

A Comprehensive Review on Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (MGNREGP)

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Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (MGNREGP) was legislated, which is one of the most progressive legislations enacted in India since independence. It guarantees 100 days of employment to each household at a minimum prescribed rate. The Act aims to provide employment to more than 20 million households, out of which more than 50 percent of the beneficiaries come from Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST) households. The Act provides that wages be settled through bank accounts in order to prevent defrauding of workers and to give them greater control over their wages. The Act also envisages equal wages for both men and women. In all, the MGNREGP promises to reduce the wandering of rural poor for their employment simultaneously addressing the problems of poverty and inequality. This review provides comprehensive information on Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme, its salient features, importance and its role in Agriculture.

Keywords: MGNREGP, employment, poverty, inequality, Agriculture.

Introduction

India has had very rich experience in the implementation of anti-poverty programmes, yet, poverty persists. After independence and particularly from the Fifth Five Year Plans onwards, Government of India has initiated several rural development programmes for raising rural employment and alleviation of rural poverty. The country has been implementing both wage employment and asset distribution programmes, as the benefits of development do not automatically reach the poorest of the poor. Government of India since independence has been consciously attempting through various plans and programmes to eradicate poverty from the country. In all such earlier anti-poverty programmes, specific provisions were made to include the vulnerable sections of the society to receive the benefits of developmental activities. However, it has been found that the benefits of the earlier programmes have not produced significant changes in the livelihoods of the weaker sections of the society. The MGNREGP is an important strategy in the current economic context of global economic crisis and national economic slowdown, where raising aggregate demand is a major task for the government.

Fiscal policy that provides more wage income directly to unskilled workers in the rural areas is likely to be much more effective in increasing aggregate incomes than other forms of public spending. In this direction, in 2005, India's parliament passed the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), which is the central government's response to the constitutionally manifested right to work and a means to promote livelihood security in India's rural areas. To this end, the Act guarantees 100 days of manual employment at statutory minimum wage rates to any rural household whose adult member is willing to do unskilled manual work. The manual work needs to create sustainable assets that promote the economic and infrastructure development of the village. 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. Around one third of the stipulated work force is women. It was initially called the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) but it was renamed on 2nd October 2009, as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (MGNREGP).

India's MGNREGP, which began in 2006, is the largest public works employment project in the world. Rural poverty reduction is an explicit objective of the MGNREGP. The Employment Guarantee Act can also help to empower women, by giving them independent income earning opportunities. MGNREGP insists that 30 percent of the employment provided, should be given to women. Implementation of MGNREGP has initiated certain strategies at women empowerment, particularly in the following aspects the work is to be organized by women's groups, the gender perspective gets built in automatically, and for the first time equal wages are paid to both men and women, which boosted the earnings of the women. The uniqueness of this act is that, it carries emphasis on issues like equality of wages for men and women, elimination of work contracting/middlemen/payment of wages only through bank and post office accounts to prevent corruption, creating transparency in workers' muster rolls, etc. The MGNREGP is possibly the most ambitious income security programme for India's rural poor. Initially it was introduced in 200 districts of the country and later extended to another 130 districts in 2007-08. By 1st April 2008, it was further extended to 593 districts covering 4,49,40,870 rural households. Now, it is applicable in all the 615 districts of the country. It is not restricted by gender, geography, age, skill and caste. MGNREGP not only provides employment but also focuses on inclusive growth, rejuvenation of natural resources, generating productive assets, protecting the environment, empowering the rural women and reducing rural-urban migration with the multiple objectives of sustaining income and consumption through wage works, creating durable assets.

Salient Features of MGNREGA

Adult members of a rural household may apply for employment if they are willing to do unskilled manual work. At least 100 days work will be provided per household per annum. Such a household will have to apply for registration to the local Gram Panchayat, in writing or orally. The Gram Panchayat after due verification will issue a job card to the household. The job card will bear the photograph of all the adult members of the household willing to work under NREGA. All adults who have completed 18 years of age are eligible to work. Employment will be provided within 15 days of application for work. Men and women will be paid equal wages and preference will be given to women. If employment is not provided within 15 days, daily unemployment allowance in cash has to be paid. Liability of payment of unemployment allowance is of the concerned States. At least one-third of persons to whom work is allotted have to be women. Disbursement of wages has to be done on weekly basis and not beyond a fortnight and wages are credited directly to their bank/post office account.

