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Research Article

AWARENESS ABOUT MAHATMA GANDHI NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ACT (MGNREGA) –A STUDY OF DISTRICT KULLU OF HIMACHAL PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee act (MGNREGA) perceived as one of the poverty alleviation programmes aimed at providing guaranteed employment to rural peoples. The scheme is believed to have potential to change the socio-economic status of village people by ensuring livelihood security. The study conducted on a random sample of 70 respondents selected from five villages of Nirmand block of Kullu district (H.P) revealed that a majority of them were aware about the job card (100%), receipt of application of employment (74%), about the number of employment days (100%), necessity of opening of bank account (60%), employment within stipulated period of 15 days (100%), regular marking of attendance (100%), installation of Notice board at work-site (94%), equity in wages of male and female workers (100%), regular checking of work done (66%) and social audit by the Gram Sabha (89%). However, they were found ignorant about unemployment allowance in case work not given within stipulated period of 15 days (100%) and the ratio of wage and material (80%). Lack of facilities like crèche, drinking water, shed etc. at the work-site followed by ignorance about unemployment allowance, not-maintaining wage and material ratio, happening of accidents at work-site due to lack of facilities and delaying of funds allocation causing shortage of work, consequently leading to turnover of workers etc were the main problems/difficulties. Hence, the study implies that basic facilities as per the provisions under MGNREGA should be provided at the work-site besides ensuring timely allocation and release of funds to the Gram Panchayats.

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INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee act (MGNREGA) is one of the several development and poverty alleviation programmes initiated by the Indian Government particularly for the rural areas. The act initiated in the year 2005 aimed at providing guaranteed employment of 100 days to the rural people has been in operation since the last one decade or so in the State of Himachal Pradesh. The scheme is believed to have the potential to change the socio-economic status of the village people ensuring livelihood security. However, awareness among the rural people about the various aspects/issues of MGNREGA is one of the prominent factors deciding its success in the rural areas. Keeping this in view, the present study was undertaken with the following specific objectives:

- To study beneficiaries' awareness on various aspects of MGNREGA.

- To identify the main problems/difficulties faced by the respondents under MGNREGA.
- To seek suggestions from the respondents for further effective implementation of MGNREGA.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in randomly selected Nirmand block of Kullu district (HP). A list of all the Gram Panchayats under the selected block was taken from the office of Block Development Officer. A list of all the Gram Panchayats falling in the selected Block was taken from the office of block Development Officer. Out of the list, two Gram Panchayats were randomly selected and from the selected Gram Panchayats, five villages were randomly selected. From each village, 15 beneficiaries working under MGNREGA were randomly selected, thus constituting total sample size of 75 respondents. However, despite repeated visits, the data could be collected from 70 respondents. The data were collected with

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the help of pre-tested interview schedule by personally interviewing the respondents.

In order to measure the respondents' perception on MGNREGA, a scale consisted of 25 statements which were formulated and edited as per the criteria laid down by Edwards and Kilpatrick (1948). The respondents response was taken on five point continuum scale viz; Strongly agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree and Strongly Disagree with a scoring of 5,4,3,2 and 1. The frequency of the respondents under each continuum was calculated and multiplied with its respective score to obtain total score on each statement. The total score of each respondent on all the 25 statements was computed along with standard deviation (S.D). On the basis of mean perception score (\bar{X}) and S.D. the respondents were classified into the following three categories:

High Perception: $> (\bar{X} + SD)$

Medium Perception: $(\bar{X} \pm SD)$

Low Perception: $< (\bar{X} - SD)$

The main problems and difficulties faced by the respondents were identified on three point continuum scale viz; Very serious, Serious and Not serious with respective score of 3, 2 and 1 and ranked accordingly. The suggestions were also elicited from the respondents for further effective implementation of MGNREGA, The data were collected with the help of well structured and pre -tested interview schedule by personally interviewing the respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The main findings of the study have been discussed as under:

Demographic Profile

The socio-economic profile of respondents is given in Table 1

Table 1 Respondents' socio -personal profile (n=70)

