

# “Performance of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme with Special Reference to Jalpaiguri District of West Bengal”

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## ABSTRACT

*National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) enacted by legislation on August 25, 2005 and it was renamed as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on 2nd October, 2009. The Act aims at eradication of extreme poverty and at making villages self-sustaining through productive asset creation. In this paper, an attempt is made to focus some lights on the measures of performance of MGNREGS in the Jalpaiguri district located in the West Bengal.*

**Keywords:** National rural employment guarantee scheme.

## INTRODUCTION

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is an Indian job guarantee scheme, enacted by legislation on August 25, 2005. The scheme provides a legal guarantee for one hundred days of employment in every financial year to adult members of any rural household willing to do public work (unskilled manual work) at the statutory minimum wage.

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 in rural India, whether or not they are below the poverty line. Around one-third of the stipulated work force is women. The law was initially called the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) but was renamed as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on 2nd October, 2009. The Act aims at eradication of extreme poverty and at making villages self-sustaining through productive asset creation. The Government has referred to it as an “Act of the people, by the people and for the people”.

In a context of poverty and unemployment, workfare programmes have become important programme interventions in developed as well as developing countries for many years. These programmes typically provide unskilled manual workers with short term employment on public works such as irrigation, infrastructure, afforestation, soil conservation and road construction.

The rationale for workfare programmes rests on some basic considerations. The programmes provide income transfers to poor households during critical times and therefore enable

consumption smoothing specially during slack agricultural seasons or years. Durable assets that these programmes may create have the potential to generate a second round of employment benefits as necessary infrastructure is developed.

NREGA became operational in West Bengal in February 2006. In West Bengal, Panchayat and Rural Development Department is responsible for implementing the scheme. The implementation of NREGA has been assigned to the poverty alleviation cell of the Department. West Bengal State Rural Development Agency which was set up in 2003, performs various tasks on behalf of the Department in providing support to implementation of NREGA. In the first phase, it was implemented in 10 districts ( Bankura, Birbhum, Malda, Purulia, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakhin Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Murshidabad, South 24 Parganas and Paschim Midnapore) followed by another 7 districts ( Purba Midnapore, Hooghly, Burdwan, Nadia, North 24 Parganas, Coochbehar and Darjeeling) from 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2007 and one more district ( Howrah) from 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2008. We have taken Jalpaiguri district for our present study. This district consist of 13 Blocks, 3 Sub-divisions and 146 Gram Panchayat in total. Out of total population, 82.26 % belongs to rural people, 17.74 % comprises Schedule Caste, 36.71% consist of Schedule Tribes and 56 % is below the poverty line.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

A study on the performance of NREGA in Kerala was made by Department of Extension Education of Gandhigram Rural Institute. The broad objective of the study was to analyze the functioning of NREGS in Kerala encompassing all its essential aspects. More specifically the study aims at analyzing the extent to which the scheme has generated employment, assessing the impact of the scheme on selected variables and ascertaining the limitations and constraints faced by the functionaries in implementing the scheme.

Another study was done on “What determines the success and failure of 100 days work at the Panchayat level? A study of Birbhum district in West Bengal” by Subrata Mukherjee and Saswata Ghosh in 2009. In this study an attempt has been made to examine the possible factors operating at the PRI level, which could contribute to the successful implementation of NREGA.

Another study was made by Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta on NREGA in the year 2009. The broad objective was to review and appraise implementation of NREGA process, documentation, transparency, mechanisms and human resources covering mainly four districts viz. Burdwan, Birbhum, Malda and Purulia.

## **Important Provisions under MGNREGA**

The main provisions under MGNREGA are as follows:

1. Adult members of a rural household, willing to do unskilled manual work; make registration in writing or orally to the local Gram Panchayat.
2. The Gram Panchayat after due verification will issue a Job Card. The Job Card will bear the photograph of all adult members of the household willing to work under NREGA and is free of cost.
3. The Job Card should be issued within 15 days of application.

4. A Job Card holder may submit a written application for employment to the Gram Panchayat, stating the time and duration for which work is sought. The minimum days of employment have to be at least fourteen days.
5. The Gram Panchayat will issue a dated receipt of the written application for employment, against which the guarantee of providing employment within 15 days of application for work.
6. Employment will be given within 15 days of application for work, if it is not done then daily unemployment allowance as per the Act has to be paid and the liability of payment of unemployment allowance is of the States.
7. Work should ordinarily be provided within 5 km radius of the village. In case work is provided beyond 5 km, extra wages of 10% are payable to meet additional transportation and living expenses.
8. Wages are to be paid according to the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 for agricultural labourers in the State, unless the Centre notices a wage rate which will not be less than ₹60 per day. Equal wages will be provided to both men and women.
9. Wages are to be paid according to piece rate or daily rate. Disbursement of wages has to be done on weekly basis and not beyond a fortnight in any case.
10. At least one-third beneficiaries shall be women who have registered and requested work under the scheme.
11. Work site facilities such as crèche, drinking water, shade have to be provided.
12. The shelf of projects for a village will be recommended by the Gram Sabha and approved by the Zilla Parishad.
13. At least 50% of works will be allotted to Gram Panchayat for execution.
14. Permissible works predominantly include water and soil conservation, afforestation and land development works.
15. A 60:40 wage and material ratio has to be maintained. No contractors and machinery is allowed.
16. The Central Government bears the 100 percent wage cost of unskilled manual labour and 75 percent of the material cost including the wages of skilled and semi skilled workers.
17. Social Audit has to be done by the Gram Sabha.
18. Grievance redressal mechanisms have to be put in place for ensuring a responsive implementation process.
19. All accounts and records relating to the Scheme should be available for public scrutiny.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of our present study are as follows:

