

## People's Lives before and after implementation of MGNREGA - a case of tribal Rajasthan

Lalit Mohan Nayak

Research Officer, Indian Institute of Health Management Research (IIHMR), Jaipur

Praful Kumar Barla

Research Officer, IIHMR, Jaipur

Bijayalaxmi Panda

Research Scholar, Dept. of Social Work, Jain Vishva Bharati University, Ladnun, Rajasthan

### Abstract:

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is the first ever law internationally, that aims at enhancing the livelihood security of people in rural areas by guaranteeing a hundred days of wage-employment in a financial year to a rural household whose members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The main objective is to protect rural households from poverty and hunger as well as generating productive assets, protecting the environment, empowering women, reducing rural-urban migration and fostering social equity. It is not just an employment scheme; it is a tool for economic and social change in rural areas.

This study is qualitative in nature and mostly based on primary data through Focus Group Discussion (FGD), Case Study and Structured Discussion and observation. It was conducted in 2011 in Kushalgarh Block of Banswara district of Rajasthan. The Multi Stage Sampling method was adopted to select Gram Panchayats and Villages while MGNREGA beneficiaries were selected through purposive sample method. There were 100 beneficiaries, 25 from each village from four villages selected on the basis of poverty and hunger, illiteracy, poor economy, health and livelihood condition of the family. The target population was beneficiaries of MGNREGA and PRI members.

The study found a vast change in behavior in the rural poor of Kushalgarh block in both boys' and girls' education, women's empowerment, social equity and the health of both women and children and youth migration to cities. Another important finding was that the socio-economic condition of the rural poor was strengthened through improving irrigation facilities for

cultivation, employment opportunities in their own villages and saving opportunities for future requirements. The most important point was that the boundary of women in society was also taken into consideration in decision-making for the family, social developmental activities

through participating in gram sabha meetings and social audits at Panchayat level.

### Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a scheme that aims at the development of rural people and came into force on February 2, 2006. It is implemented by the Ministry of Rural Development in order to enhance livelihood security. MGNREGA focuses on unskilled manual work for rural people to pave their path to social and livelihood security through small income generational activities. It consists of various rural developmental activities like roads, bridge construction, canals, ponds, etc. It is implemented by government agencies at district, block and gram panchayat levels. The government provides prescribed wages of Rs 119/- per day for up to 100 days of labor. It also provides minimum facilities of safe drinking water, first aid and crèches for beneficiaries and their children on the work site.

### Relevance of the Study

Banswara district is bordered on the north by Dhariawad tehsil of Udaipur district and Pratapgarh district; on the east by Ratlam district of Madhya Pradesh; on the west by Sagwara and Aspur tehsils of Dungarpur district; and on the south by Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh. It also touches the boundary of Panchmahal district of Gujrat on the south-west. Maize,

wheat, cotton and gram are the main crops. Graphite, soapstone, dolomite, rock phosphate, limestone and a variety of marbles are found. Forest land covers 20% of the total area but is mostly devoid of trees. The hills have become bald-headed. As per 2001 population census, the total population in the district is 1,420,601. The density is 298 per square kilometer.

Kushalgarh Block is a remote rural area around 70 km from Banswara. It consists of hills, rivers, forests and undulating land with stony black soil. The main occupations of the people are agriculture, laboring and work as a domestic servant at home and on the farm land of the Mahajans or other rich families. Most adult boys and girls migrate to the cities due to the lack of employment. The Tribal People namely, Bhills, Meena, Gurjar, Luhar, Damor etc and other dominant castes like Rajputs, Brahmins, Muslims and Prajapat belong to the Block that governs the territory.

Education and literacy standards are low compared to other districts of Rajasthan. The literacy rate of Kushalgarh Block is 37.33% which is lower than the district's literacy rate of 44.63%. The male and female literacy rates are 52.49% and 21.75% respectively, also lower than the district average (60.45% male and 28.43% female). They do not want to send their children to school but encourage them to work as domestic workers or daily wages labour in the homes and fields of Mahajans or other rich families. They do not focus on girls' education as compared to boys.

The health status of the people of the block is appalling due to lack of awareness of health issues and lack of sanitation and personal hygiene. Usually, they use river water as their drinking water which is also responsible for the decline in health.