Panchayat Raj Institutions have a principal role in planning and implementation. Each district has to prepare a shelf of projects. The selected works to provide employment are to be selected from the list of permissible works. The different categories of permissible works are as follows: water conservation and harvesting, drought proofing, afforestation and tree plantation, irrigation canals, irrigation facility to land owned by households of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes or to land beneficiaries of land reforms or land of the beneficiaries under the Indira Awas Yojana, renovation of traditional water bodies such as desilting of tanks, land development, flood control and protection such as drainage, rural connectivity to provide all-weather access. The shelf of projects has to be prepared on the basis of priority assigned by Gram Sabha. At least 50 percent of the works have to be allotted to Gram Panchayats for execution. A 60:40 wage and material ratio has to be maintained. Contractors and use of labour displacing machinery are prohibited. Work should be provided within 5 km radius of the village or else extra wages of 10 percent is payable. Work site facilities such as crèche, drinking water, shade have to be provided. Social Audit has to be done by the Gram Sabha at least once in six months. Grievance redressal mechanisms have to be put in place for ensuring a responsive implementation process. All accounts and records relating to the scheme are to be made available for public scrutiny and to any person desirous of obtaining a copy of such records, on demand and after paying a specified fee. Those who violate the MGNREGA Act will be penalized with a penalty of up to Rs. 1,000. The Act stipulates that priority shall be given to women. In terms of implementation in mandates a minimum of one-third of the beneficiaries are women who have registered and have requested for work.

Importance of MGNREGP

Sharma and Sharma (2011) have emphasized the importance of Government's wage employment schemes. From the wage employment schemes people get multiple level of benefits, i.e., income generation, maintain livelihood and assets creation. The flagship programme of National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (NREGP) was started in September 2005. Later it was renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (MGNREGP) in 2009. It addresses the challenges of poverty and unemployment. The direct and visible impact was on reduction of migration. The MGNREGA assures 100 days of job especially for socially disadvantaged groups like women, SCs and STs. Previously, the workers were very poorly paid, but MGNREGA has increased the local wages also at par with MGNREGA wages. The ST population has shown keen interest in MGNREGA works. It gives special provision to employ the aged and the differently abled (Kurinjimalar and Chinnaraj, 2013).

This is the only programme to provide equality in wages for men and women. It has eliminated work contracting and middlemen. The payment of wages is done through banks and post offices, to prevent corruption. Transparency is brought about by creating workers' muster rolls, etc. The social audit is an important activity under the scheme. This scheme provides sufficient level of wages to the people. After the implementation of NREGA, migration is slowing down, productive assets are being created and the power equations are also changing. But, there are also certain issues that need to be addressed, such as in most of the NREGA worksites; people did not get worksite facilities like crèche, first aid, drinking water, etc. NREGA gives much priority to the poorest sections of society especially women, SCs and STs. The maximum level of women participation will lead to a decline in distress migration and an improvement in food consumption among certain families. Similar studies were conducted by Hazra (2009), Nidheesh (2009) and Akhthar *et al.*, (2012).

MGNREGP and Infrastructure

Sanyal (2011) emphasizes the historical importance of MGNREGA and the criticism of earlier rural employment programmes. The MGNREGP is the largest employment guarantee programme in the world. It is a great move towards generating the right to work in a country with a population over a billion with an ambition to build durable assets and basic rural infrastructural facilities in the country. To give importance to rural infrastructure is an important aim of economic development. The MGNREGPs has completed four years of implementation during which it has been extended to all districts covering more than 4.5 crore households. The allocation for NREGA has been stepped up to Rs. 40,100 crores in 2010-11. The MGNREGP works include water conservation, drought proofing (including tree plantation and afforestation), flood protection, land development, minor irrigation and horticulture. There is a need to focus on the following areas in the coming years: (1) enforcement of the guarantee and generation of continuous employment, (2) enforcement of other entitlements, including new minimum wages, opening bank accounts, etc., (3) ensuring transparency and creating good monitoring structures, and (4) ensuring effective Social Audit and (5) appointment of members in all committees, ensuring technical manpower to villages, etc. Some of the related studies were supported by Rao (2010), Shah (2010), Dutta (2011) and Prasanna *et al.* (2014).

