

CORONA Crisis, Return Migrant Workers and MGNREGA: A Study of Tonk District in Rajasthan

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Abstract: *The whole world is suffering from the pandemic Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19). The paper attempts to study the effectiveness of MGNREGA on livelihood of return migrant workers during Corona crisis in Sangrampura village of Tonk district of Rajasthan. The study finds that only 10 per cent of return migrant workers are working under MGNREGA. Study also evaluated the effectiveness of the scheme for the livelihood of return migrant workers in village and finds that there is no significant association between the satisfaction about MGNREGA works and effectiveness of scheme for livelihood of return migrant workers in village. It is concluded that the MGNREGA did not yield desired results during the lockdown.*

Keywords: Corona Virus Disease; MGNREGA; lockdown; return migrant workers

1. Introduction

Throughout human history, there have been a number of pandemics of diseases such Smallpox, Tuberculosis, Cholera, Bubonic plague, and Influenza and HIV/AIDS. These are the most brutal killers in human history.¹ Presently, the whole world is suffering from the Corona Virus Disease. It is originated in region of Wuhan (China) in December, 2019. It has been named COVID-19, a shortened form of 'Corona virus disease of 2019'. The virus spread worldwide within few months. World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic in March, 2020.

Migration is one of the most important factors after fertility and mortality that affect the demographic changes in a country.² Generally, people are migrating to access the employment opportunity is the destination place. India is a country of villages. About 70 per cent of country's total populations are living in rural areas. The villagers generally belong to marginal, small and landless poor and agriculture is a primary source of their income and livelihood which is not sufficient for their survival. They are not able to get the minimum facilities or basic needs. Non-availability of work in villages forced people to move towards city and towns.

Currently, the whole world is suffering from the Corona virus disease. The Government of India ordered a national wide lockdown on 24 March, which affecting the entire 1.3 billion people of India. Migrant workers of rural areas are also affecting by this lockdown decision because all the economic activities are almost shutdown and they don't have employment and work. On 14 April, Prime Minister Narendra Modi extended the lockdown until 3 May, and it further extended further by the Government of India by two weeks until 17 May and it was further extended till 31 May

by National Disaster Management Authority on 17 May.³ Therefore, government is sending them to their native areas. There are a large number of migrant labourers across the country are returning to the residences due to lack of wages, livelihood and food during the ongoing lockdown.

COVID-19 Status in India

Currently large numbers of countries in the whole world are suffering by the COVID-19 and India is also including in the list of countries those are facing a serious problem due to Corona pandemic. The first case of Corona pandemic in India was reported on 13 January, 2020.⁴ According to Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, total number of 4,40,135 active cases of Corona positives, recoveries (8,17,208) and death (30601) in India as on 23 July, 2020 (Table no.1).

Table 1: COVID-19 Status in India: (as on 25 May, 2020)

S.No.	Place	Total Active Cases	Total Recoveries	Total Deaths
1	India	4,40,135	8,17,208	30601
2	Rajasthan	8811	23815	594

Source: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of India.

2. MGNREGA: An Alternative for Return Migrant Workers during Corona Lockdown

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is the flagship welfare scheme launched in February 2006 by UPA government in 200 most backward districts of country in I-phase and later it was extended to all districts of India.⁵ Reduction in labour migration through the provision of locally available work in rural areas is the one of the significant objectives of the scheme. The Rajasthan

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19pandemic_lockdown_in_India.

⁴ Official website of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of India, <https://www.mohfw.gov.in>.

⁵ The Gazette of India, part-II, Section-1, Registered No DL-(N)/0007/2003-05, New Delhi. 7 September 2005.

¹ Pandemics in human history, Wikipedia website <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pandemic>.

² Sangita Kumari. (2014). "Rural-Urban Migration in India: Determinants and Factors." Vol. 3. Issue 2. Mar 2014. 161-180.

government has initiated steps to generate labour-intensive opportunities in order to give regular wages to the poor villagers. The flagship scheme's wages have been revised from ₹199 a day to ₹220 a day.⁶ Ashok Gehlot (Chief Minister of Rajasthan) said that it would issue job-cards to all migrant labours and engage them under the MGNREGA.

According to **Sachin Pilot (Rajasthan Deputy Chief Minister)**, "MGNREGA is the lifeline of rural labourers and daily-wage workers, small, marginal farmers, agricultural labours and construction workers who have been the worst affected due to Covid-19 lockdown. Therefore, in order to provide financial support to the affected people in the year 2020-2021, hundred days of employment fixed under MGNREGA should be increased to 200 days per family."⁷ Recently, he wrote a letter to Union Rural Development Minister Narendra Singh Tomar for demanding the number of days of work under scheme *MGNREGA* to be doubled to 200 for the 1.13 crore workers employed under the scheme in Rajasthan state. In such crisis, MGNREGA scheme is the best way to provide financial support to the affected people. The scheme is playing a crucial role in India for the workers who were migrating back to their native place. Rajasthan state ranked 1st in country by providing work under MGNREGA during this lockdown.