1. The main objective is to focus some lights on the measures of performance of MGNREGS in the Jalpaiguri district located in the West Bengal.
2. How far the Jalpaiguri district has achieved the main motive of this scheme in consistent with the main provisions under this Act?
3. What are the major challenges as far MGNREGS is concerned?
4. What types of work is being done and who are mainly responsible for its successful implementation?

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The statistical data for the study have been mobilized both from the primary and the secondary sources. Primary data has been collected from the Jalpaiguri district in West Bengal through a well designed questionnaire and the secondary data has been collected from different reports published by Panchayat and Rural Development Department (Government of West Bengal), Ministry of Rural Development (Government of India, 2009), Census of India (2001), Bureau of Applied Economic and Statistics (Government of West Bengal, various issues), books, journals and periodicals. The data thus collected, have been analyzed for specific interpretation. The study covers the entire Jalpaiguri district in West Bengal.

Seven dimensions were selected in order to measure the overall performance level of Jalpaiguri district as par MGNREGS is concerned. These dimensions are i) Persondays generation, ii) Participation of different categories of people viz.SC,ST and women, iii) Number of households provided 100 days employment, iv) Percentage of women participation in different schemes of MGNREGS, v) Utilisation of fund against the availability of fund, vi) Average number of days employment and viii) Number of different schemes and their weigtage.

## ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

**Table 1.** Persondays Generation (in Lakhs)

Year	Persondays
2006-2007	38.49
2007-2008	80.32
2008-2009	56.23
2009-2010	160.56

**Source :** [http:// nrega.nic.in](http://nrega.nic.in)

From Table 1, it is observed that at the time of inception of the scheme in Jalpaiguri district, persondays generation was only 38.49 lakhs in the financial year 2006-2007. In the financial year 2009-2010, it has been raised to 160.56 lakhs i.e. increased by 317.14 % comparing to 2006-2007. Obviously we can say that Jalpaiguri district has shown tremendous performance as per persondays generation is concerned.

**Table 2.** Persondays Generation of SC, ST and Women (in Lakhs)

Year	SC	ST	Women
2006-2007	-	-	-
2007-2008	-	-	-
2008-2009	24.23	17.50	22.62
2009-2010	72.42	43.77	74.81

**Source :** [http:// nrega.nic.in](http://nrega.nic.in)

From Table 2, it is observed that in the financial year 2008-2009, persondays generation among SC, ST and women counterpart were 24.23 lakhs, 17.50 lakhs and 22.62 lakhs respectively. But in the financial year 2009-2010, the figures augmented to 72.42 lakhs, 43.77 lakhs and 74.68 lakhs respectively. The increase percentage of SC, ST and women counterpart are 198.88%, 150.11% and 230.72% respectively. From the calculated percentage it is seen that the enhancement rate in the case of women persondays generation is the highest in comparison to SC and ST people in the Jalpaiguri district in West Bengal. The rate of enhancement of persondays generation in case of the ST people is the lowest in this regard.

**Table 3.** Number of Household Provided 100 Days Employment

Year	Number of Household
2006-2007	123
2007-2008	1706
2008-2009	661
2009-2010	8528

**Source :** [http:// nrega.nic.in](http://nrega.nic.in)

From Table 3, it is observed that at the time of inception of the scheme in Jalpaiguri district, only 123 number of households got 100 days employment. It enhanced manifolds in the financial year 2007-2008. At present, Jalpaiguri district has provided 100 days employment to 8528 number of households through MGNREGS.

**Table 4.** Year wise Women Participation (in Percentage)

Year	Women Participation (in %)
2006-2007	42.54
2007-2008	43.27
2008-2009	40.22
2009-2010	46.60

**Source :** [http:// nrega.nic.in](http://nrega.nic.in)

From Table 4, it is observed that, year wise women participation from its inception to till date ranges between 40% to 47% which is higher than the average of the state. The average women participation of the state is only 26.57%. Therefore we can say that Jalpaiguri district

is showing outstanding performance as par women participation is concerned. Women are becoming more independent through successful implementation of this scheme in the Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal.

