



## IMPACT OF EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ON LIVELIHOOD SECURITY: EVIDENCE FROM THE MGNREGA IN J&K.

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### ABSTRACT

*The MGNREGA aims at creating sustainable livelihood for rural poor by linking the benefits of the scheme with the participation. The study looks at the impact of NREGA on the rural poor in the selected districts of J&K. The methodology adopted for this study is descriptive & the data collection has been done by carrying out the primary survey of the sampling districts. Besides, the discussions were also held with the various stakeholders to find out the challenges in implementation of the scheme in the state. The study found that there is an asymmetric influence of the scheme across districts in the state. Besides, the implementation of the scheme suffers from poor skills & capacity of the ground level workers.*

**Key Words:** MGNREGA, Rural Poor, Assymmetric

### Introduction

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (2005), was implemented in the state of Jammu & Kashmir in a Phased manner. In the first phase, the scheme was operationalised in three districts of J&K viz, Doda, Kupwara and Poonch. The NREGA became fully operational in 2007. The scheme is one of the biggest and most ambitious public works programs in the world fundamentally due to its ambitious objective of providing guaranteed 100 days' work on a prevailing minimum wages in a calendar year. This was meant to increase employment and extend an additional income stream to rural families. NREGA has also shown considerable potential to improve women's empowerment, natural resource management, and reduce rural to urban migration (Ravi et al., 2013). Besides, an interesting feature of

NREGA is its provision of 33 % for women and women are to be paid equal wages as men. By implementing NREGA which is an employment guarantee programme, it seeks to ensure that rural poor enjoy a gainful employment & income by taking up works related to soil conservation, irrigation, water conservation, drought-proofing, afforestation etc. This aims to eradicate chronic poverty and ensure livelihood security of poor rural households. By being self-targeting in nature as the wage rates are set at a level to attract only those willing to work at basic wage rates, it is expected to result in a reduction of information and agency (Sjoblom & Farrington, 2008).

## Objectives

1. To examine the impact of NREGA on the employment generation in the twin districts of Poonch & Kupwara of J&K state.
2. To find out the participation of marginalised groups such as SC, ST & women in works under NREGA.
3. To identify the key challenges in the NREGA implementation in the state & suggest appropriate measures for improvement.

## Methodology

The present study is undertaken in the most backward districts of Kupwara & Poonch in J&K state of India. The selection of the above districts was made purposively based on the socio-economic profile of these districts. Besides, the performance in NREGA was another parameter for selection of the districts. The data collection & analysis involves both secondary & primary sources. The data collection was done by carrying out a survey of 30 households in each block involving a total of 3 blocks in each district. The total sample size was 180. Besides, a survey, using a structured survey instrument, of officials & other stake holders like panchayat members, programme officers etc was made to find out the constraints faced by them in the implementation process of NREGA.

## Impact on Employment

The employment provided to various households in Kupwara in 2012-13 was 36691 and Man-days generated was more than 20 lakh & 30 thousand days. Similarly, in 2013- 14, the total households employed increased to more than 4 thousand whereas the Man-days generated jumped up additionally by 40 thousand days from previous year. In 2014-15, the total households employed increased in excess of 18 thousand & total Man-days generated was more than 64 thousand Man-days (*MORD, 2015*). After looking at the data, it can be easily observed that the access to employment is increasing with every passing year.

In district Poonch of Jammu region, the total households employed in 2012-13 was in excess of 41 thousand and total Man-days generated was 20 lakh 80 thousand. In 2013-14, the figures for households employed stood at 40 thousand while as the Man-days generated was 20 lakh 12 thousand. In 2014-15, the employed households figures decreased 28 thousand while as the Man-days also decreased to around 11 lakh Man-days (*MoRD, 2015*). The access to employment in district Poonch presents a disturbing trend as both the Household and Man-days generated figures are facing a downslide.

**Access to Marginalised Groups**

The population figures of scheduled castes (SC's) and scheduled tribes (ST's) in Kupwara is significantly low compared to district Poonch. Whereas in Kupwara district, the employment to women stood at around 37 thousand in 2012-13. In 2013-14, the employment to women workers stood marginally higher than previous year. In 2014-15, the women employment didn't increase any further.

In district Poonch, the employment to ST's stood in excess of 53 thousand in 2013-14. Whereas, in 2014-15, the employment to SC's & ST's was 132 and 53360 respectively. The access to employment for women workers in Poonch district under MGNREGA for 2012-13 was more than 20 thousand (*MoRD, 2015*). Whereas, in 2014-15, the employment figures to Women workers remained same as in 2013-14.

**Implementation Challenges & Suggestions**

The challenges confronted in implementation process are resoundingly similar as faced at many places across India. The problem of low wages is a major challenge for encouraging rural households to take up work under NREGA. The problem is mainly due to higher market wages coupled with pathetically low minimum wages. Besides, the survey results showed that women workers are hesitant to take up work under NREGA due to "distance issues", as the allotted work is far off from their homes. Further, the cultural barriers also work against the growing participation of women folk in NREGA works.

The capacity & lack of skills of various stake holders particularly the panchayat members, village level workers etc. works against the basic purpose of MGNREGA. In this context, the skill enhancement of workers and panchayat functionaries would go a long way in furthering the objectives of the programme (T.Haque, 2011).

The social inclusion objective of MGNREGA has significantly suffered in the state of J&K as the participation of subaltern social groups such as SC's, ST's and women has more or less remained constant as revealed by official data. The survey reveals that the state machinery has badly failed in addressing this issue as no strategy is seemingly forthcoming in arresting this trend.

**Conclusion**

The MGNREGA has offered a rights based deal to rural poor particularly to disadvantaged sections such as SC's & ST's. The act envisions a major improvement in socio-economic conditions of rural poor with state machinery acting as vibrant force in consummating the outlined objectives. However, it appears from this study as also pointed out by other researches that major gaps still exist in the implementation of MGNREGA in the State of J&K which need to be addressed in so for the state wants to better its performance on major socio-economic indicators. In the context of J&K, the capacity & skill building of panchayat functionaries & government officials, awareness campaigns, monitoring of the implementation by state vigilance at various levels, participation of local people in identification & execution of works under NREGA in the state has to be promoted significantly. Lastly, the quality of assets created need to be scaled up if the state aims to create sustainable livelihood for rural poor.

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