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EVALUATION OF MAHATMA GANDHI NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE PROGRAMME IN KARNATAKA



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Abstract: India is a developing economy, the nature of unemployment existing in the rural India, sharply differs from the one that prevails in industrially advanced countries. A reduction of unemployment has been one of the principal objectives of economic planning in India. It has been envisaged that the growth of the economy would not only increase production but also provide the capacity for absorbing the backlog of unemployment and underemployment and a substantial proportion of the additions to the labour force. However, relatively low level of income from which the economy has to be pulled up, it was recognized that there would be some leakage in the percolation effect of growth and, in any case the percolation effects would not be sufficient to generate the required employment opportunities. It was, therefore, felt necessary in the different plans to have supplemental programmes for specific target groups and specific areas for employment creation, income generation and poverty alleviation (India.).

Keywords: Evaluation , economic planning , critical , labour.

INTRODUCTION

The critical and emergent nature of the problems of unemployment and poverty called for state interventions to create employment generation through a host of policy planning initiatives. It was during the Fifth Five Year Plan that removal of unemployment and poverty alleviation was spelt out as one of the principal objectives of economic planning in the country. Economic policies were re-designed for which the mandate was spelt out in unambiguous terms in the Five Year Plans. The seventies, eighties and the nineties saw emergence of special schemes in the rural development sector such as IRDP, NREP, RLEGP, JRY etc. to tackle the problem of unemployment and poverty through employment generation and asset creation. As a result, the seventies and eighties witnessed steady increase in employment generation, though the rate of growth of employment continued to somewhat lag behind that of the growth of the labour force all along (Report on 2009-10). Provision of increasing employment opportunities both in urban and rural areas to solve the problem of unemployment has been recognized as an important objective of economic planning in India. Large expansion in employment opportunities, utilizing fully the manpower resources of the country and ensuring a substantial expansion in employment opportunities and expansion of productive employment have been pronounced as important objectives in various Five Year Plans (Dr. R.N. Pandey).

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was implemented to provide work for landless labour and marginal farmers and other unemployed in the rural area this will increase income and agriculture production as well as

productivity through undertaking the various Agriculture-based activities at grass -root level on this motive The National Rural Employment Guarantee act, having received the assent of the president on 5th September 2005 was published in the Gazette of India on 7th September 2005. The Act guarantees 100 days of employment in a financial year, any rural household whose adult members are willing to do unskilled manual work under this scheme. 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. It was initially called the national rural employment guarantee act (NREGA) but it was renamed on 2nd October 2009 namely Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA Reports, 2009). (India)

Hence, the present effort research wanted to study the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in Karnataka. Therefore, for convenience the history of employment generation programmes is presented in the part, I. The various provisions under MGNREGA are given in the part II. About MGNREGA and women is depicted in part III. The part IV contains MGNREGA in Karnataka, The part V, presents evaluation of MGNREGA. And the conclusion is given in the part VI.

I. The History of employment Generation programmes:

The Government implemented workfare programmes that offered wage employment on public works on minimum wages. The wage employment programmes started as pilot projects in the form of Rural Manpower

(RMP) [1960-61], Crash Scheme for Rural employment (CRSE) [1971-72], Pilot Intensive Rural Employment Programme (PIREP) [1972], Small Farmers Development Agency (SFDA), Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labour Scheme (MFAL) to the poorest of the poor. These experiments were translated into a full-fledged wage-employment programme in 1977 in the form of Food for Work Programme (FWP). In the 1980's this programme was further streamlined into the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), Development of Women and Children in Rural Area (DWCRA 1982), and Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP 1983). Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY 1989), Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS 2nd October, 1993), Now it has been restructured into single programme in 1999 including Training of Rural Youth for Self-employment (TRYSEM), Food for work programme (FWP), The Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) was merged with JGSY from 1999-2000 and was made a rural infrastructure programme. The programme was merged with the Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY) from 2001-02 and National Food for Work (NFFWP, 2005) These wage-employment programmes implemented by State Governments with Central assistance were self-targeting, and the objective was to provide enhanced livelihood security, specially of those dependent on casual manual labour, and 2005 National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) are the wage employment programmes. (Acharya)

