

BENEFICIARIES' PERCEPTION ON MGNREGA – A STUDY OF KULLU DISTRICT (HIMACHAL PRADESH)

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee (MGNREGA) scheme – A job guaranteed scheme aimed at ensuring livelihood security in the rural areas and has a great potential to change the social-economic condition of the rural people. The study conducted on 70 respondents selected from Nirmand Block of Kullu District (HP) revealed that a majority of them (62.86%) had medium level of perception about MGNREGA. Lack of facilities like crèche, drinking water etc. (Rank I) followed by ignorance about unemployment allowance (in case employment not given within stipulated period of 15 days of application), non-maintaining of wage and material ratio (Rank III) and happening of accidents due to lack of facilities at the worksite were the main difficulties faced by the respondents. Similarly, delaying in fund allocation and payment (Rank V) etc. were found some of the other main problems faced by them under MGNREGA. A simple majority (54%) were satisfied with the execution of MGNREGA by their Gram Panchayat. Hence, the study implies that awareness among the workers about some of the provisions of the MGNREGA particularly in case of compensation for delayed payment, ex-gratia payment, grievance redressal mechanism, unemployment allowance and employment with stipulated distance of 5km was very low. Hence, the study implies that efforts should be made to make the workers/village people aware through the use of mass media like Radio, TV and Newspaper etc. and by organizing some type of orientation programs for them. Facilities of Crèche, drinking water, Shed etc. could be ensured at worksite through proper monitoring and supervision by the implementing authority and the study has recommended that the days of employment should be increased from 100 days to 150 to 200 days.

KEYWORDS: *MGNREGA, Livelihood Security, Crèche, Monitoring and Supervision, Awareness*

Article History

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INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) - an Indian Job Guarantee Scheme was enacted by legislation on August 25, 2005. The scheme provides at least 100 days guarantee wage employment in a financial year to every household in the Gram Panchayat and contains a lot of provisions for the welfare of village people. The scheme aimed at ensuring livelihood security in the rural areas; and has a great potential to change the socio-economic condition of the rural people. The scheme has been operating in the State of Himachal Pradesh for the last one decade or so but what is the perception of the beneficiaries towards MGNREGA and the main problems being faced by them were some

of the few burning questions for which the present study was undertaken with the following specific objectives:

- To determine respondents' perception towards MGNREGA.
- To identify the main problems faced by them.
- To provide suggestive measures for effective implementation of MGNREGA.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh. Out of the five Development Blocks, one Block (Nirmand) was randomly selected. From the selected block, two Gram Panchayats, and from these Gram Panchayat five villages were randomly selected. From each selected village, 15 village people working under MGNREGA were randomly selected, thus, consisting of a total sample of 75 respondents. However, despite repeated visits, the data could be collected from 70 respondents.

Respondents' perception on MGNREGA was measured with the help of scale developed for the purpose. The scale consisted of 25 statements which were formulated and edited as per the criteria laid down by the Edwards and Kilpatrick (1948). The response of each respondent for all the twenty five statements were taken on five point continuum scale viz.; Strongly agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree and Strongly disagree with respective scoring of 5,4,3,2 and 1. On the basis of total score and standard deviation, the respondents were classified into following three categories:

- **High Perception:** $> (\bar{X} + SD)$
- **Medium Perception:** $(\bar{X} \pm SD)$
- **Low Perception:** $< (\bar{X} - SD)$

The main problems faced by the respondents were also identified. The suggestions from the respondents were also elicited for further implementation of MGNREGA. The data were collected with the help of well-structured and pre-tested interview schedule by personally interviewing the respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main findings are discussed as under:

Respondents' perception on MGNREGA

The perception of respondents' was taken (statement-wise) on five point continuum scale and accordingly mean perception score was calculated (Table 1).

