

Awareness about the major workers related provisions under MGNREGS: A study of Kadwa block in Katihar district, Bihar

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Abstract

MGNREGS is one of the flagship scheme of the Govt. of India guaranteeing 100 days of the employment to every household in rural areas in an year. The scheme has potential to mitigate rural poverty, distress, vulnerabilities etc. However, numerous studies have documented low awareness about the provisions especially related to the worker's rights and entitlements under the scheme among the public and particularly workers. Number of studies have unearth irregularities in its execution and implementation like fudging of figures, fake entries in muster rolls, overwriting, false names, irregularities in job cards and even inclusion of the names of dead persons in muster rolls. While supply has been strengthened, demand side has been greatly ignored. As a result intended beneficiaries i.e., the workers suffers due to lack of know and awareness. Successful implementation of any scheme is a function of awareness of keys stakeholders apart from their active participation and availability of necessary logistics & resources. In Indian context, without awareness of the stakeholders no successful implementation of any scheme can be imagined. It is therefore, essential to conduct studies on MGNREGS including awareness studies among stakeholders including workers, so that tailor made IEC may be used and correct deviations in implementation of the scheme. Workers awareness not only avail their rights and entitlements, but they also work as a pressure group and keep the officials on line, ensure efficient implementation of the scheme, reducing or eliminating corruption, diversion of public money, resources, making the programmes, schemes effective, sustainable and beneficial to larger public.

Keywords: awareness, employment, MGNREGS, scheme, workers

1. Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was notified on 7th Sep, 2005. The aim of this act is to enhance livelihood security by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed employment in a financial year to every household, whose adult member volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) covers the entire country with the exception of districts that have 100 % urban population, addressing causes of chronic poverty by augmenting wage employment. The act directs the state government to implement MGNREGS, wherein the centre bears 100% wage cost of the unskilled manual worker and 75% of the material cost including wages of the skilled and unskilled workers. The assets created under MGNREGS implicitly reflect long term sustainable gainful employment generation.

MGNREGA mandates that the village-level elected governing body at the district, block at intermediate level and panchayats at village level will be the principal authorities for planning and implementation of the scheme. This in turn lends considerable amount of power to the functionaries at the very end of the delivery channel.

The supply side of the scheme has been strengthened considerably as is evident from the infrastructure created for efficient service delivery. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is being widely used, including biometric smart cards for authentication of beneficiaries, stream lining the payment process, mobile phones with embedded software to measure completed work, digitization of data at various

levels etc. However, while strengthening the supply side; the demand side has been greatly ignored. The intended beneficiaries suffer due to lack of knowledge and awareness further aggravated by low education level and poor economic status. Numerous studies have documented irregularities in MGNREGS implementation including fudging of figures, fake muster roll entries, inclusion of false names in muster rolls, overwriting, irregularities in job cards etc. Even names of dead people, who had not registered, featured in the muster rolls. Successful implementation of any scheme is a function of awareness of stakeholders, especially users, workers, their active participation in it, apart from availability of necessary logistics and resources.

2. Review of literature

According to CBGA (2006) ^[4], the awareness level about the scheme varies from state to state. Awareness level was higher in AP (97.5%) followed by Chattishgarh (69%), MP (45%), and Jharkhand (29%). Some of the bottlenecks identified in MGNREGS implementation were non-payment of unemployment allowances, presence of invisible workers etc. Borah (2016) ^[2] conducted a study on MGNREGS and documented concern about the low awareness on important provisions by the tribal women folk, like only 6% of tribal women were aware of the provision of issuing job card within 15 days of registration. Similarly low awareness was found about other provisions like payment of unemployment allowances (3%), work within radius of 5 km (4%), reservation for women workers (5%), Role of *gramsabha* (3%), provision of social audit (2%).

Rajshree *et al.* (2013) ^[10] conducted a survey in a village in Andhra Pradesh. They found that the beneficiaries were not aware of their basic entitlements at the work site such as crèche, clean drinking water, shade etc. Each beneficiary had been assigned a biometric smart card which was also linked to their bank accounts. A bank agent swipes the card on a machine and carries the transaction, yet most of the workers were unaware that they have bank accounts. It was not clear how their work was measured and their wages calculated. They were also not aware of the helpline number, which could be dialed in order to report grievances. This lack of information leads to potential deviations and corruption in the system.

