

Grass Root Constrictions in Implementation of MNREGA in West Bengal

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted in two districts, Burdwan and South Dinajpur of West Bengal with 200 MNREGA beneficiaries and the MNREGA functionaries of block and village panchayat level as respondents to identify the major constrictions in the implementation of MNREGA at the grass root level. The major constrictions in the implementation as perceived by the beneficiaries were: incomplete list of adults in each household, delay in receiving job cards, wrong date or no date recorded on the work application, selection of a low priority or inappropriate work, favoring or discriminating against people in allocation of work, late payment of wages and various aspects of the programme carried out without people's involvement. The major constrictions as perceived by the MNREGA functionaries were shortage of manpower, huge paper work and long bureaucratic structure, financial inclusion in MNREGA, problem of power cut and morality of the people.

Key Words : Constrictions, Job card, Delayed payment, Evaluation, Low priority work, Inappropriate work, Discriminations, Favoritisms, Manpower, Financial inclusion, Skilled labour, Morality

INTRODUCTION

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA), 2005, was operationalized in India from 2nd February, 2006 is a result of long struggles of various social movements. The programme has started with the major objective of reducing chronic poverty from the country by guarantying atleast one hundred days of unskilled wage employment to the rural poor and create community assets so that the process of employment generation becomes sustainable. Central Government is making large public expenditure under MNREGA. In the 2009-10 budget, an allocation of ₹ 39,100 crore had been made for MNREGA, which was an increase of 144 per cent over the 2008-09 budget (₹16,000 crore). Many states particularly Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan are doing well with MNREGA. it has been observed that many states particularly, eastern and north-eastern states, the implementation of the programme is not moving in the right spirit. Several shortcomings and loopholes have been reported regarding its implementation. In this context, it is important to identify those constrictions, which are hindering the effective implementation of the programme. The present study was taken up to pin point the constrictions of effective implementation of the programme at the grass root and suggest improvement strategy.

METHODOLOGY

The state West Bengal was selected purposively for

the study, because it is one of the states of India where MNREGA was first introduced. Two districts, namely Burdwan and Dakshin Dinajpur were selected randomly. From each of the districts, two blocks were randomly selected. Katwa-I and Katwa-II were selected from Burdwan district; and Gangarampur and Tapan were the selected blocks from Dakshin Dinajpur district. From each block, two Gram Panchayats (GP) were randomly selected and from each GP, one Gram Sabha (GS) was selected randomly for the study. The study was conducted in total eight Gram Sabhas. Twenty five beneficiaries from each of the eight gram sabhas were selected randomly. It accomplished a total of 200 MNREGA beneficiaries as respondents. After consultation with the experts and reviewing a vast volume of literature, an exhaustive list of constrictions regarding the implementation of the programme at grass root was prepared. Several constrictions were enlisted under the sub-headings namely, registration of the families, Distribution of Job cards, Receipt of work application, Selection of work to be taken up in Gram Panchayat, Allotment of work, Payment of wages and Evaluation of completed work.

The respondents were asked to respond to the constrictions on a three-point continuum ranging from most important, less important and least important constriction with the score of 3, 2 and 1, respectively. The mean scores for each of the constrictions were calculated and the constrictions were ranked. Open ended questions were asked to the MNREGA functionaries to point out the

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constrictions, which are hindering its implementation according to their perceptions. The Block Development Officers (BDOs), Panchayat Pradhans and the Village Nirman Sahayak of all the selected Gram Panchayats were interviewed for this purpose.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The most important constrictions as perceived by the respondents regarding the implementation of MNREGA at grass root were identified and recorded.

According to the respondents, incomplete list of the adults in each household was the most important constriction in the process of registration of the families under MNREGA (Table 1).