#### **Objectives of the study:**

- To study the status of livelihood and socio economic conditions of the rural poor

- To find out the status of agricultural production and of effects of MGNREGA
- To identify the conditions and situations of women and their participation in the developmental activities through the MGNREGA scheme.

#### **Methodology**

The study was explorative and qualitative in nature. The methodology was designed and implemented for the identification and collection of data on the status of MGNREGA in Kushalgarh Block of Banswara district of Rajasthan and was conducted systematically and scientifically. The Multi Stage Sampling method was adopted to select Gram Panchayats and Villages and MGNREGA beneficiaries were selected through purposive sample method.

The criteria of selection of two Gram Panchayats (Mundari and Timendabada) were on the basis of BPL families. Similarly, four villages (Kajalapada, Nathpura, Amlipada and Ambapada) were selected on the basis of BPL families to identify the impact and status of poor people through MGNREGA.

100 beneficiaries, 25 from each village, were selected on the basis of poverty and hunger, illiteracy, poor economic, health and livelihood condition of the family.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD), case studies and structured interviews were conducted for collection of data. FGD and Case study method were adopted with MGNREGA beneficiaries and structured interviews were with PRI members.

Content analysis was adopted to analyse the data. The target population was beneficiaries of MGNREGA and PRI members. Eight (8) FGDs (two from every village) were conducted with both male and female beneficiaries (25-40 years) for collecting detailed information regarding their status. Four (4) case studies were conducted with unmarried youth (age group of 15-25 of those studying through distance learning or not, but the beneficiaries of MGNREGA) on the basis of one case from each

village. Eight (8) structured interviews with PRI members were conducted. The age group of most FGD of beneficiaries was 25-40 years.

### Analysis and Interpretation

The concept of MGNREGA for people of Kushalgarh block seems quite different from the other geographical areas of Banswara district. The following main points were seen in Kushalgarh when the scheme was undertaken.

- People thought MGNREGA was the work of Mahajans who wanted development for themselves
- It was also the work of the Government who were paid for such activities
- MGNREGA work was for those who had no other activities to do at home
- The activities were time-wasting and unnecessary and work at home was affected by doing them
- It was a way to pass time for those people who do not get any job at home and feel bored

But after some days, people gradually changed. The earlier concept of MGNREGA changed but they still needed to understand its importance and value. Discussion with some respondents and the observations of the researchers were that:

- Many now understood that it was a source of income-generation while staying at home
- Some people understood that it was the Government's scheme for the development of rural people especially socially disadvantaged people
- Some understood that it meant a decline in migration to towns/ cities for income generation and is also a means of poverty alleviation for the rural poor
- A few of them understood that it is a path of improvement towards sustainable livelihoods and the means of coping with the global world through generating income.

### Status of rural people before implementation of MGNREGA at Kushalgarh

Those four villages of Kushalgarh block were tremendously undeveloped and people had no idea how to better their livelihoods. There were no alternative sources of income generation for sustainable livelihood and development in these localities. Thus most of the villagers migrated to the cities to get a better livelihood. Most of the people in this block were BPL and extremely poor. They depended only on agricultural production which was dependent on rainfall. There were no irrigation facilities to improve crop production so they produced less grain. They faced many difficulties just to keep themselves alive.

Only a few families sent some of their male children to school and only up to 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> class. After that, they dropped out to work on their crop farming lands and help support their families. Most of the boys migrated to the cities, especially to Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, to earn some money. The male students saw education as "*Pariksha me pass hua to Zindabad aur fail hua to Ahmedabad.*" (*Either pass in the examination is all right/ Zindabad or fail is Ahmedabad- Translated*<sup>1</sup>). This means that if they pass the examination, they will continue with their education otherwise they will go to Ahmedabad to get a job. No girls were sent to school. They supported their mothers in housekeeping and farming. Most of them were taking care of their younger brothers and sisters while their mothers worked on the farm. The local people did not want to send their girls to schools because they think after a certain age the girl will leave her parental home and go to another's. The people say that "*Chhoron hai aapono dhaan, Lekin Chhoriyon parke dhaan.*" (*Boys are one's own property but girls are others'- Translated*)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The quotation derives from case study. The case study was conducted with an unmarried male youth, MNERGA beneficiaries at village Kajal Pada of Mundari Panchayat.