Sr.No.	Socio-personal Traits	Frequency	Percentage
1	Age (years)		
	21- 30	20	28.59
	31-40	22	31.42
	41-50	18	25.71
	51-60	10	14.28
2	Educational Status		
	Upto Middle	6	8.57
	Matric	18	25.73
	Higher Secondary	28	40.00
	Graduate	10	14.28
3	Post Graduate	8	11.42
	Land Holding		
	Upto 10 bighas	54	77.14
	10-20 bighas	8	11.43
4	More than 20 bighas	8	11.43
	Family Type		
	Nuclear	38	54.28
5	Joint	32	45.72
	Family Size		
	2-4	30	42.86
	5-7	32	45.72
	8-10	8	11.42

It has been observed from the data that a majority of respondents were Matric to Higher Secondary passed (66%), having upto 10 bighas of land (77%) with nuclear family (54%) of 5 to 7 members (46%), and were quite young in the age group of 21 to 40 years (60%)

Source of information about MGNREGA

As is evident from the data in Table 2, the main source of information were family members (46%) followed by Television (34%) and government sponsored campaigns (14%).

Table 2 Source of information about MGNREGA

Information Source	Frequency	Percentage
Television	24	34.28
Radio	2	2.85
Newspapers	2	2.85
Family Members	32	45.72
Government Sponsored Campaigns	10	14.28

However Radio, Newspapers were least consulted by them to seek information about MGNREGA.

Awareness regarding Job Cards

Whether the respondents were aware that the job cards are prepared by Gram panchayat; and whether or not the same have been obtained by them, the response is given in Table 3.

Table 3 Response on Job Cards

Sr.No.	Aspect	Response (%)	
		Yes	No
(a)	Awareness	70(100)	Nil
(b)	Obtained Job Cards	70(100)	Nil

The data revealed that all the respondents were aware that the job cards are prepared by Gram Panchayat and the same had been obtained by all the respondents from their respective Gram Panchayat.

Awareness on obtaining receipt of application for employment from Gram Panchayat

On probing whether they knew the receipt for employment is to be taken from Gram Panchayat; and response is depicted in Table 4.

Table 4 Response regarding receipt of application for employment

Sr.No.	Aspect	Response (%)	
		Yes	No
(a)	Awareness	52(74.28)	18(25.72%)
(b)	Got receipt	0	70(100%)

It was clear from the data that though a majority of the respondents (74%) had knowledge that receipt of application for employment should be taken from Gram Panchayat, yet none was found to receive it. Hence, the reasons should be identified by the Government agencies engaged in implementing the MGNREGA for non-obtaining receipt by the persons working under the scheme.

Awareness regarding days of employment under MGNREGA

Whether the respondents were aware about the number of employment days under MGNREGA, the response has been displayed in Table 5

Table 5 Response on employment days under MGNREGA

Sr.No.	Aspects	Response	
		Yes	No
(a)	Awareness	70(100%)	0
(b)	Got employment (days)		
	Upto 25	12 (17.14%)	
	26-50	18 (25.71%)	
	51-75	34 (48.58%)	
	76-100	06 (8.57%)	

A perusal of data revealed that though all the respondents were aware that there are provisions of 100 days employment under MGNREGA. However, a majority of them (57%) got employment of 51 to 100 days. There were still 43 percent who could get employment only 26 to 50 days. Hence, the study implies that efforts should be made by the implementing agency to search for the reasons where does the fault lie and accordingly take appropriate steps to rectify the problems.

Awareness about necessity of opening bank account

On probing whether the opening of bank account is necessary or not, a majority of the respondents (60%) were aware that opening of bank account was compulsory so that wages can be directly deposited in their bank accounts (Table 6).

Table 6 Awareness Regarding opening of bank account

Sr.No.	Aspect	Response (%)
(a)	Aware	70(100)
(b)	Not Aware	Nil

Whereas the remaining 40 percent were found ignorant about the same.

The findings were in agreement with those of Chauhan *et al* (2015) who reported that more than 12 crores bank accounts were opened under MGNREGA and further observed that women were now ready to come out of their houses to work with men ensured by equal wages for both male and female workers.

Awareness regarding employment and unemployment allowance (in case employment not granted within stipulated period of 15 days)

The respondents opinion was taken on whether they were aware that the employment is provided by the Gram Panchayat within 15 days from the receipt of application date; and whether they got it and knew that in case the employment not given within stipulated period, employment allowance will have to be provided by the gram panchayat, their response have been depicted in Table 7.