Table 1: Constrictions in registration of the families
n=200

| Particulars | Mean Score | Rank |
|---|------------|------|
| Absence of the concerned functionary | 2.54 | II |
| Denial of registration to eligible applicants | 1.05 | V |
| Incomplete list of adults in each household | 2.89 | I |
| Registration of bogus families/individuals | 1.77 | III |
| Rejection of 'incomplete' registration forms | 1.37 | IV |
| Asking for money for registering names/families | 1.01 | VI |

Every adult member, willing to work under the programme did not get the job card. In-depth discussion in this regard, revealed the practical fact regarding the process of registration at the grass root. It was actually a back calculation process. Usually the functionaries used to take decision to start a work under MNREGA. Then the announcement is made that MNREGA work has been started in some particular site and interested persons are requested to report there. So, the people used to start working first and they got registered later. Usually all the adult members of a particular family do not go for work in that particular site. So, they don't get registered. The respondents stated that delay in receiving the job cards was the most serious constriction under distribution of job card category (Table 2).

Table 2: Constrictions in distribution of job cards
n=200

| Particulars | Mean Score | Rank |
|---|------------|------|
| Delay in receiving job cards | 2.97 | I |
| Issuance of false job cards | 2.44 | IV |
| Issuance of Job Cards to non-residents | 1.12 | VI |
| Issuance of Job Cards to minors | 1.02 | VII |
| Issuance of Job Cards to those not members of the listed family | 2.85 | III |
| Non-issuance of job cards | 2.91 | II |
| Asking for money for issuing job cards | 2.21 | V |

When the villagers report at the working site, their names are being enlisted in a white paper. Then actually the official procedure starts of making the job cards for the

individual beneficiaries. Sometimes it takes two to three months.

The respondents perceived that wrong date or no date recorded on the work application was the most important constriction under the receipt of work application category (Table 3).

Table 3: Constrictions in receipt of work application
n=200

| Particulars | Mean Score | Rank |
|--|------------|------|
| Non-acceptance of work application by the relevant authorities | 1.03 | IV |
| Wrong date or no date recorded on the work application | 2.93 | I |
| Rejection of 'incomplete' forms | 2.79 | II |
| Oral application or request for work being made an excuse for denial of work on time | 1.15 | III |

Some of the respondents even did not get any receipt of work application. The respondents perceived that the selection of works under MNREGA, either were of low priority or inappropriate in nature (Table 4).

Table 4: Constrictions in selection of public work to be taken up in particular gram panchayat
n=200

| Particulars | Mean Score | Rank |
|---|------------|------|
| Selection of a low priority or inappropriate work | 2.83 | I |
| Selection of work that serves a vested interest | 2.60 | II |
| Lack of public support/ cooperation for that work | 1.24 | III |
| Poor selection of a worksite | 1.15 | IV |

In-depth discussion with the respondents revealed some ground realities like; some economically well to do SC/ST people in the locality got the benefit of land development activities under MNREGA as they had political backing. Sometimes non-agricultural works under MNREGA start at inappropriate seasons which overlap with agricultural works. Sometimes renovation of water bodies start at the beginning of rainy season, which causes disruption of all the works with the onset of monsoon rains.

The respondents felt that there were cases of favoritism and discrimination against people in allocation of work (Table 5).

Table 5: Constrictions in allotment of work
n=200

| Particulars | Mean Score | Rank |
|---|------------|------|
| Favoring or discriminating against people in allocation of work | 2.73 | I |
| Not respecting the gender quota | 2.60 | III |
| Not informing the applicant and then marking him/her as absent | 2.68 | II |
| Demanding money for allotting work | 1.24 | IV |

The persons nearer and dearer to the local political bodies or panchayat functionaries used to get work first. Late payment of wages was the most common problem as perceived by the respondents (Table 6).

