as per the condition laid down under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. In Arunachal Pradesh, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was first introduced in the Upper Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh for the first time on February 2, 2006, when MGNREGA was introduced in 200 districts of the country during the first phase of MGNREGA implementation. During the second phase of the introduction of MGNREGA in the country during 2007, the Lohit and Changlang districts were selected amongst 130 additional districts selected for implementation of MGNREGA. The remaining districts of Arunachal Pradesh were covered under MGNREGA from 2008. At present, MGNREGA is operational in all 25 districts in Arunachal Pradesh with objectives-

- a) Providing social protection to the most vulnerable people living in rural India by providing employment opportunities,
- b) Providing livelihood security to the poor by creating durable assets, improving water security, conserving soil and increasing the productivity of land,
- c) Strengthening drought-proofing and flood management in rural areas,
- d) Empowering the socially disadvantaged people, especially schedule caste, schedule tribe, women, etc. through the right based legislation,
- e) Strengthening the decentralization and participatory planning process by converging various anti-poverty and livelihood initiatives,
- f) Deepening democracy at grass root by strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions,
- g) Implementation of greater transparency and accountability in governance.

MGNREGA guarantees 100-days of employment to a household in a financial year, whose adult member(s) is willing to do unskilled wage employment, it aims to curb the problem of unemployment and to increase the living standard of the rural population by creating durable assets in rural areas to strengthen livelihood resource base from the list of permissible activities ranging from conservation of water and soil resources to rural connectivity. The focus of these activities is to conserve and preserve the water and natural resources so that poverty may be removed on a sustainable basis. The primary objective of the Act is to meet the demand for wage employment in rural areas. The works permitted under the Act address causes of chronic poverty like drought, deforestation and soil erosion so that the employment generation is sustainable. The Act is also a significant vehicle for strengthening decentralization and deepening processes of democracy by giving a pivotal role to local Governing bodies, the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). MGNREGA is fundamentally different from the earlier schemes. It is a right-based demand-driven wage employment scheme with provision for allowances and compensation both in case of failure to provide work on demand and delay in payment of wages for work undertaken, (Umdor Sumarbin, 2014).

II. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

MGNREGA perhaps is one of the largest and most ambitious rural employment programmes in the country. However, like other social security programmes, the implementation of MGNREGA is not free from flaw. The schemes have shown several anomalies and implementation lacunae. The present article aims to highlight the issues and challenges Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Programme in Arunachal Pradesh.

The present article is based on the information collected from various secondary sources. Relevant secondary sources have been collected from the MGNREGA website, reports and notification issued by the ministry of rural development, the government of India relating to MGNREGA and different circular issued by the Rural Development Department, Government of Arunachal Pradesh. Further various research journals highlighting issues of MGNREGA have been referred to understand the issues and challenges of MGNREGA in other states. The opinion and views of block and panchayat functionaries and the general public were heard through various informal discussions. Further, the main sources of the present article have been the observational outcome of MGNREGA works in Ziro-I CD block of Lower Subansiri district, Arunachal Pradesh during 2017-18.

III. ISSUE AND CHALLENGES OF MGNREGS

The MGNREGA is perhaps the largest and most ambitious rural employment and scheme in India. However, many studies have revealed that the implementation of MGNREGS since its inception has serious lacunae. Various factors have contributed to the implementation problems of MGNREGA. For instance, Mahi Pal, (2014) revealed that the lack of awareness among various stakeholders about the provisions of the Act and not using proper IEC strategy for awareness building is one of the factors responsible for lacunae. Similarly, Amrit Patel, (2010) revealed that the PRIs functionaries as implementing agencies are not aware of some of the scheme's essential features of the scheme. Koyu, Sarkar, Singh, & Singh, (2017) opines that apparently, the working of MGNREGA is congruent with the policy document of the scheme. But the performance of MGNREGA is miserably poor. The issues and challenges of MGNREGA in Arunachal Pradesh is presented in this article under the following heads:-

1. Lack of Awareness

The awareness level of beneficiaries and implementing agencies greatly determine the success and failure of any rural development schemes in India. Unlike other rural employment schemes, MGNREGA has given rise to the demand-driven approach. The works under MGNREGA has to be triggered by the beneficiaries themselves. But the study revealed that due to lack of awareness, the beneficiaries do not demand work under the scheme. Instead, the works under MGNREGA is turning into allocation based.

Due to a lack of awareness about the provisions of the Act, people are unaware of the basic entitlements guaranteed under MGNREGA, such as Possession of a Job Card, minimum wage rate, unemployment allowance, delay compensation, fare wages, worksite facilities, social security provisions, social audit, etc. It is found that most of the elected Panchayati Raj members at the Gram Panchayat level are also unaware of these entitlements of the MGNREGA. The widespread ignorance among beneficiaries and Panchayat members led to the poor performance of MGNREGA. It is observed that the official responsible for the implementation of MGNREGA deliberately does not share this information out of fear of the strong check and balance by the Panchayats and beneficiaries. The lack of awareness does not only hamper the working of MGNREGA but often lead to corruption and poor management of the scheme. The Government must carry out intensive awareness programmes for beneficiaries and intensive capacity building and training programmes for the Panchayats. Awareness must be generated by the grassroots about the rights of Social Audit and people must be encouraged to use social audit and RTI tools as the means to check the corruption, leakage and mal-administration.