Kumar and Kalrani (2012) ^[9] documented concerns in MGNREGS implementation, which include the fact that local government corruption led to the exclusion of specific section of the society, who were vulnerable, marginalized. Local governments have also been found to claim more people have received jobs cards than people, who actually worked in order to generate more funds, so that the local officials can embezzle them. A multi crore fraud was suspected, where many people had been issued the job card, who were either already employed and/or who were not aware that they had a job card. There were large number of districts in many states, where the number of households that had been issued job cards were more than the total number of households in those districts.

Rajshree & Biplav, (2013) ^[10] conducted a study on MGNREGS and found rampant corruption in its implementation, wherein workers worked for one day and were paid wages for one day; however, records showed them as having worked for 33 days, with the wages for the remaining 32 days being misappropriated. The job cards were often in the possession of the local panchayat members, who misuse it to extract payments against fake entries.

All together 289 officials have lost their jobs on the charge of irregularities in MGNREGS implementation in Bihar. More than 5000 others have been served the show cause notices for irregularities in the executing the rural employment guarantee scheme, 316 FIR registered in the state. Citing the irregularities that have been detected in the scheme, the government had said of a total of 1.27 crore job cards issued, 20 lakh were found to be “fake“(The Business Line, 2013) ^[14]. It was also discovered by the erstwhile Planning Commission that there was poor implementation of the scheme in various states such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Workers were often not getting the full wages due to them (Ravallian, 2014)

3. Objectives

To analyse the awareness level of workers about the major provisions under MGNREGS related to rights, entitlements of the workers and analyse and highlights the factors of awareness.

4. Methodology

Multistage stratified random sampling method was adopted to

select the samples. At first stage 4 panchayats were randomly picked up from Kadwa block. Total 80 samples were selected through stratified random sampling method, 20 each from the muster rolls of the 4 panchayats. Samples were selected in such a manner, so as to ensure 10 each males and females are selected from each panchayat. Six extra samples were also selected to ensure that in total 80 samples with full answers are available for analysis, excluding the schedules, which did not elicit complete responses. Predesigned interview schedules were administered among the workers. Primary data was collected in April, 2017.

5. Scope and limitation

The study has been conducted in four panchayats Jaja, Nista, Sheikhpura and Bharri of Kadwa block in district Katihar, Bihar.

Table 1: MGNREGS workers data

| | Registered Workers | Number of Job-cards | | Active Workers | Active job cards |
|---|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|----------------|------------------|
| | | Applied for | Issued | | |
| Bihar State | 22650936 | 15538123 | 14390765 | 4934266 | 3977545 |
| Katihar district | 850173 | 548108 | 502117 | 189454 | 149112 |
| Kadwa block | 103809 | 72036 | 66182 | 25366 | 19291 |
| Four Panchayats MGNREGS workers data | | | | | |
| Bharri | 3445 | 2583 | 2545 | 645 | 550 |
| Jaja | 3282 | 2041 | 1865 | 933 | 707 |
| Nista | 2682 | 1897 | 1801 | 784 | 630 |
| Shekhpura | 3147 | 2351 | 2211 | 436 | 343 |
| Total | 12556 | 8872 | 8422 | 2798 | 2230 |

Source: www.nrega.nic.in

In Kadwa block has the highest number of registered workers. Bihar is one of the most backward state in India and further Katihar is one of the most backward district in it. The social and economic indicators in the study area are abysmally low. The results of the study may not be applicable to other parts of the country. The study is mainly concerned with the awareness and factors of awareness about the major provisions related to rights, entitlements of workers under MGNREGS.

6. Results and Discussion

Primary data was collected through the interview schedule, which was subsequently analysed using Excel & Minitab. The analysed results have been classified in two categories – basic profile of the workers and awareness about major workers related provisions under MGNREGS. The analysed results are given below, ensuing discussion on the same.

6.1 Basic profile of respondents

The first part of the analysed result deal with the basic profile of the workers, which included variables like sex, age, social category, marital status, education, economic category. The findings of the analysed results are given as below