II, MGNAREGA

The National Rural Labour Employment Guarantee Act 2004, enacted by the Government of India to replace all the ongoing wage employment programmes. This act provides every household in rural areas with right to work of at least 100 days of guaranteed employment every year for at least one adult member at statutory minimum wages. The Act provides a Guarantee is given for casual and manual work on public works; Work should be provided within 15 days of demanding it: Work should be located within 5 km distance; Guarantee is to be given to one person (18 years and above) of each household living in rural India; for at least 100 days every year and at statutory minimum wages. If work is not provided to anybody within the given time, he/she will be paid a daily unemployment allowance, which will be at least one third of the minimum wages. Also, if work is provided outside the limit of 5 km, the worker will get an allowance for traveling and living there.(MRD)

Workers on public works under the programme will be entitled to the following amenities, facilities and allowances:
Medical treatment and hospitalization costs in case of injury at work, along with a daily allowance of not less than half of the statutory minimum wages. In case of death or disability of a worker, an ex-gratia payment shall be made to his legal heirs in the manner laid down in the Workmen Compensation Act.

The programme also envisions to provide Facilities at work sites which are (1) safe drinking water, (2) shade for small children and workers for rest, (3) first aid box with adequate material for emergency treatment of minor injuries,

strokes, body ache and other health hazards, and (4) crèche for babies.

In case of any delay in the payment of wages, (payment later than seven days), workers will be entitled to the payment of compensation as per the Payment of Wages Act. Five per cent of wages may be deducted as contribution to welfare schemes like health insurance, accident insurance, survivor benefits, maternity benefits and social security schemes.(Adhikari)

Unemployment allowance is to be paid, if work is not provided within 15 days of demand, at the rate of one third of the statutory minimum wages. Strict penalties have been laid down in the bill for non-compliance with rules relating to employment guarantee, terms of employment and entitlement of workers.

The act lays down detailed clauses for ensuring transparency of implementation and accountability of implementers. The district chief executive officer in the district will be responsible for the programme at the district level. The funds will be at their disposal and they will maintain the accounts of employment and expenditure. Each gram panchayat will prepare an annual report on the implementation of the programme, which will be made available for public scrutiny. All accounts and records relating to the programme will be available in convenient form for public scrutiny. Copies will be provided to anyone at cost price. The details of each project, including accounts, will be displayed prominently on a board close to the site after completion of the work. Similar information will be displayed in the gram panchayat office. The gram sabha will monitor the work of the gram panchayat by way of social audit. The productive assets created under the programme will be evaluated by technically qualified personnel to ensure that they meet the required technical standards and measurements. Any dispute/complaint will be attended to within seven days by the programme officer. Heavy penalties have been laid down for non-compliance with any rules under the act (a fine not less than Rs 1,000 or imprisonment up to six months, or both).(Bhatty)

A central employment guarantee council is constituted at the national level to implement the programme. The council, which has adequate representation from women and dalits. Which undertake tasks such as advising central government on all matters concerning implementation of the act, establishment of central evaluation and monitoring systems, and organizing regular monitoring. At the state level there is a state council, which advises the state government on all matters concerning the employment guarantee programme and its implementation. At the district level, the collector or CEO is responsible for the implementation of the programme. All other officers of the state government and local authorities within the district are ultimately responsible to the collector. At the block level there is the programme officer and panchayat samiti in charge of the implementation of the act.

III. NREGA and Women

Implementation of NREGA programme has the objective not only to provide employment to the male members in the households but also to provide the

employment to female members of the households for improving the financial status of women. For this intention, women also provided employment under this programme. Except women specific programmes in all the other programmes which are implemented by the Government of India make a provision that minimum 33 percent of the benefits must flow to women. Under NREGA special provision are made in favor of women are given as follows-

Wages are to be paid according to the Minimum Wages Act 1948 for agricultural labourers in the State, unless the Centre notifies a wage rate which will not be less than Rs. 60/ per day. Equal wages will be provided to both men and women.