**Table 5.** Year wise Utilization of Fund (in Lakhs)

Year	Fund Available	Fund Utilized	Utilization (%)
2006-2007	5293.44	3582.26	68
2007-2008	9765.23	8292.37	85
2008-2009	11172.92	7177.40	64
2009-2010	21946.44	20152.38	92

**Source :** [http:// nrega.nic.in](http://nrega.nic.in)

From Table 5, it is noticed that in the financial year 2006-2007, fund utilization against the availability of fund was 68% .Then it increased to 85% in the year 2007-2008. But in the financial year 2008-2009, utilization of fund was slightly decreased and came down to 64 %. Presently, Jalpaiguri district has utilized 92 % of the availability of fund in the financial year 2009-2010. So, we can say that Jalpaiguri district is showing overwhelming performance in this regard.

**Table 6.** Average Number of Days Employment

Year	Average No. of days
2006-2007	10.73
2007-2008	29.02
2008-2009	25.38
2009-2010	64.11

**Source :** [http:// nrega.nic.in](http://nrega.nic.in)

The average number of days employment in West Bengal is 26 days. From Table 6, it is noticed that from the financial year 2006-2007 to 2008-2009 average number of days employment was not satisfactory in this district. But in the year 2009-2010, this district has been able to overcome the problem and of now the average number of days employment is 64.11 days. So, we can say that different types of work under this scheme have been taken up at a rapid progress in this district in order to give more employment to the rural people.

**Table 7.** Presently Approved Sector wise Schemes (Number) and Percentage of Expenditure

Name of Scheme	Number of Schemes	Percentage of Expenditure
Water Conservation & Harvesting	9131	7 %
Draught Proofing	3631	1%
Micro Irrigation Works	3578	4%
Irrigation Facilities to Land Owned by SC/ST	1372	1%
Renovation of Water Bodies	5061	2%
Land Development	4875	17%
Flood Control & Protection	4673	13%
Rural Connectivity	15561	55%

**Source :** [http:// nrega.nic.in](http://nrega.nic.in)

From the records of approved sector wise schemes and percentage of expenditure it is observed that more emphasis has been given on rural connectivity where 15,561 number of schemes have been taken up. On the other hand, 17% and 13% of total expenditure have been incurred for the purpose of Land development and flood control purpose. Due to these initiatives, we will be able to communicate with rural people in a better way in the near future and the economy of this district will develop.

### **CONCLUSION**

We can conclude that the level of performance of Jalpaiguri district in West Bengal is satisfactory as per MGNREGS is concerned. Number of Household provided 100 days employment is very much satisfactory. Women's participation in this district is also above 40%. At present 92% fund has been utilized for planning, implementation and monitoring of MGNREGS. The average number of days employment in Jalpaiguri district is 64.11 days. This district is giving more emphasis on rural connectivity, flood and land development purpose which is very much essential for overall upliftment of Jalpaiguri district. The overall impact of MGNREGS works have been reflected in the following areas:

1. Decline in Migration;
2. Decline in Rural unemployment;
3. Decline in Flood affected areas;
4. Decline in Thefts in rural areas;
5. Increase in Agricultural production;
6. Better Rural communication;
7. Increase in Ground water level;
8. Increase in Financial activity of rural household;
9. Increase in Vegetation covered area;
10. Increase in Financial activity of women.

Finally we can say that MGNREGA is not just employment but for sustainable solution to all major problems.

### **SUGGESTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. More emphasis should be given on Draught proofing, Irrigation facilities to land owned by SC/ST, Renovation of Water Bodies etc.
2. Under MGNREGA, 100 days employment is provided to any adult member which is not at all sufficient to maintain the living standard of rural people. Number of days should be enhanced.
3. Different programmes like Staging of road shows, Drama in local language at village levels, Leaflets, Handbills, Wall writing etc. should be conducted to create and increase awareness among rural people.
4. Wage may be revised taking into account the wage rate in the local market.
5. Provision of unemployment allowance needs to be strengthened where there is a demand / need for work.
6. Further concerns include the fact that local Government corruption leads to the exclusion of specific sections of society. Local Governments have also been found to claim more people have received job cards than people who actual work in order to generate more funds than needed, to be then embezzled by local officials. Bribes as high Rs. 50 are paid in order to receive the job card. Government should give strong vigil to stop this type of corruption.
7. A multi-crore fraud has also been suspected where many people have been issued the NREGA card who is either employed with another Government Job and who are not even aware that they have a Job Card. Detailed investigation is required to stop double employment.
8. The productivity of labourers involved under NREGA is considered to be lower because of the fact that labourers consider it as a better alternative to working under major projects.
9. Since a Gram Panchayat is the primary agency for implementing NREGA, the capacity of Gram Panchayat becomes the most fundamental element for the successful implementation of the programme. Capacity of the Gram Panchayat indicates both the physical capacity (i.e. more technical and skilled manpower) as well as the capacity to produce meaningful plans in sufficient numbers so that those who demanded work can be provided employment.
10. Priority should to be given to the workers of closed tea gardens. Many incidence of death due to starvation and malnutrition took place in the closed tea gardens of Jalpaiguri district.
11. More oppotunity of work should be created for differently abled persons to make them independent under this scheme.
12. MIS staff is very important for proper implementation of this scheme. Therefore sufficient number of MIS staff should be deployed as soon as possible.



13. Government should adopt unique policy to mobilize the surplus income of rural people for financial inclusion which will ultimately lead to economic growth of our country.

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