Poverty and MGNREGP

Poverty is the greatest enemy of human development. Since independence, the issue of poverty within India has remained a prevalent concern. According to the common definition of poverty, when a person finds it difficult to meet the minimum requirement of acceptable living

standards, he or she is considered poor. Millions of people in India are unable to meet the basic standards, and according to government estimates, in 2007 there were nearly 220.1 million people living below the poverty line. According to the World Bank Report (2010), India is on the track to meet its poverty reduction goals. According to the Census Report (2011), 83 million people continue to live below the poverty line in rural India. According to the National Sample Survey (2012), seven crore people are living without any employment opportunities in India. The total number of villages in India have increased from 6,38,588 (Census, 2001) to 6,40,867 (Census 2011), an increase of 2279 villages. So, from these observations, the Government of India can implement various rural development programmes to eradicate the rural poverty. However, by 2015, an estimated 53 million people will still live in extreme poverty and 23.6 percent of the population will still live under \$1.25 per day. This number is expected to reduce to 20.3 percent or 268 million people by 2020. Nearly 21.1 percent of the entire rural population and 15 percent of the urban population of India exists in this difficult physical and financial predicament. A great deal of further effort is needed to create a hunger-free and poverty-free world. The removal of poverty is an essential condition for economic growth and sustainability. The problem of unemployment and underemployment is another important aspect; and it has a close link with poverty.

The poor people in India are not just unemployed but also unemployable without education, health, sanitation or minimum proper conditions of living. They are all called vulnerable group of the National Commission for Enterprises in the unorganized sector (NCEUS) identified as 77 percent of our population. The average income of this 77 percent of population is Rs. 20 per day. But planning commission, World Bank, various committees try to analyse the real level of poverty in our country. India's poor are unfed, unglad and uneducated. They don't have any sustainability in life, jobs and purchasing power. NREGS became a very effective instrument in planned development, creating jobs and purchasing power for the millions of unskilled and semi-skilled people in rural India. If the Government increases or expands the public works programmes, drought and famine related natural disaster may be controlled by this classic fiscal instrument. Indian policy makers have introduced different anti-poverty programmes not only for poverty reduction, but also for the economic development. The NREGS denotes the positive impact or multi-dimensional impact on villagers of the Northern States. In a true manner, NREGS is a means of survival to this section of hapless old, aged unskilled labourers in rural areas. The NREGS has created self-belief amongst the poor that they can earn money for their family. With the implementation of MGNREGA, there is a shortage

of labour for agricultural operations making farm activities expensive. It is a fact that the number of labourers engaged in agricultural activities has reduced. Similar studies were supported by Roy (2009), Yadav (2010), Dalapati *et al.* (2010), Sreenivasalu and Reddy (2011), Akthar *et al.* (2012) and Kurinjimalar (2018). Palanichamy (2011) has discussed the nature of rural economy, in the rural areas the major economic activities are irregular and intermittent and seasonal fluctuations. This leads to poor economic condition of the rural poor; so they are forced to use their children for the same work. Withdrawal of children from school is another dimension of the problem persisting in the rural areas. All these facts articulate for protection and sympathy from the Government to safeguard the rural population in our country. So, the ultimate result is implementing the employment generation programme in the State. The aim of NREGA is to increase the Purchasing Power (PP) of the rural people, primarily semi or unskilled work to people living in rural India whether or not they are below the poverty line. The NREGP is really a boon for rural poor especially in developing countries. It is a short term job provider and in the long term it may lead to sustainable livelihood enhancement. Despite the widespread opulence and the unprecedentedly high real income per head in the world, millions of people die prematurely and abruptly from intermittent famines, and many million more die every year from endemic undernourishment and deprivation across the globe. Further, hundreds of millions lead lives of persistent insecurity and want. While this is quite obvious, many things are unclear about the characteristics, causation, and possible remedies of hunger in the modern world. A great deal of probing investigation-analytical as well as empirical is needed as background to public policy and action for eradicating famine and eliminating endemic under nutrition (Kurinjimalar and Prasanna, 2017).