At least one-third beneficiaries shall be women who have registered and requested work under the scheme.

A door-to-door survey may also be undertaken to identify persons willing to register under the Act. The survey may be conducted by a team headed by the President of the Gram Panchayat and involving Ward members, SC/ST and women residents, a village-level Government functionary and the Gram Panchayat Secretary. The team members may be given orientation at the Block/District level.

If some applicants have to be directed to report for work beyond 5 km of their residence, women (especially single women) and older persons should be given preference to work on the worksites nearer to their residence.

While providing employment, priority shall be given to women in such a way that at least one-third of the beneficiaries shall be women who have registered and requested for work under the Scheme (NREGA, Schedule II, Section 6).

Equal wages shall be paid to both men and women workers, and the provisions of the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 shall be complied with. A considered choice needs to be made between "individual accounts" (for each NREGA labourer) and "joint accounts" (one for each Job Card). If joint accounts are used, the different household members (e.g. husband and wife) should be co-signatories. Special care should be taken to avoid crediting household earnings to individual accounts held by the male household head (leaving women with no control over their earnings).

Special awareness and outreach activities should be conducted to ensure that all labourers (including women) are able to handle Bank procedures, especially in areas where they are unfamiliar with the banking system.

Separate individual accounts for women members of the household may be opened in the case of male headed households.

For every work sanctioned under the Scheme, there should be a local Vigilance and Monitoring Committee, (VMC) composed of members of the locality or village where the work is undertaken, to monitor the progress and quality of work while it is in progress. The VMC will comprise nine members. The Gram Sabha will elect the members of this Committee and ensure that SC/STs and women are represented on it. It should have at least 50% of members from among NREGA workers. The VMC should be elected for the period of one year by the Gram Sabha. The GP/ Implementing Agency should apprise this Committee of estimates regarding the work, time frame and quality

parameters. The Final Report of the Committee should be attached along with the Completion Certificate of the work, and should also be placed at the next meeting of the Gram Sabha in the Panchayat where work has been executed. A copy of the Report will also be sent to the Programme Officer and the District Programme Coordinator. The Programme Officer will be responsible for ensuring that local Vigilance and Monitoring Committees are constituted. VMC should be village specific and not work specific. It should facilitate the social audit by the Gram Sabha.(ISST)

IV. MGNAREG in Karnataka:

The Karnataka state has 6.1 crore population as on March 1, 2011, with decadal growth of 15.1 percent for 2001-2011, lower than national level decadal growth rate of 17.6 percent. The state has population density of 319 persons per square kilometer which is below national average of 382 persons per square kilometer. The Karnataka has the crude birth rate of 18.8 percent and death rate of 7.1 percent. Karnataka's 38.57 percent of population stays in urban areas. Besides it has literacy of 75.6 percent (as per Census 2011) and the sex ratio of 968 females per thousand males (Census 2011)

The state of Karnataka has registered a growth of more than 7 percent between financial years 2007 to 2012, establishing itself as a strong growth driver for the country. The state covers an area of 191,976 square km or 5.8 percent of the total geographical area of India. The state contributes around 5.5 percent to India's GDP, with agriculture's share at 6 percent, industry at 5.6 percent and services contribution at 5.3 percent. At the micro-level, the state records a per capita income of Rs 69,051 (as of 2011-12), above the national average level of Rs 61,564 for the same year, indicative that benefits of growth are reaching at the individual level.