2.1 Research problem

The Government of India ordered a series of lockdowns and all the economic activities are almost shutdown. All the migrant workers are returning back to their native areas due to the lockdown. And MGNREGA is the only source of their livelihood during lockdown. Therefore, the present study is about to study the effectiveness of MGNREGA on livelihood of return migrant workers during this Corona crisis and lockdown.

2.2 Objectives of the Research

- To study the primary source of return migrant workers of village during lockdown.
- To examine the effectiveness of MGNREGA on livelihood of return migrant workers.
- To make appropriate suggestions for strengthening of the scheme on the basis of findings of the study.

2.3 Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant association between the satisfaction about MGNREGA works and the perception about the effectiveness of the scheme on livelihood of return migrant workers.

⁶ Mohammed Iqbal. "Coronavirus lockdown: Rajasthan government steps in to give wages to poor villagers." *The Hindu*. 24 April 2020.

⁷ Sandeep Phukan. "Battle against COVID-19 should be at a human level, says Sachin Pilot." *The Hindu*. 08 April 2020.

3. Methodology

The present study is based on the primary survey. Primary data were collected from return migrant workers returning during Corona lockdown from selected Sangrampura village of Gram Panchayat Niwariya of Tonk district (Rajasthan). Direct personal conversation and interview schedule was used for collecting the relevant information. Chi-Square test also used to analyse the association between the perceptions of the respondents.

4. Limitations

The study had conducted in Sangrampura village in Tonk district of Rajasthan to analyse the effectiveness of MGNREGA scheme on return migrant workers during Corona crisis and lockdown. The findings of the study may not be transferable to other situations and entire state because the sample was restricted to specific area.

5. Results and Discussion

The result and discussion is divided into four sections (i) status of return migrant workers during lockdown, (ii) category-wise perception about the effectiveness of the scheme on livelihood of return migrant workers, (iii) significance of satisfaction about works under MGNREGA and effectiveness of scheme on livelihood and (iv) perception of return migrant workers during lockdown. This section provide information about cross-table prepared by using the collected information, bar diagrams and pie charts are used to present the information drawn through the tables.

1) Status of Return Migrant Workers during Lockdown:

Total number of return migrant workers in Sangrampura village is 50. Table depicts that out of them, 41 workers (82%) has revealed that their primary source of income is non-agriculture wages followed by 5 workers (10%) employed under MGNREGA and remaining 4 workers (8%) are doing agriculture activity. This is also illustrated in following figure 1.

Table 2: Primary Source of Income during Lockdown (N=50)

	Number of workers	% of total workers
Agriculture	4	8 %
Non-agriculture Wage	41	82 %
MGNREGA	5	10 %
Total	50	100

Source: Data collected from field survey.

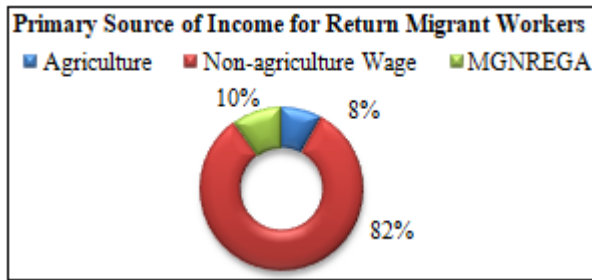


Figure 1: Primary Source of Income during Corona Lockdown

2) Category-wise Perception about the Effectiveness of the Scheme on livelihood of return migrant workers:

Category-wise perception of return migrant workers about the effectiveness of the MGNREGA on their livelihood during Corona lockdown presented in Table 3. Table shows that out of the total respondents, 5 workers are considered that MGNREGA is effective for their livelihood instead of 33 workers stated that the scheme is effective for their livelihood during this Corona crisis and lockdown and remaining 12 workers are provided their views that the scheme is partially effective for their livelihood.

Table 3: Category-wise Perception of respondent about Effectiveness of MGNREGA on livelihood (N=50)

Category	Answers of Respondent			
	Yes	No	Partially	Total
ST	1	5	5	11
SC	1	1	0	2
OBC	3	27	7	37
Total	5	33	12	50

Source: Data collected from field survey.

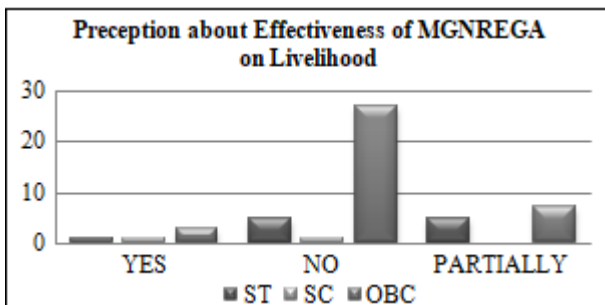


Figure 2: Bar-Chart Analyses of Return Migrant Workers

3) Significance of Satisfaction about Works under MGNREGA and Effectiveness of scheme on livelihood

To analyse the association between above mentioned two variables Chi-Square test has been performed as to whether works under MGNREGA is effective for livelihood of return migrant workers. The Chi-Square analysis of cross-tabulation reveals that there is no significant association ($p > 0.05$) between the parameters cross-tabulated (Table 4). Thus, the hypothesis that satisfaction about MGNREGA works not ensure the effectiveness of the scheme on livelihood of return migrant workers accepted. The null hypothesis (H_0) is proved correct and therefore reject alternative hypothesis (H_1).