Agriculture and MGNREGP

Hanumanthappa (2012) has explained the importance of agriculture in India. Agriculture plays an important integral part in the Indian economy. More than 60 percent of the population depends upon the agriculture sector. The agriculture sector provides the major and main source of income to the rural people. The agriculture growth is substantially more important for the poor segments of population. Unfortunately, the agriculture sector failed to provide sufficient employment opportunities to the rural poor. This is the ultimate and real fact for increasing incidence of farmer suicides. Around 48 percent self-employed farmers are women and 64 percent of the informal sector work force depending on agriculture is women. Rural women, since many centuries, have been putting in unsounded, unbearable and inadequately paid joyless drudgery, to their families' livelihood and have provided food security to the country's 1.13 billion people.

Similar literatures supported by Patel (2010), Sharma (2013) and Prasad (2011). Krishna *et al.* (2011) have explained the status of the rural poor, the agricultural wage workers, small and marginal farmers and casual workers engaged in non-agricultural activities; constitute the bulk of the rural poor in India. The small level of land holdings and low productivity and non-cultivable lands are the cause of poverty among households both in rural and urban areas. They depend only on land-based activities for their livelihood. Poor level of education and lack of other vocational knowledge and skills are also due to poverty. Due to poor physical and social capital base, a large proportion of the people are forced to seek employment involuntarily with extremely low levels of productivity and wages. So, the creation of employment opportunities for unskilled workers has been a major challenge for development planners. The NREGA has multiple invisible objectives. They not only provide employment opportunities during lean agricultural seasons, but also in times of flood, droughts and other natural calamities. They create rural infrastructure which supports further economic activities. It is clearly found that economically, socially and physically weaker sections have benefited and they have been utilizing MGNREGS. Banerjee and Saha (2010) have discussed about the employment generation and purchasing power. Employment generation is necessary for purchasing power. If the Government introduces employment generation programme, ultimately the purchasing power will be increased. On the other hand, if the government doesn't spend for employment generation, the purchasing power will be less. Therefore, the demand is based on purchasing power of the people. The employment ratio has gone up in 2004-05 as compared to 1993-94. The male unemployment rate has gone up by 3.1 percent (NSS 61st Round). In such a situation, the implementation of MGNREGA can achieve the twin objectives of employment generation in rural India and it addresses the issue of falling agricultural productivity through creation of productive assets. The large farmers mainly depend on the farm labourers. After implementation of MGNREGP, the farm labourers are not willing to get minimum wages from agricultural sector. It would not be economical for the farmer to provide higher wages to the labourers in order to retain the labourers in his field. The implementing authority of NREGA failed to consider these matters. A convergence between NREGS projects and farm related asset-creation works in NREGS would be highly appreciated.

MGNREGP and Ecological Re-Generation

Murugavel (2009) has studied NREGA's and its impact on ecology. A comprehensive new report by the Centre for Science and Environment says that the NREGS, not only generates employment, but it also makes ecological

regeneration. It further says that the scheme has huge potential for regenerating the village economy in India, but only if it focuses on the creation of productive assets. MGNREGA was the world's largest Ecological and Food Security Act, which can successfully strengthen the ecological foundations for sustainable agriculture. The Act aims at creating a demand-driven village infrastructure, including durable assets, to increase the opportunities for sustained employment and it regenerates the natural resources. The NREGA leads to employment oriented environmental benefits i.e., strengthening the natural resources and enhancing the rural livelihoods and also providing a sustainable eco system service to the peri-urban and urban locations. Similar studies were conducted by Mishra *et al.* (2011), Reddy (2012), Akhtar (2012) and Tripathy (2013).

MGNREGP and Women Empowerment

The positive impact of MGNREGA is to secure the rural livelihoods; it eliminates the distress migration from backward areas. It also promotes women's economic empowerment. Women play an important role in the economic development. The visible and invisible form of women's work indirectly leads to economic development. Women's potential hidden power is to be utilized for which, their status in the society must be improved. The incidence of poverty is the main reason for her low bargaining power, hence poverty should be removed. According to the author the Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen observed that development is freedom, which in turn empowers. He emphasizes, "Indeed the empowerment of women's one of the central issues in the process of development for many countries in the world today". But, most of the women have been suffering from different discriminations, disability, injustice and inequality all over the world in almost all countries. But the MGNREGP stipulates that the priority shall be given to women. One of the important provisions of MGNREGA is a minimum of one-third of the beneficiaries should be women who have registered and have requested for work. The participation of women for FY 2008-09 was 48 percent. The highest women participation for FY 2008-09 was observed in Tamil Nadu (80 percent) and Kerala (84 percent). The programme not only provides employment opportunity, it also provides equal wages to both men and women; it has empowered the women economically as well as socially. After implementation of MGNREGS, the women force have been getting more employment opportunities, they have had better control over family expenditure, savings and social participation and participated more in household management decisions and financial management decisions compared to the non-participant women. The programme gives more confidence to the poorest people in the society (Kurinjimalar and Buvaneshwari, 2011; Kurinjimalar, 2017).

