

CHAPTER IV

Conclusions and Recommendations

This dissertation broadly aimed to review the functioning of MGNREGA in a village study in Rajasthan. To what extent has livelihood security been enhanced through MGNREGA has been one of the three main focus areas in this study.

Provision of livelihood security by giving at least 100 days of employment to volunteering households is the primary goal of the Act. Against this goal it is evident that the MGNREGA work in the village has not significantly enhanced the livelihood security. The question also is whether work was demanded by any volunteering Household. The best statistic is for year 2016-17, wherein, the average persondays per household was 61. The primary data clearly brings out that the sample workers are inclined to work but the MGNREGA work has not attracted the able bodied people who could work for higher wages in the surrounding areas. The market wage is also significantly higher and therefore MGNREGA is less attractive for those who can travel to nearby towns etc. However the sample workers (30 women workers) are enthusiastic for the MGNREGA work. It would definitely have an impact on providing supplementary income to the families besides placing purchasing power in the hands of women. It is also an endeavour in training of people in participating in Gram Sabha deliberations for preparing village plans in the form of shelf of works. This strengthens local governance.

The moot point is that, the right to work has been given by the Law and this can be exercised by the women members of the house even if the male members of the family are engaged in farm labour on market wages. The Gram Sabha and the Administration cannot show poor enthusiasm just because the population are not in destitution. The Act gives the right to work to every household and if this provision is invoked by an individual, the same has to be given effect to. This essence has to be understood and propagated. Viewed from this perspective, the Gram Panchayat falls short of meeting the objectives.

The perspective employed by administration, that the cause of low participation is the low enthusiasm of the households and also the small number of active worker base, cannot be appreciated because the low participation seems to be the consequence of poor mobilization of the Gram Sabha and absence of proactive administration with regard to this scheme. All the sample workers(30 women workers), wanted work for 100 days in the scheme and three workers also mentioned that if they work out of their home, it is going to be MGNREGA or Forest Department work.

The argument that the MGNREGA work has not had significant presence in the village because of no demand of work from volunteering households, is not a valid argument. The sample workers had to depend on the Mate, to comprehend as to what is meant by application for work. They had mentioned that they affixed their thumb impression on a document. With this being their literacy levels and world view, it appears that they do not comprehend what their entitlements are under MGNREGA and do not have

the comprehension or the capacity to demand a dated receipt for their application. This has resulted in a scenario, where the employment for the volunteering households is not created by the demand driven mechanism envisaged by MGNREGA.

The central point is that not only do people lack awareness levels but they also seem to lack the capacity to enforce their rights. Administrative support and Gram Sabha assertion of Local Governance is not seen.

The Gram Sabha has made a long list of works but its initiative ended at that point. The Administrative support in terms of processing muster rolls for prompt payment is note worthy, but by not planning for adequate work and implementing it, the administration may have discouraged the potential workers. It is difficult to feel enthused about a work that would give you employment for 20 to 30 days and may be the potential workers would gradually stop looking up to the scheme.

The capacity of the Gram Sabha in planning the shelf of works is also not completely satisfactory. The Gram Sabha for instance sent a list of 173 works for approval. From a realistic point of view we may see that the higher echelons of the planning apparatus would have been submerged with such a flood of proposals resulting in virtually little outcome. The works are actually finalized or approved by the district administration at the time of considering cases for work sanction in the current year. Evidently the shelf of works are not processed by the higher echelons, at the time of seeking approval for labour budget. The process therefore has uncertainties even from the point of view of Gram Sabha, which is not an ideal situation.

There are challenges that need to be addressed to enable achievement of livelihood security through MGNREGA. The awareness of the scheme as a rights based scheme is not fully understood by people and the same needs to be advertised. The application process should become more transparent. However many institutions and legal provisions we may create, they would mean nothing if the people do not invoke these.

The Gram Rozghar Sevak ought to seriously take this job of creating awareness in the people and assisting them to submit applications and demand dated receipt from the GP office. Moreover the Gram Panchayat ought to realistically draw the shelf of works instead of just collecting all the demands of the ward members and forwarding the long list to the higher levels, quite mechanically without serious application of mind. The Gram Sabha ought to deliberate the various proposals and send only the required and the feasible shelf of works to the Block office. The seriousness in the process is lost if this process is done mechanically. Why is the list of works, in terms of quantity of work, not in sync with the demand for work in the village and if the demand does not exist there is no rationale in drawing a long list of works. The Gram Sabha also remained silent while works were not taken up even after being sanctioned for the financial year 2016-17. The Gram Sabha therefore needs to be proactive on this count.

One of the crucial inadequacies of the social and political infrastructure of the village is the virtual absence of the SHGs on its landscape. It is more or less a considered view now that the SHGs are the catalysts that effect the economic and political development in the villages. The case of

Kudumbashree of Kerala is often quoted in this regard. It is these SHGs that help in mobilising women and training them in interactive and negotiation skills, leading to confident groups of women participating in the daily proceedings of the village, culminating in their active Gram Sabha participation. In this village the absence of SHGs connotes the social backwardness of the women and infact economic activities like MGNREGA are certainly useful for generating a positive spiral.

There are factors that constrain the creation of durable productive assets under MGNREGA. The number of works taken up under MGNREGA is very low. The interaction with the sample workers has shown that the women folk of the village in general, are inclined to work under MGNREGA, and therefore the number of works, interalia, are considered sub optimal. As regards the productivity of assets, quantitative studies were not feasible in a study of this limited a scope, but the perceptions of some stake holders do highlight that the water related structures do have an impact.