Table 4: Chi-Square Analysis of the Cross-Tabulation between Satisfaction about MGNREGA Works and Effectiveness of the Scheme for Livelihood of Return Migrant Workers

		Is the MGNREGA is effective for your livelihood during Corona Lockdown?			Total	
		No	Yes	Partially		
		Count	20	2		7
Are you satisfied with MGNREGA works during Corona Lockdown?	No	Expected Count	19.14	2.9	6.96	29
		Std. Residual	0.2	-0.5	0	
		Count	13	3	5	21
	Yes	Expected Count	13.86	2.1	5.04	21
		Std. Residual	-0.2	0.6	0	
		Count	33	5	12	50
Total	Expected Count	33.0	5.0	12.0	50.0	

Source: Data collected from field survey.

Chi-Square Test:			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	0.7575	2	0.684691
N of Valid Cases	50		

P value > 0.00001, Not statistically significant at $p > 0.05$

4) Perception of Return Migrant Workers during Lockdown

The few questions were asked to the respondents to know the perceptions of the people relating with MGNREGA implementation during lockdown. Table 5 depict that 21 out of total 50 respondents are satisfied with the works undertaking under scheme during lockdown and remaining 29 workers are not satisfied. Total 45 respondents stated that they will migrate again to previous place after lockdown for their work and will not work in MGNREGA, but remaining 5 workers said that they will not migrate and will prefer to work under the scheme at their native place. All the respondents are opined that the wage rates, workdays and number of members per family under MGNREGA should increased. They also demanding for wage payment on daily basis, and then it will be useful for their livelihood.

Table 5: Perception of Return Migrant workers (N=50)

S.N.	Questions	Yes	No
1	Are you satisfied with MGNREGA activity during lockdown?	21	29
2	Should MGNREGA wage rates be increased?	50	0
3	Should wages be paid on daily basis?	50	0
4	Should work days be extended in MGNREGA?	50	0
5	Will you migrate again after lockdown?	45	5
6	Will you want to work in MGNREGA after lockdown?	5	45

Source: Data collected from field survey.

6. Findings

The present study finds that primary source of income of 41 return migrant workers (82%) is non-agricultural wages and only 10 % workers are working under MGNREGA. Out of total 50 respondents, 33 workers stated that the scheme is

ineffective for their livelihood during the crisis instead of only 5 workers support the idea that MGNREGA is effective to provide source of livelihood for them and rest of 12 workers viewed that the scheme is partially effective during Corona lockdown. 21 out of total 50 respondents are satisfied with the works undertaken under scheme during lockdown and remaining 29 workers are not satisfied.

- [5] The Gazette of India, part-II, Section-1, Registered No DL-(N)/ 0007/2003-05, New Delhi. 7 September 2005.
- [6] Mohammed Iqbal. "Coronavirus lockdown: Rajasthan government steps in to give wages to poor villagers." The Hindu. 24 April 2020.
- [7] Sandeep Phukan. "Battle against COVID-19 should be at a human level, says Sachin Pilot." The Hindu. 08 April 2020.

7. Suggestions

On the basis of the findings following suggestion can be made:

- The 100 days of employment to one member from each family is not sufficient during the crisis. Thus, all the return migrant workers in the villages should be provided work under MGNREGA.
- The villagers frame their income expenditure pattern according to their daily wages. Therefore, the government needs to ensure that wages under MGNREGA should be paid on daily basis,
- There is a need to make the scheme is so attractive that people will stop migrate to nearby place for their livelihood and will work under MGNREGA. It will reduce the rural-urban migration.
- Total workdays provided under MGNREGA should be increased according to the demand pattern of households.

8. Conclusion

Government of India has initiated by starting the MGNREGA activities during lockdown to provide the financial support for the livelihood of return migrant workers and their family and the idea behind this approach is that the scheme will be the best way to provide economic benefits to them in such crisis. At present, all the economic activities are closed due to Corona lockdown; MGNREGA is the only means by which the livelihood of the people is possible, but wages are not being paid daily under the MGNREGA.

Therefore, the workers returning from outside are not interested to do work under MGNREGA and most of them are engaged in non-agricultural work for their livelihood. The study provided the results that return migrant workers are satisfied with the activities undertaken under MGNREGA but the wages and 100 days employment to a member from each family is not sufficient for their livelihood during lockdown.

References

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