

## Impact Of Mnrega In Rural Areas In Up

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### Abstract

The MNREGS is indeed the first tangible commitment to the poor that they can expect to earn a living wage, without loss of dignity. A particular significance of the MNREGS is that many of the assets created under the programme can directly benefit the poor. This is because the Act specifies that individual works are permitted, but only for the benefit of households below the poverty line and from the scheduled castes and tribe communities. Perhaps the most important of all, and of lasting impact, is that a process for the empowerment of the poor is emerging around the MNREGS. This process has commenced in several parts of the country where poor households have been able to assert themselves and demand the payment of the minimum wage, bargain for higher wages, seek and obtain the unemployment allowance from a reluctant and unwilling administration. Training and capacity building for each one of the stakeholders is also an important, if obvious priority. It is specially so for the MNREGS because the dimensions and processes involved here require a different kind of understanding- quite outside realm of the experience of the past.

**Keywords-** Empowerment, Impact Of Mnrega, first tangible commitment and Rural Areas In Up.

### Introduction

The Critics notwithstanding, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGS) has widely been acknowledged as a pioneering legislation. However, it is seen essentially as a wage employment programme. The MNREGS is indeed the first tangible commitment to the poor that they can expect to earn a living wage, without loss of dignity, and demand this as a right. And the guarantee of 100 days of employment is possibly the most important feature of the Act. Never before in development history has there been an initiative of this nature and magnitude. Direct benefits from the wage have also been of enormous importance to poor households.

However, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Schemes (NREGS) is much more, and its potential is truly phenomenal. The unique character of the MNREGS lies in the remarkable opportunities it opens up to transform the development scenario in India. This has already begun to be revealed in the two years that it has been in operation. The irony is that this is yet to be recognized or understood even in government. Will the promise then, be fulfilled?

**ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE OFFICIALS** Perhaps for the first time in a government programme, transparency and accountability has been seen to be possible - as a participatory process. This is the direct outcome of social audits, the conduct of which has been mandated not only in the Right to Information (RTI) Act, but also in the MNREGS itself. Such social audits have thrown up incredible instances where corrupt officials in village after village have returned the money which they misappropriated. At public meetings, MLAs and other politicians have also disowned their henchmen who pocketed funds of the programme. This has happened most outstandingly in Andhra Pradesh where

the social audit has been made an integral part of the implementation routine. Such an approach, using also the RTI Act, has implications for projects and schemes in virtually every sector.

Further, partnerships between the administration and the community have worked and were found to have been feasible. Officials, NGOs, village groups and wage labourers have got together in several States to ensure the effective implementation of the programme -a big change from the feudal and maibaap syndrome which continued to persist after British left. This brings us closer to the objective of decentralized governance.

### **FUND GENERATION IN RURAL AREAS-**

An important aspect is the undeniable contribution of the programme to capital formation in agriculture. The Act itself spells out the type of works which are permitted. All relate to asset creation and focus on water conservation. Contrary to the common understanding of rural works as the construction of roads which are washed away with each monsoon, the experience from the field in the first year shows that 75% of the 8.3 lakh works with an expenditure of Rs. 9,000 crores, have been water harvesting structures, minor irrigation tanks, community wells, land development, flood control, plantations and so on. Benefits included the creation of over 12 crore cubic metres of water storage capacity, 3 lakh kms of drainage and embankments in water logged areas, 3.5 lakh hectares each of plantations and land development. These contribute also to drought proofing in low rainfall and semi desert regions.

A particular significance of the MNREGS is that many of the assets created under the programme can directly benefit the poor. This is because the Act specifies that individual works are permitted, but only for the benefit of households below the poverty line and from the scheduled caste and tribe communities. Just as the horticulture revolution under the Employment Guarantee Scheme of Maharashtra benefited the better off farmers in the 1990s, so also the MNREGS can make possible a productivity revolution on the lands of the poor. It is not known even in informed circles that the poor possess more than 15 million hectares of land; and today, this literally beckons the launch of an integrated development package-for horticulture, agriculture, integrated farming systems, plantations. At several places this is already being attempted, but on a small scale, and not in a planned and coordinated manner. There is nevertheless little doubt that the employment guarantee has enormous potential as an instrument for growth with social justice - an old, yet relevant refrain.

### **IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME**

Perhaps the most important of all, and of lasting impact, is that a process for the empowerment of the poor is emerging around the MNREGS. This process has commenced in several parts of the country where poor households have been able to assert themselves and demand the payment of the minimum wage, bargain for higher wages, seek and obtain the unemployment allowance from a reluctant and unwilling administration.

The MNREGS has in fact provided the stimulus for the mobilization of the poor across the country, possibly for the first time in recent history - in Tamil Nadu, Chhatisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh- and on a large-scale, through yatras and abhiyans, meetings and discussion, awareness and sharing. The awareness of the guarantee of employment, the direct impact of the wages on the household-which enabled children to go to school, improved nutrition within the family, brought down dependence on money-lenders, reduced abject poverty and migration-these bring a more enduring confidence amongst the poor. And are building blocks for living lives on equal terms and with dignity.

Clearly, the employment guarantee has initiated changes which are qualitatively different from any of the past; these could define a new paradigm in development. They have of course, not been

widespread, and the impact also has been varied and uneven. However, this is just the second year, and even so a difference is being made. The challenge now is how best to proceed to achieve the promise of the MNREGS. Certain priorities suggest themselves.

## **COORDINATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING**

There is all round concern at the slow rate of growth in agriculture (just 2.6%), and the solution is seen in directing capital investments to rural areas - as has been highlighted both in the Economic Survey and the Budget for 2008-09. The MNREGS can play a vital role in this, and we have noted that a significant beginning has already been made.

A critical and pre-requisite condition then, for enhancing the contribution of rural areas to the GDP through the employment guarantee, is to create and position a strong and effective management system - especially at the District, Block, Gram Panchayat and village levels. This has in fact never really been attempted, after the aborted community development experiment of the nineteen fifties. The MNREGS can impact several schemes in the districts, from watershed development to the provision of common facility centres for artisans, from irrigation to village drains and water supply. It will therefore be appropriate to integrate the prescribed procedures and norms for the NREGP with those for other programmes, so that we can have a composite system. (This is done periodically in industry, as a matter of course, with IT tools and customized software - of course on a smaller scale.)

Training and capacity building for each one of the stakeholders is also an important, if obvious priority. It is especially so for the MNREGS because the dimensions and processes involved here require a different kind of understanding - quite outside the realm of the experience of the past. The design of suitable courses and orientation programmes is a huge task.

Finally, despite the budget provisions, the proclamations of the employment guarantee as the flagship programme of the government, the fanfare and the speeches, what seems to be missing is belief and faith in it. There is no passion in owning it as a priority. or even a sense of identification. It has been marginalized, and relegated to a mere scheme of the ministry of rural development. It should instead, be treated as a National Programme of the Government of India and receive the same commitment as the green revolution did - for indeed it stands for much more.

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