2. Poor planning and a lack of community participation in the planning exercise.

The Rural Development Ministry, Government of India has identified unrealistic planning at Gram Panchayat (Sandip Das, Financial express). MGNREGA planning involves extensive exercise to identify developmental gaps in the village. The participation of general people is the pre-requisite for the proper identification of development needs in the village. It is observed that due to lack of awareness, community participation in the MGNREGA planning exercise is missing rather it is observed that the planning exercise is made closed-door without considering the local needs. The problem of planning exercise and community participation must be addressed through proper capacity building and training interventions.

3. Lack of professionalism

Planning and implementation of any rural development programmes require professional human resource support, especially in the rural areas where the level of education and exposure is extremely low. The MGNREGA planning and implementation in Arunachal Pradesh lack professionalism. The shortage of technical human resources to guide the Panchayats in the right perspective is one of the major challenges of MGNREGA. The study revealed that most of the works taken up under MGNREGA is related to civil engineering works, it is mainly because of the availability of human resources from a civil engineering background. The works relating to Natural Resource Management (NRM), livelihood related works, agriculture and allied related works, etc are hardly selected due to the absence of human resources from those fields. The Government must try to induct human resources from various background, to empower villagers to take up other permissible works under MGNREGA.

4. The problem of Internet Connectivity

With the introduction of the national e-governance plan by the Government of India, almost all the activities under MGNREGA like GIS-based planning, e-muster rolls, NeFMS, etc. are made mandatory and it requires proper internet connectivity. However, in Arunachal Pradesh, many Gram Panchayats are not connected with internet facilities. Due to this, timely updating of MGNREGA MIS is being hampered. Further, the internet connectivity issues severely hampered the timely feeding of data in electronic muster rolls, due to which payments are delayed in many cases.

5. Low MGNREGA wage rate

The wage rate in Arunachal Pradesh greatly determines the participation of people in MGNREGA works. The study revealed that the local wage rate in Arunachal Pradesh is much higher compared to the MGNREGA wage rate. The local wage rate paid for unskilled works in Arunachal Pradesh is something around Rs. 350 to 500. Whereas the MGNREGA wage rate in Arunachal Pradesh is Rs. 192 only per day. The always workers look for works with a higher wage rate. The unregulated local wage rates in Arunachal Pradesh undermine the MGNREGA works, this leads to rampant migration of rural workforce towards urban areas in search of employment with higher wage rate.

6. Lack of coordination among different tiers of Panchayati Raj

The Panchayati Raj system in Arunachal Pradesh composed of a three-tier system, the coordination among all the three-tier system is one of the greatest challenges of MGNREGA. The MGNREGA stipulated that 50 per cent of works has to be taken up at the level of Gram Panchayat; however, it is observed in the study, the interference of the upper tier of the Panchayati Raj system in the implementation of the scheme is a regular phenomenon in Arunachal Pradesh. The block functionaries are struggling with the conflicting interest of different tiers of Panchayati Raj in implementing MGNREGA.

7. Lack of coordination among the functionaries of Rural Development Departments and Panchayati Raj departments

Unlike other states where the department of rural development and the Department of Panchayati Raj are functioning under the supervision of a single directorate. In Arunachal Pradesh, the directorate of Panchayati Raj has been separated from the directorate of rural development. This separation led to the separation of functionaries attached to it. At the block level, the official functionaries of both rural development and Panchayati raj are working. The clash of interest of official functionaries is often observed between these two levels of official functionaries, hampering the implementation of MGNREGA.

8. Departments working in isolation

The government of India through its various circular and notification have been advocating for convergence of various resources available under various schemes of the line departments and MGNREGA. However, in reality, every department is working in isolation, no department is showing any interest in joining hands with MGNREGA. It is due to this MGNREGA in Arunachal Pradesh are mostly restricted to single types of works even though the village needs other works as well.

IV. CONCLUSION

The discussion on the issues and challenges of MGNREGA in this article shows that the working of MGNREGA in Arunachal Pradesh has been suffering from various issues and challenges. Even after decades of the introduction of MGNREGA in Arunachal Pradesh, the MGNREGA could not yield the desire results. The majority of the rural people are still longing for other works despite the presence of MGNREGA in the state. People are often found looking for another job with a higher income. People are found to be ignorant about various entitlements of MGNREGA. Therefore, capacity building and training of both implementing agencies and the beneficiaries are required. Further, the working of departments in isolation is another major challenge that MGNREGA is facing in the state. Hence, both state and central government should re-look into the matter, to make it a purposeful one.

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