<sup>2</sup> The quotation derives from the focus group discussion. The FGD was organized with married

Similarly, the social status of the women in their families is not given as much importance as the male's. Though the women are regarded as goddesses in our society, they are exploited and ignored in many circumstances. Their views are not accepted in any kind of decision for the families and if they are facing any kind of health problem, they are ignored. They are often exploited and abused physically, mentally, emotionally and sexually. They are supporting hands with their husbands at the time of cultivation and harvest yet they have no authority to fight for their rights.

### **Changing Status of people after implementation of MGNREGA Livelihood and Socio-Economic Development of the Rural Poor**

The status of rural poor changed after implementation of MGNREGA. During the Focus Group Discussion, the participants said that MGNREGA was a means for a better sustainable livelihood that provides jobs to the rural poor. Most beneficiaries saw MGNREGA as giving them good opportunities to earn money for the maintenance of their families, thus paving the way to sound health of mind and body and enabling them to do some developmental activities for family members. They also added that MGNREGA improves the economic standard of the family, village and society and helps them to send their children to school. It also removes hunger and thirst and provides healthy living. Some of them said that *"through MGNREGA people are provided employment by which they are able to purchase food grain for their livelihood."* (Translated)<sup>3</sup>

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*male, MGNREGA beneficiaries at village Kajal Pada of Mundari Panchayat.*

<sup>3</sup> *The quotation derives from Focus Group Discussion. The FGD was conducted with MGNREGA beneficiaries at village Mundari.*

A beneficiary of Kajalpara village of Mundari Gram Panchayat expressed his opinion that *"whosoever engages into the MGNREGA work, they can remove difficulties and problems and can see ways of making a better livelihood for their families."* (Translated)

Another beneficiary from Ambapara village of Timeda Gram Panchayat expressed his satisfaction that *"if there were no support from MGNREGA, there would not be food, shelter and clothes which would lead to the death of rural people."* (Translated)

Hearing what his neighbours said made the beneficiary promise to identify the right path for the improvement of his family and children. He also promised to improve the treatment of his wife to establish a new form of standardized family with great love and affection. He agreed to work in MGNREGA and on his farming lands to collect more grain and money to make a better life for his family. He thought to send his children to school. Finally he was supported by the neighbors for his wife's treatment and success in his life. Now he is living a better life due to MGNREGA.

### **Agricultural status of people after implementation of MGNREGA**

The agricultural status of the rural poor changed a lot due to implementation of MGNREGA. Previously there were no irrigation facilities for their farming but now they have channels and ponds and have set up irrigation systems for their crops. Now people cultivate and harvest twice/ thrice in a year. Through the support of MGNREGA farmers earned money and used it on major expenses such as participating in the training program in relation to modern technology and organic farming, conducted by Krushi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) at the district level.

### **Changing Status of women and their participation in development activities through the MGNREGA Scheme**

The status of women improved significantly. They were living within the boundaries of custom

and tradition before the implementation of MGNREGA but afterwards they were participating in the gram sabha meetings and in social audits at the Panchayat level as a result of MGNREGA which eradicated superstitions and paved the way to development. They are also more aware of their rights and now participate in decision making. People were unable to send their girls to school and were neglecting their health due to their poor economic condition, but now they are sending their daughters to school and taking care of their health. In an emergency they immediately visit nearby government hospitals/ facilities.

### **Challenges from MGNREGA**

People faced many challenges at first when MGNREGA was implemented in the villages. Some households did not get employment while some were not given job card applications because of family divisions.. During one case study, the beneficiary said that her two families were part of a joint family that had BPL status. The BPL card was in the name of the head, her father-in-law. However, because of family problems, they separated and began living as a nuclear family. But they only received one BPL card which meant that the father-in-law was eligible to receive a job card application but his sons were not and both families were rejected.

Frequently, BPL card holders applied for job cards but did not receive them time. When they asked the Sarpanch about their card's status, he ignored them which meant that some BPL card holders did not get any employment in MGNREGA

During focus group discussion with the beneficiaries, they expressed their unwillingness and dissatisfaction with PRI members, planners and implementers of MGNREGA. Often, PRI members did not give the full wages of Rs.119/- per day at the end of the month but some deductions would be made through illiteracy and unawareness about the daily wages pattern. At first they worked for Rs. 43/- to Rs.60/- per day. Now they get more than Rs. 90/- per day on the basis of working conditions. If they are working

in more difficult circumstances, they get full payment of Rs.119/- per day. The payment system and distribution of payment mechanism was operated by PRI members who paid beneficiaries according to what they themselves wanted.