Table 2: Basic Profile of the respondents

| SEX | Age | | Social Category | | | Marital Status | | | Education | | | Economic Category | |
|---------------------|-------------|-----------|-----------------|----------|-----------|----------------|-----------|----------------|------------|-----------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------|
| | Age (group) | Frequency | General | OBC | ST/SC | Married | Unmarried | Widow/ Widower | Illiterate | Literate | Primary & Above | BPL / AAY | APL |
| MALE | 18-29 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| | 30-39 | 7 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| | 40-49 | 13 | 7 | 4 | 2 | 12 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 3 | 4 | 9 | 4 |
| | 50 &> | 18 | 11 | 4 | 3 | 14 | 0 | 4 | 8 | 7 | 3 | 10 | 8 |
| Total Male | | 40 | 23 | 9 | 8 | 32 | 3 | 5 | 15 | 15 | 10 | 22 | 18 |
| FEMALE | 18-29 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| | 30-39 | 10 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 9 | 1 | 0 | 7 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 4 |
| | 40-49 | 15 | 7 | 2 | 6 | 14 | 0 | 1 | 8 | 5 | 2 | 8 | 7 |
| | 50 &> | 14 | 6 | 2 | 6 | 12 | 0 | 2 | 10 | 3 | 1 | 9 | 5 |
| Total Female | | 40 | 16 | 7 | 17 | 36 | 1 | 3 | 25 | 11 | 4 | 23 | 17 |

Source: Primary data

It can be noted from the above table that among males 18 males were in 50+ year age bracket, followed by 16 in 40-49 age group, 4 in 30-39 age group and 2 in 18-29 age group. While in case of females maximum 16 were in 40-49 age group followed by 13 in 50 + age group, 10 in 30-39 age group and 1 in 18-29 age group. In social category, maximum 23 males (7 in 40-49 and 11 in 50+ age category) were in general category followed by 9 in OBC (4 each in 40-49 & 50+ age category) and 8 (3 in 50+ and 3 each in 30-39 and 40-49 age category) in SC/ST category. This shows that more males in general category were engaged in MGNREGS. While in case of female maximum 17 females were in SC/ST category dependent on it followed by 12 OBC and 11 general category. This shows that more female from SC/ST were engaged in it. In marital status

there were 33 males followed by 5 widowers and 2 unmarried. In female, 36 were in married category followed by 3 widows, 1 unmarried.

As far as education is concerned, it was found that 15 males and 24 females were illiterate, whereas 15 males and 12 females were found literate. In case of primary & above education 10 males and only 4 females were found in this category. 21 males were in BPL category, whereas for female this number is slightly pegged higher at 24.

6.2 Workers awareness about major provisions under MGNREGS related to workers

The summarized findings on awareness level of male and female workers on major provisions related to workers under MGNREGS are given in the following table.

Table 1: Workers awareness about major provisions under MGNREGS related to workers

| Sl. No. | Major provisions related to workers | Male | | Female | | Persons | | All | Chi-Square | |
|---------|--|------|----|--------|----|---------|----|-----|------------|---------|
| | | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | No | | Value | P-Value |
| 1 | 100 days of employment guarantee per household | 9 | 31 | 6 | 34 | 15 | 65 | 80 | 0.738 | 0.390 |
| 2 | Written application for employment | 7 | 33 | 3 | 37 | 10 | 70 | 80 | 1.829 | 0.176 |
| 3 | Guaranteed job within 15 days | 5 | 35 | 2 | 38 | 7 | 73 | 80 | 1.049 | 0.235 |
| 4 | Knowledge about minimum wage | 6 | 34 | 1 | 39 | 7 | 73 | 80 | 3.914 | 0.048* |
| 5 | Provision of basic facilities at worksite | 8 | 32 | 4 | 36 | 12 | 68 | 80 | 1.569 | 0.210 |
| 6 | Reservation of work for women workers | 5 | 35 | 3 | 37 | 8 | 72 | 80 | 0.556 | 0.456 |
| 7 | Payment of wage mandatory into worker’s bank account | 35 | 5 | 29 | 11 | 64 | 16 | 80 | 2.813 | 0.094 |
| 8 | Equal wages for both sex – man and woman | 18 | 22 | 14 | 26 | 32 | 48 | 80 | 0.833 | 0.361 |
| 9 | Right to payment within a fortnight | 7 | 33 | 4 | 36 | 11 | 69 | 80 | 0.949 | 0.330 |
| 10 | Work within a radius of 5 km | 6 | 34 | 5 | 35 | 11 | 69 | 80 | 0.105 | 0.745 |
| 11 | Role of <i>gramsabha</i> in MGNREGS implementation | 4 | 36 | 0 | 40 | 4 | 76 | 80 | 4.211 | 0.040* |
| 12 | No use of workers displacing machinery | 8 | 32 | 5 | 35 | 13 | 67 | 80 | 0.827 | 0.363 |
| 13 | Eligibility for unemployment allowance | 8 | 32 | 2 | 38 | 9 | 71 | 80 | 4.144 | 0.043* |
| 14 | Medical assistance for injury in the worksite | 7 | 33 | 4 | 36 | 11 | 69 | 80 | 0.949 | 0.330 |
| 15 | Ex gratia payment for death and disability | 7 | 33 | 5 | 35 | 12 | 68 | 80 | 0.392 | 0.531 |

Source: Primary data

* Significant at 5%

The findings of the study can be seen in the above table. It was discovered that the awareness across the parameters were low among the workers. Regarding “100 days of employment guarantee to each rural households”, it was found that only 15 persons (9 males & 6 females) out of 80 were aware of it. Question related to requirement of “the written application for work” was asked and it was found that only 10 workers (7 male & 3 females) were aware about this provision. There is provision of “guaranteed job before 15 days” on giving written application. It was noticed that only 7 workers (5 males & 2 females) were aware of this provision.