Karnataka's economy has also been affected by the macro-economic environment

Karnataka's economy has also been affected by the macro-economic environment prevailing at the national level. As per the Advance Estimates released by the Directorate of Economics and Statistics, the GSDP (current prices) growth rate in financial year 2013 is estimated to be 13.9 percent compared with 14.0 percent in the year 2012. The real GSDP growth rate has recorded only a moderate increase from 5.5 percent in financial year 2012 to 5.9 percent in financial year 2013. The real growth has been at the same level for the industrial sector. After recording a negative growth in financial year 2012, agricultural sector has seen a moderate increase in its growth rate at 1.8 percent in 2013. This can be attributed to some extent to the concerted efforts by the State in pushing for farmer friendly policies and making agricultural credit available at subsidized interest rates. However the largest contributor to GSDP, the services sector, has slipped to 8.9 percent growth from 9.5 percent growth in financial year 2012, attributed to the global slowdown in economy. Software exports are affected due to lesser global demand. Lower growth of agriculture sector combined with near same growth in industrial sector and a moderate increase in services sector growth has effectively pulled down the overall GSDP growth rate to below percent.(Planning commission)

The Karnataka state has prepared its own employment guarantee programme and has formulated rules for the purpose. Each person wanting employment will get registered with the gram panchayat and get a job card from the panchayat along with his/her photograph. Work will be provided to all registered persons as per the rules laid down in the state. Suitable committees will be formed at the block and district levels for the purpose of preparing shelves of projects, for issuing guidelines to monitor and evaluate projects, deal with public complaints and grievances and for overseeing the implementation of the programme. These committees will also be answerable to elected representatives. The programme officer at the block level is responsible for matching the demand for employment with employment opportunities available in the area. At the village level, the gram panchayat is responsible for planning projects as per the recommendations of the gram panchayat. It will prepare an annual development plan and maintain details of projects to be undertaken under the programme. In the selection of works, priority will be given to those recommended by gram panchayats.

Adequate staff and technical support will be provided to gram panchayats and the programme officer to carry out their responsibilities under the programme. Shelves of projects will be prepared at the block and district levels for the purpose of selection of workers under the programme.

An important lesson that India should learn after its experience of more than three decades of poverty alleviation programmes is the critical importance of decentralization, and institutions for promoting people's participation. Experience has shown that unless the right kind of institutions are set up at the local level involving people in the process of decision-making, planning and implementation, no programme can achieve any success worth the name. It is important therefore that such institutions are strengthened and when necessary new institutes are set up under the programme.

The act has already identified some institutions and their role at the state, district, block and village levels. Broadly, these are from the development administration and panchayat bodies. However, in most cases these institutes are not yet ready to perform their functions like planning, social audit, etc. Efforts to be made to ensure that these institutes, such as gram panchayats, block and district panchayats are able to perform their role. In addition, many other institutes will be needed to implement the act. It will be necessary to encourage formation of committees for the maintenance and management of the assets; institutes to implement social security like health insurance, accident insurance, maternity benefits; workers' organizations to develop their bargaining strengths; training and capacity building organisations, as well as institutes like self-help groups, technical schools, and cooperatives for promoting productive use of the assets later on. All this needs to be done in a decentralized manner and in a project mode.

The progress of MGNREGA in Karnataka state is explained in the below table-1, to examine the implementation the recent years 2009-10 and 2010-11 is selected.

Table-1. Households wise MGNREGA Implementation Status Report for the Financial Year 2009 to 2011 in Karnataka