Table 6: Constrictions in payment of wages n=200

| Particulars | Mean Score | Rank |
|--|------------|------|
| Non-payment of wages | 1.08 | VII |
| Late payment of wages | 3.00 | I |
| Underpayment of wages | 2.64 | II |
| Payment of wages to the wrong person | 2.55 | III |
| Payment of wages in the name of non-existent (ghost) workers | 2.04 | IV |
| Payment of wages for non-existent projects | 1.10 | VI |
| Failure to pay minimum wages | 1.61 | V |

It takes two to three months, or even five to six months to get the payment under MNREGA.

Most of the respondents indicated that decisions regarding various aspects of the programme were carried out under MNREGA without people's involvement (Table 7).

Table 7: Constrictions in evaluation of completed work n=200

| Particulars | Mean Score | Rank |
|---|------------|------|
| Taking and/or recording of improper measurements | 1.74 | V |
| Not consolidating the information regarding the works in one place | 2.61 | III |
| Issuing of false Completion Certificates | 1.44 | VI |
| Works not conforming to specifications/standard | 2.13 | IV |
| Data recorded in a confusing or incomprehensible manner | 2.68 | II |
| Various aspects of the programme carried out without the people's involvement | 2.79 | I |
| Failure of the grievance redressal mechanisms | 2.61 | III |

The MNREGA functionaries were also interviewed to ascertain the reasons that pose problems in the way of MNREGA implementation. Some of the significant reasons are as delineate hereunder.

Shortage of manpower:

Usually the Block Development Officers (BDOs) have to work as Programme Officers of MNREGA in their respective blocks. After handling so many other important works of the block office, it is too much burden for them to look after the MNREGA works. According to the BDO of Gangarampur block, a lion share of his time is being consumed by the MNREGA, after it is being started. No separate MNREGA cell was set up in Gangarampur and Tapan block of South Dinajpur district.

Huge paper works and long bureaucratic structure:

The functionaries have to perform huge paper works under MNREGA, and that is very time consuming. Long bureaucratic structure is mainly responsible for delay in

starting any work. Usually it takes a long time to get grant or permission for starting any work under MNREGA from the higher authority and in the mean time agricultural season comes around. So, this is the reason as explained by the functionaries, why MNREGA works and agricultural works get overlap or renovation of the water bodies get start just before the rainy seasons.

Financial inclusion in MNREGA:

Financial inclusion has brought transparency in MNREGA. But, it is one of the main causes of delayed payment of wages as explained by the MNREGA functionaries. Banks or post offices do not have enough manpower to support and maintain the huge amount of accounts of the MNREGA beneficiaries. They used to devote only two hours a day to open new accounts for the MNREGA beneficiaries and payment of wages. So, usually it takes a long time.

Problem of power cut:

Power cut is a big problem particularly in the morning hours as explained by the bank and post office officials. Bank officials used to devote two hours (10 am to 12 noon) a day to open accounts or make wage payments for the MNREGA beneficiaries. Most of the banks and post offices have become computerized now. So, in the morning hours if there is power cut then the opening of new accounts or payments of wages get delayed.

Morality of the people:

At the beginning, all the beneficiaries of a single household used to have common joint account in post office or bank to get wages under MNREGA. But that created some problem. So, the concerned functionaries have decided to make individual accounts for each and every beneficiary and that is also time consuming in the process.

CONCLUSION

Analyzing the constrictions, as perceived by the beneficiaries and functionaries in the implementation of MNREGA, it is recommended that separate programme officers for MNREGA should be deputed at the block level. Every block should have a separate MNREGA cell, which will solely look after the MNREGA activities. As it takes a long time to get work order or money sanction from the higher authority for the MNREGA works, the functionaries should start the planning beforehand, so the activities can be started at proper time and it should not overlap with the agricultural activities. It is recommended that educated village youths should be employed as skilled labour under MNREGA, so that they can help the bank or post office functionaries to create new accounts for the beneficiaries and look after timely payment of

wages for the beneficiaries. The works under MNREGA should be started on the basis of priority of the locality and care should be taken that there should be no favoritisms or discriminations among the people in allocation of the work.

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