The range of assets created is very limited. There is a complete absence of certain category of works such as agricultural related works like NADEP and Vermi composting, Solid Waste Management works, Livestock related works and Rural drinking water works (Soak Pits and Recharge Pits). The synergies of all these diverse works ought to be realized for creating an integrated model of development in a village. The central point however is the low political maturity levels of Gram Sabha. The inability to proactively participate in drawing a realistic shelf of works and also in demanding that all those works be approved in principle before the commencement of the

financial year. The inability to decide on the work pattern month, and not making necessary planning and coordination by the Gram Sabha and also by the administration are serious challenges.

Recommendations

The low awareness levels are a serious constraint that needs to be addressed. Documentaries (made in the native dialect) about the rights given by the scheme and methods by which they could be invoked should be screened in the villages several times so that the people will retain the essential aspects of the scheme. Regular broadcast in the popular television programmes is also deemed useful.

Awareness levels by itself does not mean much, in the absence of the capacity to demand the rights. Some of the people in the village who congregated at the work site were educated people and one of them is a ward member himself. They agitated that the work in their habitation is taking place after a gap of several years while there are many women in the village who would work for 100 days a year. The capacity to invoke the rights is clearly absent and this is more a product of group and institutional dynamics than a single individual's initiative. A proactive role needs to be played by the Gram Sabha. To start with, Gram Sabha meetings ought to deliberate why the works are not being carried out in the village and bring this to the notice of the district and the state administration.

The provision of obtaining dated receipt for the application for work is the most important aspect of the Law as regards to enforcement of the right to work. This provision virtually lies unused but if the Ward members are given

responsibility of educating the people and handholding them in the process of application of work and also obtaining a dated receipt, a turn around in participation in the scheme is bound to happen, because in the ultimate analysis there are people in the village who would work 100 days a year.

Gram Sabha is to forward the Shelf of Works, that is in sync with the real demand for work. Every ward member could easily employ a house to house survey to register the employment needs of the people in their habitation.

Once the shelf of works is prepared as a serious exercise, the Gram Sabha deserves to to be given a reasoned account of any deviation or any modification in the finally approved shelf of works and this is to happen before the commencement of the financial year. This finally approved shelf of works ought to be uploaded in the official MGNREGA website. At the end of the year, the appraisal of the work of the administration and the Gram Sabha also need to be done from the stand point of achievements made with respect to this shelf of works. Any deviation or shortcoming ought to explained by a reasoned account and just not by stating that the labour is not available. This is where the significance of application and dated receipt lie. The responsibility of coordinating this process lies primarily with the Gram Panchayat. If at least one of the two levers (the administrative support and the Gram Sabha mobilization), is strong, it is feasible to hold the erring lever accountable. The problem becomes too difficult to surmount when the administrative support is low and the Gram Sabha mobilization is poor.

As the village does not seem to possess a vibrant people's mobilisation, the District Administration ought to actively monitor the shelf of works. Certainly poorly performing panchayats could be monitored at the State level too, but for this to take place in an effective way, meaningful data has to be available on the website, which is not the case for the Kant Panchayat.

The MGNREGA works that are sanctioned for the Kant Panchayat are few in number, but these also have remained incomplete as the shelf of works for 2016-17 and 2017-18, have revealed. The administration is accountable for non completion of works on grounds other than genuine.

The MGNREGA works that have a direct bearing on aquifer recharge, ought to form a part of the shelf of works in this drought prone area. These works for instance are the Rural Drinking water programmes such as Soak pits and Recharge pits.

The Schedule of Rates applicable in Rajasthan for road work requires for a day's wage, to excavate 100 cu ft in ordinary soil. In hard soil the work required is 63 cu ft. The women workers complained that the ongoing road work construction involved hard soil but they are being asked to do earth work as per the norms for ordinary soil, that is, 100cu ft of hard soil. The issue of interpretation of what norm to follow appears to be complicated and the same needs to be relaxed wherever there is ambiguity. It is pertinent to mention that in Tamil Nadu, the norm for a day's wage is to excavate 1 cu m of soil in the works relating to digging the command area of a village tank or the channels from the command area to the water body. Apparently there is State wise

variation of Schedule of Rates that cannot be explained away on grounds of variability of soil types. It may be mentioned that the Schedule of Rates of different State Governments are not available on the MGNREGA website and this is a serious transparency issue because States with lax work norms generate more participation in terms of person days and remuneration with correspondingly much less labour output.

The MGNREGA website is useful in providing a lot of data for drawing evidence on matters of livelihood security such as the weaker section participation but to help understand the policy making dynamics and depth of local governance, information is needed on the shelf of works and the demand for work as the starting point for our analysis. At present we neither have data on the proposed shelf of works nor the approved shelf of works. At best we have a work expenditure list that contains all the works, but the data does not suggest any thing about the political maturity of local governance. We need to know what the village wanted and what was sanctioned and what finally transpired on the ground and why. If any shortcomings are found, how are they addressed in the following year, is also a pertinent question for which evidence is needed. Relevant data is required for drawing such evidence.

The Gram Sabha does not become proactive merely because of the legal provisions that have made it an independent institution of self governance but it is increasingly understood by the policy makers these days that the dynamics that catalyse this process of self governance is the SHG movement which is being seen as the Nano group which catalyses the Micro group which is the Gram Sabha. The SHGs, the Gram Sabha and the Gram

Panchayat is the Triad that would transform Kant Panchayat, and Rural India, too. This fundamental requirement is to have an active Gram Rozghar Sevak and a Barefoot engineer in assisting the Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat in creating and nurturing the SHGs, in order to ensure effective implementation of MGNREGA.