Table 1: Respondent's Perception (Statement-Wise) on MGNREGA

Sr. No.	Statement	Mean Perception Score (mps)
1	MGNREGA Programme is useful in improving livelihood of people.	4.09
2	MGNREGA Programme has brought significant change in people's life.	3.31
3	MGNREGA Programme has helped in controlling migration of people from village/rural areas.	3.86
4	MGNREGA Programme has facilitated the people in sending their wards to school due to improved financial position.	3.8
5	MGNREGA Programme has helped the people to repay their debt (in case of need).	3.14
6	MGNREGA has been useful in creating useful assets for the village.	3.94
7	MGNREGA wages has helped people in purchasing medicines and thus, in health care.	3.4
8	MGNREGA wages has helped people in buying durable goods for the family.	3.23
9	MGNREGA has enabled people to buy agriculture inputs like seeds, fertilizers etc.	3.31
10	Due to MGNREGA people are able to find job/work in vicinity of their village.	3.83
11	Under MGNREGA people can get work within fortnight of receipt of application.	2.14
12	Work allotted by the <i>Gram Sabha</i> under MGNREGA is for the welfare of village people.	4.26
13	Wages are timely paid to the workers under MGNREGA.	3.23
14	Payment of wages in MGNREGA is quite transparent.	3.03
15	Wages as a mean of livelihood are sufficient in MGNREGA.	2.03
16	There is no gender discrimination in terms of wages under MGNREGA	4.37
17	Wages under MGNREGA are given as per the State government norms.	3.46
18	Timely payment of unemployment allowances is given under MGNREGA.	1.89
19	Facilities like drinking water, tools/implements, crèche etc. are available at work site.	2.17
20	There is provision of ex-gratia grant/ compensation in case of causality at the workplace under MGNREGA.	3.09
21	There are some preventive measures against any accident at the workplace.	2.6
22	The provision of one-third women workers is mandatory in MGNREGA.	3.46
23	There is provision of minimum three percent reservation to the disabled persons under MGNREGA.	3.34
24	MGNREGA has been quite useful in improving the socio-economic status of enrolled workers.	3.91
25	People are satisfied with the functioning of MGNREGA in the village.	3.23

A cursory look at the data revealed that the respondents had positive perception with the statements at serial numbers XVI, XII, I, X, IV and III i.e. there is no gender discrimination in terms of wages under MGNREGA (mps=4.37), The work allotted by the *Gram Sabha* under MGNREGA for the welfare of people (mps=4.26), MGNREGA is useful in improving the livelihood of people (mps=4.09), Due to MGNREGA people are able to find job/work in vicinity of their village (mps=3.83), MGNREGA has been useful in creating useful assets for the village (mps=3.94) and has helped in controlling migration of peoples from village/rural areas (mps=3.86). Similarly, the respondents were found to have favourable perception on the statements like MGNREGA is useful in improving the socio-economic status of enrolled

workers (mps=3.91), it has facilitated the people in sending their wards to school due to improved financial position (mps=3.80), the provision of one-third women workers is mandatory in MGNREGA (mps=3.46), wages under MGNREGA are given as per state government norms (mps=3.46) and MGNREGA wages has helped people in purchasing medicines and thus in health care (mps=3.40).

However, respondents were disagreed on the statements that timely payment of unemployment allowances is given under MGNREGA (mps=1.89), desirous job seekers', wages as a mean of livelihood are sufficient in MGNREGA (mps=2.03), people can get work within fortnight of receipt of application (mps 2.14) and that the facilities like drinking water, tools/implements, crèche etc. are available at work site (mps=2.17).

Hence, the study implies that the regular monitoring/checking on the part of administrators, implementers of the programme is needed so that regular facilities like Drinking water, Crèche be ensured at work site, Timely payment of unemployment allowance needs to be provided to the peoples working under MGNREGA.

These findings were in consonance with those of Borah *et al* (2014) who reported that MGNREGA helped in increasing the income of women which, in turn, enhanced their contribution to their household income and thus, reduced the debt burden on them. Sahoo (2014) also reported that equal wages were paid both men and women worker under the Act and Gram Sabha played a key role in the selection of work and conduct of social audit. The author also suggested that steps should be taken by the government to upgrade the skills of rural women so that they could earn more income.

Farooqi *et al* (2015) also observed that MGNREGA had increased total income of the beneficiaries particularly the women working under the scheme were found more supportive to their husbands in household expenditure.

Respondents' Perception towards Improvement in their Socio-Economic Condition

The respondents were asked whether there was improvement in their socio-economic status, the response has been depicted in Table 2.

Table 2: Respondents' Response (n=70)

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	60	85.72
No	10	14.28

More than four-fifths of the respondents (86%) perceived improvement in their socio-economic condition due to MGNREGA whereas the remaining 14 percent replied in negative i.e. there was no improvement because of MGNREGA in their socio-economic status.

Perception Regarding Execution of MGNREGA by their Gram Panchayat

Respondents' perception was obtained whether they felt satisfied with the implementation of MGNREGA by their Gram Panchayat or not, the response is given in Table 3

Table 3: Respondents' Perception

Response	Frequency	Percent
Satisfied with execution of MGNREGA	38	54.28
Not Satisfied with execution of MGNREGA	32	45.72

It is evident from the data, 54 percent of the respondents were satisfied whereas the remaining 46 percent did not express their satisfaction with the execution of MGNREGA by their Gram Panchayat.

Respondents' Overall Perception about MGNREGA

On the basis of mean perception score and standard deviation, the overall perception of respondents' was determined into three categories presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Overall Perceptions about MGNREGA

Perception	Frequency	Percent
High	12	17.14
Medium	44	62.86
Low	14	20.00

It is clear from the data that a majority of the respondents (63%) had medium perception about MGNREGA. Those who had high and medium perception were found to be 17.14 and 20 percent respectively.

