



An assessment of Awareness of MGNREGS: A Case Study of Kolhapur District

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Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), is one of the most ambitious, central sponsored wage employment scheme. The objective of MGNREGS is to ensure livelihood security of rural people by guaranteeing at least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to every household, whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The scheme has been implemented in Kolhapur District in its Phase III from 1st April 2008. Until the F.Y 2012-13, total 176228 job cards were issued and 1265923 Person days wage employment was generated in the district. The distinct feature of MGNREGS is its bottom up approach. As the scheme is demand driven, effective implementation of the scheme depends on, awareness of the targeted group on their basic entitlements under the scheme. The objective of this paper is to assess beneficiaries' awareness on the key features of the scheme. The study reveals that most of the beneficiaries had very low level of awareness. Probably this may be one of the reasons for comparatively low implementation of the scheme in the Kolhapur district.

Key words: MGNREGS, Awareness, Job card, Employment.

Introduction

Lord Keynes diagnosed unemployment in advanced economies to be result of a deficiency of effective demand. India being a developing economy, the nature of unemployment is cyclical or frictional unemployment. It is not because deficiency of effective demand, but consequences of shortage of capital equipment, other complementary resources or some structural deficiencies.



Absence of gainful employment opportunities in the rural areas leads to farmer suicide, even in some of the fastest developing states of the country. On this account, Government of India enacted the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in September 2005. It came into force in February 2, 2006, and implemented in a phased manner throughout the country. In its Phase I, it was introduced in 200 most backward district of the country. In phase II, it was implemented in an additional 130 districts in the year 2007-08. The scheme was extended to the remaining 274 districts of India from April 1, 2008 in its Phase III. In the Kolhapur District, it has been implemented from 1st April 2008 in its phase III. From October 2, 2009, National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) has been renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme.

Uniqueness of the Scheme:

The MGNREGS is unique employment generation scheme because of its inbuilt key features, the MGNREGS is a bottom-up, people-centred, demand - driven, self- selecting, and right-based employment generation scheme where wage seekers have to demand for work and then it becomes legal responsibility of implementing agency to provide work. The MGNREGS provides a legal guarantee for wage employment against the employment demanded by the rural wage seekers. There is legal provision for unemployment allowances in case of failure to provide wage employment within the stipulated time. The MGNREGS has a legal provision of compensation in case of delays in wage payment of the work undertaken. The MGNREGS is a self selecting program as, its decisions regarding the nature and choice of works, the order in which work to be implemented, site selection etc are to be taken by Gram Sabhas. Decisions of Gram Sabhas cannot be overturned by higher authorities until and unless they are not in line of the provisions of the act, and its operational guidelines. MGNREGS has a unique in built feature of Social audit. Social Audit assures the transference and accountability of performance, especially to its immediate beneficiaries.



Wage Employment Generated Under the scheme in Kolhapur District:

The scheme is implemented in Kolhapur District in its Phase III from 1st April, 2008. Although the implementation of the scheme was started from the April 2008, the implementation of the scheme has been geared up from 2010-2011. From the financial year 2010-2011 to 2012-13, total 2,73,5953 wage employment person days were generated in the district. In the financial year 2010-2011 total number of 2675 households were provided employment in the District, these households generated 35758 person days in the year under the scheme. In F.Y 2011-12, 38847 households were provided employment, and these households generated 1266572 person days wage employment. Further in F.Y 2012-13, 30511 households were provided employment and total 1433623 person days wage employment were provided.

Objective of the Study:

The bottom-up, demand driven, right based, people-centred features of MGNREGS, underlines the importance of awareness of the scheme in the targeted wage seekers. The effective implementation of the scheme totally depends on, the awareness of the targeted group on their basic entitlements under the scheme.

In this context the present study is under taken to assess the awareness of beneficiaries on their key entitlements under the scheme.

Methodology:

Present study is based on the primary data collected by the researcher from the beneficiaries of the MGNREGS in the District. The Stratified random sampling method was used for selecting the respondents. The Stratification of the district is made on basis of Talukas.

