

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) - An Initiative towards Sustainable Development

Vineeth Mathew

Research Scholar, St. Berchmans College, MG University, Kerala, India

Abstract: Sustainable development is the development strategy that fulfills the wants of the present generation without denying the opportunity of the future generations to satisfy their needs. The older concept of sustainability concentrated more on environmental issues but the recent trends in sustainable development includes economic growth aspects, social inclusion and environmental protection and most importantly poverty eradication in all its forms is an unavoidable requirement for sustainable development. In the case of India, indicators of sustainable development points out that, countries natural ecosystem that includes forest reserves, agricultural land availability, water resources etc. are declining in a great percent over the years. So India has to take more positive actions towards sustainable development which is important for country's ecological balance. The introduction of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme (MGNREGS) in 2005 can be considered as a great step towards sustainable development in the rural areas of the country. It is a social security measure that guarantees of 'Right to Work' to Indian citizen. MGNREGS ensures a legal guarantee for at least 100 days of employment in every financial year to adult members of any rural household who is willing to do unskilled public related manual work at the statutory minimum wage. The main objective is to overcome the causes of chronic poverty through guarantee of employment through different categories of works which will result in the creation of sustainable social assets and thereby ensuring the overall development of the area.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, MGNREGS, Poverty, Employment Generation

1. Introduction

Sustainable development can be stated as the, development strategy that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs. The development strategy of sustainability has two important concept i.e. needs and limitations. The concept of needs includes the essential necessities of the rural poor and limitations points out to the ability of the technology, government systems and environments to meet present and future needs. The concept of sustainable development greatly stress on the economic and social development along with environmental protection. India also recognizes the need and importance of a development strategy that sustained the environment and resources for future. Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997–2002) had given more emphasis on the synergy between health, environment, and development. It also identified one of its core objectives the need for ensuring environmental sustainability of the development process through social mobilization and participation of people at all levels. According to 2011 census report, nearly 70% of Indian population lives in rural areas and majority of them are facing the problem of poverty and unemployment.

2. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme -2005 (MGNREGS)

Our country has celebrating the seventy years of independence but poverty and unemployment still exists in our rural areas to a great extent. The country cannot achieve the goal of sustained economic development unless these two problems are completely eliminated. Since independence, many programs and schemes were

implemented continuously like Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP), and National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) Food for Work Programme (FWP), Ensured Employment Scheme (EAS), and Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY), Sampoorna Gramin Rozgar Yojana (SGRY) etc. in order to ensure rural development through employment generation, poverty eradication and infrastructure development. But several limitations of these employment programs created the need for thinking some other scheme which has the great potential to provide employment and thereby reduce poverty in rural India. In order to achieve this objective the government of India introduced the historic social security program National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) in 2005-06. NREGS was implemented through an act called "National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA). National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was renamed in to Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme to Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in 2009 October 1st. The main objective and aim of MGNREGS is to making villages of country more self-sustaining through productive assets creation. It was also focus on the multiple objectives of providing employment in a rights-based framework, addressing rural poverty, discouraging rural -urban migration and building of sustained and quality rural infrastructure through different works. MGNREGA legally guarantee 100 days of employment to every rural household who are willing to do any unskilled manual works at a minimum statutory wage in a financial year.

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Specific objectives of MGNREGS

- a) Strengthening the livelihood resource base of the rural poor through durable asset creation.
- b) Providing an alternative employment opportunity for rural poor in employment off seasons.
- c) Playing the key role for sustainable development in rural areas.
- d) Empowering rural poor through the processes of a rights-based law.

3. Objective

The objective of the paper is to make a descriptive study about the role of MGNREGS in sustainable development through poverty reduction, employment generation and asset creation.

4. Data Source

Only secondary data have been used for the analysis and description of the objective. It was collected and combined from different books, research papers, reports, journals, online data base which are related to MGNREGS and Sustainable Development.

5. Employment Generation and Poverty reduction through MGNREGS

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) that guaranteed 100 days of employment in a year to every rural house of rural India. MGNREGA-2005 is an advanced and radical scheme which provides a right to employment. Through MGNREGA, the Government was committed to providing unskilled works to every rural household whose demands such work and volunteer to do such work. The work was to be providing at the minimum wage rate and, as far as possible, with a radius of five kilometers of the village where the applicant resided. Failure to provide such wage employment within 15 days of the receipt of the application entitled the applicant to receive unemployment allowance. Total Person-days employment generated under MGNREGA in all the States and UTs of India (except Delhi NCT) was 25368 Lakhs during the Financial Year 2010-11 (P). It was 21634 Lakhs during the Financial Year 2011-12 (P) and was 22665 Lakhs during the Financial Year 2012-13. Under the scheme 3.8 crore households were provided employment and 135 crore person days of employment were generated. Data shows in 2011-12, the total number of people living below the poverty lines both rural and urban area has decline to 21.9 percent in 2011-12 from 37.2 percent in 2004-05 because of increase in per capita consumption. This is an unprecedented diminish in poverty levels, some 40 percent of those who were poor in 2004-2005 were no longer poor seven years later. Before the implementation of MGNREGS in 2004-05, the average persons below poverty line in rural areas was 42 % and after MGNREGS it was declined in to 33.8% in 2009-10 and further decline to 25.70 in 2011-12 (NITI Ayog Report, 2011).

6. Sustainable Asset creation through MGNREGS

Creation of durable assets and strengthening the livelihood resource based of the rural poor people shall be an important objective of the scheme. In order to ensure sustained income in the long run leading to improvement in the quality of lives of the rural people MGNREGA pointed out a list of nine to create sustainable properties through implementation of the programme in the rural areas. However, the Act also allows creation of personal properties through the programme which are more particularly required by the vulnerable sections of the society which were denied of such benefits so long due to social oppression. Since the inception of MGNREGA, around 252 lakh works have been completed. Following are the permissible works that can be doing under MGNREGS to ensure a sustained development of the rural sector.

Water conservation and water harvesting works which are helpful to increase the water availability and agriculture productivity. 2. Drought proofing works which includes forestation and tree plantation. 3. Irrigation works which includes construction of canals, check dams etc. in order to provide a better irrigation facility in rural areas. 4. Renovation of traditional water bodies to ensure increased water availability. 5. Flood control works. 6. Rural connectivity works which includes the construction of village roads. 7. Development of common waste land for productive purposes. Several useful assets are created through these works under the scheme that includes, millions of acres of uncultivable lands brought under cultivation, afforestation programme in Bihar, wells taken up in Madhya Pradesh/ Jharkhand, environmental stabilization works in the hilly areas, drought resistance programmes in water scarce states etc. (Assessment report of MGNREGS, 2015-16). According to the latest report, a total of 2, 29, 65,035 assets were created in rural India under MGNREGS through different kinds of works.

7. Conclusion

The MGNREGA considered as the most powerful initiative ever undertaken for transformation of rural livelihoods in India. During a decade of its implementation the first objective of MGNREGA assumes importance and there was a less concentration on the ultimate objective of creating sustainable productive assets. Now it is the time for the different stakeholder of the scheme to concentrate on asset creation which strengthens the natural resource management which in turn leads to agricultural development. The sincere efforts of the different stakeholder in implementation could realize its potential in raising the productivity of agriculture particularly in backward regions and also to strengthen the rural infrastructure which finally leads to sustainable development of rural India.

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