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IMPACT OF MGNREGA ON EMPLOYMENT GENERATION -- A STUDY OF THE DHEMAJI DISTRICT OF ASSAM



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ABSTRACT

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was enacted on August 25, 2005. It was introduced with an aim of improving the purchasing power of the rural people primarily living below poverty line in India. The MGNREGA Act aims at enhancing the livelihood security of people in rural areas by guaranteeing hundred days of wage-employment in a financial year to a rural household who volunteer to do unskilled manual work. This act started functioning from February 2006. Initially it was introduced in 200 districts of the country. MGNREGA has introduced in the Dhemaji district of Assam in the very first phase of its launch. It started functioning from 2nd February 2006. It has already completed nine years of its functioning in Dhemaji along with some other parts of India. This paper is an attempt to examine the impact of MGNREGA on employment generation in the Dhemaji district of Assam. MGNREGA has provided employment opportunities to the vulnerable section of the society. However, still there is a big gap between jobs offered and jobs demanded. It has still a long way to go to fulfill the objective of providing complete hundred days of work to per household. There is also report of anomalies in its implementation.

KEYWORDS: Household, Manual work, Poverty line, Purchasing Power, Wage-employment,



INTRODUCTION:-

Chronic poverty is an acute economic problem in India. Since independence, Government of India has been adopted numerous employment generation programmes. The major objective of these employment generation programmes has been the poverty alleviation. The employment generation programmes have impact on the alleviation of poverty. However, these programmes could not make enough impact on unemployment in the rural areas because the problems of

seasonality in employment and underemployment remained unsolved. In order to solve all these problems, government of India introduced Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in 2005. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) aims at enhancing the livelihood security of people in rural areas by guaranteeing hundred days of wage-employment in a financial year to a rural household who volunteer to do unskilled manual work. This act

started functioning from February 2006. Initially it was introduced in 200 districts of the country and by 1st April 2008 it covered 593 districts covering 4,49,40,870 rural households. NREGA is renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act on October 2009. This act was introduced with an aim of improving the purchasing power of the rural people, primarily semi or un-skilled work to people living below poverty line in rural India. MGNREGA has introduced in the Dhemaji district of Assam in the very first phase of its launch. It started functioning from 2nd February 2006. It is perhaps the most ambitious anti-poverty scheme launched anywhere in the world. It has already completed nine years of its functioning in Dhemaji along with some other parts of India. Since its launch MGNREGA has made deep inroads into the lives of millions of rural poor generating livelihood opportunities.

Dhemaji is an economically backward district of Assam mostly inhabited by the tribal people mainly Misings, Sonowal Kacharies and a sizeable number of Deories and Bodos. Agriculture is the main occupation of Dhemaji. Nearly ninety percent people lives in villages in Dhemaji. Seasonal unemployment and under-employment is the main cause of unemployment in Dhemaji. In February 2006, along with five other tribal dominated districts of Assam, MGNREGA was introduced and implemented in Dhemaji. Already the MGNREGA has completed nine years of its functioning here. From various studies it has reported that the act has tremendous impact on employment generation, capital formation and socio-economic condition of the people of Assam. This paper is an attempt to examine the impact of employment generation in Dhemaji.

Employment generation is one of the prime objectives of MGNREGA. The employment benefits of MGNREGA has reached to the schedule Castes (SCs), Schedule Tribes (STs) and women from 2006-2007 to 2014-15. MGNREGA has provided wage employment with an average of 25-30 person days in the rural areas of various districts of Assam. The average person day of employment generation in Assam is below the national average. At present all the twenty seven districts of Assam has implemented MGNREGA Act. The performance of MGNREGA in Dhemaji is below the expected level. However, the participation of STs and women in MGNREGA in Dhemaji is above the state average. This paper is an attempt to examine the impact of MGNREGA on employment generation in Dhemaji in the year 2013-14 to 2014-15.

In 2013-14, the MGNREGA has provided average person day of employment per household in Assam is 25.43 percent but in the same year it has provided average day of employment in Dhemaji is only ten percent. In 2013-14, the act has provided average employment in Assam is 23.65 person days and the employment generated to SCs and STs are respectively 6.59 percent and 16.18 percent. But in the same year, in Dhemaji, MGNREGA has provided average employment is 9.57 person days while employment to SCs and STs are respectively 2.06 person days and 34.90 person days.

Employment Generation in 2013-14

DHEMAJI	Number of Household issued Job Cards	SC	ST	Others	Total	Women
		3314	31993	82121	117428	NA
	Person days generate	23267	393154	710203	1126564	375436
	% of total workdays	2.06	34.90	63.04	---	33.23
	Number of household completed 100 days of work	NA	NA	NA	275	

Source-Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

In 2013-14, MGNREGA provided employment to women in Assam is 24.75 percent of total working days generated in that financial year while in Dhemaji, it has provided employment to women is 33.23 percent of total working days generated.