For defining the sample size, total beneficiary households in the financial year 2011-12 in Kolhapur district, was consider as population under study. As in this year the



highest 38704 household's availed employment, it is considered as a population size for the study. Proportion Sample size estimating method is used to get sample size from the population. Calculated sample size for the study is 385 households in the district. Calculated sample size is proportionally allocated among 12 Talukas of the District considering the number of beneficiary household in each Taluka. Data was collected through well structured interview schedule. The collected data was coded classified and tabulated using SPSS. The awareness level of beneficiaries were assessed on eight key features of the scheme, they were Right to employment, Number of days household can avail employment in the year, Unemployment benefits, Wage rate under the scheme, Extra wage rate if worked beyond five Kilometers of the village, Role of Gram Sabha in MGNREGS Planning, Procedure of Grievance Redress and Provision of Social Audit.

To quantify the awareness level Unaided-Aided recall test was conducted on each parameters and weighted average Mean was calculated. A weight of '2' for unaided recall, '1' for aided recall and '0' for can't recall was given. Total score of each beneficiary was summed up for getting awareness level of each beneficiary. The maximum and minimum score of each beneficiary was among 16 to 0 respectively. Based on total score obtained by the beneficiaries on the awareness, they were grouped into three categories, low, medium and high aware beneficiaries.

Result and Discussion:

The Table 1 indicates Unaided, Aided and Can't Recall awareness percentage of beneficiaries on each Parameter of the Scheme. The study reveals that 41.6 percent beneficiaries recall Right to Employment under MGNREGS without any aid, whereas 20 percent recall it with aid and 38 percent can't even recall it. These unaware beneficiaries worked under the scheme only because they were offered employment by the local implementation agency, they were not aware of their entitlement to work under the scheme. As MGNREGS is demand driven scheme, initiation of implementation of the scheme take place only if employment is demanded by rural wage seekers. Unawareness



for legal right to work leads to non demand generation for work and further low implementation of the scheme.

Most of the beneficiaries (61 percent) were unaware of how many number of days a household avail employment under the scheme. Out of total beneficiaries 38.5 percent

Table 1 Recall of Beneficiaries on Key features of MGNREGS.

Parameters	N	Unaided Recall Percentage	Aided Recall Percentage	Can't Recall Percentage
Right to Employment	385	41.6	20	38.4
Number of Days employment can get days	385	12.5	26	61
Unemployment Benefits	385	5.5	13.2	81.3
Wage rate	385	8.6	17.4	74
Wage Rate if worked beyond 5 km.	385	3.9	6.5	89.6
Role of Gram Sabha	385	6.2	15.8	77.9
Grievance Redress	385	4.7	11.2	84.2
Social Audit	385	2.1	10.6	87.3

Source : Primary Data

12.5 percent unaided and 26 percent aided) beneficiaries were aware of it. In the financial year 2010-11 0.37 percent, 2011-12 5.8 percent and in 2012-13 11.1 percent households



completed 100 days of employment out of total household availed employment under the scheme. Low awareness for total days of employment entitlement under the scheme probably a reason for fewer households completed hundred days wage employment. Further, the study indicates 81.3 percent beneficiaries were unaware of provision of unemployment benefits under the scheme. They did not demanded for the work nor demanded for unemployment allowance, only worked under the scheme as and when the work was offered by the implementation agency. It creates a question mark on a demand driven component of the scheme.

Wage rate offered under the scheme is according to the minimum wage rate in the State. MGNREGS engineers, measures the work done and calculate the wage of the beneficiaries. Most of the beneficiaries (74 percent) were unaware of the prevailing wage rate under the scheme. These beneficiaries revealed that most of the time their wage payments were delayed, however not given any compensation. Out of total beneficiaries 89.6 percent beneficiaries were unaware of the extra wage they were entitled to receive under the scheme.

The MGNREGS, has a bottom up approach, work to be undertaken, site selection of work, planning of MGNREGS are to be decided in the Gram Sabha. The Study reveals that 77.9 percent beneficiaries were not aware of role of Gram Sabha in implementation of the scheme.

To protect the interest of beneficiaries of MGNREGS, it has inbuilt feature of grievance redress under the scheme. The study indicates that 84.2 percent beneficiaries were unaware of this feature. Social audit feature of the scheme ensures transference and accountancy under the scheme. The study reveals that awareness for provision of Social audit is very low in the district; only 12.7 percent beneficiaries were aware of the provision of social audit of the implementation of the scheme. It may be one of the important of reason for number of irregularities under the scheme.