MGNREGS has been successful in providing all the components that pave the way for empowering women. Similar studies supported by Verma (2003); Sankari *et al.* (2009) and Kurinjimalar (2012a, b). Pankaj and Tankha (2010) have explained the provisions of MGNREGA especially for women. The provisions like priority for women in the ratio of one third of total workers (Schedule II (6)), equal wages for men and women (Schedule II (34)), crèche for the children of women workers (Schedule II (28)) were made in the Act, with the view of ensuring that rural women benefit from the scheme in certain manner. The women's participation and the share of women in total person-days were relatively high in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan and Tripura in all the three years from 2006-2009. The Southern states of India namely, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu with relatively better human and gender development indices have ensured high participation of women in all the three years. In some rural areas, women's participation in gram sabha has increased, and there is even an increase in the number of women who speak in the gram sabha. Through MGNREGA women are being as independent bread earners, with control over their earnings and have significant empowerment effects i.e., greater decision making part in the family and confidence to earn independently of male family members. The MGNREGA wages have led women buy food, clothes, medicines and address their short-term needs. Most of the women workers reported that the MGNREGA programme has brought a significant change in their communities and their own lives. The MGNREGA workers are earning more wages than the marker wages and it has improved their spending capacity. Women workers are spending their earnings for household food and consumption purpose, health care and for their children's education. After implementation of MGNREGA, women do not depend on their husbands for any expenses, and they have some cash in their hands. They have greater degree of economic independence and self-confidence. Kumari (2011) has noted the gender disparities, work participation rate of women and problems of women in informal sector. In the 20th century, it was expected that the industrial revolution would reduce the poverty and it will lead to modernization and economic development. But in reality, the position and the contribution of women to household and to the economy was very poor. In our country, women workers are still facing some serious problems such as gender disparities between men and women in employment opportunities, wage disparities etc. The work participation rate of women is also on decline. Women are treated as unskilled and low paid in unorganized sectors. These kinds of problems restrict them from engaging in better jobs. All these reduce their decision making power in the family and their ability to participate in the development activities of the country (Kurinjimalar, and Prasanna, 2013).

MGNREGP and Other Poverty Alleviation Programmes

Sharma (2009) has interlinked the NREGP and global economic crisis. The NREGP is an important strategy of global economic crisis and national economic slowdown, where raising aggregate demand is a major task for the government. The Government of India has implemented various poverty alleviation programmes and wage employment programmes such as CRASH (1961), Antoyada Programme (1977-78), TRYSEM (1979), NREP (1980), RLEGP (1983), JRY (1989), EAS (1993), SGSY (1999), SGRY (2001), Food for Work (2001) and NREGA (2005) for poverty alleviation by providing employment to its citizens. Among these programmes, NREGS is the largest rural employment programme in India. The Central Government allotted Rs. 39,000 crores allocations to NREGS which is the budget for the year 2009-10. It is the largest allocation to a poverty reduction programme since independence. It identifies the people who are in the clutches of poverty, deprivations and discrimination; it provides wage employment to economically and socially backward people. The NREGA was implemented in various districts on the basis of their demand.

They conduct different works like water conservation, water harvesting, drought proofing, flood control, renovation of traditional water bodies, land development and rural connectivity. These kinds of jobs are mainly for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, landless labourers and other Back Ward classes. This programme is based on various kinds of objectives such as sustainable development, poverty eradication, women empowerment, infrastructure development etc. The demand for MGNREGS work is higher in poorer states, reflecting the self-targeting feature of a low wage employment guarantee scheme. The performance of SC and ST population was very high in all the states including the states where the overall participation in NREGA is low. It exposes the NREGA which tends to cover the poor as beneficiaries. The important point to be mentioned here is that the percentage of households completing 100 days of employment is still very low in all the states. Most of the NREGA workers or households are now taking better food, clothing and are enjoying better life. NREGA can be used in such a way that it helps to stabilize these sectors by reducing fluctuations and promotes their growth by raising labour productivity. NREGA reduces the unpaid work of women for promoting women's participation in the mainstream employment in the labour market. This is a positive impact of women including reduction in gender inequalities. Some of the official reports show that the NREGS in Northern States point out that one of the major reason for lack of employment days is the lack of demand for jobs. Some of the similar studies conducted by Maulick (2009), Sankari and Murugan (2009).