MGNREGA monitor/ mates were selected by PRI members from the same communities. The mates also supported PRI members in operating the scheme as they wished. Political influences meant that actual beneficiaries faced many problems in getting job cards and full payment. Worse still, in order to get a MGNREGA job card, the beneficiary had to pay commission to the Gram Pradhan or Sarpanch and they did not get the payment slip which were supposed to be deposited in the local post office.

### **Recommendations**

- Working place/ Grass root level

The criterion for a job card in MGNREGA should not be just a BPL card because when the BPL survey was conducted it was not successfully implemented and many needy families were missed and so could not participate in MNREGA, The government should make new guidelines/ norms for MNREGA job cards including both BPL card holders and those who have no BPL card but should be awarded job cards on the basis of income certificate followed by minimum five criteria i.e. kuchha houses, no electricity in house, no job holder in house, no toilet, no land or minimum land, as substantiated by the Sub-Collector/ Tehsildar/ DM/ Revenue Officer/Adl. Tehsildar.

With joint families, where two sons stay with their family under one roof and their father is a BPL card holder, both father and sons should get BPL cards and MGNREGA job cards.

There should be proper management of attendance of beneficiaries at work sites. The mate/ supervisor should not allow beneficiaries to come to the work site just to get registered for attendance but not work the government-prescribed hours.

- Panchayat Level

Sarapanch and Ward Panch members of the Panchayat should be fully aware of the principles, norms and objectives of the scheme and should clearly follow the norms during implementation of the scheme. Sarapanch and Ward Panch members of the panchayat should provide job applications to all BPL card holders and help them to fill in the form properly. The Panchayat secretary and Sarapanch should follow up the job cards and check that the Block office/ Panchayat Samiti Office has issued job cards for all applications in time. The Panchayat should distribute job cards to beneficiaries without taking any kind of bribe or gift.

The beneficiary should get full payment for his/her labor as per norms and the pay slip should be handed over to the beneficiary or deposited in the village/ local post office.

The total budget, expenditure and balance sheet of the scheme should be presented in the social audit at the panchayat level in the presence of all beneficiaries and stakeholders of the panchayat. The implementation plan and work site facilities/ benefits should also be discussed in the social audit so that the rural people can know about their rights.

- Block/ Panchayat Samiti Level

A full time Block level monitoring team should be set up under the chairmanship of the Sub-Collector. The monitoring team should comprise of government servants as well as employees of community-based voluntary organizations/ NGOs/ Mahila Mandal. The BDO and Panchayat Samiti Chairman should visit the work sites once a month and should take feedback about the monthly payments and whether beneficiaries are facing any challenges.

Training programmes on programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation and quality assurance should be organized at block level for PRI members, the monitor team and other programme managers and planners

- District Level

A district level monitoring team should monitor block level monitors. The block level monitors/ mates should not be selected by the Panchayat Samiti or block office. The monitoring team should be selected by a committee consisting of the Sub- Collector/ SDM, BDO, two Social Activists nominated by local NGOs (one male and one female) and the Sub-chairmanship collector.

- State Level

A Third Party Audit (TPA) should be conducted at every district work site to learn the real situation, challenges faced by both beneficiaries and managers and limitations of the scheme. The state government should conduct action and experimental or quasi-experimental research to study the impact of the scheme on the lives and livelihoods. The state party should plan accordingly to make maximum use of the funds.

### **Conclusion**

Through MGNREGA, disadvantaged people in Kushalgarh block of Banswara district of Rajasthan experienced significant changes in their lives. Women who had been restricted by custom and tradition were now participating in Gram Sabha meeting and social audits, thus eradicating superstition and paving the way to development. Many farmers were able to earn money and take advantage of the training in modern technology and organic farming offered by the Krushi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) at district level. However, although the disadvantaged were gradually improving their socio economic status, they still had to pay money to the Gram Pradhan or Sarapanch to get a MGNREGA job card for 100 days unskilled manual work. They were still exploited by mates in terms of their daily minimum-prescribed wages which were supposed to be deposited in the post office and a receipt given to beneficiaries. Education also improved, especially among girls. Women began to take part in decision-making in their families. And family members took better care of the women's health. The most encouraging observation from the field was that migration to towns and cities was much reduced through the

provision of 100 days unskilled manual work in their own villages, thus generating income.

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