S. No	States	2009-10			2010-11		
		Issued job cards	Demanded employment	Provided employment	Issued job cards	Demanded employment	Provided employment
1	Bagalkote	213225	162957	160800	190932	90619	87370
2	Bangalore	73596	39898	39233	61925	7285	7044
3	Bangalore rural	104252	55039	54200	75384	29281	28537
4	Belgaum	599676	354970	348895	529800	253956	248065
5	Bellary	231410	94185	90715	231527	94642	89453
6	Bidar	233627	123827	120708	201294	108553	96097
7	Bijapur	289884	151847	150126	331713	97646	92669
8	Chamaraja nagara	149347	67180	65691	94752	29115	26385
9	Chikkaballapura	198048	149471	145948	129876	52145	47873
10	Chikmagalur	125688	44932	43721	125707	50089	47567
11	Chitradurga	297598	167739	158386	234852	134720	131101
12	Dakshina kannada	81635	34470	34309	90533	25868	24330
13	Davanagere	261639	180521	177525	217715	125272	111535
14	Dharwar	110296	60935	60417	114678	70166	67790
15	Gadag	116117	68611	67490	121659	57657	51916
16	Gulbarga	551841	359780	334955	206847	71538	65131
17	Hassan	229185	79284	77359	202675	93915	89936
18	Haveri	174219	114446	113645	170439	72852	69628
19	Kodagu	45180	18136	17823	54255	29105	27442
20	Kolar	270381	226372	216077	193457	102850	88262
21	Koppal	264952	149189	146827	215039	133731	84114
22	Mandya	169709	66827	65559	183814	66812	64061
23	Mysore	238742	126977	124210	160726	55270	50178
24	Raichur	285113	176360	171639	194646	121090	115428
25	Ramanagara	126698	60567	59907	128951	54418	50860
26	Shimoga	205302	136092	133904	178992	116352	108662
27	Tumkur	422833	280781	273527	259715	128866	121899
28	Udupi	37473	17932	17860	34233	6400	6203
29	Uttara kannada	131623	64520	63895	137752	56971	52917
30	Yadgir	0	0	0	220267	77257	72015
Total		6239289	3633845	3535351	5294245	2414441	2224468

Source: nrega.ac.in

The above table shows that during the year 2009-10, the total job cards issued were 6239289. The employment demanded were 3633845 and the employment provided were 3535351. Similarly, for the year 2010-11, the total job cards issued were 5294245, the employment demanded were 2414441, the total employment provided were 2224468 in the entire state.

In the case of districts are concerned, the Belgaum ranks first by issuing 599676 job cards followed by Gulbarga with issuing 551841 job cards during the year 2009-10.

The below table 2 shows the Districts wise progress of MGNREGA for the year 2012-13. The funds available district wise, the expenditure made in Rs. Lakhs,

Table .2. District wise Progress under MGNREGA for the year 2012-13 (up to Sept. 2012)

Sl. No	District	Total available funds (Rs in lakhs)	Expr.(Rs in lakhs)	Person days generated (in lakhs)	Employment provided to Households (in No's)	Works		
						Under taken (in No's)	Completed (in No's)	Under progress (in No's)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Bagalkot	3790.24	3485.07	23499	623694	7033	1659	5374
2	Bangalore (U)	335.49	23.44	403	9118	1136	1	1135
3	Bangalore (R)	900.04	399.21	5846	163956	1257	66	1191
4	Belgaum	6687.06	4865.41	22135	322853	18261	569	17692
5	Bellary	2280.71	1290.88	16528	382040	3562	283	3279
6	Bidar	3368.52	2883.21	12333	135960	16541	330	16211
7	Bijapur	5429.3	4830.1	20751	329260	16900	241	16659
8	C.R.Nagar	2248.42	997.7	7113	110239	2217	508	1709
9	Chikkaballapur	1927.12	609.51	12461	96899	6860	84	6776
10	Chikmagalur	2028.4	1502.04	10669	260747	5931	522	5409