In 2014-15, MGNREGA has provided average employment in Assam is 21.81 person days while in the same year the act has provided employment in Dhemaji is less than ten percent. In the same year employment generated towards SCs and STs are respectively 6.07 percent and 15.16 percent in Assam and in Dhemaji the same is respectively 1.96 percent and 34.48 percent. Employment generated to women in Assam is 28.13 percent of total person days while in the same year it is 41.57 percent in Dhemaji. The MGNREGA has provided employment to vulnerable sections of rural areas of Assam so in Dhemaji too like SCs, STs and women. SCs and STs both together got nearly forty percent of total workdays in Dhemaji. However out of these two STs got more employment in Dhemaji. Again participation of STs in Dhemaji is higher than the state average. It is because Dhemaji is a tribal dominated district of Assam. The participation of women of Dhemaji in MGNREGA is much higher than the state average. The higher participation of women of Dhemaji in MGNREGA indicates awareness of the act among the women of Dhemaji. Higher participation of women also reveals any discrimination of gender.

Employment Generation in 2014-15

		SC	ST	Others	Total	Women
DHEMAJI	Number of Household issued Job Cards	3424	33429	82844	119697	
	Person days generate	4006	70397	129766	204169	84267
	% of total workdays	1.96	34.48	63.56	-----	41.57
	Number of household completed 100 days of work	NA	NA	NA	18	NA

Source-Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

Providing hundred days of employment to each household is another important feature of MGNREGA. But complete hundred days of work is still a far away objective to be fulfilled in Dhemaji. In 2013-14, only 275 household has completed hundred days of work which is 0.23 percent of the total number of job card holders in that particular year. Again in 2014-15, only 18 household has completed hundred days of work which is meagerly 0.01 percent of the total job card holders. This shows the difference between jobs demanded and jobs offered under MGNREGA. The gap between jobs demanded and job offered under MGNREGA in Dhemaji is due to various reasons. Moreover various reports and information from the villagers of Dhemaji has revealed that the Act has very poorly implemented. Due to the poor implementation MGNREGA has failed to reach the targeted goal of providing hundred days of employment to the people of rural areas.

The reasons for the poor implementation of MGNREGA Act

First, corruption adversely affects the programme in Dhemaji. There are several cases of fake entries. In some cases same name is repeated more than once. There are allegations of nexus between the block development officials and the village panchayats in many places. There should be a strict

enforcement of transparency safeguards. Proper implementation of Direct Benefit Transfer scheme will be helpful to reduce the scope of fake job cards.

Second, Absence of social audit is also a shortcoming of MGNREGA. Social audit has been made mandatory for all works executed under MGNREGA. Yet, in many cases social audit do not take place regularly.

Third, Lack of awareness also restricts the implementation of the programme. Due to poor awareness among the villagers of Dhemaji, people do not aware about their basic entitlements such as job cards, minimum wage amount, minimum number of employment days, etc. Under MGNREGA, there is a provision of unemployment allowance in case the local authorities fail to provide employment; however there is widespread ignorance about how to avail the allowance. Poor awareness leads to corruption and it eventually affects the true potential of the scheme.

Fourth, Lack of awareness and lack of knowledge of the provisions of MGNREGA among villagers also responsible for poor implementation of the Act.

Fifth, According to MGNREGA guidelines, payments should be made within fifteen days of the completion of work. However delay in payment and incorrect payments are a common problem under MGNREGA. Reason for payment delay is mainly due to inadequate and late transfer of fund from sponsoring agency to implementation agency. Government must ensure easier availability of funds at the district level.

CONCLUSION

The MGNREGA Act has already completed nine years of its functioning in Dhemaji district of Assam. Despite some shortcoming the act has already made its impact on the rural people of Dhemaji, Assam. Independent studies and news report indicates that MGNREGA has provided employment opportunities to STs, SCs and Women of Dhemaji. In fact, increase in women workforce participation rate and increase participation of STs is a great success of MGNREGA in Dhemaji. However, there are still number of issues relating to the adequate and proper implementation of MGNREGA in Dhemaji. Recently, the government authorities have initiated various measures to check corruption relating to the proper implementation of MGNREGA. Corruption free implementation of the act will surely benefit the rural people. Introduction of Direct Benefit transfer, mandatory social audit of executed work, timely payment of wages, full inclusion of village panchayats in the execution of the act and making aware of the provisions of the Act to the villagers will definitely bring more and more people under the purview of MGNREGA.

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