Table 2:
Distribution of beneficiaries according to their awareness on MGNREGS activities

Level of Awareness	Frequency	Percent
Low (0-4)	294	76.4
Medium(5-12)	89	23.1
High(13-16)	2	0.5
Total	385	100.0
Mean =2.91		

Table no 2 indicates distribution of beneficiaries in terms of low medium and high awareness level. Out of total beneficiaries almost 76.4 percent beneficiaries were having very low awareness of the scheme, whereas 23.1 percent beneficiaries' falls under medium awareness level, and hardly 0.5 percent beneficiaries were having high awareness level of the scheme. In spite of six years of implementation of the scheme in the district, low awareness of the scheme is alarming.



Here further attempts have been made to study the association of awareness for MGNREGS within different beneficiary household. For it three hypotheses were proposed.

Null Hypothesis	Particular	Awareness				Chi-Square	Decision
		Low		Medium			
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%		
H0 ₁ : Awareness for MGNREGS is independent of caste	SC & ST	68	17.8	20	5.2	0.897	Null hypothesis accepted
	Other	226	59	69	18		
H0 ₂ : Awareness for MGNREGS is independent to Gender	Male	211	55.1	77	20.1	0.005	Null hypothesis Rejected
	Female	83	21.7	12	3.1		
H0 ₃ : Awareness for MGNREGS is independent to literacy	Educated	177	46.2	54	14.1	0.937	Null hypothesis accepted
	Uneducated	117	30.5	35	9.1		

H0₁: Awareness for MGNREGS is independent of caste

Although no special provision was made to offer employment in terms of Caste under the scheme, it was proposed to give preference to SC and ST beneficiary household while allocating employment. The study indicates that overall awareness for MGNREGS is very low and Awareness for MGNREGS is independent to caste.

H0₂: Awareness for MGNREGS is independent to Gender.

The MGNREG act stipulates that while offering employment, priority shall be given to the women in such a way that at least one-third of the beneficiaries shall be women. In the Kolhapur district from the F.Y year 2010-11 to 2012-13 total 1265923 number of women employment days



have been generated. The percentage of women employment days generated for F.Y 2010-11 to F.Y 2012-13 are 70 per cent, 47 per cent and 45 per cent respectively. The MGNREGS has emerged an effective source of employment for women. For woman empowering through MGNREGS their awareness for the various features of the scheme is most important. The study indicates that awareness for MGNREGS is dependent to gender.

H0₃: Awareness for MGNREGS is independent to literacy

To spread the awareness about the MGNREGS government has taken various initiatives. The information about MGNREGS is been disseminated through print and electronic media, The act propose that to spread the information about MGNREGS in the village special efforts is to been taken, information about MGNREGS shall be spread through local news paper, hording at village level, wall painting in the villages and notices on the Gram Panchayat notice board. Along with it direct household surveys to be conducted to reach individual job seekers. Although all these methods are proposed under the scheme to spread the awareness the awareness for the scheme is very low. Here an effort has been made to study the association between awareness for the scheme and education level of the beneficiary. The study indicated awareness for MGNREGS is independent of literacy. It suggested that level of awareness is low in literate as well as non literate beneficiary. It indicates that the present media strategies adopted are ineffective in spreading awareness about the scheme.

Conclusion:

The study concludes that awareness level of beneficiaries on their key entitlements under MGNREGS is very low. This underlines the need of immediate corrective measures to spread awareness of the scheme. The Government of India planning to limit the implementation of the scheme only in 200 poorest districts. However, India's Human Development Survey (IHDS) conducted by the National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) and the University of Maryland shows that, nearly 70 per cent of India's poor live in better-off districts. It is imperative to spread the awareness of the scheme to reach the unreached marginal section of the society. Beyond the traditional print and electronic media personal contact and counseling may



play much more important role in this regards. Role of civil societies, self help groups and local government bodies is equally important to identify the targeted beneficiaries. Educational institutes, especially Institutes imparting social science education could be actively involved in generating awareness. Role plays, street plays at the village level would help to educate village population on functioning of the scheme. MGNREGS beneficiaries need to train on the process of Social audit to ensure transparency and accountability. It is a high time now, when we are dreaming to be an economical super power; we transfer some benefits of our growth to the marginal section of the society.

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