Galab et al. (2010) have mentioned about the important features of NREGS. The NREGS reduced the days of involuntary unemployment, because every unskilled worker gets employment through NREGA. The share of employment and income of the females help to control their family. If we compare the participant and non-participant households of NREGA, the status has been changing only on NREGA participant especially the females. Dawn (2012) has mentioned about the importance of differently abled persons. In 1997, the Government of India incorporated the National Handicapped Finance and Development Corporation (NHFDC) in order to help entrepreneurs with disabilities through financial assistance. Besides the policies emphasizing vocational empowerment, employment exchanges under the National Employment services as well as special employment exchanges have been entrusted with the responsibility of placement of persons with disabilities (PWD). These attempts to secure the specially challenged are the most satisfying form of employment suitable to their physical and mental potentialities. Sharma (2013) has mentioned about the Government direction and present day scenario with different development policies in the country. The NREGA addresses the social exclusion, especially providing employment opportunities to disadvantaged groups who are living in the interior rural part of the country. Nayak (2011) has tried to correlate the employment generation and spillover effects. MGNREGP can improve sustainable rural livelihoods through spill-over effects, thereby, enabling the poor to manage their risks and opportunities effectively. There is no denying of the importance of policy and programme actions for employment generation to ensure food security amongst poor than direct food subsidy strategies. Ray (2011) has explained the importance of MGNREGA, it aims and also the author has mentioned about the post-Keynesian approach. The MGNREGA works on the lines of the 'Employer of Last Resort' (ELR) strategy of Minsky, the famous American economist. It further elaborates how the MGNREGA treads a post-Keynesian (heterodox) path, by taking into consideration 'realistic assumptions' about social protection and unemployment in the economy.

Sharma (2011) has mentioned about the employment generation through PWP, importance of NREGA, impact of NREGA and multiplier effect. The employment generation through PWP is a selective mechanism for providing food security to the most needy in case of a famine threat. These scholars opined that, "it has vast potential to generate additional income for the rural poor" also it can enhance the livelihood security by creating sustainable assets in the country side. For instance it has been argued that, "even if such programme does not yield any positive result, the fact that increased wage incomes in rural areas would generate

more demand for rural goods and services, and thus generate positive multiplier effect". Sharma (2011) has discussed about the surplus labour in the developing countries. They has argued in favour of reversed link i.e., by embedding relief operations into a continuing decentralized rural public works programme which has portfolio of economic and social infrastructural investment and maintenance. Regarding MGNREGA it has been riddled with corruption and delay in the wage payment, which is an important aspect regarding the deliverance of the ends of this policy, which is to provide an additional source of income to the poor?

Conclusion

According to the Government of India, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is poised to change all this through Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (MGNREGP). MGNREGP guarantees 100 days of employment to each household at a minimum prescribed rate (The minimum wage rate is prescribed by the respective State Governments). The Gram Panchayat issues a job card to each household (after registering the members of the household free of cost) and provides job within 15 days of registration (on demand by the household). The long term objective of the programme is to enhance people's livelihood on a sustainable basis by developing the economic and social infrastructure in the rural areas. The types of works recommended in the scheme are related to economic and social infrastructure such as water conservation and water harvesting, drought proofing, irrigation canals, provision of irrigation facility for land owned by SC/ST beneficiaries under Indira Aawas Yojana, renovation of traditional water bodies, land development, flood control and protection works including drainage in water logged areas, and rural connectivity. In India, the scheme provides employment to more than 20 million households, out of which more than 50.5 percent of the beneficiaries come from SC/ST households. Equal preference is given to women as compared to men. There is no doubt that MGNREGP has reduced the wandering rural poor for their employment and has changed the hearts and minds of the rural poor with unprecedented hopes and expectations.

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