When the researcher asked about “the provision of minimum wages”, it was discovered that 73 out of 80 workers did not know about it. Only 6 males and 1 female were found to be aware of this provision. Regarding the provision of “the basic facilities at worksites”, it was learnt that only 8 males & 4 females were aware about it, out of their 40 samples each. Low awareness was also noticed in case of the awareness about the provision of “reservation of work for women workers”. It was found that only 1 out of 10 workers was aware of this provision.

Regarding provision “payment of wages mandatory in bank

account”, majority (64) of the workers (35 males & 29 females) were aware about it. When the researcher asked about the provision of equal wages for both sex, it came to the light that 32 persons (18 males and 14 females) were found to be aware. This provision was found to be known to slightly more people. It may be noticed from the above table, that the provision of “right to payment within a fortnight” was also known to very small number of workers i.e., 11 out of the 80 persons (7 males and 4 females). The low awareness was also witnessed about the provision related to “work within radius of 5 km”. Only 11 persons (6 males & 5 females) were found to be aware of this provision.

Only 4 workers (4 males & 0 females) were aware about “the role of the *gramsabha*” in implementation of the MGNREGS. It was noticed in the study low awareness about the provision of “no use of worker displacing machinery”, with only 13 persons (8 males & 5 females) aware of it. One of the major provision about the MGNREGS is “unemployment benefits”, if a worker is not given work after 15 days of request, s/he becomes eligible for unemployment benefit. For the 1st month 1/4th wages will be paid and half in the subsequent months, in case no work is availed to him/her. It was found that only 14 workers (8 male & 6 females) aware about this provision. Also low awareness was found about the provision of “the medical assistance for injury in the worksite” and “ex-gratia payment for death and disability”. Out of the 80 only 11 persons (7 males & 4 females) and 12 persons (7 males & 5 females) were found to be aware about these provisions respectively.

Also hypothesis were tested to see, whether significant difference exists between male and female on awareness about the variables. Chi-square test was applied to see the difference. The results of the Chi-Square distribution and their P-Values/Significance are given in the last two columns of the above table. Significant difference between male and female were noticed in three cases. There was a significant difference in awareness between male and female in case of “knowledge about the minimum wage” (Chi-Square = 3.914, and P-Value = 0.048). In case of the, “eligibility for unemployment allowance” Chi-Square = 4.144 and P Value = 0.043. Also significant difference (Chi-Square = 4.211 and P-Value = 0.040) was noticed between male and female in case of “role of *gramsabha*” MGNREGS implementation. No significant differences were noticed in awareness level between males and females in respect of other parameters.

Workers were found to be very poorly aware of majority of the MGNREGA provisions related to rights and entitlements of the workers. Highest awareness was noted in case of provision of “the payment of wages mandatory into the worker’s bank account” i.e., 64 out of the 80 workers. The reason for high awareness about this provision is that every workers wages or other benefits are transferred in his/her bank account and it can be opened in presence of the workers and documents are required for opening account, which can be produced by workers. Even at the time of withdrawal the workers have to be physically present to put their thumb or give signature or biometric. This system of payment is also discussed among workers. This leads to greater awareness among workers. But despite all these, all workers were still not aware of this provisions and 14 out of the 80 workers were found to be ignorant of it.

On the other hand parameters like “role of *gramsabha*”, “guaranteed job within 15 days”, “knowledge about minimum

wage”, “reservation for women workers”, “eligibility for unemployment allowances” parameters witnessed very low awareness. Low awareness or unawareness on MGNREGS provisions related to workers were prevalent among both males and females with males being slightly more aware, but the difference was insignificant. However, significant difference between males and females were found in three cases described in the previous para.

One of the reason of the low or non-awareness is the non-transparency in operation of the functions of the panchayat and schemes and modus operandi of the concerned officials. There is no state machinery to disseminate information and awareness about the functions of the panchayati raj and schemes including MGNREGS. The implementing authorities, officials, panchayat officials never propagate the provisions related to rights and entitlements of the workers. Though some of the provisions are written on panchayat’s walls, but they are inadequate to enlighten the public and workers. In most of the cases, the workers were found to be unaware or very poorly aware about the rights and entitlements.