Table 7 Respondents response

Sr.No.	Aspects	Response	
		Yes	No
(A)	Awareness regarding employment within stipulated period (15 days)	70(100%)	Nil
(B)	Obtained employment within stipulated period	Nil	70(100%)
(C)	Awareness about unemployment allowance	Nil	70(100%)

It was revealed from the data that though all the respondents knew that the employment have to be provided by the Gram Panchayat within stipulated period of 15 days from the days of receipt of application, however, it is very disappointing to note that neither the respondents got employment within stipulated period nor they were aware about unemployment allowance in case employment is not given within the stipulated period. Hence, the study implies sincere efforts should be made by the implementing agency to create awareness among the people through the use of various mass media like TV, radio, newspaper; whatsapp messages etc. so that the job seekers

under the scheme may not be deprived of the benefits of unemployment allowance.

Awareness about necessity of marking attendance

The respondents’ opinion on whether the marking of attendance was compulsory and if they had marked their attendance regularly, the response has been given in Table 8.

Table 8 Awareness Response

Aspects	Response	
	Yes	No
Aware about marking of attendance	70(100%)	Nil
Whether attendance was marked daily	68(97.15%)	02(2.85%)

It is evident from the data that though all the respondents knew that attendance should be regularly marked yet about 3.0 percent could not do so due to the reasons best known to them.

Awareness regarding installation of Notice Board at the work-site and whether the same was installed by the Gram Panchayat

After ensuring whether or not they were aware about the installation of Notice board at the work-site and if the same was installed at their worksite by the Gram Panchayat, the response has been depicted in Table 9.

Table 9 Respondents response

Aspects	Response	
	Yes	No
Awareness about installation of Notice Board	66(94.28%)	04(5.72%)
Installed Notice Board at the work site	42(60%)	28(40%)

The data revealed that a significant majority of the respondents (94%) were aware that installation of Notice Board should be there at the worksite. However, 40 percent of the respondents reported that the same was not installed by the Gram Panchayat at the work-site.

Awareness Regarding Equity in Wages of Male and Female workers; and the ratio of Material and wages

Whether the respondents had knowledge that there is provision of equal wages for both men and women workers under MGNREGA; and are they aware that the material and wages ratio should be 60:40, the response is shown in Table 10.

Table 10 Respondents response

Aspects	Response	
	Yes	No
Aware about equity in wages of male and female workers	70(100%)	Nil
Aware about ratio of wage and material	14(20%)	56(80%)

It was revealed that although all the respondents knew that men and women both are provided equal wages, yet a majority of them (80%) were ignorant about the ratio of wages and material. Hence, the people need to be aware through short duration orientation trainings and local newspaper so that ratio of material may not exceed at the cost of wages/employment.

Sahoo (2014) also reported that equal wages were paid both men and women worker under the Act and Gram Sabha played a key role in the selection of work and conduct of social audit. The author also suggested that steps should be taken by the

government to upgrade the skills of rural women so that they could earn more income.

Respondents’ opinion regarding regular checking of work done, sufficiency of employment days and implementation of MGNREGA by Gram Panchayat

The opinion taken from the respondents on the above aspects is presented in Table 11.

Table 11 Respondents’ opinion

Sr.No.	Aspects	Response	
		Yes	No
(a)	Regular checking of work done	36(65%)	24(34.28%)
(b)	Sufficiency of employment days (100%)	42(60%)	28(40%)
(c)	Satisfaction regarding execution of MGNREGA by Panchayat	38(54.28%)	32(45.72%)

A majority of the respondents (66%) reported that their work was regularly checked by the supervisor/mate but 34 percent replied in negative. Similarly, 60 percent found the employment days in MGNREGA as sufficient and were satisfied with its implementation by the Gram Panchayat (54%). However, there were still 40 percent and 46 percent of the respondents who reported the days of employment as insufficient and showed their dissatisfaction with the execution of MGNREGA by their Gram Panchayat respectively. Reimeingam in the study conducted on scheduled tribes workers in Sikkim observed that MGNREGA was widely and effectively implemented in rural areas with the help of strong and efficient Panchayati Raj System. It was the driving factor for poverty alleviation and enhanced the development of ST & SC particular in rural areas.

Singh *et al* (2017) also reported that workers working under MGNREGA were not satisfied with the number of employment days and facilities at the work-site.

Respondents’ opinion regarding social audit by Gram Sabha and improvement in socio-economic condition

The respondents’ awareness on social audit was examined and their perception on whether there was improvement in their socio-economic condition has been presented in Table 12.