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11	Chitradurga	7112.81	6617.43	3122	10526	2289	26	2263
12	D.Kannada	1066.38	390.59	4893	124927	3649	551	3098
13	Davangere	10384.41	9967.53	41245	1236039	7268	1965	5303
14	Dharwad	3523.71	3034.23	20136	378104	9214	3174	6040
15	Gadag	2571.95	2130.71	32841	533055	7684	2359	5325
16	Gulbarga	6481.19	4833.91	16980	415770	13554	163	13388
17	Hassan	4361.96	3381.32	3036	11877	14077	455	13622
18	Haveri	3527.16	3149.85	10948	144143	5855	658	5197
19	Kodagu	1135.87	724.2	6340	134133	4060	148	3912
20	Kolar	2996.78	2222.89	1753	22329	3781	125	3656
21	Koppal	4942.79	2056.28	17230	226447	16853	1829	15024
22	Mandya	2400.14	852.36	5805	63821	1611	382	1229
23	Mysore	2207.42	568.87	6153	117497	6252	139	6113
24	Raichur	5846.93	5679.31	41542	793775	13311	2185	11126
25	Ramanagar	2460.91	2259	7457	72031	3617	267	3350
26	Shimoga	2404.54	2134.25	53984	614164	4743	1250	3493
27	Tumkur	6834.41	833.6	11737	243533	8421	106	8315
28	Udipi	1538.55	87.43	2362	46495	2470	24	2446
29	U.Kannada	2330.62	1606.86	14188	245795	7708	913	6795
30	Yadgir	2718.46	2204.83	5261	58331	7744	2165	5579
Total		105842.49	75922.02	438751	7932558	223856	23147	200709

Source: nrega.ac.nic.in

Number of man days created and employment provided to household along with the status of work progress is presented in details in the above table. The total fund available for whole state was Rs.105842.49 lakhs. The total expenditure made was Rs.75922.02 lakhs. Total of persons of job generated were 438751. The number of households provided employments were 7932558 for the year 2012-13V. Evaluation of MGNREGA.

Two major lacunae: The two major striking drawbacks of the act are its unrealistic underlying assumptions and short-term vision. Firstly, the act has made several assumptions regarding the capabilities of different agencies involved in its implementation. These assumptions do not seem to be realistic. The act has assumed that: There is a committed and efficient government administration; the poor are aware and organized enough to demand their rights; Panchayats, including gram sabhas, function well for the poor; there will be convergence of programmes and schemes for strong planning; the rural population is homogenous and is capable of making panchayat bodies and the administration accountable, and there will be a need to create an enabling environment by undertaking special efforts to realize. Therefore, the ground level situation are different then the official assumptions.

What is the main objective of the programme? Is it meant to provide relief to the poor through supplementary employment in the lean season, or is it meant to provide them enough wage income to reach poverty-line income levels? Is it a purely relief programme or is it one that provides full-fledged employment to people? The answer has implications for the number of days of employment to be provided under the programme as well as for the wage rate to be paid under the programme.

Under the first approach, it is argued that keeping the wage rate below the market rate has several advantages, Firstly, the programme, is then acceptable politically as it does not force farmers to raise farm wages. Secondly, it becomes self targeted as only the poorer sections will offer themselves for the programme. Thirdly, the costs of the programme will be low, which will contribute 10 its financial sustainability. It is observed that these programmes have been successful only in countries where the wages have been lower than the market wages. K Subbarao's study of such programmes in South Korea, Argentina, South Africa and Bangladesh leads him to conclude that the programmes have been targeted well and have been financially sustainable only when the wage rate has been kept below the market wage rate (Subbarao, K). It is also observed by experts (Krishnaraj) that Maharashtra's EGS was successful till about the mid-

1980s because the wages paid under the scheme were lower than the market rate. After the wages were raised, the poorest were thrown out in favour of the less poor and the non-poor. The financial sustainability of the EGS also became difficult after the wage increase.

However, we believe' that the second approach is acceptable. The main objective of the guarantee is to provide the right to work. And Right to life, which can provide adequate employment to people, to enable them reach a minimum level of living. It is important therefore that: (1) there is no limit to the number of days of employment under the programme. (2) Employment is provided throughout the year, (3) wages are minimum wages that can help the worker's household to reach poverty line wage income, and (4) there is a package of minimum social protection for the worker. Also, payment of the minimum wages will tend to raise the market wage rate in the region to the advantage of other workers.

