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A REVIEW OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES IN INDIA

Santanu Panda¹ and Arup Majumder²

¹ICSSR Postdoctoral Fellow; ²Research Scholar, Department of Anthropology,
Vidyasagar University, West Bengal, India

Abstract: The Rural development generally refers to the process of improving the quality of life and economic well-being of people living in relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is considered as a “Silver Bullet” for eradicating rural poverty and unemployment, by way of generating demand for productive labour force in villages. It provides an alternative source of livelihood which will have an impact on reducing migration, restricting child labour, alleviating poverty, and making villages self-sustaining through productive assets creation such as road construction, cleaning up of water tanks, soil and water conservation work, etc. For which it has been considered as the largest anti-poverty programme in the world. In this paper, based on the secondary data, an attempt has been made to comprehensively understand the development effort to rebuild the rural life and livelihood on the basis of various secondary data.

Keywords: India; Rural development; Development; Development projects.

INTRODUCTION

In India, out of total population of 121 crores, 83.3 crores live in rural areas (Census of India, 2011). Thus, nearly 70 per cent of the India's population lives in rural areas. These rural populations can be characterised by mass poverty, low levels of literacy and income, high level of unemployment, and poor nutrition and health status. In order to tackle these specific problems, a number of rural development programmes are being implemented to create opportunities for improvement of the quality of life of these rural people.

The term 'rural development' is the overall development of rural areas to improve the quality of life of rural people. And it is a process leading to sustainable improvement in the quality of life of rural people especially the poor (Ramesh, 2012). The rural developmental programmes intend to reduce the poverty and unemployment, to improve the health and educational status and to fulfill the basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing of the rural population. To improve the conditions of rural people, Government of India launched some schemes through the planning commission of

India such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), *Rastriya Sama Vikas Yojana* (RSVY), *Indira Awas Yojana* (IAY), *Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana* (SGRY), Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP), *Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana* (PMGSY), Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA), etc. All these schemes are aimed to reduce the gap between rural and urban people which would help reduce imbalances and speed up the development process.

MGNREGA: THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In the post-Independence period, the Government wanted to uplift the socio-economic condition (SEC) of their people who mainly depended upon forest products and daily labour. Another important component of the governmental perspective was to settle the rural population as agriculture population.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, guarantees

100 days of employment in a financial year to any rural household whose adult members are willing to do unskilled manual work. The Act has come into force with effect from February, 2006 in 200 districts initially and later on, it was extended to all the rural districts of India from the financial year 2008-09.

MGNREGA has come after almost 56 years of experience of other rural employment programmes, which include both Centrally Sponsored Schemes and those launched by State Governments. These comprise the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) 1980-89; Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP) 1983-89; *Jawahar Rojgar Yojana* (JRY) 1989-1990; Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) 1993-99. *Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana* (JGSY) 1999-2002; *Sampoorna Grameen Rojgar Yojana* (SGRY) 2001; National Food for Work Programme (NFFWP) 2004. Among these programmes, the SGRY and NFFWP have been merged with NREGA in 2005.

The Act was implemented in phased manner – 130 districts were added in 2007–08. With its spread over 625 districts across the country, the flagship program of the UPA Government has the potential to increase the purchasing power of rural poor, reduce distress migration and to create useful assets in rural India. Also, it can foster social and gender equality as 23 per cent workers under the scheme are Scheduled Castes, 17 per cent Scheduled Tribes and 50 per cent women. In 2010–11, 41 million households were employed on NREGA worksites. This Act was introduced with an aim of improving the purchasing power of the rural people, primarily semi or unskilled work to people living in rural India, whether or not they are below the poverty line (en.wikipedia.org/.../Mahatma_Gandhi_National_Rural_Employment).

THE PRESENT STUDY

In the present review paper, we reviewed the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in detail with the help of secondary data. The data was collected between January 2013 to July 2013 from Vidyasagar University library, rural development section and tribal welfare

department of Paschim (west) Medinipur district administration. Two case studies are also cited based on first-hand field work. The present study intends to assess the overall scenario i.e., the pros and cons associated with the scheme with the following objectives:

- i. To assess and acquire new insights on development of MGNREGA as well as overall socio-economic impact of different rural development programmes on the lives of the rural people.
- ii. To document the improvement or changes brought by MGNREGA in the lives of the rural poor at the household level and village level.

MGNREGA: THE PRESENT STATUS

A number of authors have attempted to study the MGNREGA in detail and its related problems. Dreze (2007) looks at the corruption in rural employment programmes in Orissa (India) and how this has continued in a NREGA as well. According to Mathur (2007), a system of regular and continuous flow of authoritative information is essential, as opposed to the random reports and studies dependent on the initiative of individuals and groups. To improve implementation, the government needs to solve problems, modify policy directives, and issue operational guidelines for the district, block and village levels. The government must take the lead, be proactive, mobilise institutions and groups, and use the media effectively. NREGS involves several lakhs of government officials, panchayat functionaries, elected representatives, NGOs and community groups. They play a critical role but had little preparation for the challenge. NREGS in fact is a program of national importance which has been marginalised. While the Ministry of Rural Development is the nodal ministry at the centre, every relevant department and agency requires being involved.