Table 12 Respondents’ opinion

Aspects	Response	
	Yes	No
Awareness on social audit by Gram Sabha	62(88.58%)	8(11.42%)
Perceived improvement in their socio economic condition	60(85.72%)	10(14.28%)

It is evident from the data that a significant majority of the respondents (89%) were aware that social audit has to be conducted by Gram Sabha. Similarly, about 86 percent of the beneficiaries perceived that their socio-economic conditions have improved due to MGNREGA.

Ali and Ahmad (2012) also reported that Gram Sabha’s resolution for preparing and implementing the plan was mandatory and it reviewed the work of MGNREGA in every six months. The author further suggested that the manual work needed to create sustainable assets that promote the economic and infrastructural development of villages. Similar findings were also reported by Farooqi *et al* (2015) who observed that MGNREGA had increased total income of the beneficiaries

particularly the women working under the scheme were found more supportive to their husbands in household expenditure. These findings were also in consonance with those of Borah *et al* (2014) who reported that MGNREGA helped in increasing the income of women which, in turn, enhanced their contribution to their household income and thus, reduced the debt burden on them.

Problems/Difficulties faced by respondents under MGNREGA

The main difficulties faced by the beneficiaries on three point continuum viz; Most serious, Serious and Not serious were identified and presented in Table 13 by ranking them on the basis of total score.

Table 13 Problem/Difficulties faced by beneficiaries under MGNREGA

Sr.No.	Problems/Difficulties	MS	S	NS	Total Score	Rank
I	Due to delay in fund allocation, payment of wages is delayed	30	25	15	155	V
II	Non-availability of funds causes shortage of work	25	25	20	145	VI
III	Shortage of work often leads to turnover of workers from the scheme	20	30	20	140	VII
IV	Due to illiteracy, the workers remains ignorant about their attendance in the Muster Rolls	25	15	30	135	VIII
V	Sometimes irrelevant work is allotted to the workers compelling them to leave the work	10	35	25	125	X
VI	Due to lack of facilities, there are accidents at work site	35	25	10	165	IV
VII	Indifferent attitude of supervisors	25	20	25	120	XI
VIII	Time lag in payment of wages adversely affect the morale of workers	30	10	20	130	IX
IX	Due to forgetting of bringing job cards, sometimes the workers are not permitted to the worksite and thus, are deprived of wages	0	0	70	70	XIII
X	Sometimes due to road blockage, the workers reach late at worksite but they are not primitted by the supervisors	0	5	65	75	XII
XI	Wage and material ratio is generally not maintained by the village panchayat	40	30	0	180	III
XII	Worksite facilities like Crèche, Drinking water etc are generally lacking	50	20	0	190	I
XIII	Due to ignorance because of illiteracy, unemployment allowance is not given (in case employment not given within 15 days of application for work)	45	25	0	185	II

It has been observed from the data that lack of facilities like crèche, drinking water etc (Rank I) followed by ignorance about unemployment allowance (in case employment not given

within stipulated period of 15 days of application), non maintaining of wage and material ratio (Rank III) and happening of accidents due to lack of facilities at the work-site etc. were the main difficulties faced by the respondents. Similarly, delaying in fund allocation, payment of wages is delayed (Rank V), Non-availability of funds causing shortage of work (Rank VI), Shortage of work often leading to turnover of workers from the scheme (Rank VII) and due to illiteracy, the workers remain ignorant about their attendance in the Must Rolls (Rank VIII) were also found some of the other main problems faced by them under MGNREGA.

These findings were also supported by Singh *et al* (2017) who reported that the workers disliked discontinuous nature of work, wage rate and delay in payment of wages and were not satisfied with the facilities at the work-site. Similar findings were also reported by Pandey (2017) who found lack in proper monitoring and vigilance of social audit and in releasing of funds well in time. The authors further suggested that decisive steps should be taken to ensure proper implementation of the scheme.

CONCLUSION

It has been conducted from the study that a majority of the respondents were aware about various aspects of MGNREGA. Lack of facilities like crèche drinking water, shed etc, ignorance about unemployment allowance, non-maintaining of wages and material ratio and delaying in releasing funds etc. were some of the main problem faced by them. Hence, the study implies that the basic facilities as per the provision of MGNREGA should be provided at the work-site besides ensuring timely release of funds to the Gram Panchayats.

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