Providing guarantee of work is the crux of the act. Somehow Maharashtra's EGS found it difficult to ensure guarantee of work. The EGS experience shows that the following steps are needed to ensure that the guarantee is actually given to workers under the programme. Work under the act should be provided throughout the year. There is no need to assume that workers need work only in the lean season. Continuous work should be ensured by systematic planning of a series of works and by minimizing delays in taking up works. If the guarantee is for poverty eradication, the limit of 100 days does not have any logic. Also, implementing the ceiling of 100 days will not be easy. It will only add to the burden and costs of administration. Again, employment guarantee for one person in a household will imply employment of the male member. It will leave out women members almost totally. The guarantee will serve its purpose only if it is given to all those who want to work. Any arbitrary selection is likely to leave out the poorest.

It is argued by policy-makers that limiting the act to one member of the family and to 100 days of employment per worker is temporary and is a part of 'progressive realization' of full guarantee for the right to work. We, however, believe that, If the programme has to generate continuous employment for the poor, promote adequate employment opportunities in the mainstream economy subsequently, and ensure timely wage payment, timely supply of food grains in PDS shops, and social security, it is important that planning under the programme is done very well. That is, the selection and sequencing of works should be done systematically; the facilities and amenities organized carefully, productive assets generated should be managed and used well and promote generation of sustainable employment.(Shah)

Social security measures, maternity benefits, and facilities at work .sites are implemented poorly.

Skill training is given, if at all, on a negligible scale. Unemployment allowance is not paid to anybody so far as: continuous work of 75 days (which is a precondition for unemployment allowance) is not provided to most persons, and even provided, adequate records from one site to another are not maintained. Quality of the assets created and their maintenance/use are frequently not satisfactory.

As far as the inclusion of the poorest is concerned, geographical targeting (limiting the programme to backward

districts) will help in reaching them, at least to start with. The universal targeting for guarantee under the programme will enable the poorest to access it. When the programme expands to other districts gradually, it will raise the wage rate in the rural labour market, which in turn will allow workers to get employment of their choice - on the programme or on the farms/local businesses.(Ajikumar)

One word on the minimum wages in India: Under the Minimum Wages Act 1948, these are to be fixed by state governments for sectors selected by them. It is observed by experts that: (1) in most cases minimum wages are fixed arbitrarily without undertaking any systematic study, with the result that these rates are frequently determined politically, (2) often these rates are so low that they are not able to ensure the poverty line income level for workers at the given participation rate, and (3) these rates are not comparable across the states and therefore cannot be used for payment of wages under the employment guarantee programme. It will be necessary for the central government, therefore, to fix an all-India minimum wage rate for this programme. The state governments may be allowed to pay higher wages at their own cost. (Sharma)

VI. CONCLUSION

In the long run employment opportunities in the mainstream economy should expand either through economic growth or through the use of productive assets generated under the programme, or both, so that the need for the employment guarantee programmes declines gradually. Considering the fact that the present economic growth in India does not seem to be generating enough employment opportunities, it will be necessary to create assets in such a way that they generate enough employment in the mainstream economy. The act thus has to focus on using the surplus labour strategically for promoting labour-intensive sustainable development. It is necessary for the act to incorporate this goal in some way. Though the employment guarantee component of the act cannot be undermined, somewhere it is necessary to point out that the assets to be selected have a long-term role to play in the economy. This requires focused efforts to ensure the selection of the right kind of assets and their productive use to expand mainstream employment. Somehow this long-term focus, which ensures the transitory nature of the programme, is missing completely. There is a need to bring in this component in the act.

The long-term perspective can be introduced in the programme by organizing mechanisms/institutions for the maintenance and use of assets and by providing the required support for promoting productive use of assets. We therefore believe that it will be necessary to make the state/district/taluka/village-level committees responsible for designing steps to promote productive use of the assets generated. A decentralized mechanism and a project mode of functioning will be useful here.

In addition, there are several other issues that will play an important role in the success of an employment guarantee programme, particularly in the light of the past experiences of such programmes, especially the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme. These are discussed in the

following section.

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