Another reason identified was that most of the workers were illiterate. Very few NGOs were found to be active in the area that too focusing on other issues. There was no culture of social audit and use of RTI. Even educated people do not bother much about the function despite that fact that substantial public money is involved in the projects and schemes being implemented by panchayats. Even low awareness about the provisions of panchayati raj and schemes among the educated class has been documented in a study, “People as partner in Panchayati Raj & Development: Analysis of Attitude and Awareness”. The same study also found low awareness about the provisions of the panchayati raj, schemes including MGNREGS, monitoring tools like social audit, RTI (Hussain, 2016)^[7].

Since, most of the women, who took part in the scheme were from the lower castes, SC/ST, they tend to be more unaware. Some male workers, who were found to be aware, reported that they learnt them during discussion with some educated people and some of them further transmitted their learning and knowledge to their co-workers mainly male workers.

It was noted, in some cases that the workers were not having job cards with them and even bank passbooks. Lack of awareness leads to ignorance among workers about their rights. Hence, they were not able to assert their rights and subjected to exploitation. Rajshree & Biplav (2013)^[10] also discovered in their study that the MGNREGS displays a glaring example of corruption due to lack of awareness and transparency. Findings from previous surveys and social audits in Orissa in 2007 as well as in Deogarh (Jharkhand) in October 2008 have shown that even wage payments through banks were not free of the maladies, which afflicted the previous system of payments: corruption, fraud and misconduct (Vanaik and Siddhartha 2008; Dreze and Khera 2008; Kar 2009)^[5, 8].

It was noticed that few workers were aware about some provisions related to workers’ rights and entitlement, but they were afraid to raise voice against the local panchayat officials, who were viewed as powerful. Farzana *et al.* (2016)^[6] found in her study that there was low level of awareness among women about the policies and entitlements and fake muster rolls and bills were being generated. One of the study, People as partner Panchayati Raj & Development has documented that

the people fear to raise their voice against the elected panchayat representatives, who were viewed as powerful (Hussain, 2016)^[7].

7. Recommendations & Conclusion

It is not possible to realize the massive potential of the MGNREGS, if we deploy the same ossified structure of the implementation with low awareness of the people and workers and deeply institutionalized corruption, inefficiency and none accountability in to the very fabric of Indian democracy. For successful implementation of the any scheme, awareness about the provisions of the schemes among stakeholders especially users is of crucial importance.

Proactive disclosure of data and records containing information on various procedures such as issuance of job cards, sanction of projects, payments processes, muster rolls etc is called for and scrutiny of the same by the citizens, workers can help conduct successful social audits and it will go a long way in implementing the scheme transparently, effectively. Proactive disclosure of data would highly empower the citizens and increase transparency. The practice of the social audit, use of Right to information needs to be propagated in a big way among citizens and workers. Besides this institutional audit and review mechanisms need to be strengthened.

Since, MGNREGS deals with substantial public money, the general public must be made aware of the provisions of the MGNREGS including the workers' rights. There is a need to generate mass awareness about the scheme including emphasis on the rights and entitlements of the workers. NGOs should be involved in awareness generation not only on MGNREGS, but also about the other schemes and functions of the panchayats. Also SHGs need to be developed in the area, which promote cohesion among members and act as a pressure group. Besides this universities and colleges may be collaborated to generate awareness about the schemes including MGNREGS and also act as a watch dog. Tailor made IEC materials need to be used to generate awareness among stakeholders especially among women workers with reference to the parameters in which their awareness level significantly differ from their male counterpart.

Ensure minimum number of 100 days of work under the scheme, and ensure payment on time, as there was no account of 100 days of guaranteed work under MGNREGA. There is no need to cut the budget of the scheme as it is poorly performing, there is need to put tight vigil on implementation as it has potential to arrest distress, rural poverty etc, which has been established by several studies also. There is also a need to build the capacity of the administrative machinery for effective implementation of the schemes including MGNREGS. Composite awareness strategy and convergence with other schemes will generate synergy.

All these measures will promote transparency, awareness among public, workers, which will ensure exercise of workers' rights, getting them their dues. These measures will ensure meeting the very objectives of combating rural poverty and mitigating distress. These will also ensure effective implementation of schemes along with MGNREGS, creating long term sustainable assets, which will also be in larger public interest.

8. References

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