Ambasta et al. (2008) gave a number of important recommendations. These included deployment of full-time professionals dedicated to MGNREGA at all levels, especially at the block level. Intensive effort at building up a massive cadre of fully trained grass-root workers is required at the gram panchayat level through a nationwide movement for capacity building, engaging government and

non-government training institutions.

Mehrotra (2008), a civil servant who has worked in implementation of the scheme, believes that 4 per cent of programme costs allocated as administrative costs and professional support is still quite low and does not recognise the fact that a programme at the scale of MGNREGA requires serious professional support.

Khera (2008) thinks that the successful implementation of the MGNREGA in the Pati block in Orissa (India) state goes beyond the ability of its residents to claim their rights. This is brought out by the high levels of engagement with the programme in terms of planning, implementation and monitoring.

Mathur (2009) states that in social audit undertaken in Andhra Pradesh (India), it was found that in certain villages, some people stated that they had not been paid for the work done. When comparisons were made of the payments as per the pass-book with the payment as per the job card, it was discovered that the job card did not contain the inner pages that record the work done by each person; the job card itself was incomplete.

The MGNREGA needs to be a support system for the desperately poor and should enable, encourage and empower them to stand on their own feet. In its present format, the MGNREGA could become yet another subsidy programme that runs the risk of becoming a burden on the nation (The Economic Times, 2009).

Rural development is the need of the hour. It not only constitutes the development of rural regions but also aims at improving the well-being and quality of life to the rural poor through collective process. It is clear from the review that though this programme is meant for improving the life conditions of the people in the rural settings but this programme suffers from a number of shortcomings. Thus, the detailed review of literature clearly indicates that there is a need for extensive anthropological research work for understanding the socio-economic impact of MGNREGA programme on rural Indian.

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE FIELD

The following case studies are cited based on first-hand field work conducted at Kurinjipadi village of Cuddalore district in

Tamilnadu, India and Dodiya village of Rajnandgaon district in Chhatisgarh, India .

Case 1: Name: Jayalakshmi Age: 45

She lives in Therkuthittai panchayat of Melbhuvanagiri Block in Cuddalore District in Tamil Nadu. She is a widow and has a son who studies in the XIIth Standard. She says that agricultural work is available only for about 6 months in a year and that too not continuously. Some of the work like harvesting paddy is done by couples (husband and wife together) and she is not able to go for such work since she is a widow. She however is able to work under NREGA. She has worked for 30 days in 2007-2008 and has used the income she earned to support her son's education. She is happy that NREGA wages are paid every week and would like to get a card for her son so that he too can work.

Case 2: Name: Mogra Age: 34

She lives in Dodiya village of Dhamansara Panchayat, Rajnandgaon Block. She has BPL card and her family used to stay in a *kacca* house. Recently she and her husband built a brick house for them. She came to know about the provisions under the NREGA through a public announcement in the village. She decided to work under NREGA. Last year she and her husband worked under NREGA for 100 days and earned a good amount of money at the rate of Rs. 60/- per day. As the small amount of land they have is enough to fulfill their basic food necessities. Finally, they decided to spend money earned by NREGA to build a *pacca* house for them.

Thus, it is clear from the cited cases that MGNREGA is a very important rural development programme in India as it helps the rural poor to earn their livelihood. This programme can go in a long way to improve the socio-economic status of the rural poor.

CONCLUSION

Around 70 per cent of the Indian population is living in rural areas. People in rural areas should have same QOL as is enjoyed by people living in sub-urban and urban areas. Furthermore, the cascading effects of poverty, unemployment, poor and inadequate infrastructure in rural areas on urban centers is leading to socio-economic tensions manifesting in economic deprivation and urban poverty.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is considered as a "Silver Bullet" for eradicating rural poverty and unemployment, by way of generating demand for productive labour force in Indian villages. It provides an alternative source of livelihood which will have an impact on reducing migration, restricting child labor, alleviating poverty, and making villages self-sustaining through productive assets creation such as road construction, cleaning up of water tanks, soil and water conservation work, etc. For which it has been considered as the largest anti-poverty programme in the world.

Since the scheme is going to be in place for an undefined period of time, and is being enlarged in terms of scope and geographical coverage, there are many challenges like non-homogeneity in its effectiveness, region specific disparities and outcomes etc. It is exactly due to this reason; few NGOs have already done some surveys. However, they are very much confined to one or two districts, and more importantly centered on systemic defects, rather than probing the impact of their programmes on beneficiaries.

There is a necessity to carry out an in-depth review of these rural development programmes with two different strategies i.e., (i) all India study by capturing signals from all corners of the country, taking into account all the regions, and (ii) comprehensive coverage of all the objectives and clauses preserved in the MGNREGA in a broad manner. Thus, there is also a need to critically examine the implementation process of this programme and its impact on livelihood of the rural people. It can be concluded that the success of this Act depends upon its proper implementation and in this scenario, the community participation is very important to make this programme more effective.

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Correspondence to:
Santanu Panda
panda9732@yahoo.in