Problems/Difficulties Faced by Beneficiaries under MGNREGA

The respondents were asked which main difficulties are being faced by them under MGNREGA, the response was taken on three point continuum scale i.e. Most serious, Serious and Not serious with respective scoring of 3, 2 and 1 and presented in Table 5.

It has been observed from the data that lack of facilities like crèche, drinking water etc. (Rank I) followed by ignorance about unemployment allowance (in case employment not given within stipulated period of 15 days of application), non-maintaining of wage and material ratio (Rank III) and happening of accidents due to lack of facilities at the worksite were the main difficulties faced by the respondents. Similarly, delaying in fund allocation and payment (Rank V), Non-availability of funds causing shortage of work (Rank VI), Shortage of work often leading to turnover of workers from the scheme (Rank VII) and due to illiteracy, the workers remain ignorant about their attendance in the Must Rolls (Rank VIII) were found some of the other main problems faced by them under MGNREGA.

Singh *et al* (2017) also reported that workers working under MGNREGA were not satisfied with the number of employment days and facilities at the work-site also These findings were also supported by Pandey (2017) who found lack in proper monitoring and vigilance of social audit and in releasing of funds well in time. The authors further suggested that decisive steps should be taken to ensure proper implementation of the scheme.

Table 5 Problem/Difficulties Faced by Beneficiaries under MGNREGA

Sr. No.	Problems/Difficulties	MS	S	NS	Total Score	Rank
1	Due to delay in fund allocation payment of wages is delayed	30	25	15	155	V
2	Non availability of funds causes shortage of work	25	25	20	145	VI
3	Shortage of work often leads to turnover of workers from the scheme	20	30	20	140	VII
4	Due to illiteracy, the workers remain ignorant about their attendance in the Muster Rolls	25	15	30	135	VIII
5	Sometimes irrelevant work is allotted to the workers compelling them to leave the work	10	35	25	125	X
6	Due to lack of facilities, there are accidents at work site	35	25	10	165	IV
7	Indifferent attitude of supervisors	25	20	25	120	XI
8	Time lag in payment of wages adversely affect the morale of workers	30	10	20	130	IX
9	Due to forgetting of bringing job cards, sometimes the workers are not permitted to the worksite and thus, are deprived of wages	0	0	70	70	XIII
10	Sometimes due to road blockage, the workers reach late at worksite but they are not permitted by the supervisors	0	5	65	75	XII

Table 5: Contd.,

11	Wage and material ratio is generally not maintained by the village <i>panchayat</i>	40	30	0	180	III
12	Worksite facilities like Crèche, Drinking water etc. are generally lacking	50	20	0	190	I
13	Due to ignorance because of illiteracy, unemployment allowance is not given (in case employment not given within 15 days of application for work)	45	25	0	185	II

Suggestions for Effective Implementation of MGNREGA

The suggestions were elicited from the respondents and the various stakeholders working under MGNREGA for its effective execution which are given as under:

- It has been observed that awareness among the workers about some of the provisions of the MGNREGA particularly in case of compensation for delayed payment, ex-gratia payment, grievance redressal mechanism, unemployment allowance and employment with stipulated distance of 5km was very low. Hence, the study implies that efforts should be made to make the workers/village people aware through the use of mass media like Radio, TV and Newspaper etc. and by organizing some type of orientation programs for them.
- Facilities of Crèche, drinking water, Shed etc. could be ensured at worksite through proper monitoring and supervision by the implementing authority.
- Proper receipt of application demanding work/job can be acknowledged so that the same can be sent to the competent authority well in time for seeking unemployment allowance. Besides, concrete measures should be initiated to take stock of employment demanded by the beneficiaries periodically in order to streamline the preparation of action plan.
- It has also been observed that the actual involvement of the local people in the preparation of plan is very low. Hence, the study implies that the efforts should be made to encourage their participation/involvement at the time of formulating work project/plan by the *Gram Panchayat*.
- The study has recommended that the days of employment should be increased from 100 days to 150 to 200 days.
- Facilities of tools and implements for workers and the first aid at the work place should be ensured.
- There should not be delay in allocation of funds for payment of wages.
- It is also recommended that adequate supervision and inspection of the worksites by the officers concerned is very essential which, otherwise, may lead to increased irregularities at the worksites. Besides, unwanted political interference and involvement of any anti-social elements in the implementation of the same should be avoided.
- Action plan and Muster Roll should be properly prepared and properly submitted to the concerned authority by the *gram panchayat*.

The findings were in agreement with those of Chauhan *et al* (2015) who reported that more than 12 crore bank accounts were opened under MGNREGA and further observed that women were now ready to come out of their houses to work with men ensured by equal wages for both male and female workers. Mir *et al.*, (2018) in their study on impact of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on Unemployment and Village Economy also

suggested that number of guarantee days for employment need to be increased and skill initiatives should be taken particularly for the women so that they could feel secure to work under the scheme in their village.

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